

The Apologetic Specific of Jacob's of Serugh Theology in the Context of the Syriac Tradition

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Abstract:

The Syriac theology was affirmed in the first Christian centuries especially throughout a symbolic and mystic specificity. Starting with Saint Ephrem, the thinking of the Syriac Fathers followed the biblical dimension of the Church's tradition that had become a real "vehicle for theology". In this context, Jacob of Serugh is one of the most prolifically Syriac hymnologists. He carries on Saint Ephrem's stile, expressing much moderated in the problem of monophysitism. Although he learned at the same school as Philoxene of Maboug, Jacob didn't have any polemical approach in his writings on dogmatic issues or more. He was maintained on the tradition of the Syriac Fathers. In our study we had tried to underline the personality of the grate Syriac hymnologist and to put into light the apologetic specific of his work. Moreover, the teaching about our Savior Jesus Christ was also accentuated by quotes from Jacob's writings.

Keywords:

Syriac theology, Jacob of Sarugh, hymnography, christology, apologetic approach

The Syriac theology knew a special development in the first Christian centuries. This important feature of the Christian Church was underlined through a very strong apologetic work promoted by many symbols and biblical images. In this context, it was situated apart by the influence of the philosophical terminology of concepts. Graphed on the old Aramaic tradition, the Syriac theol-

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ogy is in his all heritage¹ a “*veritable vehicle for the Christianity* from the first centuries”.² Moreover, the context of interaction between the Semitic specific and the Greek influences is very important in the process of understanding the manner of promoting the truth of confession and also in the genesis of Christological doctrine in the Church.³ The interaction between the Greek and Syriac theology had become a certification starting from the fourth century. From this moment, the Christian apologetic in the Syrian areal has enriched with many translations, writings and also with a martyrial confession beyond the pagan oppression. This reality is also valid for the Greek apologetic. In this period the Greek translations from the work of Saint Ephrem were realized according to the original form. On the other hand, the theological work of Theodor of Mopsuestia and Diodor of Thars was entirely known in the Greek environment together with many liturgical texts from the Syriac areal.⁴ Moreover, the theological Schools from Antioch and Edessa were also very important in this process. These two places are the most important centers from the Syriac apologetics because here they are intellectually formed the most known theologians and confessors in the Oriental Christianity.

After the Constantine **peace**, the Roman side of Syria is more opened to the dialogue with the Greek areal, developing a dynamic theology based on the writings of Saint Ephrem, Saint John Chrysostom and also of the Syrian doctors. Unfortunately, the Persian side of the Syrian territory still remained on the op-

¹ You can see: Ioniță Apostolache, „The Syriac Theological Heritage in the Context of the Christological Controversies from the First Christian Centuries”, în *The Christian Paradigm of a United Europe. Theology and Mystique in the Work of Saint Cyril of Alexandria*, Ed. Mitropolia Olteniei, Craiova, 2015, p. 212-226.

² “Christianity used Syriac as the vehicle for its message and doctrine and monopolized this language for its exclusive use” – see: Hendrik Jan Willem Drijvers, “Syrian Christianity and Judaism”, in J. Lieu – J. North – T. Rajak (edd.), *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians. In the Roman Empire* (London – New York 1992) p. 126; cf also Lucas Van Rompay, “The East (3): Syria and Mesopotamia,” in S. Ashbrook Harvey – D. G. Hunter (edd.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford 2008), p. 366; Bawai Soro, *The Church of the East. Apostolic & Orthodox*, San Jose, CA 2007, p. 100.

³ “From the fifth century onwards” – says Leslie William Barnard – “Syriac-speaking Christianity became, in the main, secondary to Greek Christendom. But that it had an original existence with a theological approach of its own should not be forgotten in the study of the origins of the Church” (*The Origins and Emergence of the Church in Edessa during the First Two Centuries A.D.*, in “*Vigiliae Christianae*”, no. 22/1968, p. 175).

⁴ Sebastian Brock believes that this exchange started from the time of Tatian, although the process of theological interaction is visible at the start of the fourth century – see: Sebastian p. Brock, *Syriac Culture, 337-425*, in “*Cambridge Ancient History*” (CAH) XIII, p. 717.

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pression of pagan persecutions,⁵ generating a martyrical apologetic based on a mystic and symbolic expression. From the fifth until the seventh century the two geographic parts from the Syrian Church (Roman and Persian), separated until by the political differences, were now divided by the doctrinal disagreements. So it makes, analyzing these problematic from a doctrinal point of view, specially related by the two natures and wills of our Lord Jesus Christ, the divinity and the humanity, we reach the true reason of splitting in the western Christianity.⁶ Starting from Chalcedon (451), the Christological problematic had generated the tree old Syrian Churches: the Western Church, the Orthodox Syrian Church and the Maronite Church. On this background, “the frequently lethal conflicts between the Greek Church of the Byzantine Empire and the Syriac Churches over such issues only ceased with the incorporation of most Syriac Christians into the Arab Muslim Caliphate during the 630s. As a result of these theological disagreements, opposing churches excommunicated each other, that is, they denied members of the other communions the opportunity to receive the Eucharist during the Divine Liturgy on Sundays”.⁷

The post-calcedonian period had generated therefore the crucial moment from the history of the Syriac Church. In this way, the Syriac Christianity from the Roman Empire was split in two: the one who accepted the teachings of Chalcedon Council (*Chalcedonians*) and the ones who rejected it (non-Chalcedonians). Both sides invoked the orthodox spirit: the first of them became known like “Greek

⁵ We must mention here the persecutions of Sapur II, that slathered all the Christian who denied the Zoroastrism (Robert R. Phenix jr. and Cornelia B. Horn, *Syriac Speaking Churches: Their Origin and History to the Eighteen Century*, in „Buletin od Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies 7, no. 2/2005, p. 12). „Dezvoltarea majoră a Bisericii Creștine în Imperiul Roman după Edictul de la Mediolanum, notează Winkler, la fel și controversa ariană soluționată la Nicea (325) nu au avut ecou în Biserica Siriacă din Imperiul Persan. Dimpotrivă, sub parți atitudinea față de creștini a fost una de toleranță, sub sasanizi persecuțiile izolate pe motiv de apostazie de la yoroastrism, pe când în vremea împăratului Sapur al II-lea acestea au atins apogeul” (D. W. Winkler, *The Church of the East. A concise history*, London – New York, 2003, p. 11; Bawai Soro, *The Church of the East. Apostolic and Orthodox*, Adiabene Publications, San Jose (SUA), 2007, p. 146).

⁶ „Unfortunately, says the Metropolitan Irineu Popa, with all the precautions taken by the council of Chalcedon it did not bring peace within the Church. If the West generally remains faithful to the dogmatic definition, very soon in the East there was a hostile reaction that will last until today. Therefore, those who interpreted the formula of St. Cyril in the opposite direction of the two natures, considered the dogmatic judgments of Pope Leo as a victory, which meant for them a victory of Nestorianism. Consequently, this party did not recognize either the Council of Chalcedon or the local bishops, who received its definition, creating a beginning for the heterodox monophysite Churches” (IPS prof. univ. dr. Irineu Popa, *Iisus Hristos este Același, ieri și azi, și în veac*, Ed. Mitropolia Olteniei, Craiova, 2010, p. 288).

⁷ Robert R. Phenix jr. and Cornelia B. Horn, *Syriac Speaking Churches ...*, p. 12-13.

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Orthodox” or “Melchite”, while the latter came to be called “Syrian Orthodox”.⁸ We didn't forget here neither the reconciliation attempts between these two Syriac churches. In this way, the byzantine emperors have made significant efforts to “draw the Miaphysites at the orthodox faith, obligating for many times the orthodox people to accept some doctrinal concessions. Between these emperors the name of Zenon is well known, with his famous *Honoticon*, in which he declared that our Lord Jesus Christ is one, anathematizing Nestorius and also Eutihus, but broking the good relationships between West and West.⁹ The generated Schism lasted from 484, until the time of the emperor Justinian, who reactivated the teaching from the Chalcedon Council”.¹⁰

Beyond these attempts, in the non-Chalcedonian side of the Syriac Church were highlighted two representative personalities for the miaphysitic Christology: Philoxene of Maboug, who represented the Syriac speaking side from the patriarchate of Antioch and Sever of Antioch, who was the Greek speaker leader from the Miaphysitic Church.¹¹ Beside of them some orientalist researchers placed the figure of Jacob of Serugh, bishop of great theological subtlety, famous hymnologist of the Syriac Church. Although he studied with Philoxene at Edessa, this seems to be the only thing that they have in commune. Therefore, since the bishop of Maboug always posted a very evident miaphysite attitude revealed especially in his writings; Jacob had always tried to avoid the Christological problems, preferring to develop a symbolic and mystical theology.

Having in mind his scales thinking and also the multiple and reaches meanings of his work, we will analyses, starting from his biographical coordinates, the apologetic part of his confessions.

Life and work of the Syrian bishop

Jacob of Setugh is one of the most known hymnologists and theologians from the Syriac areal. His identity and also his theological activity are mentioned

⁸ „For the sixth century the term ‘Syrian Orthodox’ does not imply an ethnic affiliation, as most non-Chalcedonian bishops were bilingual, and there was hardly anything exclusively Syrian about the church. The term ‘Nestorian’ was used by non-Chalcedonians in order to disqualify the Chalcedonians and attach them to a dyophysite doctrine that at this time was generally regarded as heretical” (Volker L. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*, Oxford Early Christian Studies, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 3).

⁹ „The *Henotikon* advises the reception of the councils of Nicaea, Constantinople I, and Ephesus I. It maintains that both Nestorius and Eutyches were justly condemned. It accepts the *Twelve Anathemas* as true doctrine” (Andrian Nichols, *Rome and the Eastern Churches*, p. 95).

¹⁰ IPS prof. univ. dr. Irineu Popa, *Iisus Hristos este Același, ieri și azi, și în veac*, p. 288-289.

¹¹ Andrian Nichols, *Rome and the Eastern Churches. A Study in Schism*, Revised edition, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2010, p. 96.

in at last three important biographies, all of them in the Syriac language.¹² He was born in 451, at Kumran, a village on the River Euphrates, like the only son of his parents. Some details about the coordinates of his life we can find in the notes of his biography, which was also bishop in Batna from the region Setugh.¹³ From him we know that his father was priest and his mother can have babies. Therefore, his birth was received like a miracle from God, the fruit of the prayers of his parents. At the age of three years old, he drew the attention of the assembly during the liturgy: “at the moment in the Anaphora of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Mysteries, the holy child got down from his mother’s arms pushed his way through the people and went to the Holy Table where he partook of three drafts of the Holy Spirit. From then on he began to pour forth *mimre* and teachings.”¹⁴ Between 466-473, Jacob was initiated in the exegesis of the Holy Scriptures at the School of Edessa. Under the coordination of the bishop Ibas, the leader of this theological school, he had translated from Greek into Syriac the works of Diodors from Tarsus, Theodor of Mopsuestia or Theodoret of Cyrus.¹⁵ Also here, Jacob learned the art theology in verse, inherited from Saint Ephrem the Syrus. This kind preoccupation denoted a stylistic proximity between the future bishop of Serugh and “the Syrians’ Prophet”. In Pseudo-Joshua’s *Chronicle* the person of Jacob of Serugh is presented in the context of the events from 494-506.¹⁶ Here we find out that the Syrian bishop took attitude towards the Christians who wanted to leave the Syrians cities in the time of the Persian war. He urged them to be steadfast in the Christian belief and to overcome together the social attempts. In this way, the most enlighten evidence where his hymns and letters of encouragement which we witted in the purpose of strengthening the people in the hope of salvation in God.¹⁷ The attitude of the Syriac father was also generated by practical reasons. He known very well that the

¹² More about the Syrian bishop we can find in a manuscript series from the 12th and 17th century. The English scholar Sebastian Brock offers a complete list with this documents where he mention also the names of Jacob’s bibliographers (vezi: „Jacob of Serugh: A Select Bibliographical guide” (2010), p. 237-239). Therefore, the most important biographic documents concerning the Syriac father are on the signature of Abbeloos, *De vita et scriptis D. Jacobi* (1867), p. 311-314 and Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (1719) I, p. 206-209.

¹³ Cf Assemani, I, 286-289. Chapter XXVII is dedicated to the life and work of Jacob of Serugh (see: p. 283-340).

¹⁴ S. Brock, *Select Bibliography*, 2010, p. 238.

¹⁵ Khalil Awan, Introduction a Jaques de Saroug, *Quatre Homilies Metriques sur la Craion*, CSCO, vol. 509, *Scriptores Syri*, Tomus 215, Lovani, 1989, p. XVI.

¹⁶ It is refers to the plague of locusts, the starvation and the epidemic that held from 494 until 502 and also about the Roman – Persian, from 502-506, that started in Edessa and splatted on Amid and Mesopotamia (*The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, translated with notes and introduction by Frank R. Trombley and John W. Watt, translated texts for *Historians* 32, Liverpool 2000).

¹⁷ *Chronicle*, 2000, p. 63-64.

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Syrian Christian cities will become pagans if his believers had fled, triggering the imminent dissolution of the ecclesiastical community. In this purpose, in 519 the Syriac Church inverted Jacob in the dignity of bishop for the Christians of Serugh. He passed away in 521.¹⁸

Because of the notoriety that he enjoyed in the theological and pastoral fields, the personality of Jacob of Serugh is until today very popular in the Oriental Church.¹⁹ In this meaning, the English professor Sebastian Brock shows that Jacob “Jacob “has the distinction of being a saint in both the Maronite Church (Chalcedonian) and the Syrian Orthodox Church (non-Chalcedonian), despite the fact that he lived at a time when the doctrinal controversies were at their fiercest!”.²⁰ His reception in the two sides of the Syriac ecclesiastical life must have been due to his irenic character. His feast is celebrated by the Maronites on April 5, by the Jacobites on October 29, June 29 and July 29. In the eastern liturgy²¹ his writings are the most widely used next to those of Saint Ephrem.²²

Because of the beauty of his hymns, Jacob received the name of “*Flute of the Spirit and Lyre of the Church*”. His work contains poetry and literature. The literary side is very small in compared to the one in the lyric. Therefore, Jacob writhed: **a liturgy, a liturgical ritual on the Mystery of Baptism, 43 epistles, six homilies and some funeral songs**. The style that he promoted and also the theological content of his works were generally analyzed by the orientalist professor Arthur Vööbus.²³ From his research results that Jacob started the hymnographic work by presenting his first exegetic commentary in verses before an episcopal college. At their special request he wrote in the short time another exegetic homily about “*The Prophet Ezekiel and about the symbolism of chariot of fire from his vision*”. This work consists of over 3000 of verses. After this last test he obtained the official acceptance from apart the Syriac bishops, being confirmed like “*Interpreter of the Holy Scriptures*”. Therefore, besides his grate lyrical work who was been mentioned above, the Syriac bishop has left tens of letters and more

¹⁸ Assemani, I, 286.

¹⁹ REMUS RUS, *Dicționar enciclopedic de literatură creștină din primul mileniu*, Ed. Lidia, București, 2003, p. 373-374.

²⁰ Sebastian P. Brock, *Mary in Syriac Tradition*, 2010, p. 5.

²¹ Ignatius Aphram I Barsoum, 257: „In the morning, in the Syriac churches is interpreted a passage from one of the most beautiful of his memre, in the honor of the Creator. Therefore, these kind of creations carry on the memory of their compositor”. Dimineața și seara, în bisericile siriene se cântă un buchet din cele mai frumoase *memre* ale sale, închinat Ziditorului a toate. Ele duc mai departe astfel pomenirea autorului lor”.

²² Cf Assemani, I, 283.

²³ Arthur Vööbus, *Memre-Dichtung*, I, CSCO, vol. 344, p. 17-34.

than 760 *memre*.²⁴ Concerning his lyrical stile, Jacob is the first Syriac poet from whom we have inherited the *dodecasyllabic* metric, lyrical style which received his mane. According to Bar Hebraeus, in the process of writing and copying his homilies Jacob was helped by at last 70 scribes.²⁵

We will refer here at his *Mariological Homilies*. Included in the *Bejan edition*, these writings are in the number of eight, being conceived in verses.²⁶ Regarding their content, we mention that are treating the most important moments from the life of the Holy Virgin. Therefore, two of them are witted on the Annunciation, one on the Visitation, one on the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, one concerning the death and burial of the Blessed Virgin Mother and three on the Nativity of Our Lord.

Here it is a little abstract of the each one of them in part:

In the *First Homily*, the Syriac father is “*Concerning the Blessed Virgin Mother of God*”. It begins with a long introduction, which comprises an address to Christ and another to Mary; two parts, which are complementary: the first part explains God’s choice of Mary, the second part is Jacob’s interpretation of the Annunciation; and a conclusion, speaking of the beatitudes of Mary, serves as a resumption and invocation.

The *Second Homily – Concerning the Annunciation of the Mother of God* – is a sort of development of the first homily, and structured thus: introduction; first part, on the Annunciation; second part, on the kinship of Elizabeth and Mary; third part, on the Visitation; fourth part, on Mary and Joseph.

The *Third Homily – Concerning the Holy Mother of God when she went to Elizabeth*, describes the moment when the Holy Mother hears from Gabriel about the late pregnancy of her kinswoman. The Homily has an introduction and two parts: the first part is on the two generations of the Son; the second part is on the Visitation or encounters of mothers and babes in their womb.

The *Fourth Homily – On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* – is an apologetic writing in which the author answer to the calumnies circulating about the virginity of the Blessed Mother, and opens with an invocation to the Son. In an unsmooth way, it passes from addressing Christ and Mary to addressing the calumniators and adversary, and thus explains the grounds of the belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary.

²⁴ Bar Hebraeus, *Chronique*, t. 1, col. 189-190.

²⁵ Khalil Awan, *Introduction*, p. XVI-XVII.

²⁶ Following Brock’s writhing we can observe the during of Jacob writings from the original text to the modern version. Abbeoos provides the Syriac text with a Latin translation of Homily I, 202-253 and Homily IV, 256-301. Vona translated in Italian all eight verse homilies. Some of these are translated in English by Hansbury (Homilies I, II, III, V), Puthuparampil (Homily IV) and Kollamparampil (Homilies VI, VII, VIII) – see: Sebastian Brock, “Jacob of Serugh: A Select Bibliographical Guide”, 2010, p. 219-239.

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In the *Fifth Homily – Concerning the Burial and Death of the Holy Virgin Mother of God* – Jacob uses some apocryphal writings and tradition, because this event is not found in the bible.

In the *Sixth Homily – On the Nativity of Our Redeemer According to the Flesh* – Jacob describes, using a Christological manner, the story of the incarnation, mentioning: the Annunciation to Mary, the Visitation, the disputation between Mary and Joseph, Mary supplicating the Son in her womb, the Annunciation to Joseph, Joseph taking Mary to his home, the Nativity, the angels announcing to the shepherds, and Mary's supplication with adoration and praise.²⁷

In the *Seventh Homily – The Second Homily on the Nativity* – Jacob speaks for the second time about the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, therefore describing the moment of the Fest.

The *Eighth Homily – On the Nativity of Our Lord* – represent a synthesis of the event of Incarnation of the Son of God in the womb of the Holy Virgin.²⁸

Apologetic ideas in the theology of Jacob of Serugh

The content and the value of his entire theological work, with many apologetic, homiletic or exegetic valences, shows that Jacob of Serugh is the image of the good shepherd. Through his hymnography, he develops a rich ecclesiological perspective. In this way it is presented the role of bishop in the Church and also is proclaimed above all the greatness of the Almighty God.²⁹ Although he lived in the first period of Christianity when the Church benefitted from the freedom of Saint Constantine, the bishop of Serugh defended the rights of his Christians, speaking on their behalf before the state authorities. Firstly he defended the right to participate in the liturgical program. In this way, the devotion to Churches tradition became an essential thing for the life of Syriac people. This truth was defended and confessed by Jacob.³⁰ Moreover, his homilies were targeted towards “the complacency and temptations were grinding the monastic life in his time”.³¹

²⁷ Also here, Jacob uses theological and historical information from the apocryphal writings.

²⁸ Beside the “Mariological Homilies”, Jacob composed also: 7 memre „Against the Jews”, memre „on the dominical Feasts”, 4 memre „on Creation”, Memra “on the veil of Moses”, Memra “on Ephrem”, Memra “on Simeon the Stylite”, prose homilies, various letters and other memre. (Sebastian Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, SEERI, Kottayam, 1997, p. 38).

²⁹ Amir Harrak, *The Syriac Orthodox Celebration of the Eucharist in Light of Jacob of Serugh's Mimro 95*, Series Analecta Gorgiana, 1046, Gorgias Press, 2010, p. 113.

³⁰ Ashbrook Harvey, „To Whom did Jacob Preach?” in *Jacob of Serugh and His Times: Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity*, ed. George Anton Kiraz, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010, p. 117-118.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

His lyrical work has a very important role in the Syriac Christianity from the fifth century. Therefore, through the power of his poetry the entire monastic congregation lived in the beauty of chanted prayer fulfilling the entire work that it must be accomplished.³² From this point of view we can say that Jacob of Serugh is really “a poet, an inspiration to read; a teacher who fathomed his subject, the entire Bible, and appreciated its deep mysteries. He expressed these mysteries in a language full of eloquence, yet one we could understand. He was an illuminator who shed new light on the Biblical narratives and clothed them in robes that we could recognize, using his unique brand of artistry of images and symbols. But while he negotiates his way through all this, he also comes across as a man who is genuinely ready to share with his audience his inner feelings of anxiety, inadequacy and self reproach; he was never aloof. Last but not least, what distinctly comes across is a man who is passionately devoted to one single vocation in life, namely that of revealing the wonders of Creation, the *ihidoyutho* (the Oneness) of the Son with the Father”.³³

The apologetic character of the work of Jacob of Serugh is very popular in his homilies. The themes that he develops here aims especially the revelation, the doctrine about the Holy Trinity, the Christology, the teaching about the Mother of God and also the interreligious elements like the position of the Church toward the Judaism. We will analyze all these characteristics in the following part of the study.

Therefore, about the act of creation, Jacob shows that cannot be dissociated by his divine character. He presents the creation as an act of divine wisdom, concretized through the work of the Holy Trinity. The reason for which is underlined the role of the Son in the creator act is charged with many polemical grounds though the Syrian writer trays to fight against the Arian tendencies from his time.³⁴ In the content of the fourth “*Lyrical Homilies at Genesis*”,³⁵ the Syrian bishop underlines the Christological character of the creative act using many analogies and enlightening symbolisms. He shows that “The Book of great Moses is permeated by the Mystery of the Son of God”. Our incarnated Lord is present in each word and each edifying fulfillment of the Father makes even clarified His role and implication in the process of creation. “Where I can find a fragment where You will not be present?/ And where I can read in this writings without confession Your

³² *Ibidem*, p. 129.

³³ Khalid Dinno, *Jacob of Serugh, the Man Behind the Mimre*, in „Analecta Gorgiana”, no. 1044/2010, p. 69.

³⁴ Taniou Bou Mansour, *La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug*, Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint-Esprit 40; Kaslik 2000, p. 12.

³⁵ Folosim aici traducerea franceză a lui Khalil Alwan: Jacques de Saroug, *Quatres Homilies Métriques sur la Creation* (HMC), CSCO, vol. 509, Scriptoris Syri, Tomus 215, Louvain, 1989.

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name?/ Father, in the moment of creation, said: «let's make the man after Our image ...»/ And so. He learned the entire world to love the One that was His most pleasing/ because the love for people incline Him up to dust,/ To which He give His image and modeled it to the mark of the One who is One.& because for the same love, God raised His Son on the Cross,/ Humbling Himself towards receiving the image of His creation”.³⁶

Having in mind the reality of the primordial existence, Jacob asks himself if *Adam was created mortal of immortal in the beginning*. “If Adam was predestinated by his Creator to be mortal/ Then why God will relate the cause of his death to this tree?/ If he will be created from the beginning immortal in his nature,/ Who could then Adam die and in what way the death has overcome the immortality that he received from God?”.³⁷ Following a long line of questions and syllogisms, Jacob underlines the importance of the ontologically freedom in which the first man was created. Another type of understanding, in the meaning of predestination towards death or immortality represents in the thinking of Jacob “*a blasphemy*”.³⁸ “Remember that all the commandments mentioned here/ Proves the real freedom of Adam./ If you are thinking truly at his creation, you will learn/ That he was created also in the same time mortal and immortal./ Therefore, the Creator with His craftsmanship has juxtaposed the natures,/ Creating the same man for two directions: for life and for death./ God created an icon half alive, half death,/ Before it can be subjected to independent conditions./ He put the soul into a clay pot made of dust,/ Uniting both of the them with the wisdom”.³⁹

Regarding *the creation of the seen world*, Jacob affirms, like the other Fathers of the Church, that it was brought into existence by God from “nothing” (*ex nihilo*). In the same way, he takes attitude against the gnostic heresies. He affirms that God summarized in Himself all created existence. Therefore, He has no need to receive any help in His creative work. In this way, the words of Genesis confirmed to be true: “In the beginning God made the heaven and the Earth”,⁴⁰ **sowing** it the divine origin of the created existence. “The divine being, says Jacob, had only a single name «*Who it is*». ⁴¹/ And since He descended to create from nothing these thinks,/ Was named Crator because He create it all”.⁴² In the creation act, the

³⁶ HMC I, 25-34.

³⁷ HMC II, 39-44.

³⁸ HMC II, 119.

³⁹ HMC II, 129-138.

⁴⁰ Cf. Genesis, 1, 1.

⁴¹ Cf. Exodus 3, 14.

⁴² *Hom sur L'Hexod* apud P. Khalil Alwan, M.L., *Antropologie de Jaques de Saroug. L'homme „Mictocosme” avec une bibliographie generale Raisonnee*, Juniech, Liban, 1988, p. 19-20.

Heavenly Father, Who is eternal, has beside the Son and the Holy Spirit, completing in Trinity of Persons the external reality of creation. In this situation, Jacob shows that the matter certainly cannot be understood as the concept of “ab-aeterno”, because the theories of the neoplatonic philosophy aren’t enough justified. Moreover, he understands and confesses that “existed a moment when the world didn’t exist,/ And all the creatures had a beginning”.⁴³ Unlike the Alexandrians and especially Origen, Jacob rejected the theory of “*the parallel worlds*” (terrestrial and noetic), thinking that “it exist a single world, ours, and a single finality that realizes it in heavens for us and on earth for the angels”.⁴⁴

The apologetic note of Jacob’s Christology is reflected in *the presentation of the new Christian perspective towards the pagan beliefs*. The incarnation of Logos means for him the moment of “collapse for the idols through the freedom of the Groom of the Light”.⁴⁵ In this way, the majority of Jacob’s arguments are gathered in the “*Homilies against the Jews*”.⁴⁶ In this writings the Syrian poet shows that, according to the divine economy, the Son came into the world to liberate “*the people that walked in darkness and into the shadow of death*”.⁴⁷ In this way, he demonstrates that the seed of falsehood was put by the devil into the ear of Eve in Heaven. There, through illusion, he promoted the first form of idolatry. Starting from heaven, after the intervention, for these he made Adam and Eve to think that “they can be like God, knowing the god and the bad”.⁴⁸ “God muses all the ages, as He has knowledge about all the things,/ He saw the days when on the earth the idols had entered./ He kept His Son because, passing the period of idolatry,/ Wanted to revel Him immediately to dissipate the imagination from the face or the earth./ Satan sowed the lie in Eva’s ear:/ «You cannot be in the image of God?», had said./ through his ear the devil speeded the seed, since he believed that will be god;/ And for fifteen generation⁴⁹ this seed has germinated!”, In the days of Peleg and Reu, the gods had multiplied,/ The error had entered and multiplied the

⁴³ *Hom sur L’Hexod I*, 168-169.

⁴⁴ Khalil Alwan, M.L., *Antropologie de Jaques de Saroug ...*, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Thomas Kollamparamphil, *Salvation in Christ according to Jacob of Serugh. An Exegetico-theological Study on the Homilies of Jacob of Serugh (451-521) on the Fest of our Lord*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2001, p. 245.

⁴⁶ Jaques de Saroug, *Homélie contre les juifs* (HCJ), édition critique du texte syriaque inedit, traduction francais, introduction et notes par Micheline Albert, en F. Graffin, *Patrologia Orientalis* (PO), tome XXXVIII, fas. 1, No. 174, Brepols, Turnhout/Belgique, 1976.

⁴⁷ Isaiah 9, 1; Mttew 4, 16.

⁴⁸ Genesis 3, 4-5: „The serpent said to the woman, “You won’t really die, for God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”.

⁴⁹ We thinks here at the teen generation from Adam up to Noah (cf. Genesis 5, 1-29), up to the ones from the proximity of the divine descending (cf. Genesis 11, 10-16). Jacob is speaking here

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idols on the earth./ In that times, from the beginning, God has allowed all these./ Keeping in secret the mystery of the Only Begotten./ In the world, He had learned that in One and in unity is the perfection;/ Therefore, He is the One, who it is said from the beginning./ That, as the Word and the Holy Spirit existed as persons, they didn't want yet to reveal themselves".⁵⁰

In other context, **mar** Jacob of Serugh analyses *the coordinates of fulfilling the holy promises in our Savior Jesus Christ*, describing the prophetic reality of the chosen people and also the reality of his decadence. In this way, the great Syrian poet describes the most important aspects and principles from the Old Testament, developed in the Jewish tradition, through which the Jewish people were guided towards salvation. Nevertheless, being in a stage higher than the pagans like partakers of the divine Revelation the chosen people cannot drink from the Spring of Salvation which is the Incarnated Son of God. The attitude of Jacob is apologetically entitled. "In each moment your Lord and God was beside you/ Until the day when you crucified His Only Begotten Son; then He abandoned and left you./ Because you raised your hand on His Son, He ignored hour spirit;/ And behold all the people of the earth will stay against you./ The innocent blood was spilled by you; from this reason/ Behold that you tremble, behold that you wander from all over the earth./ Where is new the greatness of your acts from the beginning of the world;/ The sounds of the trumpets of the sons of Levi?/ Where is the priest and his liturgical garments".⁵¹

In other passages Jacob explains very clearly the theological details about the Saint Trinity dogma. In this concern, he underlines very often the equivalence of essence between God the Father and God the Son. Therefore, Jesus Christ is our Lord and Word and living and wise Word.⁵² In the same way it is presented *the theology of the Mother of God*. Therefore, Jacob defends the person of the Holy Virgin against the old Nestorian tendencies, saying in each moment that at the Annunciation he made a cosmic choice, in the purpose of the salvation of the entire world. According to the Syrian father the Holy Virgin was chosen by the Logos of God to become the Mother of the entire human race. "A daughter of man was sought among women;/ she, who was the fairest of all, was chosen./ The Holy Father wanted to make a mother for his Son,/ and He did not allow that she, whom He has chosen, become His mother./ Maiden, full of beauty, hidden from her yet

about the revelation that God offers to the chosen people through Abraham as a beginning of the separation from idolatry (PO, p. 115, note 8).

⁵⁰ HCJ IV, 27-40.

⁵¹ HCJ V, 11-19.

⁵² Sebastian Paul Brock, *The Published Verse Homilies of Isaac of Antioch, Jacob of Serugh, and Narsai: Index of Incipits*, in "Journal of Syriac Studies" (JSS), no. 32/1987, Section XIV, 614, 13.

upon her;/ and her heart was pure, that she might see the mysteries that had taken place in her".⁵³ Further, Jacob names the Mother of God "the second paradise" to clarify this choice. He is beyond all through the good think and humbleness.⁵⁴ At the command of his Son, says Jacob, the archangel Gabriel was send at the Holy Virgin to bring her the good news, in the annunciation. Including here the all work of the Holy Trinity, mar Jacob of Serugh speaks about the abolition of the original disobedience in Adam and also about the healing of the original sin through the obedience of Mari. "*He greeted her, implanted life in her, proclaimed peace to her;/ With love he met her and brought to end all the former things./ That wall of iniquity which the serpent had built then,/ By His descent, the Son pulled down so that it may not be restored again./ When He descended, he broke down the hedge which was placed between the sides,/ So that there may be peace between the earthly and the heavenly beings./ On this account the Watcher greeted Mary/ As a pledge of the great peace for the whole world*".⁵⁵

Last but not least; we must observe the polemical attitude of Jacob in his Christological apologies. In this regard, he speaks about the relationship between wisdom and faith, sowing when it is necessary to use it and when is its end. According to him, the rationality has no incidence on the real seen thinks. Therefore, the people who try to explain the divine existence using this method are characterized in pejorative sense "*wisdoms*". Amongst one of them, Jacob includes the Greek philosophers that are named "*sons of Satan*". Moreover, in his conception, only the faith and love can approach man to the real knowledge of God. This method is accessible especially to the simple people alone that are "pure in heart", like the Savior says.⁵⁶ Only one of them "are able to pray to God and to see his miracles in Christ, understand it without questions and without trying to spy out the glory of God".⁵⁷

Jacob's position toward Chalcedon or wrote from the symbol to mystery

The most delicate problem in relation with the personality of the Syrian poet was the one of his monophysite origins and of course that of his orthodoxy, if he was orthodox of monophysit. About this problem the opinions are divided. So it makes that, on the one side Assemani and later Abbeloos sustained the orthodoxy

⁵³ Section VI, 622, 4-11.

⁵⁴ Section VII, 623, 10-15.

⁵⁵ Section X, 629, 4-11.

⁵⁶ Mathew 5, 8.

⁵⁷ Roberta C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysites Christologies. Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Sarug*, Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 140-141.

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of his believe. On the other side, “after the publication of two of his epistles, addressed to the monks from Mar Bassus from Harim, together with their answer and with the epistle send to Paul, bishop of Edessa, emerged that Jacob was from the beginning a monophysit and never renounced at his opinion. This theory is sustained in majority by the east researchers from XX century (Baumstark, Bardenhewer, Tissarant, Jugie etc)”.⁵⁸

In a very passionate apology, written in 1948 by P. Peeters, the monophysite ideas, partially identified in the work of Jacob of Serugh, were rejected due to the lack of authenticity. From 1956, Dr. Kruger has generated the hypothesis of a real monophysitic specific in the thinking of the Syrian author; although he recognizes that a part from his homilies had been included in the liturgical use.⁵⁹ In this debate, the patristic scholar Ortiz of Urbina is moderated, using arguments from both sides. However, he affirms that “Jacob has remained orthodox until his death”. This thing appears from the style that he adopts, staying far away from any kind of “dogmatic polarization”.⁶⁰

In the contemporary period, the English scholar Sebastian Brock supports the orthodox position of the thinking of Jacob. In this way, he says that Jacob “evidently disliked and tried to keep out of the contemporary Christological controversies and it is only from one of his Letters that (under pressure on this correspondents) he openly expresses his disapproval of the doctrinal formula of Chalcedon (451)”.⁶¹ Therefore, unlike his contemporaries, Philoxene and Sever, that were clearly against the doctrine of Chalcedon, Jacob adopted “an irenic attitude, preferring to avoid the formulas and controversial terms and to express his faith in Incarnation, using the Syriac specific phraseology”.⁶² The approach of the monophysite heresy is therefore circumspect. The Christology that he develops has a proper specificity using the symbolic and mystical message, unlike the gnostic influence from that time.⁶³ Moreover, Jacob has harnessed the exegetical tradition

⁵⁸ Remus Rus, *Dicționar enciclopedic al literaturii creștine din primul mileniu*, p. 374.

⁵⁹ As the hymns of Saint Ephrem, many of Jacob's poems were assimilated in the liturgical use of the Syriac Churches of the orthodox rite and also in the maronite. (R. Phenix jr. - Cornelia B. Horn, *Syriac Speaking Churches ...*, p. 19).

⁶⁰ Dr. T. Jansma, *The Credo of Jacob of Serugh: a Return to Nicaea and Constantinople*, in „Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis/Dutch Review of Church History”, Nieuwe Serie, Vol. 44 (1961), p. 18.

⁶¹ Sebastian Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, p. 37.

⁶² Sebastian Brock, “The Rise of Christian Thought. II – The Theological Schools of Antioch, Edessa, and Nisbis,” in H. Badr (ed), *Christianity. A History in the Middle East*, Beirut, 2005, p. 150.

⁶³ “His theory of knowledge has distinct Gnosticizing tendencies which produce a very different picture of Christ. Where Philoxenus to a certain extent, and Severus to a large extent, can be characterized as belonging to a school of thought deeply affected by Christian Platonism, Jacobs

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of Theodor of Mopsuestia and also the symbolism inherited from Saint Ephrem the Syrus, leading on the specific of the Syriac theology.⁶⁴

The apologetic heritage is related to the authentic part of Syriac theology. Like Saint Ephrem, Jacob of Serugh exceeds the limitation of concepts and goes beyond the liturgical reality from symbol towards the mystery. Although he is very little known in the Romanian theology, the Syrian writer offers many important apologetic arguments in the Christian work of confession. His homilies, majority in verses, exemplify an authentic manner of thinking in the doctrine of the Church. In this way, the Syrian bishop “elaborates a series of doctrinal structures very important in the act of revelation and prophecy: the works of the Holy Spirit, the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation of the Son of God as a confession of the divine love toward man, the foundation of the Church which expands the salvation work of Christ in our time”.⁶⁵

To sum up, he understands that the written heritage of Syrian bishop represents a concrete example of promotion of the path between symbol to mystery, in the spirit and letter of the Holy Scripture. Therefore, beside Aphrahat and Saint Ephrem, Jacob of Serugh offers today an authentic example of a confession theology.

thought is far more mythological and symbolic, far closer that the thought world in which Gnosticism flourish that to the world of Greek philosophy and theology” (Roberta C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysites Christologies*, p. 113).

⁶⁴ Sebastian Brock, *The Rise of Christian Thought ...*, p. 150.

⁶⁵ Remus Rus, „Jacob de Serugh. Omilia 79: *Despre vălul de pe fața lui Moise*”, în *Filocalia Siriacă. Iubirea de frumos și înțelepciune – calea spre desăvârșire*, traducere, selecție de texte, cuvânt introductiv, note și comentarii de Remus Rus, Ed. Univers Enciclopedic Gold, București, 2014, p. 279.