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Edited by Philippe Luisier (Editor), Rafał Zarzeczny (Book Reviews)
e-mail: recensioni-periodica@pontificio-orientale.it; Jarosław Dziewicki
(Managing Editor) e-mail: edizioni@orientaliachristiana.it, with the
Professors of the Pontifical Oriental Institute.

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Bishara Ebeid

The Christology of the Church of the East

An Analysis of Christological Statements and Professions of Faith of the Official Synods of the Church of the East before A.D. 612

Introduction

The assembly of the bishops of the Church of the East in 612, under the direction of Babai the Great, is considered to have undertaken the “Nestorianization” of the Church of the East.¹ Before this date we can note another approach in official Christological statements from the Church of the East, in its official synods, and in its thinkers and theologians: officially this Church used a traditional Antiochene Christology of the one *parṣopā* (πρόσωπον) and two *kyanē* (natures – φύσεις), while the theologians of this Church tried to interpret this doctrine through different currents of thought. These attempts of interpretation are reflected, as we will demonstrate in this article, in the Christological statements of the Synods of the Church before 612. Unfortunately there has not been any study on these professions of faith or statements, except the general presentation in the article by J. Fiey² and the analysis in the article by S. Brock.³ Even Patros Yekhana Patros did not include all the synods in his presentation of the Christology of the Church of the East.⁴ Likewise, Bawai Soro, in his book on the Church of the East, did not refer to the Christological decisions of the synods of this Church.⁵ This fact has led us to write on this subject and to make an analysis of these Christological statements. As we will see, an examination of these synods and of their Christological professions of faith

¹ By the term “Nestorianism” we mean the Christological expression: two *kyanē* (natures) and two *qnomē* (hypostases) in one *parṣopā* (person/πρόσωπον) of Christ, which could be found in some Greek sources (such as the anonymous author quoted by Leontius of Jerusalem), or in Syriac sources, even before 612 (such as Ḥabib, cited by Philoxenus). See also the clarification in the course of our introduction and also in note 87. This topic will be discussed in an article we are preparing and that deals with the Christology of Ḥabib.

² Cf. Fiey, “Christologie et Mariologie.”

³ Cf. Brock, “The Christology of the Church.”

⁴ Cf. Patros, “La cristologia della Chiesa d’Oriente.”

⁵ Cf. Soro, *The Church of the East. Apostolic and Orthodox*.

reveals a significant progression of thought expressed in traditional and archaic language.

A. de Halleux expressed the opinion that two Christological currents co-existed peacefully together within the Church of the East.⁶ To support his opinion, however, he did not refer to the synods and their statements. Other scholars, seeking to demonstrate that the opinion of de Halleux was not precise, tried to see a western Chalcedonian⁷ influence in some theologians of this Church and to note the controversies between its theologians.⁸ We are convinced that the Christological development over time, by the theologians of this Church, occurred in various ways; not only was this interesting evolution indirectly influenced by the Christological currents of the West, but it was also directly related to the historical context of this Church.

To prove our hypothesis, we will analyze the Christological statements of the nine synods held before the year 612, taking into consideration the historical context outside and inside the Persian Empire. We will call the two Christological currents, to which de Halleux and other scholars refer: *qnomā-parṣopā* and *two-qnomē*, but these terms will not appear before our analysis reaches the point at which it can demonstrate their existence. To carry out our analysis, we will cite the statements and professions of faith of the Church of the East found in the *Synodicon Orientale*,⁹ translating them into English and taking into consideration the existent translation by S. Brock.¹⁰ At the end of our analysis we will present our conclusions to demonstrate our hypothesis on the Christology of these synods, a Christology in progress that attempted to resolve the same Christological questions that theologians and Councils in Byzantium sought to address.

Before we start our analysis it could be helpful to make a clarification of some technical terms we use. Even if the term *qnomā* is the Syriac translation of the Greek ὑπόστασις, and even if it is usually translated by scholars as hypostasis (at least, in a Trinitarian context)¹¹ we will leave it as *qnomā*. In the history of Christian dogma, Trinitarian and Christological, the term ὑπόστασις did not have one significance and unique metaphysical function. If it was translated into Syriac by *qnomā*, it does not always mean that the

⁶ Cf. de Halleux, "La christologie de Martyrius-Sahdona," 29.

⁷ By the term west we mean Byzantium, the Byzantine Empire.

⁸ Cf. Abramowski, "Martyrius-Sahdona."

⁹ It should be mentioned that the edition of the *Synodicon*, made by Chabot, is a very limited collection and is based on later copies of a 13th or 14th cen. manuscript, cf. Van Rompay, "Synodicon Orientale," 387. This is to be considered as a hindrance to research in this field.

¹⁰ See the translation in Brock, "The Christology of the Church," 133-142.

¹¹ Patros, "La cristologia della Chiesa d'Oriente," 29-31.

Christology was never existed; in fact, even Nestorius was not a real Nestorian.¹⁸

Finally, we preferred also to use the term Monophysitism for all those who proclaimed one nature in Christ. This does not mean that we ignore the proposal of modern scholars to distinguish between moderate and extreme Monophysites calling the former by the term “Miaphysitism/Miaphysites” and the latter “Monophysitism/Monophysites.”¹⁹ But since the same texts that we are examining do not distinguish terminologically between these two groups, as will be clear from our analysis, we chose to use just the term Monophysitism for the two groups. To distinguish, however, between them we used for the extreme Monophysites the term “real Monophysitism,” which was the doctrine of Eutyches and his followers and for that we used also for them terms like Eutychians or Eutychianism, while for the moderates we used terms like: Severians, Jacobites, Syrian Monophysites or moderate Monophysites.²⁰ Having now made these necessary clarifications we can start our Christological analysis of the *Synodicon Orientale*.

The Synod of 410

This synod is considered the first official synod of the Church of the East after its unification under one Catholicos, the bishop of the capital city of the Sassanid Empire, Seleucia-Ctesiphon.²¹ In this synod, the Church of the East officially recognized the Creed of Nicea, quoting the text of the Creed of the 318 Fathers of Nicea in the acts of this synod and noting the agreement of the bishops of the Church of the East. Since there are two versions of this Creed — one in the *Synodicon Orientale* of the same Church and the other in West Syriac manuscripts that include the acts of the Synod of 410 — and even if, as de Halleux has demonstrated, the form found in the West Syriac manuscripts is the original text of the creed of the Synod of the 410,²² we will present both texts because we do not know exactly when the Church of the East changed the original text and adopted the one we have in the edited *Synodicon*.

Our interest is to see how this text translates and expresses the belief in Christ. An analysis of the expressions used could help us to understand the progress and the development of the dogmatic thought of the Church of the East and its philosophical terminology.

¹⁸ Cf. de Halleux, “Nestorius,” 169-174.

¹⁹ Cf. Brock, “Il dibattito,” 76-77.

²⁰ On this see also Luisier, “Il miaphisismo.”

²¹ Cf. Baum – Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 14-15.

²² See the article by de Halleux, “Le symbole.”

The text according to the west Syriac version:

ܡܚܘܢ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	And in Him, in His Son, the Only-Begotten,
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	Who was born from Him,
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	that is, from the substance/essence of His Father.
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	God from God
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	Light from Light
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	True God from true God
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	[He] was born and not made
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	Who is the Son of the nature (consubstantial) of
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	His Father
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	Who for us, the human beings that were made by
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	Him, and for our salvation,
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	descended and put on a body and became a
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	man...

The text according to the *Synodicon Orientale*

ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	the Son of God,
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	Who was born from the Father, the Only-Begotten,
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	that is, from the substance/essence of the Father.
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	God from God,
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	and Light from Light
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	True God from True God
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	Who was born and not made
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	The Son of the substance/essence (consubstantial)
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	of the Father,
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	by whom everything in heaven and on earth was
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	made
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	Who for us, the human beings, and for our sal-
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	vation
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	descended from heaven and was incarnate and
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ	became a man ...

We can notice in the text of the *Synodicon* the following: Jesus Christ the Lord is the Son of God the Only-Begotten; he comes from the substance/essence (ܩܕܝܫܐ) of the Father, for that he is consubstantial with the Father. The text uses the phrase “the Son of the substance/essence of the Father” to translate the Greek expression ὁμοούσιος.²³ Even if such a translation were made, i.e. “the Son of the substance/essence of the Father,” is literal, we can see a theological meaning behind it: the Father is the substance/essence of the divinity. This means that the Son gets his essence

²³ *Idem*, 162-163.

²⁴ *Synodicon orientale*, 22.

²⁵ See also on this use in Grillmeier – Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II/II, 482, especially note 12 on the same page.



from God the Father as substance/essence, or in other words, as a cause.²⁶ The question that someone might have, looking at both texts together, is the following: why did the *Synodicon's* version use in the expression of the "consubstantial" the term substance/essence (ܩܕܫܘܬܐ) instead of nature (ܕܘܩܘܠܐ)? Do we have an explanation given by the same text (the *Synodicon's* version)?

To have an answer we can read the anathema with which the Creed concludes:

ܕܠܐ ܐܝܬܐ ܩܕܩܘܠܐ ܩܕܩܘܠܐ ܕܩܕܩܘܠܐ ²⁷ ܩܕܩܘܠܐ ܩܕܩܘܠܐ	But those who say that there was [a time] when He [the Son of God] did not exist and [that] He did not exist before He was born, or [that] He [comes] from nothing, or say that He [comes] from another <i>qnomā</i> or substance/essence, or think that the Son of God could be changed or displaced; these the Catholic and Apostolic Church excommunicates.
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We find in this anathema the appearance of an important term: *qnomā* (ܩܕܩܘܠܐ). As we said above, this term, at least in Trinitarian doctrine, corresponded to the Greek hypostasis. However, we also see that the expression that the Son is not (generated) "from another *qnomā*, or from [another] substance/essence (ܩܕܩܘܠܐ)" might suggest that these two terms are synonyms, even though we are in a period after the fifth century. So someone could say that the development of the Cappadocian Fathers is not taken into consideration: i.e. the distinction between substance and hypostasis.²⁸ We do not think this is the case, though. The fathers of the Church of the East already knew about the distinction in the Trinitarian doctrine between the terms οὐσία and ὑπόστασις. It is not by chance that the text uses the term substance/essence (ܩܕܩܘܠܐ) instead of nature (ܕܘܩܘܠܐ) or substance (ܩܕܩܘܠܐ) — a transliteration of the Greek οὐσία.²⁹ We think that the use of the term substance/essence (ܩܕܩܘܠܐ) has a technical and philosophical motivation that reflects the time when the Church of the East changed the original text. With this term (ܩܕܩܘܠܐ), the same Church wanted to explain that the Father as a hypostasis is the cause of the Son. It is very

²⁶ In fact, knowing that the authors of this Church chose to translate this same phrase into Arabic literally, leads us to maintain that there was a theological dimension and dynamism behind such phrase which is the underlining of the fact that the Father is the cause of the Trinity and, for this reason, He could be identified with the divine substance itself.

²⁷ *Synodicon orientale*, 22-23.

²⁸ On this topic see Kariatlis, "St Basil's Contribution."

²⁹ On this term see Patros, "La cristologia della Chiesa d'Oriente," 29.



interesting to note that in the other synods this Church uses the term “nature” for the divinity of Christ, which is *common* to the three hypostases of the Trinity, but, as we have said, the term ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ is the cause of the Trinity which is the hypostasis of the Father, who includes the divinity as nature. So if the Son cannot have another cause for his existence, then this cause could be just a hypostasis, which means a concrete nature or, to use Aristotelian terminology, a second substance. For this reason, in fact, we think that the text uses the terms ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ and ܩܘܠܘܒܐ which according to our interpretation could be identified, provided that the condition that ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ indicates, in our case, just the hypostatized nature of the Father.

The Synod of 486

Unfortunately, there are no extant decrees or decisions of the synods between 410 and 486, especially those held in 484 and 485 as a reaction to the *Henotikon* of the Byzantine Emperor Zeno and his religious policies. We only know that the Christological statements of those synods were expressed in Antiochene terms.³⁰ In the year 486, a synod was held under Catholicos Acacius in the capital Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and it is the first synod, of which we have the decisions, that deals with Christological doctrine and problems after the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).³¹ As Sebastian Brock notes, the Christological statement of this synod is expressed in Antiochene terms also, but it cannot be considered a Nestorian doctrine.³² We will analyze the Trinitarian statement and the Christological one, and we will focus on the terminology and the philosophical way that the Church of the East chose to express these doctrines, in order to understand more about the relationship between the doctrine of this Church and Antiochene Christology.

The Trinitarian statement:

ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ
ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ
ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ
ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ
ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ
³³... ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܒܐ

The belief of all of us should be in the one confession of the one divine nature which exists in the three perfect *qnomē* of the one true and eternal Trinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...

This statement is expressed in the first part of the first canon of this

³⁰ Cf. Brock, “The Christology of the Church,” 126.

³¹ Cf. Patros, “La cristologia della Chiesa d’Oriente,” 34-35.

³² Cf. Brock, “The Christology of the Church,” 126.

³³ *Synodicon orientale*, 54.

The second part of the first canon contains a Christological statement. Belief in the Economy of Christ, the Incarnation, consists in the confession of the two natures (ܩܘܢܝܢܐ) — the divinity (ܩܘܢܝܢܐ) and the humanity (ܩܘܢܝܢܐ). These two natures are united perfectly. To express this dogma, the fathers of this synod spoke of a perfect conjunction (ܩܘܢܝܢܐ ܩܘܢܝܢܐ). The meaning of this perfect conjunction is that there is no separation (ܩܘܢܝܢܐ ܩܘܢܝܢܐ) between the two natures after they are united. That does not mean, however, that there is a confusion or a mixture between the humanity and the divinity because of this perfect conjunction. We think that the doctrine of the perfect conjunction was the way with which the fathers of the synod wanted to express the reality of the union, and not, as some scholars hold, the way with which they wanted to express the one appearance of the two natures.³⁵ In our opinion, it is a response to those who maintained that the union between the natures of Christ was “according to the will,” which was understood by the fathers of the synod as not being a real union.³⁶

We must notice, according to our text, that every nature conserves its properties (ܩܘܢܝܢܐ, lit. in what belongs to it). With this, the fathers sought to protect the divine nature from any idea of introducing a passion into it. It is a clear anti-Theopaschite character of this Christological statement, as noticed by Brock.³⁷ In the last sentence of the statement its anti-Theopaschite character is even clearer.

Finally, we can notice that the divinity belongs to the Lord (ܩܘܢܝܢܐ ܩܘܢܝܢܐ). The subject of the divinity and the humanity is, thus, the Lord. Now, the question is whether we can identify the Lord with the eternal Logos, the Son of God. For our text, the Lord is Christ as is clear, in fact, right from the first sentence. Taking into consideration the whole context of this paragraph we can understand that we are talking about the Economy. So we have one subject of the union of the two natures, Christ the Lord. This one subject is called also, in the last sentence, the *par̄ṣopā* (ܩܘܢܝܢܐ) of the Savior. This is a very important technical term; it is, as we said above, the Syriac form of the Greek πρόσωπον. This one Savior; this *par̄ṣopā*, is Christ and Lord. So according to our text, we cannot identify Christ of the Economy with the Logos. We can say that Christ, this *par̄ṣopā*, is the *result* of the union between the two natures.

These two natures are called a perfect God (ܩܘܢܝܢܐ ܩܘܢܝܢܐ) and a perfect Man (ܩܘܢܝܢܐ ܩܘܢܝܢܐ). It is worth asking if the fathers wanted to say that the natures are two perfect *qnomē*, taking into consideration what

³⁵ Cf. Macomber, “The Christology of the Synod,” 152-153.

³⁶ Cf. Grillmeier, *Gesù il Cristo*, Vol. I/II, 880.

³⁷ Cf. Brock, “The Christology of the Church,” 126.

the first part said about the three perfect *qnomē* of the Trinity. We can be sure that the synod is referring to the *qnomā* of the Son as a perfect nature, even if they do not call it by that term in the Christology. However, do they mean by “perfect Man” that he is a single person, an individual? That could be one interpretation. What could help us, in fact, to maintain that this Christological statement could be interpreted as two-*qnomē* Christology, i.e. Nestorian doctrine, is the expression “the exemplars of the natures” (ܩܢܘܡܐ ܕܢܬܝܒܐ). It is the only known synodical text that uses such an expression. We think that applying this term in Christology the fathers of the synod tried to underline the very distinction between the natures and that each one conserved not just the natural properties but also the individual ones, since the term could be translated as individual representation. In this case, the two natures manifest their natural and individual properties through the one *par̄ṣopā* of Christ as one manifestation, without considering them, however, as separated natures-realities. According to this interpretation, actually, one could maintain that with the expression “exemplar” (ܩܢܘܡܐ) the fathers of the synod meant *qnomā*, individual nature. In any case, we are not sure, since we know that the Church of the East did not officially use the term *qnomā* in its Christology, even for the Logos, before the year 612.³⁸ For that reason, we cannot speak in this case about a Nestorian doctrine, i.e., two-*qnomē* Christology, but the text by itself can be understood in that way, namely as Nestorian.

The last issue we will discuss is the use of the term *par̄ṣopā*. As Abramowski noted, this is the first time in the official documents that we possess from the Church of the East that this term is used to refer to the one subject of the two united natures.³⁹ Some scholars saw Nestorianism in it.⁴⁰ We think that there is no Nestorianism at all since, as we noted above, there is no use of the term *qnomā* in the Christological statement. What we do have, though, is a very clear Antiochene influence,⁴¹ and especially, as Macomber noticed, a Theodorian Christological background.⁴² Antiochene Christology uses for the one subject of the Incarnation the term *πρόσωπον*, and this is the fundamental Antiochene element in the Christology of this synod, besides the anti-Theopaschite position.⁴³ This use of the term *πρόσωπον* is

³⁸ The same question and answer was given by Macomber, “The Christology of the Synod,” 153.

³⁹ Cf. Abramowski, “Martyrius-Sahdona,” 18.

⁴⁰ Cf. Macomber, “The Christology of the Synod,” 154.

⁴¹ Cf. Brock, “The Christology of the Church,” 126.

⁴² Cf. Macomber, “The Christology of the Synod,” 151-154.

⁴³ Cf. Baum – Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 29-30.

clear, for example, in the correspondence between Nestorius and Cyril.⁴⁴ Actually, we see that a very clear influence on the statement of the synod of 486 comes from the Formula of Union (433) between the Antiochians and the Alexandrians, written by the latter using their Christological terminology and thought,⁴⁵ even if this formula does not use the term “conjunction.” Later on, we will see in the analysis of the Synod of 605 how this technical term was understood as “union.”

After this analysis, we can really understand the reaction of the Church of the East to the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon and the Christological discussion taking place in the Byzantine Empire. This reaction can be understood further by analyzing the other synods, as we will do now.

The Synod of 544

Between the Synod of 486 and that of 544, several historical events took place that could help us to understand the Christological texts of this period. First of all, the theological school of Edessa was closed by the emperor Zeno and transferred to Nisibis. Narsai also moved to Nisibis, where he reopened the school with the help of Barsauma, the bishop of the city. Under new management, so to speak, the school of Nisibis was characterized by an adherence to Antiochene thought, especially that of Theodore of Mopsuestia.⁴⁶ The second event involved another transfer into Persia, this time, of the works of Nestorius. Here, the Catholicos of the Church of the East, Aba, played a very significant role. He had the works of Nestorius translated into Syriac;⁴⁷ among these was the Bazar of Heracleides which was probably translated in the year 539/540.⁴⁸ It is also important to remember that Justinian ascended the throne of Constantinople in the year 527. His reign was full of theological discussions and various religious policies;⁴⁹ as we will see, this atmosphere in the Byzantine Empire had a certain influence, though probably an indirect one, on the Church of the East.⁵⁰

The Synod of 544 did not produce an extant Christological statement.⁵¹ However, we do have a type of Creed of the Fathers of the synod, in which

⁴⁴ Cf. Scipioni, *Nestorio e Il Concilio*, 132ss.

⁴⁵ In that formula we can notice the expressions “perfect God” and “perfect Man,” the distinction of the natures and the conservation of the properties of each nature which are united in the one πρόσωπον. See more on this formula in Grillmeier, *Gesù il Cristo*, Vol. I/II, 897ss.

⁴⁶ Cf. Baum – Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 26-28.

⁴⁷ Cf. Van Rompay, L., “Aba I,” 1.

⁴⁸ Cf. Brock, “The Christology of the Church,” 126.

⁴⁹ See the article by Maraval, “La politica religiosa di Giustiniano.”

⁵⁰ See the article by Guillaumont, “Justinien et l’Église de Perse.”

⁵¹ Cf. Brock, “The Christology of the Church,” 127.

we can find important Christological material. Moreover, this synod pronounced several anathemas, in which we can find, as we will see, a clear reflection of the Christological discussions held in Byzantium at the time.

Expressions from the Creed of the synod of 544:

⁵²... ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ We believe in one God ... in the singleness of the nature ...

ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ And in the latter days, he spoke with us by his Son, whom he appointed as heir of everything, who is Christ our Lord, he who was born in the flesh from the Holy Virgin Mary ... and he gave to his disciples the mystery of his body and his blood. And then he finished his economy with his passion and his death on the cross. And on the third day he prevailed over death with the power of his divinity ...

ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ ... and after forty days he ascended to heaven while his disciples were looking at him, those who were told by the Angels: "this Jesus whom you saw, who ascended to heaven," to say that as he ascended in his true body, that is, in fact, in his perfect humanity...

⁵⁴... ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ These things were known exactly by the grace of the Holy Spirit, which [came] upon the disciples. They [the disciples] learned from the Holy Spirit that Christ is not an ordinary man, nor a God who is naked of the garment of humanity in which he was manifested, but Christ is God and Man ...

The part on the Trinity is very simple; the belief is in the one God and the one nature (ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ) of God. There is no mention of the three *qnomē*, and not even of the names "Father, Son, Holy Spirit."⁵⁶ But from the beginning of the Christological part of this Creed, we can notice that this one God, as a cause of everything, is the Father. In fact we read in the cited text, precisely in the second sentence, that God spoke with us by his Son (ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ)

⁵² *Synodicon orientale*, 541.
⁵³ *Idem*.
⁵⁴ *Idem*, 542
⁵⁵ *Idem*.
⁵⁶ We need to notice that in the rest of the text, in the Christological part, we have a mention of the Trinity as one divinity in three *qnomē*: "... ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ ܘܢܘܨܘܢܐ ܕܘܗܘܐ ..." *idem*.

ܡܝܘܿܢܝܿܐ). After that, we have very important information; this Son of God is Christ our Lord (ܩܝܿܣܿܬܢܿܐ ܕܩܘܿܕܿܫܿܐܢܿܐ), he who also was born in the flesh (ܘܿܒܿܝܿܬ ܕܘܿܩܘܿܕܿܫܿܐܢܿܐ) from the Virgin. It seems to us that we have an identification between the Son of God and Christ the Lord, the subject of the Incarnation.

This one subject gave to his disciples the mystery (ܩܝܿܣܿܬܢܿܐ)⁵⁷ of his body (ܡܝܿܘܿܢܿܐ) and his blood (ܡܝܿܚܿܐܢܿܐ). We can say that the body and blood belong to Christ, but at the same time, having the identification with the Son of God, we can recognize that the body and blood could be said to be “of the Son of God.” The same interpretation we can give for the phrase about the resurrection. The one subject prevailed over death by the power of his divinity (ܡܘܿܠܿܚܿܘܿܬܢܿܐ ܕܩܘܿܕܿܫܿܐܢܿܐ). According to the text, the divinity belongs to the one subject of the Incarnation, which means to Christ, since the whole text is talking about the Economy of God (ܩܘܿܕܿܫܿܐܢܿܐ ܕܩܘܿܕܿܫܿܐܢܿܐ). At the same time this Christ, according to the identification made at the beginning, is the Son of God. So the divinity belongs to the *qnomā* of the Son,⁵⁸ and this is very logical.

In reference to the ascension, we have another important expression. The subject of the action is Jesus (ܕܩܘܿܕܿܫܿܐܢܿܐ) whom the disciples saw ascending to heaven. Jesus ascended with his true body (ܩܝܿܣܿܬܢܿܐ ܡܝܿܘܿܢܿܐ), which means for the Church of the East, as we can notice in the same text cited (ܩܘܿܕܿܫܿܐܢܿܐ ܕܩܘܿܕܿܫܿܐܢܿܐ), that Jesus ascended with his perfect humanity (ܩܘܿܕܿܫܿܐܢܿܐ ܕܩܘܿܕܿܫܿܐܢܿܐ). We need to remember that the Syriac tradition, and specially, the Church of the East, does not always use the term *kyanā* (ܩܝܿܣܿܬܢܿܐ) to talk about the divine nature and the human nature in Christ; often it simply employs the terms “divinity” (ܩܘܿܕܿܫܿܐܢܿܐ) and “humanity” (ܩܘܿܕܿܫܿܐܢܿܐ).⁵⁹ Taking this into consideration, saying that the true body is perfect humanity means that the body is a perfect human nature. Can we say that this perfect human nature is a *qnomā*? In fact, according to what we noticed in the synod of 486, it could be a way of interpretation. So, if we take into consideration that the perfect *qnomā* manifests the *common* nature, we can suppose that the real and true body is a *qnomā* of the *common* nature of human beings.⁶⁰ Thus, when the synod writes that Jesus has a true body,

⁵⁷ On this term see Brock, “Sant’Efreem,” 94-95.

⁵⁸ Even if the text above does not mention the *qnomā* of the Son, we know, as we saw in the texts of the previous synods, that the Son of God is one *qnomā* of the Holy Trinity. Also, the term *parsopā*, as a technical term for “Christ,” the subject of the Incarnation, would be used by us even if the texts do not mention it. It was already in use by the fathers of the synod of 486, who applied it to Christology.

⁵⁹ Cf. Brock, “The Christology of the Church,” 131.

⁶⁰ The same understanding/interpretation can also be found in Grillmeier – Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II/III, 578.

it means that he has a perfect human nature; in our opinion and according to these interpretations, this means also that the humanity in Christ is one *qnomā*. Likewise, calling the subject now with the name Jesus makes us wonder if they really desired, with this expression, to indicate a single person, an individual man, and in consequence, *qnomā*, which could be understood as a single nature, an individual.

Our image will be clearer when we analyze the last sentence cited above. It emphasizes the unity of Christ as a single subject of two natures. Christ is not merely an ordinary man (ܚܡܫܐ ܚܝܝܐ) and at the same time he is not just a God (ܚܡܠܐ) who is without the garment of humanity (ܚܘܠܐ ܚܕܘܬܐ). Does the use of the expression “ordinary man” mean an individual man? Someone might think that this expression could be the Syriac translation of the Greek “ψιλός ἄνθρωπος.” This Greek expression was used to refer to those who believed that Christ had just a human nature.⁶¹ It was attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia and to Nestorius to accuse them of being adorers of a human being.⁶² Leontius of Jerusalem (d. 543), in his work against the Nestorians (*Contra Nestorianos*), alleges that the Nestorians, in their works, used the term “ψιλός ἄνθρωπος,” simple man, for the humanity of Christ to express that this humanity has its own hypostasis.⁶³ We can suppose that the Syriac expression “ܚܡܫܐ ܚܝܝܐ” was used to express the same idea, that the humanity in Christ was a single and individual man.⁶⁴

We think that this interpretation could be taken into consideration seriously since the second phrase mentions the term “God” (ܚܡܠܐ), and not “divinity” (ܚܕܘܬܐ). If “divinity” indicates the divine *kyanā* (nature) so, we can suppose that the term “God” could be understood as a divine *qnomā*. So Christ cannot be just one human *qnomā* or just one divine *qnomā*. Christ, as the Creed affirms, is God and Man (ܚܝܝܐ ܚܡܠܐ). Again the last affirmation of the Creed uses the terms “God” and “Man” and not “divinity” and “humanity.” According to our view, we see a possible Nestorian way of

⁶¹ Cf. Cross – Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1345.

⁶² This was, in fact, anathema XII of Constantinople II: “Εἴ τις ἀντιποιεῖται Θεοδώρου τοῦ ἀσεβοῦς τοῦ Μοψουεστίας ...ὡς ψιλὸν ἄνθρωπον βαπτισθῆναι ...,” Denzinger – Hünermann, *Enchiridion*, 242 (n. 434). See also Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, 180.

⁶³ “... Καὶ περὶ τούτου τὴν πίστιν ἡμᾶς ἀπατεῖ, ὡς τὴν προϋπάρχουσαν τῆς ἀνθρωπείας φύσεως ὑπόστασιν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ φύσιν ὁ Λόγος τὴν ἄσαρκον πρό αἰώνων, ἐν ὑστέροις καιροῖς ἑαυτῷ σάρκα περιβαλὼν αὐτῇ τῇ ἰδίᾳ ὑποστάσει οὐκ ἀνθρώπου ψιλοῦ τὴν ἀνθρωπείαν φύσιν ἐνυπέστησεν,” PG 86, 1748D. We can also notice that the citations in the *Contra Nestorianos* probably come from an existing Nestorian work in Greek, cf. Grillmeier – Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II/II, 273-274. See also the comment by Gleed, *The Development*, 125 (note 431), 132-133.

⁶⁴ See also the opinion of Patros, “La cristologia della Chiesa d’Oriente,” 36; he thinks that the synod affirms that the humanity in Christ is an individual man, but without providing any further explanation.

see the same affirmation in the anathema of this synod of the Church of the East? Did the Church of the East feel the necessity to deal with this heretical doctrine?⁷² This anathema could be understood in this way, namely, that for the Church of the East, in Christ there are not two *qnomē*: a divine and a human one, so that the Trinity becomes quaternity, if we take seriously into consideration our doubt about the possible identification of *parṣopā* and *qnomā*.

Besides that, we could take into consideration the second anathema cited above. We have again an identification of the Son of God and Christ. In fact the text says that the Only-Begotten Son of God (ܩܡܠܩܢ ܒܝܢ ܩܡܘܥܐ) is Christ our Lord (ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ). Even if the text above mentions the term Christ just in the context of the Incarnation (ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ), this identification is very clear. The one who was manifested in the flesh is the Son of God, the Lord Christ and not someone else.

This identification does not mean that there is any confusion between the two natures of Christ. To underline that, the synod mentions another anathema against the Theopaschite doctrine, which is the third anathema cited. The passions and the death belong to the human nature of Christ (ܩܡܘܥܐ ܡܢ ܗܘܡܢܐ), while his divinity (ܡܢ ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ) remains impassible. This position was underlined also by the neo-Chalcedonians. The teaching that in Christ there is one hypostasis and one person made them underline that Christ's sufferings were in his human nature.⁷³ Again we see a reaction of the Church of the East to what was happening in the West. It is clear that the Church knew about this discussion either directly, since some of its men were involved in the Christological discussion, such as Narsai⁷⁴ and the Catholicos Aba mentioned above,⁷⁵ or indirectly through contact with people who were coming from the West and bringing with them news of the Byzantine Empire.

This means that the Church of the East was not silent, as some scholars

που, ἤγουν ὑποστάσεως ἐπεδέξατο ἡ ἁγία τριάς καὶ σαρκωθέντος τοῦ ἐνός τῆς ἁγίας τριάδος Θεοῦ λόγου.”

⁷² The heresy in this case is the consideration that in Christ there exist two hypostases as not really united realities: divine and human, so the Trinity becomes quaternity.

⁷³ The goal of the neo-Chalcedonian movement was the adoption of the formula *the One of the Trinity who suffered in the flesh*; even if there is a Theopaschite character, the emphasis that the passions were of the human nature is clear, cf. Grillmeier – Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II/II, 318ss. In fact, the third anathema of the fifth Ecumenical Council marks this dogma: “... ἀλλ’ οὐχ ἓνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ λόγον, σαρκωθέντα καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, καὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ τὰ τε θαύματα καὶ τὰ πάθη, ἅπερ ἔκουσίως ὑπέμεινε σαρκί ...” Denzinger – Hünermann, *Enchiridion*, 236 (n. 423).

⁷⁴ Cf. Becker, *Fear of God*, 71-72.

⁷⁵ Cf. Bettolo, “Mar Aba,” 101-103.

argue;⁷⁶ rather, it took a clear but indirect stand on the events that were taking place in the West. This fact is clear also from the last anathema mentioned above. In our opinion, it is a response to those who were teaching two hypostases/*qnomē* in Christ.⁷⁷ In fact, saying that the prayer should not be concluded with the name of the holy Trinity and the name of something else is reminiscent of the accusation of the non-Chalcedonians against the Nestorians and the Chalcedonians.⁷⁸

In the end, we can conclude our analysis of this synod by saying that, even if the Church of the East did not use technical and philosophical terminology to express its doctrine, it does not mean that this doctrine is not important or cannot be a base for the progress and development of the Christology of that Church. We can see the stress on the subject of the Economy, which is Christ. This subject is identified with the eternal Logos and Son of God. Thus, if we could give an interpretation using the technical terminology that appeared in the previous synod, we could say that we are dealing with an identification of the terms *paršopā* and *qnomā*.⁷⁹ Also we can notice that the humanity of Christ, which is perfect and true, is described as that of an individual man. So this means that the same doctrine could be interpreted in a Nestorian way; the Christology of two *qnomē* and one *paršopā*. The fact that the Catholicos Aba translated Nestorius into Syriac means that the Christology of Nestorius was becoming accessible to the thinkers in the Church of the East, but still needed time to be interpreted.⁸⁰ In the same period, terms such as *qnomā* and *paršopā* continued to require further explanation to be used correctly. In the end, if we take the identification of *qnomā* and *paršopā* made by our interpretation, we could arrive at a concept close to the one of hypostatic union, but we still need more progress in Christological thought, as we will see in the next synods.

The Synod of 554

Under Catholicos Joseph, in the year 554 — just one year after the fifth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople II — a synod of the bishops of the

⁷⁶ Cf. Baum – Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 30.

⁷⁷ About the existence of theologians who were teaching two hypostases in Christ one can give the example of the anonymous author of the citations in the work of Leontius of Jerusalem *Contra Nestorianos*; for more details see Abramowski, “Ein nestorianischer Traktat.”

⁷⁸ It was, for example, one of the favorite accusations against Nestorians by Philoxenos of Mabbug, cf. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog*, 361.

⁷⁹ We can notice that Christ (*paršopā*) is one, he is identified with the Son of God (*qnomā*), and the Trinity does not become quaternity, so we can hypothesize that the *paršopā* and *qnomā* are identified.

⁸⁰ Cf. Bettiolo, “Mar Aba,” 108.

section. So is there really a connection with the Chalcedonian definition, or do we have a traditional statement and profession of faith? To answer this question, we need to analyze this profession further.

First of all, the synod claims to hold the traditional doctrine on Christ. This doctrine teaches that in Christ there are two natures (*kyanē*): his divinity and his humanity. We can say that the subject of the doctrine is the Lord Christ, the *result* of the Incarnation. Can we call him *parṣopā*, as the synod of 486 did? We think it is possible to do so because Christ is the subject of the Economy of God, or in other words, the subject — the result — of the Incarnation, as we saw above.

In addition, this doctrine, according to the profession of the synod of 554, has consequences. The first is the conservation of the properties of each nature. Teaching, in fact, that the two natures conserve their properties means that there are no grounds for thinking that mutations and confusions could happen between these two natures: the divinity and the humanity of Christ. The second consequence is very important as well. With this doctrine, the three *qnomē* (hypostases) of the Trinity remain three. Does this mean that they refute the accusation of the addition of another *qnomā* to the Trinity? It seems to be so, and it means that, probably, Christ is one *qnomā* and not two. This affirmation will be supported by the anathema at the end of the profession, which we will analyze afterwards. Now, let us see the relationship between the Trinity and the union in Christ.

Saying that in Christ there are two natures united means that it is a real union. For this reason, the synod affirms that this union is real and ineffable, indescribable (ܐܘܢܝܢܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܐܘܪܝܢܐ). As a consequence of this union in Christ, the Father has just one Son. Again, we can see a kind of identification of Christ with the Son of God, the *qnomā* of the Logos. This affirmation reminds us of the doctrine of the council of Constantinople II, especially the fourth anathema, which emphasized the reality of the union in Christ, as we said above. The synod, it seems to us, is trying to affirm the same thing here — that the union (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ) is real and true. Moreover, we need to notice that the fathers of the synod used the term “union” and not “conjunction” (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ). We will return in the conclusions to discuss this use of terms.

The profession of faith finishes with one anathema against those who teach two christs and two sons, because this doctrine means that the three *qnomē* (hypostases) of God become four, the Trinity becomes quaternity. Now it is clear that speaking of just one Christ and one Son means one *qnomā*. And if Christ is the *parṣopā* of the union, then we have, probably, an identification of the terms *parṣopā* and *qnomā*, even without the use of these terms.

Can we say now that there is a Chalcedonian or neo-Chalcedonian influence on the profession of this synod? Such a relationship is possible, but only indirectly. We need to take into consideration the fact that the presence of the Nestorians (those who teach two hypostases/*qnomē* in Christ)⁸⁷ and the moderate Monophysites (the Severians) who were finding refuge in the Sassanid Empire, as a result of the religious policy of Justinian, is an important element in the historical context of this synod.⁸⁸ These newcomers could be an indirect source of the Christological development made in the West for the Christians of the Church of the East. In our opinion, the profession is written in an Antiochene language, probably under the influence of Theodorian Christology. Even if we can notice the emphasis on the non-confusion and non-division of the two natures in Christ, we cannot say, as some scholars have maintained, that this synod recalls the four adverbs of Chalcedon;⁸⁹ it is a clear anti-Theopaschite formulation rooted in an Antiochene Christology⁹⁰ which was also adopted by the Church of the East.⁹¹

So, as a conclusion, we can say that this synod was held to deal with the presence of the newcomers from Byzantium. The profession of faith adopted by this synod is against real Nestorianism, but at the same time it is also against real Monophysitism (Eutychianism). It is clear that the language of the synod is traditional and Antiochene, but this does not mean that we cannot make a possible interpretation of it, trying to understand the reasons that pushed the Church of the East to hold this synod and to compose this profession of faith.⁹² In other words, the presence of the Monophysites in the land of the Persian Empire and their accusation against the Church of the East — that the acceptance of the doctrine of two natures entails

⁸⁷ As an example we can give *Ḥabīb* the Nestorian against whom Philoxenus of Mabbug wrote two works, see on this de Halleux, “Le Mamlēā de ‘Ḥabīb’ contre Aksenāyā”; Grillmeier – Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II/III, 545-620. These Nestorians did not teach two christs or two sons in Christ as two subjects (real-Nestorianism), but they sustained that in Christ the two really united natures were hypostatized (singular and determinate natures), which is, according to us, the base of the doctrine of the synod of 612 in which the Church of the East adopted the two-*qnomē* Christology under the influence of Babai the Great.

⁸⁸ Cf. Abūna, *Tārīḫ al-Kanīṣah*, 129-132.

⁸⁹ Cf. Baum – Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 34.

⁹⁰ Cf. Grillmeier, *Gesù il Cristo*, Vol. I/II, 790ss.

⁹¹ Cf. Becker, *Fear of God*, 117ss.

⁹² We do not believe that the reason for this synod was to deal with the problem of the Catholicos elected by the Persian authority, cf. Baum – Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 34. Reading the canons of this synod (especially canon XIV), we can notice that there was a fear from the newcomers and strangers from Byzantium and the new situation in the Persian empire, cf. *Synodicon orientale*, 103-104.

an adoption of the real Nestorianism⁹³ — caused this Church to hold this synod and to deal with this accusation. The doctrine is expressed with traditional language: two natures in one Christ, but against the two extreme doctrines: real Monophysitism (one nature) and real Nestorianism (two christ-subjects). The fifth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople II, had to deal with the same problem, and we believe it is the reason behind the indirect similarity between the anathemas of the fifth Ecumenical Council and the profession of this synod, and thus an indirect relationship with the theology of Chalcedon and the neo-Chalcedonians.

The Synod of 576

In the year 576 and under Catholicos Ezekiel, a new synod in the Church of the East was held. As Brock has noticed, we have no formal profession of faith, unlike with other synods, but we have a type of Creed included in the canons of the synod, in which we have some important Christological expressions that we can analyze, even if these expressions do not make use of the philosophical terms *qnomā* or *paršopā*.⁹⁴ Before we look at these Christological expressions, it is also important to realize that in the period of this synod, we have the organization of monasticism in the Church of the East made by Abraham of Kashkar.⁹⁵ It is very important to mention that Abraham of Kashkar required his monks to read the translated works of Nestorius⁹⁶ because this fact sheds light on how the current of two-*qnomē* Christology started to grow and gain support; moreover, Babai the Great was a monk in the Monastery of Abraham of Kashkar, and this explains his two-*qnomē* doctrine.⁹⁷ Also, the presence of moderate Monophysites in this period is more noticed in the Persian Empire. These two events could help us to understand the reason the Church held this synod. One event was actually a reaction to the other. The Church of the East felt the necessity to

⁹³ If we take, for example, the work of John of Tella “*Profession of Faith*,” we can find a clear accusation of real Nestorianism against the members of the Church of the East who were teaching two natures and one *paršopā* in Christ, cf. Menze – Aklam, *John of Tella’s Profession of Faith*, 87.89: “*لما نرى منكم انتم قلتم انتم صحتكم له اثنان في حكمة . نرى اثنان*”; the same accusation was made by Philoxenus against Ḥabib who affirmed two-*qnomē* in Christ. As we said above, we are preparing an article about this topic that should be published soon. In fact, this shows the existence of the two Christological currents within the Church of the East that were, however, accused of being real Nestorianism by their opponents, a heresy that never existed.

⁹⁴ Cf. Brock, “The Christology of the Church,” 127.

⁹⁵ For the reform of monasticism by Abraham of Kashkar see Chialà, *Abramo di Kashkar*.

⁹⁶ Cf. Bettolo, “Mar Aba,” 108.

⁹⁷ Cf. Chialà, *Abramo di Kashkar*, 119ss, for his monastic orders and the importance of reading Nestorius, see *idem*, 122.

qnomā as a perfect nature. So, if the humanity of Christ is perfect, does that mean that it is a *qnomā*?

The last sentence of the citation could help us further. The expression we have is very similar to the Chalcedonian definition.¹⁰¹ It states that the “incarnate Christ” must be known “in two natures” (ܟܼܘܼܢܼܝܘܼܬܘܼܗܘܼܢ ܟܼܘܼܢܼܝܘܼܬܘܼܗܘܼܢ): God (ܟܼܘܼܢܼܝܘܼܬܘܼܗܘܼܢ) and Man (ܟܼܘܼܢܼܝܘܼܬܘܼܗܘܼܢ), but at the same time that he is one Son (ܫܼܘܼܬܼܢܘܼܬܘܼܗܘܼܢ). This expression, which does not use any technical term for the incarnate Christ, could be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is as follows: We have two natures that are perfect. This means that there are two *qnomē*, and for that reason, the two natures are called “God” (i.e., one divine hypostasis) and “Man” (i.e., an individual human being) and not “divinity” and “humanity.” These two natures/*qnomē* are united in the one *paršopā*, the one Son. The second interpretation takes into consideration the identification between *qnomā* and *paršopā* and says that the two natures are united in the *qnomā-paršopā* of the Son. This means that the human nature, even if it is perfect, does not possess its own *qnomā* and for that reason we have not four *qnomē* in the Trinity after the Incarnation, but only three.

Certainly, these are two ways of interpretation. However, the ambiguity shows that the traditional way to express the faith in the Church of the East could be a basis of development for two different currents of Christology which have the same goal: describing the distinction between the two natures of Christ and the unity of the subject of the Incarnation, the one Christ and Son. The next anathema that comes from the same synod could help to explain this opinion of ours further.

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Thus, this [is the] true belief, in three *qnomē*, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, one glorified and true nature. [This belief] alienates, rejects and refutes all the contentious companies of the followers of Mani, Marcian, Bardaisan and the rest of their fellow heretics. And in [this belief] are taken away, expelled and demolished all the sects of the followers of Arius, Eunomius and Apollinarius with the rest of the heretics, their adherents, [who] blaspheme the Father and make the divinity of the Son to suffer and move away the Holy Spirit, and [in this way] they [introduce] confusion into the equality of the Holy Trinity.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Brock, “The Christology of the Church,” 127. We can notice the expression of Chalcedon “ἐν δύο φύσεσιν ... γνωριζόμενον,” adopted by this synod.
¹⁰² *Synodicon orientale*, 114.

we will see clearly in the next pages, taking into consideration the movement of the two-*qnomē* Christology, which was already starting to be notably present in the Great Monastery of Abraham of Kashkar's community, and the opposite movement of Ḥenana, the *qnomā-parṣopā* current, about which we are going to speak in the next synod.

The Synod of 585

The importance of this synod is to be found in its historical context. We have the beginning of the doctrinal movement of Ḥenana of Adiabene at the school of Nisibis and his provocative Christology and hermeneutical doctrine. In fact, in his hermeneutical lessons at the school of Nisibis, of which he was the director in 571, Ḥenana preferred the works of John Chrysostom to those of Theodore of Mopsuestia.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, this theologian was, according to his enemies,¹⁰⁵ a supporter of Origen and of the Chalcedonian Christology.¹⁰⁶ These choices of Ḥenana were so provocative that some of his students, two future Catholicos of the Church of the East, Isho'yahb II and Isho'yahb III, left the school of Nisibis with other students and teachers. In addition, since Ḥenana's movement had a big influence on the monasticism of the area,¹⁰⁷ the community of Abraham of Kashakar started to argue against him and his followers.¹⁰⁸

In Byzantium, we have the attempts of the emperor Maurice to bring about union with the Church of the East. In fact, Catholicos Isho'yahb I, under whom this synod was held, went to Constantinople as a head of a delegation 586/587. We can certainly see behind this event a political will to confirm the peace after the long period of war between the Persian and the Byzantine Empires.¹⁰⁹ Isho'yahb I also wrote a profession of faith that, according to some historical sources, was accepted as orthodox by the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Antioch (the Chalcedonian one).¹¹⁰ Before we see this interesting profession of faith, we need to see and analyze first another profession, the one of the synod of 585 and its Christological statement.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Baum – Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 36.

¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately the works of Ḥenana were destroyed because of the over against him, cf. Childers, J. W., "Ḥenana," 194; for that reason, what we know about his Christology and his exegesis comes solely from citations in the works of his opponents, cf. Abramowski, "Martyrius-Sahdona," 19.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Childers, "Ḥenana," 194.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Becker, *Fear of God*, 90.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Chialà, *Abramo di Kashkar*, 57.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Baum – Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 36.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Brock, "The Christology of the Church," 127.

the type of the human nature in Christ is; is it a single man or a general nature? To answer this question, we need to look at another citation.

Before that, however, we would like to point out the way in which the second phrase marks the unity and the distinction of the two natures and the importance of this phrase. First of all, we have a new term with which to describe the unity of the natures, the word "unification" (ܩܕܫܐܝܢܐ). In our opinion, the fathers of this synod chose this term to mark the reality of the union. That is, if the two natures are truly united it does not mean that the humanity could be abused (ܩܩܠܩܕܢܐ) or forgotten (ܩܕܠܩܕܢܐ) or that the divinity could change (ܩܩܘܩܕܢܐ) or die (ܩܕܩܕܢܐ). The importance of this phrase is its simplicity in expressing the conservation of the properties of each nature without the use of the term "property." Moreover, this last affirmation was clearly written against, or as an answer to the Syrian Monophysites. As we have said, the goal of making this distinction between the natures of Christ is to make sure that no one could think that the divine nature of Christ suffered; the same is clear also in the next expression of the creed of this synod:

ܐܠܐ ܥܡ ܩܕܫܐܝܢܐ ܩܕܫܐܝܢܐ ܗܘܐ ܗܘܐ ܘܥܬܘܕܥܝܬ ܕܠܐ ܕܢܐ ܡܘܬ ܘܥܬܘܕܥܝܬ ܕܠܐ ܕܢܐ ܡܘܬ
 ... that as the nature of his divinity did not suffer and did not die ...¹¹⁴
 ... ܩܕܫܐܝܢܐ

Even if simplicity is a very notable element in this profession of faith, at the end of the commentary, where we have a very important and interesting Christological statement that is considered by the fathers of the synod as a summary of all the commentary on the Creed, we can find the use of a very important technical term about the Economy: We have the reappearance of the term *paršopā* (ܩܩܘܩܕܢܐ), after a long absence since the synod of 486:

ܩܩܘܩܕܢܐ ܐܠܐ ܥܡ ܩܕܫܐܝܢܐ ܩܕܫܐܝܢܐ ܗܘܐ ܗܘܐ ܘܥܬܘܕܥܝܬ ܕܠܐ ܕܢܐ ܡܘܬ ܘܥܬܘܕܥܝܬ ܕܠܐ ܕܢܐ ܡܘܬ
 This is the belief without corruption, and this is its sense, put briefly, following the sequence of its phrases, with which the *paršopā* of Christ and the natures of his divinity and his humanity are fully proclaimed, against those who confess his divinity and deny his humanity, and against those who confess his humanity and deny his divinity, and against those who deny his divinity and confess that he is an ordinary man or who liken him to one of the just.¹¹⁶

This statement is formulated as a polemic against all those who do not confess the two natures of Christ. This polemic is directed, firstly, against

¹¹⁴ *Idem*.

¹¹⁵ *Idem*, 136.

the Economy of God, which means the Incarnation of the Logos. Saying additionally “not by nature” the fathers of the synod sought to re-emphasize that the *par̄ṣopā*, which is the manifestation of the two natures of Christ, could not be identified with the *qnomā* of the Logos by nature, because this *qnomā* is of the divine nature and not of the two natures, or else the result of the union would be one nature and not two distinct natures.

If we make such an interpretation, we need to explain another problem. Can we suppose that the humanity has no *qnomā* of its own, but is not the divinity the *qnomā* of the Son? In our opinion, if we take into consideration what we have noticed in the last synod, we can make another hypothesis. The *qnomā* of the Son was united with a human nature without *qnomā*; the union took place in the one *qnomā* of the Son, which henceforth was a *qnomā* of two natures; and for that reason it is called *par̄ṣopā*. This can really help us to understand how some thinkers of the Church of the East could make an exchange between these two terms. They were not just influenced by the Chalcedonian and neo-Chalcedonian currents; rather, the official documents of their Church form the basis that led them to make use of such terminology and to engage in this progression in thought. In fact, Ḥenana, whom we mentioned above, was one of these thinkers who identified the eternal Son and Christ, using a type of identification between the terms *par̄ṣopā* and *qnomā* to describe the result of the union,¹¹⁹ which we can also see being done by the last synod. He even adopted the concept of the composition (σύνθεσις),¹²⁰ which we could see in the function of the metaphysical term of *par̄ṣopā* according to our interpretation, namely, *par̄ṣopā* could have the same metaphysical function of the “σύνθετος ὑπόστασις”: *par̄ṣopā* could be understood, in fact, as the *qnomā* of the Logos with the human nature.

We can find an identification between *qnomā* and *par̄ṣopā*, also, in the profession of the Catholicos Isho'yahb I which he made in front of the Byzantine Emperor Maurice and which was accepted as orthodox, as we said above. In this profession, we cannot find any technical term in the Christological part. In our opinion, we have a traditional language with a clear progress in thought. It is not, as some scholars might think, a profession under the influence of Chalcedonians or neo-Chalcedonians;¹²¹ rather, in our opinion, it is a profession of the faith of the Church of the East that reflects the theological current and thought within it during that period.

The Catholicos identifies Christ, the subject of the Economy, with the

¹¹⁹ Cf. Abramowski, “Die Christologie,” 315ss, see also, Abramowski, “Babai der Grosse,” 233ss, see also Becker, *Fear of God*, 199-200; Reinink, “The Cause,” 526-527.

¹²⁰ Cf. Abramowski, “Martyrius-Sahdona,” 25.

¹²¹ Cf. Brock, “The Christology of the Church,” 127.

at the third citation above, the Catholicos affirms a hypostatic union? Or a union according to composition?¹²⁶ Probably yes, but we cannot talk about a hypostatic union using the term *qnomā* because we have the condition that this identification can be made “only by Economy.” So we can say that the term *parṣopā* could really mean a union according to composition.

In such a profession, with which the Catholicos sought to pave the way towards an agreement between the two Churches, i.e., the Chalcedonian and the Church of the East, we do not have the use of any technical terms for the Economy; however, even if this lack of technical terminology seems to be a political attempt on the part of the Catholicos, this way to express Christology is traditional for the Church of the East, as we have seen above. In conclusion we can say that the Catholicos’s statement confirms the existence of a Christological current in the Church of the East that identifies the term *qnomā* with *parṣopā*. In fact, the official documents allow us to make this affirmation, even if they do not always use these technical terms; their metaphysical content is clear. For that reason, we can be sure that this synod was a victory for the Christological current of Ḥenana and not a condemnation of it, as some scholars maintain.¹²⁷ In fact, the synod takes a negative attitude towards those who do not accept the works and the doctrine of Theodore of Mopsuestia,¹²⁸ but that does not mean that the Christological position of Ḥenana was condemned. For that reason, we think, the fathers of the synod did not mention his name,¹²⁹ not only because he was supported by the Metropolitan of Nisibis Simon and other bishops,¹³⁰ but also because of the fact that his Christology was in the same current as that of the Catholicos Isho’yahb I and of the fathers of the synod.

The Synod of 598

A new synod was held in the year 598 under the Catholicos Sabrisho. This synod does not have a profession of faith or a commentary on the Creed, as the other synods do. We do, however, have a list of anathemas that contain Christological doctrine; we will analyze these to understand the progress of the thought of this Church and the relation of this synod and its doctrine with those of the other synods. Before doing so, we need to

¹²⁶ Union according to composition means that the two natures in Christ coexist together in the one hypostasis of the Logos; see the fourth anathema of the ecumenical council of Constantinople II, cf. Denzinger – Hünermann, *Enchiridion*, 238 (n. 424). See also Grillmeier – Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II/II, 448.

¹²⁷ Cf. Baum – Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 36.

¹²⁸ Cf. *Synodicon orientale*, 136-138. (The second canon of this synod).

¹²⁹ Cf. Chialà, *Abramo di Kashkar*, 57

¹³⁰ Cf. *idem*.

as a synonym of the hypostatic union.¹³⁵ Indeed, in our discussion of the last synod, we argued that some of the expressions could refer to a type of “composition.” This anathema could not be contrary to our interpretation, since the composition to which we referred above does not mean a mixture of natures; rather, the term “composition” in our explanation above simply explains the way of existence of the two united natures that are manifested by one *parṣopā*. That this is the case will be shown by the next interpretation.

For the Church of the East, the teaching of composition, adopted by Monophysites and neo-Chalcedonians, means mixture, and such doctrine cannot preserve the union of the Son of God (ܐܘܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܘܒܝܢ ܕܥܠܘܘܬܐ). We should ask now which kind of union the fathers of the synod do affirm. Is it a hypostatic union?

We need to notice, first of all, that this union is called by the term “ܐܘܢܘܨܘܬܐ.” Also, this union belongs to the Son of God; in other words, it is a union of the *qnomā* of the Son of God. Can we consider this a hypostatic union? To understand more and to answer this important question, we need to analyze the rest of the text cited. On the one hand, this union means that every nature must conserve its properties, and for that reason, everyone, says the text, who attributes the sufferings and the death to the divine nature is anathema. On the other hand, the humanity of the Logos of God, which is called a dominical Temple (ܐܘܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܥܠܘܘܬܐ ܕܥܠܘܘܬܐ) cannot be considered a simple or ordinary man (ܐܘܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܥܠܘܘܬܐ). Again, we have the use of the term “simple man.” We need to look for the reason why the humanity of the subject of the union cannot be considered as a simple man. The quotation says that this humanity belongs to the Logos of God. This means two important things: the humanity belongs to the *qnomā* of the Logos, and the subject is the same Logos of God who is identified with Christ, the subject of the Economy. The consequence of this is that, according to our interpretation, the humanity of Christ does not have its own *qnomā*, and for that reason, it cannot be seen as a simple or mere man. In fact, this analysis confirms our hypothesis, as we said above, about the use of the term “ܐܘܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܥܠܘܘܬܐ.” The second reason for the rejection of considering the humanity of Christ as a simple man is the union by itself.

At the end of the anathemas, we have a kind of explanation of the type of union that the fathers of the synod affirm. It is an indescribable and inexplicable union, starting in the womb of the Virgin; moreover, the union lasts forever and is without separation (ܐܘܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܥܠܘܘܬܐ ܕܥܠܘܘܬܐ ܕܥܠܘܘܬܐ ܕܥܠܘܘܬܐ ܕܥܠܘܘܬܐ ܕܥܠܘܘܬܐ). To know that we are going in the right direction in our

¹³⁵ Cf. *idem*, 128.249-295. It is good to notice, also, that the interpretation that every group gave to this term is different.

interpretation, we need to see the expression that the text gives to the humanity of Christ; it is called a dominical temple (ܩܘܪܝܐܩܘܨܐ). The adjective “dominical” was given also by Leontius of Jerusalem to the humanity of Christ, calling it “κυριακός ἄνθρωπος.” For Leontius, this term, as noticed by Grillmeier, was chosen to refer to Christ as a perfect term to explain the consequence of the union for the human nature, which was divinized, since it did not have its own hypostasis.¹³⁶ Leontius of Jerusalem, in fact, in the thirteenth chapter of his work *Contra Nestorianos*, tries to answer the question asked by an anonymous Greek Nestorian: to explain the composition between the Logos and the human being taken from us. In answer to this question, Leontius makes it clear that the humanity in Christ, which he calls “κυριακός ἄνθρωπος,” has no hypostasis of its own because it was united with the divine nature in the hypostasis of the Logos.¹³⁷ Expressions such as “the Logos united to himself the human nature,” which we find in our text, can be found in the work of Leontius in a similar polemical context, just as in our text here.¹³⁸ Again, we can notice, in our opinion, a reciprocal influence between the neo-Chalcedonians and the theologians of the Church of the East. The influence made by the neo-Chalcedonians remains indirect,¹³⁹ because the thinkers of this Church had made their own developments in Christology so that they could arrive precisely at such an affirmation. We say that the influence is indirect, because in this profession we have no use of the technical terminology that is used by Leontius of Jerusalem, such as “*en-hypostaton/etero-hypostaton*” etc. This fact means that the Church of the East was far removed from the progress in metaphysical thought that was occurring among the Chalcedonian Greeks, but at the same time, the Church could reach, with simple and traditional language, the same Christological ideas. So, as a first conclusion, by calling the humanity of Christ “a dominical temple,” the fathers of the synod

¹³⁶ Cf. *idem*, 309-311. For the history of this concept in the patristic tradition see Grillmeier, “Ο κυριακός ἄνθρωπος.”

¹³⁷ Grillmeier – Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II/II, 309-311.

¹³⁸ “Τὸ συντεθῆναι τὸν Θεὸν Λόγον τῷ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἀνθρώπῳ καθ’ ὑμᾶς, ἢ αὐτὸν μόνον εὐρηγέτησεν, ἢ τὸν ᾧ συνετέθη ἄνθρωπον, ἢ ἀμφοτέρους ἅμα, ἢ οὐδ’ ἑαυτὸν οὐδὲ ἐκείνον, ἀλλ’ ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς μόνους, ἢ Θεόν καὶ ἡμᾶς, τὸν δὲ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἑαυτῷ συντεθέντα ἄνθρωπον οὐδαμῶς, ἢ αὐτὸν τε καὶ ἡμᾶς ἅμα, ἢ ἡμᾶς τε καὶ τὸν ἐξ ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπον, Θεὸν δὲ οὐδὲ ὄλωσ,” PG 86, 1465C.

¹³⁹ We do not have any information about an extant Syriac translation of the work *Contra Nestorianos* of Leontius of Jerusalem, cf. CPG 6813; for that reason, we cannot affirm that his work was known in Persia, even if it could have arrived and been known in Greek. Nevertheless, the fact that Leontius made a very interesting metaphysical progress of thought and use of terminology, which are not used by the fathers of this synod, leads us to maintain that solely the general opinion of this neo-Chalcedonian thinker was known by the thinkers of the Church of the East, especially if, as we said, his work was composed in a polemical atmosphere.

ing of Ḥenana and his movement, as some scholars suggest;¹⁴⁷ rather, it could be a condemnation of the position of Ḥenana regarding Theodore of Mopsuestia, even if the synod did not mention his name openly. Ḥenana, in fact, did not consider Theodore the doctor (معلم) of the Church, even if he did not refute his works.¹⁴⁸ In any case, we cannot see that the synod condemned the Christological doctrine of Ḥenana and his movement; on the contrary, the synod adopted this current of Christology, as we demonstrated in our analysis above.¹⁴⁹

It is clear also that the doctrine of this synod is against the Nestorianism, i.e., the two-*qnomē* Christology. We are not sure, however, if this two-*qnomē* Christology was considered as real Nestorianism, that is, the teaching of the two christs and two sons.¹⁵⁰ We can safely say that if the Church of the East had continued her adoption of this Christological current, that is the *qnomā-parṣopā* Christology, and had developed it more it could even have accepted the *communicatio idiomatum*. However, as historical events tell us, the victory of this Christological current did not remain for long, and the work of the enemies of Ḥenana and of his followers started to get stronger, as we will see reflected in the next and last synod of our analysis.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Baum – Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 37. In note 145 above, we can notice in the cited text the word “مدرسة,” which could refer to the school of Nisibis, even if it is in the plural. Nevertheless, we see in this condemnation a position against the hermeneutical teaching of Ḥenana and not against his Christological way of thinking.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Becker, *Fear of God*, 90, 199-200.

¹⁴⁹ Some scholars consider also that the indirect condemnation of Ḥenana’s movement in these synods was because of his exegetical position regarding Theodore of Mopsuestia, cf. *idem*, 199. We think, however, that this synod of 598, that we are analyzing here, condemned just the exegetical position of Ḥenana, the director of the school of Nisibis, and not his Christological thought, trying by this to calm the situation at the school of Nisibis. In fact, we know that as a reaction to such an exegetical position some teachers and students left the school, cf. Vööbus, A., *History*, 308-312. Then, however, some opponents of Ḥenana, especially Babai the Great, started to write against his Christological thought, linking it with his exegetical and spiritual theology. So, after a time of indirect condemnation of his exegetical thought, in the synod hold during the year 605 and the one of 612 we have an indirect condemnation of Ḥenana’s Christology too. This is our hypothesis to be considered as a reevaluation of the opinions of L. Abramowski and A. Becker; for their opinions see Becker, *Fear of God*, 199-202.

¹⁵⁰ In fact, this period should be considered as a period of tensions between these different Christological currents within the Church of the East. As A. Becker demonstrated, in this time there appeared also works of individual theologians, members of the same Church of the East, who were accusing each other of wrong doctrines, cf. *idem*, 91-92. For the case of Henana we know that he was accused to be Monophysite, Chalcedonian, or Originist, cf. Childers, “Ḥenana,” 194; we do not know however, if the two-*qnomē* Christological current was accused, by the *qnomā-parṣopā* current, to teach two christs and two sons.

The Synod of 605

The historical context of this synod is particular. The wars between the Persian Empire and Byzantium were still ongoing. The Church of the East continued to try to define its doctrine in the face of other confessions and especially, this time, in the face of the Christology of the Chalcedonians. For that reason, as Brock has noticed, we have the most powerful statement against all those who refute the teaching of the great Theodore of Mopsuestia.¹⁵¹ Some scholars see in such a position a condemnation of Ḥenana and his movement;¹⁵² in our opinion, however, this time it could be not just against his hermeneutical doctrine, but also indirectly against the Christological *qnomā-paršopā* current.¹⁵³ As we will see, starting from this synod, the two-*qnomē* Christological movement became stronger and more notable, a fact which is reflected in the Christological expressions of this synod. Also, we need to observe that in this period, Babai the Great started his activity in the two-*qnomē* Christological movement, adopting the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia and of Nestorius and giving it an interesting interpretation and making at the same time a notable progress in thought.¹⁵⁴ We should remember also that Babai started his action from the Great Monastery of the community of Abraham of Kashkar, the center of the two-*qnomē* Christological movement;¹⁵⁵ this means that we have a controversy between two monastic communities, the one which was influenced by Ḥenana¹⁵⁶ and the other, the community of Abraham of Kashkar.¹⁵⁷ In this context, Catholicos Gregory I held a synod in which we find the next Christological statement:

¹⁵¹ Cf. Brock, "The Christology of the Church," 127. See the position of the Church in *Synodicon orientale*, 210-211.

¹⁵² Cf. Baum – Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 37.

¹⁵³ In fact as G. Reinink noticed, Babai developed the two-*qnomē* Christology as a reaction to the doctrine of Ḥenana, cf. Reinink, "The Cause," 525. So, taking into consideration that the Christological current of Babai was very strong at the time of this synod, which is reflected through its Christological statement as we are going to see, we can consider the decisions and the Christology of this synod as an indirect condemnation of the Christology of Ḥenana and also of his exegetical tradition.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *idem*; On the thought of Babai and its relation to the Christology of Nestorius see Scipioni, *Ricerche*.

¹⁵⁵ See the note 97, above, see also Baum – Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 36, 38.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *idem*, 35-36.

¹⁵⁷ Ḥenana accepted Alexandrian ways of exegesis, i.e. more spiritual and less historical and literal, and this influenced the spirituality of some monastic communities of the Church of the East, cf. Becker, *Fear of God*, 90; The reaction against this spiritual doctrine could be reflected in the canons of the community of Abraham of Kashkar and the conditions of its establishment, cf. Chialà, *Abramo di Kashkar*, 49-96. Babai, in fact, being a member of this community and its future guide, cf. *idem*, 119-136, linked this spiritual doctrine with the

Even if our text here does not mention the term *qnomā*, we can interpret the words “perfect God” or “perfect man” as a *qnomā*, which is perfect in the common nature to which it belongs. To understand this explanation better we should take into consideration that the fathers of the synod by perfect probably meant a concrete nature that exists by itself (subsistent). So the perfect God as *qnomā* is a subsistent divine nature which belongs to the common nature of divinity, and the perfect man is a subsistent human nature which belongs to the common human nature.

These two natures conserve their properties (ܩܢܘܡܐ, lit. in what belongs to it) even if they are united. The reason for that is the type of the union. The union is a real union (ܩܘܡܐ ܩܘܡܐ) of the *parṣopā* of the one Son and Christ (ܩܘܡܐ ܩܘܡܐ ܩܘܡܐ). This union is denoted by the term “ܩܘܡܐ” and not “ܩܘܡܐܐ” (conjunction) as was done in the synod of 486, so even if we have similar Christological expressions, and even if in both synods the union is described as real and true and perfect, this time we have the use of the term “ܩܘܡܐ” (union) — a term that other synods after 486 also employed. Does this mean that the fathers of this synod, and maybe those of the synod of 486, understood the term “ܩܘܡܐܐ” as “union” and not as “conjunction,” according to its Theodorian Greek background, “συνάφεια”? We can answer this question affirmatively, confirming our opinion in opposition to that of Macomber. In fact, the synod of 585, too, had used the adjective “perfect” to describe the union “ܩܘܡܐܐ ܩܘܡܐܐ,” and that would confirm our hypothesis.

We can notice also that the properties are more related to the common natures than to the concrete ones, and precisely because the natures conserve their properties the union is real. This is a refutation of the accusation made by Chalcedonians and Monophysites against the real Nestorianism and against the Nestorians, including the Church of the East and its traditional official Christology at that time (two natures, one *parṣopā*) and the two Christological currents within it (*qnomā-parṣopā* and two-*qnomē*): that the lasts (so called Nestorians) teach that the union in Christ was not real.¹⁶⁰ This accusation, in fact, was the result of the interpretation made by the Chalcedonians and Monophysites to the union according the pleasure or the will, i.e. the doctrine of Theodore of Mopsuestia and other Antiochians. Again, the Church of the East rejects the real Nestorianism, and rejects the accusation of being considered real Nestorian, i.e. teaching two, not really united, subjects (natures) in Christ. However, we do not have a definition of this real union that the synod proclaims. Both Chalcedonians

¹⁶⁰ See the IV anathema of the council of Constantinople II; the same accusation we can find in the *Profession of faith* of John of Tella, and in the *Contra Nestorianos* of Leontius of Jerusalem.

and non-Chalcedonians talk about a real union, marked the hypostatic type of union, and some thinkers even went so far as to talk about a “natural” or “substantial” union, to emphasize the reality of the union of the two natures, as Leontius of Byzantium did.¹⁶¹ For the Church of the East, however, saying that this union was “of the one *parṣopā*” of the Son and Christ was enough to show that the union is real. It could be the way they chose to express the Theodorian doctrine of the *prosopic* union.¹⁶² It is clear, in addition, from the text that the result of the union is one, and for that reason they used the technical term *parṣopā*, which, as we have said earlier, was used exclusively in the context of the divine Economy to refer to the one subject. The question now could be the following: what is the relationship between this one *parṣopā* and the united perfect natures? Moreover, since the synod states that this *parṣopā* is of the one Son and Christ, who is identified with the Logos of God, the *qnomā* of the Son, is there any connection between *parṣopā* and *qnomā*? Are they synonyms, or does every term have its own metaphysical function?

In our opinion, we have in this passage a new approach to the Christology of the Church of the East. We cannot use the same interpretation that we used with the other Christological statements for one reason: In this profession of faith, we have a clear definition of the human nature of Christ as being perfect man, which means a concrete and subsistent nature, namely a single *qnomā*, even if the fathers did not use the term *qnomā* in the Christology. Moreover, it is clear that there is a difference between the terms *qnomā* and *parṣopā*. In fact, we have the same analysis as with the synod of 486, in which we encountered the adjective “perfect” and the technical term *parṣopā*.

This synod does not explain all this metaphysical background of our analysis-interpretation, but taking into consideration that the movement of Babai the Great was started before this synod, and that we already had thinkers who were starting to use the translated works of Nestorius, we can affirm that probably with this synod, we have the beginning of the influence of this second current of Christology on the official doctrine of the Church of the East. That does not mean that one current took the place of the other. The victory of this current will occur in the next synod of this Church in 612, in the assembly of the bishops under Babai the Great himself. Our synod here still identifies Christ and the eternal Logos, and it did not employ the term *qnomā* in a Christological context. Babai and his followers could find in this synod and the one in 486, and in their professions of faith, a good background and preparation for expressing the two-*qnomē*

¹⁶¹ Cf. Grillmeier – Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II/II, 205-212.

¹⁶² On this doctrine see McLeod, *The Roles*, 163-175.

Christology. It is clear, in fact, that there is a desire not simply to refute the other Christological current, but rather to be different from the other Christian confessions — especially, in this period, from the Chalcedonians and from neo-Chalcedonian Christology. In our opinion, the Church of the East tried with this synod to define its traditional doctrine in the face of the other confessions, using the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia. This time, even the Christology of Ḥenana is refuted, because it could be identified with the Chalcedonians.¹⁶³ In addition, although we have an identification of the Logos with Christ, the two-*qnomē* Christological current won the victory in this synod. Yet we cannot consider this synod, just as we did regarding the one in 486, to have adopted “Nestorianism,” namely the teaching of two natures and two *qnomē* in one *parṣopā*, which was to happen only in the year 612. These two synods, then, could be considered as a preparation for the final victory of the two-*qnomē* current, which makes a distinction between Christ and the Logos and uses the term *qnomā* in the Christological context.

Conclusions

After our analysis of the official synods of the Church of the East, we can arrive at some conclusions that regard the Christology of this Church and the discussion between scholars about it. First of all, it is clear that the terminology chosen by this Church in its official synods is distinctive in two categories, Trinitarian theology and Christology (i.e., the divine Economy in Christ’s Incarnation). Each field has its own metaphysical terminology: *qnomā* for Trinitarian theology and *parṣopā* for Christology, while the term nature (*kyanā*) is used in both fields.¹⁶⁴ For this reason, we have tried to approach the Christological professions and statements of those synods, applying this terminology, even if sometimes the term *parṣopā* does not appear in reference to the divine Economy. We have also noticed that *qnomā* is a perfect nature. Even if this definition was used exclusively in the context of Trinitarian doctrine, we have tried to apply it in the context of Christological doctrine where we noted the appearance of the expressions “perfect humanity,” “perfect divinity,” “perfect God,” or “perfect Man.” This application helped us to observe how the two-*qnomē* Christological current or the *qnomā-parṣopā* current could base their doctrines on the first synods of the Church of the East, i.e., the traditional Antiochene Christology of two natures and one *parṣopā* (*parṣopā*).¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ For more see *Syriac dialogue*, vol. II, 125-129.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Abramowski, “Martyrius-Sahdona,” 18. See also Grillmeier – Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II/III, 615-620.

¹⁶⁵ See also the opinion, without lots of details or even detailed analysis, of G. Reinink who

The following summary in tabular form will help us to make a final reflection on all our analysis:

<i>Synod</i>	<i>Subject of the Incarnation</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Other information</i>
486	Christ <i>parṣopā</i>	Perfect Conjunction of two natures, with their exemplars: Perfect God, perfect Man.	Conjunction without confusion or separation
544	Son Christ	God and Man; Divinity and humanity together	Not ordinary man, Not God without humanity, Perfect humanity
554	Christ Son of God	Ineffable union of divinity and humanity without confusion or change; conservation of properties.	No quaternity, No two christs or sons
576	Christ Son Logos	Two natures: God and Man; Incarnate Christ	Perfect temple of the dwelling
585	Christ <i>parṣopā</i>	Unification of two natures: divinity and humanity; the <i>qnomā</i> of the Logos in Christ, Perfect union between divinity and humanity	Not ordinary man, Identification with the Logos by Economy, Defense of Theodore of Mopsuestia
598	Christ	Inseparable union of divine nature and human nature without confusion or composition	Dominical temple, Not mere man, No quaternity, no two christs or sons, Acceptance of Theopaschite formula
605	Christ Son <i>parṣopā</i>	True union of perfect God in his divinity and perfect man in his humanity	Conservation of properties

We do not believe, after all this analysis we have made, that the Church of the East, in composing these professions of faith, was directly influenced

confirms the existence of two different interpretations of the same traditional Christology, cf. Reinink, "The Cause," 525-526; We, actually, call these two different interpretations as two different Christological currents within the Church of the East.

by the Christological currents in the West, in Byzantium. Indirect influence and a feeling of having to react to the events that were happening on the other side of Christendom — events that were in direct relation to the essence and the presence of the Church of the East in the Persian Empire — would be a better way to describe the reasons for these synods and their Christologies.

First of all, with the synod of 486, we have the only clear surviving Christological reaction to the synods of Ephesus and Chalcedon and the *Henotikon* of Zeno. In this synod, Christ as the one subject of the Economy is also called by the term *parṣopā*. This technical and metaphysical term for the Economy, which is a fundamental element of Antiochene Christological thought, is the result of the perfect conjunction of the two natures. As we noted, the term “perfect conjunction” is understood, probably, as a real union without separation. The two united natures are described as exemplars, probably to underline the very distinction between them through the individual properties. They are also called “perfect God” and “perfect man.” This last expression is very important. The “perfect God” is the *qnomā* of the Logos, even if the synod did not use this term in the context of the divine Economy. The question, then, deals with the type of the “perfect man” in Christ: is it another *qnomā*, which means a singular and individual man? If so, do we have the addition of a fourth *qnomā* in the Trinity, which would mean a change into quaternity? What is the connection between the *qnomā* and *parṣopā*? What is their metaphysical function? These, we think, are the important questions to which the synod of 486 did not reply.

The synods of 544, 554 and 576 tried to give answers to the above questions. In these three synods, we have an identification between the Logos, the Son of God, and the Christ. In addition, the synods of 544 and 554 emphasized that the Trinity cannot become a quaternity and that there are no two christs or two sons. If we take into consideration these two affirmations, we could suppose, with some certainty, that the human nature of Christ cannot be a *qnomā*, which means a single man. The expression “ordinary man” (ܩܘܡܐ ܩܘܡܐ) here provides good support for our hypothesis. However, at the same time, this humanity is a perfect nature, and it is called “man”; how can we explain this? The synod of 576 took another step to resolve this problem. We have the expression “the incarnate Christ/Christ in the flesh,” (ܩܘܡܐ ܩܘܡܐ ܩܘܡܐ); in our opinion, this expression could be a key to understanding the connection between the *qnomā* and the *parṣopā*. *Qnomā* could manifest a single perfect nature, so Christ before his Incarnation could be called a *qnomā*, while after the Incarnation, we have the *parṣopā* which manifests two natures. The term “incarnate Christ,” according to our interpretation, could also express the evolution of the Church of

the East as regards the Christological idea of the composition “σύνθεσις.” The incarnate Christ could be a synonym of *Christus compositus*, “Χριστός σύνθετος.”¹⁶⁶ With this interpretation, we could resolve the problem regarding the perfect human nature that is not a single *qnomā*. Certainly, we do not have a clear doctrine of a hypostatic union, but if the hypostatic union means a real and true union, then the synods always emphasized this fact. The union is real, without confusion or separation.

In our opinion, these three synods could be a clear reflection of the *qnomā-parṣopā* Christological current, which certainly co-existed peacefully with the other Christological current until the controversy with Ḥenana, as de Halleux maintained,¹⁶⁷ without giving a good explanation.¹⁶⁸ The fact that in the year 562/563 we have an official text of a delegation of the Church of the East to Byzantium in which we have a clear two-*qnomē* Christology¹⁶⁹ confirms our opinion on the peaceful co-existence of the two currents. The two-*qnomē* current was the other solution that some thinkers of the Church of the East tried to give to the open questions posed by the synod of 486. This current, as is clear from the official documents we have analyzed, was not yet very influential. Both currents were using Christological thought found in some thinkers of the Church of the East, and maybe an indirect influence from thinkers from the West, especially Chalcedonians and neo-Chalcedonians. The two-*qnomē* current was doubtless using the Syriac translations of Nestorius, while the *qnomā-parṣopā* current employed other works. The common tradition of these two currents could be the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia.

Only with the stance taken by Ḥenana against the tradition of Theodore of Mopsuestia do we have the start of competition between the two Christological currents. This conflict was fuelled by the fact that it was a conflict between different monastic movements in the Church of the East.

The synod of 585 could be a good reflection of this atmosphere. In this synod, we have the appearance of the technical term *parṣopā* in the context of Christology; this *parṣopā* is the unification and perfect union of the two natures. The human nature could not be ordinary man, but at the same time, and only in reference to the divine Economy, the *parṣopā* could be identified with the Logos. In other words, the human passion could be at-

¹⁶⁶ On this term see Grillmeier – Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II/II, 126-128.294-295.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. de Halleux, “La christologie de Martyrius-Sahdona,” 29.

¹⁶⁸ This prompted Abramowski to raise a rhetorical question about this opinion of de Halleux, cf. Abramowski, “Martyrius-Sahdona,” 17.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Guillaumont, A., “Justinien et l’Église de Perse,” 62-66, see also Abramowski, “Martyrius-Sahdona,” 17-18.

tributed to the Logos, which means one type of *communicatio idiomatum*. In our opinion, all this leads us to maintain that here the *paršopā* could have the function of the composition. If this interpretation is correct, then this synod, even if it condemned indirectly the position of Ḥenana against that of Theodore of Mopsuestia, supported a Christology that is still in the *paršopā-qnomā* current, the current to which Ḥenana belonged as well. We should also notice that in the Christological doctrine of this synod there is a kind of use of the term *qnomā* for the divine nature of Christ. It is clear, then, that this synod reflects the start of the tensions between the two Christological currents.

We could describe the synod of 598, in which we have some very important elements, as being in the same tradition as the Synod of 585, with its acceptance of the Theopaschite formula “God the Logos himself perfected the passion of our salvation in the body of his humanity” (ܐܠܗܐ ܩܘܡܐ ܡܢ ܡܳܠܗܘܬܳܐ ܕܰܚܝܘܢܳܐ ܕܰܚܝܘܢܳܐ ܕܰܚܝܘܢܳܐ ܕܰܚܝܘܢܳܐ ܕܰܚܝܘܢܳܐ). Moreover, the humanity of Christ is called a “dominical temple” (ܕܰܘܡܰܝܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܠܰܝܰܟܰܐ), which could be understood to indicate that this humanity did not have its own *qnomā*. The problem with this synod is the refutation of the “composition” in Christ. This refutation does not mean that the idea of composition in general, which we found, according to our interpretation, in the doctrine of the synods of 576 and 585, is refuted, but rather that the idea that this composition means a confusion between the natures is rejected. It is clear that the official way of thinking of the Church of the East is still in agreement with the *paršopā-qnomā* current.

The last synod analyzed, the one in the year 605, could be considered as the start of the influence of the two-*qnomē* current in the official documents of the Church of the East. Christ as the *paršopā* of the Economy, even if he is identified with the Son, is perfect man in his humanity and perfect God in his divinity. We saw in these expressions a definition of the metaphysical function of *qnomā*, which is different from that of *paršopā*.

The victory of the two-*qnomē* current came about in the synod of 612 under the direction of Babai the Great. It would not be an outright victory for his Christological thought, however, because the synod did not use the term *paršopā* in its Trinitarian theology, as he did.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, from this synod onwards, the term *qnomā* started to have a new metaphysical significance and was applied in the field of Christology. This victory was not accepted by the other current, which continued to exist and to express its Christology. The conflict between the Catholicoi Isho’yahb II and Isho’yahb III, who were members of the community of Abraham of

¹⁷⁰ On this subject see, Abramowski, “Babai der Grosse,” 297ss.

Kashkar on the one hand, and Martyrius-Sahdona, who belonged to another monastic community influenced by Ḥenana, on the other, could be a good example of this atmosphere.¹⁷¹

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¹⁷¹ On this controversy see the articles of de Halleux, "La christologie de Martyrius-Sahdona"; de Halleux, "Martyrius-Sahdona," and the opinion of Abramowski in Abramowski, "Martyrius-Sahdona." We should say that L. Abramowski did not see Martyrius as a follower of the Christology of Ḥenana, but as a Chalcedonian in the Church of the East. However, we do not agree with this opinion; after our analysis, we sustain that the *qnomā-parṣopā* current had different approaches and ways to resolve the open Christological questions from those of Chalcedonian Christology had. We thus see the Christology of Martyrius as belonging to the *qnomā-parṣopā* current, rather than as Chalcedonian. See also, regarding this, Reinink, "The Cause," 525-526, note 45. This would be a topic of a future study we are planning to do, cf. Ebeid, "La cristologia," 218-219, note 53.



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Pontifical Oriental Institute
Rome
Email: bisharaeheid@gmail.com

Bishara Ebeid

SUMMARY

The Church of the East, even if it was outside the Byzantine Empire and did not take part in the Christological discussions and controversies there, could not be silent. Our analysis of the Christological statements and professions of faith shows the reaction of this Church to the Christological controversies. These statements demonstrate this Church's own progress in Christological thought, its way of responding to the most important Christological questions, in two different Christological currents: the *qnomā-parṣopā* current and the two-*qnomē* current. This analysis could help scholars understand better the development of the Christology of this Church before the assembly of bishops in 612 and her "Nestorianization," namely, the doctrine of two *kyanē* (natures) and two *qnomē* (hypostases) in the one *parṣopā* (persona) of Christ. This analysis could also assist scholars who study the Christology of the Church of the East after the year 612, since the controversy between the two different Christological currents did not stop with the victory of the two-*qnomē* movement in 612.