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Christology and Monasticism

The case of Philoxenus of Mabbug

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Introduction

If Orthodoxy must be understood as Orthopraxy; Orthodox Christology, then must be seen as Orthodox Anthropology. The anthropological model for the monastic life was always related to Christology and included the soteriological doctrine monks should follow. In this paper I would like to illustrate this discipline through an analysis of the thought and doctrine of one of the most important theologians of the West-Syrian Church, i.e. Philoxenus the bishop of Mabbug. In the past, A. de Halleux made a first approach to Philoxenus' spirituality and its relation to Christology, taking as a source, the *Commentary* of Philoxenus on the Prologue of the Gospel of John.¹ With my analysis, however, I will focus on Philoxenus' Christological doctrine expressed

¹ Cfr. A. DE HALLEUX, «Monophysitismus und Spiritualität».

in his letters sent to monks and monastic communities. In these letters, Philoxenus explained his view of Orthodox Christology, i.e. Miaphysite Christology, and gave some spiritual advices based on this Christology in order that the monks can 1) have an Orthodox spiritual and monastic life and 2) enjoy the salvation in Christ. My aim, then, is to highlight the main points of Philoxenus' Christological doctrine and to explain how such Christology was a base of his spiritual and anthropological and soteriological doctrine.

To accomplish my aim, and after having presented some information regarding the life of Philoxenus and after considering his writings in this paper, I will analyze his spiritual advice to monks in temptation. To understand, then, the relationship between these spiritual advices and his Miaphysite Christology I will present briefly the main points of his Christological doctrine in order, afterward, to see how this doctrine offers the perfect anthropological and soteriological model, the monk should follow in his battle with Satan and in his ascetic life that has as its finality his own divinization and the vision of God face to face.

Philoxenus of Mabbug: some biographical remarks²

² On the biographies written on Philoxenus see D. A. MICHELSON, «A Bibliographic»; A. VÖÖBUS, «La biographie»; A. DE HALLEUX, «À la source». There are lot of references where one might find secondary information regarding the life of Philoxenus, see for example P. BETTILOLO, «Letteratura Siriaca»; A. DE HALLEUX, *Philoxène de Mabbog*, 1-105; D. A. MICHELSON, «Philoxenos of Mabbug»; D. A. MICHELSON, *Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug*, Oxford 2014, 1-16; M. NIN, «La lettera ai monaci di Senun di Filosseno di Mabbug», 83-86.

He was born in approximately 440 in the Persian province of Bet Garmaito a Persian family, and was named Xenaias. To get a Christian education, he went to Edessa, where, until that time, the school of Persians was still active.³ In this school he received a diophysite christological education based on Theodore of Mopsuestia's doctrine. However, after a short period of staying there, he started to react against this Christology that supported the Alexandrian school, that is, the doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria and his followers. Some medieval sources concerning his life recount that this change in his Christological vision was necessary for him in order to stay in some Miaphysite monasteries of the Mesopotamia and the Western Syria, where his name took a Greek form, i.e., Xenaias became Φιλόξενος (Philoxenus).

Some scholars, however, such as A. de Halleux,⁴ do not agree with such reasoning. In fact, the early sources on Philoxenus' life that we possess mention few details from this period of his life. It is also notable that not one of his works, written during his stay in these monasteries, has been passed down to us. We just know that during this stay and as a monk, from approximately 470, he began his anti-Calcedonian activity.

Then, he was ordained a priest by the Miaphysite patriarch of Antioch Peter the Fuller. As a priest, he

³ On this school and its function see A. H. BECKER, «Edessa, school of»; S. BROCK, «The Rise of Christian Thought II - Theological Schools of Antioch, Edessa and Nisibis», 151-154; see also A. H. BECKER, *Fear of God*, 41-76.

⁴ Cfr. A. DE HALLEUX, *Philoxène de Mabbog*, 31-33.

continued his activity against the Calcedonian and Nestorian doctrines, participating in the mission of the same patriarch Peter against Calcedonians and Nestorians, especially supporting him in the dispute over the theopaschite addition in the Trisagion's hymn made by Peter himself.⁵ When Peter was removed from the patriarchal throne of Antioch, Philoxenus, during the year 484, went to Constantinople in order to meet the emperor Zeno. There he demonstrated his acceptance of the emperor's *Henotikon*,⁶ giving it a Miaphysite interpretation. He also succeeded in convincing Zeno to make Peter return to the patriarchal throne of Antioch. Peter, having returned to the throne of Antioch, on August 16, 485 ordained Philoxenus as bishop of the city and metropolitan see of Mabbug (the ancient Hierapolis, today Membij) in the province of Euphratensis.

Philoxenus, as a bishop and until the consecration of Severus as patriarch of Antioch, continued his anti-Calcedonian and anti-Nestorian action in the large area of Syria including Antioch, since its throne was occupied by a Calcedonian patriarch, namely Flavian.⁷ Philoxenus'

⁵ On Peter the Fuller and the addition in the Trisagion see A. GRILLMEIR - Th. HAINTHALER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2/3, 290-293; E. KLUM-BÖHMER, *Das Trishagion*; B. EBEID, «La chiesa giacobita», 532-534, 541; G. BARDAY, «Lotte cristologiche dopo il concilio di Calcedonia», 357-358.

⁶ Regarding the period of Zeno and his *Henotikon* and the consequences of the emperor's religious policy see A. GRILLMEIR - Th. HAINTHALER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2/1, 247-317; B. EBEID, «La chiesa giacobita», 533-535. E. DOVERE, «L'enotico di Zenone Isaurico»; P. MARVAL, «La ricezione di Calcedonia nell'impero d'Oriente», 128-142.

⁷ On Flavian see P. MARVAL, «La ricezione di Calcedonia nell'impero d'Oriente», 134-139; P. GRAY, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the East*, 36-39.

activity was concentrated into making propaganda in favor of the *Henotikon* of Zeno. Since Philoxenus himself was behind electing Severus on the patriarchal seat of Antioch, this event is to be considered the culmination of Philoxenus' action against the Calcedonian Flavian. He, with other Miaphysite bishops, took place in the enthronement of Severus that occurred during 512, demonstrating in this way his satisfaction of Severus' election.⁸

The last period of his life, and before his exile, was dedicated to a missionary activity in Western and Eastern Syria, in Persia, and also in Najran, a kingdom in the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula, where he ordained the first two bishops of the area. Probably he was also involved in the closure of the school of Persians in Edessa.

Despite the fact that he had little success in converting the city of Mabbug to a Miaphysite Christology, but because of his activity in the general polemical field and because of his role in the anti-

⁸ On Severus of Antioch, his historical context and his Christology see S. BROCK, «Severus of Antioch»; R. CHESNUT, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, 9-56; A. GRILLMEIR - Th. HAINTHALER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2/2, 20-180; I. R. TORRANCE, «A Theological Introduction»; I. R. TORRANCE, «Paradigm Change in Sixth-Century Christology»; I. R. TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*; L. PERRONE, «Il "Dialogo contro gli astartoceti"»; P. ALLEN - C.T.R. HAYWARD, «Severus of Antioch as Theologian»; P. ALLEN, *Severus of Antioch*; R. ROUX, «Sapereteologico e sapere profano»; V. C. SAMUEL, «Further Studies in the Christology of Severus of Antioch»; V. C. SAMUEL, «One Nature of God the Word»; V. C. SAMUEL, «The Christology of Severus of Antioch»; V. C. SAMUEL, *The Council of Chalcedon and the Christology of Severus of Antioch*; A. KOFKY, «Severus of Antioch».

Calcedonian and anti-Nestorian controversies, Philoxenus deserves his title as “pioneer of Syrian Miaphysitism”.

In 518, when Justin I ascended to the imperial throne of Constantinople, Philoxenus refused to accept the emperor’s religious policy.⁹ Thus in 519 he was exiled to Gangra and then to Thrace in Philippopolis, where he continued to write to monastic communities encouraging them in their ascetic life and advising them to follow Miaphysite Christology faithfully. He died in exile at a very advanced age on December 10th in 523.

Philoxenus, knowing Syriac and Greek, through his writing has made a synthesis between, on the one hand, the primitive Syriac tradition of Ephrem the Syrian and John of Apamea, and, on the another hand, the Greek and Alexandrian tradition of Athanasius, Cyril and Evagrius. Moreover, he Hellenized the Miaphysite Syriac theological language,¹⁰ something that is notable in his works and writing that has been passed down to us.

Philoxenus’ writings

Attributed to the name of Philoxenus, there are a huge number of works. The authenticity of some of these works is still dubious up until today.¹¹ The bishop

⁹ On Justinian’s religious policy see P. MARVAL, «La politicareligiosa di Giustiniano»; P. GRAY, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the East*, 53-79.

¹⁰ In regards see D. A. MICHELSON, «It is not the custom».

¹¹ Cfr. D. A. MICHELSON, «A Bibliographic», 312-320.

of Mabbug wrote in different genres and on many theological topics. Besides the list of Philoxenus' writing offered by A. de Halleux,¹² D. A. Michelson published a *Clavis* of his works (both published and non-published), presenting also the then known manuscripts that contain these works and writings. In addition he mentions studies and research concerning Philoxenus, his context, his thought and doctrine and his writings.¹³ For this paper here I took into examination the following works¹⁴:

1. Letter to Abraham and Orestes.
2. Letter to lawyer who become a monk, tempted by Satan.
3. Letter to monks
4. Letter to someone who left Judaism and came to the life of perfection.
5. Letter to the monks of Senoun.
6. Letter to the monks of Tell 'Addâ (Teleda).
7. The first letter to the pure Monks of Bêth-Gaugal.
8. The second letter to the pure Monks of Bêth-Gaugal.
9. The spiritual discourses.

Christ as a helper to the monk in his battles

In the spiritual life, temptation has a major importance. According to Christian faith, and especially to monastic and spiritual writings, temptation's source

¹² Cfr. A. DE HALLEUX, *Philoxéne de Mabbog*, 109-116.

¹³ Cfr. D. A. MICHELSON, «A Bibliographic».

¹⁴ See the references at the bibliography of this paper.

is Satan himself. For Philoxenus, as M. Nin notes correctly,¹⁵ Satan can tempt monks through two ways: 1) disturbing their spiritual battle creating in their monastic and spiritual life problems and difficulties for their body and soul; and 2) manipulating their faith by creating in their thoughts wrong doctrines or making them follow incorrect doctrines.¹⁶ Therefore, at the beginning of his *Letter to the monks of Senoun*, Philoxenus affirms that the battle the monk might have in his spiritual life is of two types: 1) a battle against passions; and 2) a battle against heretics:

After the humiliation of the body's sublimity and pride, now you must suffer the arrogance of the heretics...¹⁷

Yet, if a monk has an Orthodox doctrine, Satan, as Philoxenus affirms in his *Letter to lawyer who become a monk, tempted by Satan*, might tempt his thought through fear:

But perhaps, in your case, [Satan] having not been able to disturb your thought by these and similar [methods i.e. doctrinal], he [Satan] has afflicted you with a bodily pain to disturb your thought through fear. But it should befit you. O hero, do not be troubled for that. If it happens and you

¹⁵ Cfr. M. NIN, «La lettera ai monaci di Senun», 101.

¹⁶ You can see more details for the role of Satan in the Economy of God according to Philoxenus in D. A. MICHELSON, *The Practical Christology*, 33-60.

¹⁷ «Երկրորդ ձևի ճգնառն ինքնուր ղեկավար: աստու. որ բնական ընդ ինքն չառձար ամբողջ...», Philoxenus of Mabbug, *Letter to the monks of Senoun*, 2-3; English translation is mine.

fact, that light, by its nature, illuminates, so also the memorial of Christ, naturally, fortifies...²⁰

If the memorials and stories of brave men, saints and martyrs, can be helpful for the monk in his spiritual battle, the memorial of Christ (אבותנו מן המצרים), that is, the whole event of God's Economy, should be the principle instrument of help and support, it is the only source of benefit. Philoxenus gives an analogy to explain how the memorial of Christ can be helpful in the spiritual battle: as light illuminates the world by its nature, the memorial of Christ naturally (אבותנו מן המצרים) fortifies the monk in his temptations coming from Satan. In this case, and taking into consideration this analogy, it could be maintained that for Philoxenus Christ by His nature fortifies the monk in his temptations.

How exactly, could the memorials of brave men, and especially the memorial of Christ be helpful for a monk in temptation? In his *Spiritual discourses*, Philoxenus explains that the monk should clothe himself perfectly in the way of Christ. This might happen just after a real purification and repentance that would guide him to the knowledge of Christ (כענין הנהגתו):

But when a person has completely taken off the world, then he clothes himself perfectly in the way of Christ. Until he takes off the dirty outer coat and

²⁰ « כל מי שהתקדש לחיים טובים, מלבד מה שהוא מילוי בתורה, לא יוכל להשתמש בה עד שיהיה ממש כגוף האדם, אשר הוא ממש צורה חיה, וכל מה שהוא מילוי בתורה, הוא רק כגוף המת, אשר הוא רק צורה מתה, וכל מה שהוא מילוי בתורה, הוא רק כגוף המת, אשר הוא רק צורה מתה, וכל מה שהוא מילוי בתורה, הוא רק כגוף המת, אשר הוא רק צורה מתה.», Philoxenus of Mabbug, *Letter to lawyer who become a monk, tempted by Satan*, f 282ra; English translation is mine.

We can maintain, then, that for our bishop, the monk can fight his passions through repentance and purification that guide him to “put on” Christ and then to gain knowledge of Him. All this is real and possible because of the reality of the incarnation of God, His death and His resurrection, the whole mystery of His Economy and its consequences into our nature. Philoxenus, in fact, in his *second letter to the pure Monks of Bēth-Gaugal*, affirms that Christ, by His incarnation and His resurrection, perfected our nature and all its imperfections, its passions and its weaknesses:

For He does not refuse the (properties) towards which He came in His will, such that, having made them his own in an inexplicable union, he honors in His hypostasis those very ones which, separated from Him, appear despicable ... The birth of our nature was honored by the birth of the Word from the Virgin. And he loosened and abolished the pains and the sufferings which the judicial sanction had joined to us, in fact, He was born without pain, by a miracle; which is demonstrated by the fact that the virginity of the Virgin who gave birth to Him was not corrupted at [His] birth, the true seal of virginity proclaims that in [His] birth the passion of pain did not occur. Likewise in His growth He honored the growth of our size; in His doctrine He made our doctrine wise; in His baptism He gave us purification; His fast illustrated our fast; His fight paid off our debt, and His struggle put a crown on our heads; His passion dissolves our passions; His death effaced the mortality of our nature; in His resurrection He rectified our fall; in His ascension He exalted

at the right. For behold, on this mighty side stands Christ, by whose power we ourselves in the natural disposition of [our] limbs always lean over toward the right side, because on this side stands our Helper, as David revealed to us through the word of Spirit that was in him: "He was at my right hand, so that I shall not be shaken".²⁸

For Philoxenus, however, to look at the image of Christ and to remember Him and His soteriological action means also to have an Orthodox doctrine regarding Him. From this point of view we shall understand the importance of Orthodox Christology for the bishop of Mabbug and why he always highlights such doctrine in his letters to monks and monastic communities. For this reason, for example, Philoxenus concludes his same *Letter to someone who left Judaism and came to the life of perfection* mentioning the Orthodox faith according to him:

And I adjure you by Jesus, the God whom you love, that whenever you pray remember my humble self and inquire after the welfare of everyone who confesses that Christ is God, one of the Trinity, and that He suffered and died for us. So that for his dispensation towards us glory and praise are due to Him and to His father and to the Holy Spirit to the ages of ages. Amen.²⁹

²⁸ On the relation between Philoxenus and Evagrius see D. A. MICHELSON, *The Practical Christology*, 104-112.

²⁹ For the other sources of Philoxenus on 'knowledge' his use and critical reading of them see D. A. MICHELSON, *The Practical Christology*, 62-82.

Additionally, in his *Letter to monks*, Philoxenus calls Orthodox monks “healthy members of the body of the truth of Christ God” (ܡܘܨܝܪܐ ܘܥܘܠܐ ܕܚܝܘܬܐ ܕܥܝܘܢܐ ܕܚܝܘܬܐ ܕܥܝܘܢܐ ܕܚܝܘܬܐ ܕܥܝܘܢܐ ܕܚܝܘܬܐ ܕܥܝܘܢܐ). They should be zealous and supporters of Orthodoxy; they must not just declare it with words but also fight for it with confidence:

To the holy, pure, and faithful convents, healthy members of the body of the truth of Christ God Who is over all; zealous supporters of orthodoxy, ye Who heal the breaches of error which false doctrines have made in the body of faith; [to] ye all whom I have seen in body and in spirit, holy monasteries ... And, to teach us that we must not only preach the truth in simple words to our friends, but that we must declare it also before enemies, with that confidence that fights with death, He said to us: “And fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul”. And again, in the public confession before persecutors, He exhorts and urges us by His promises to declare the faith which He has delivered unto us, saying: “Every one that shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father Who is in heaven, and before His angel; but he that shall deny Me, I will also deny him before the Father and before the angels”.³⁰

³⁰ For more details regarding “Knowledge” in Evagrius and his tradition, especially the Syriac one, see D. A. MICHELSON, *The Practical Christology*, 82-104. See also C. STEWART, «Evagrius Ponticus and the Eastern Monastic Tradition»; J. KONSTANTINOVSKY, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic*.

Christ is the truth, and he who tastes this truth rightly, that is, according to Orthodox doctrine, will be inflamed by it and must seek for it always.³¹ In real truth, that is, Orthodox Christology, there is no place for fear. Brave men are the Orthodox men who are perfect in love, since they have communion with the truth and with love in absolute, i.e. Christ.³² He who really tastes the truth and has true communion with Christ, affirms Philoxenus in his *First letter to the pure Monks of Bēth-Gaugal*, should feel sorrow and suffer when he hears blasphemies against Christ or wrong doctrines regarding Him:

Now the disciple who knows Christ and delights in Him cannot fail to experience sorrow when he hears a blasphemy against Him. For as our body naturally suffers when a wound is inflicted upon it by iron, or a stone, or anything else, so also does the soul of the true disciple suffer when witnessing a blow and an insult against Christ. Is there a greater insult than that which the new Jews of our day utter, blaspheming Christ face to face, subtracting from the honor [due to] Him

³¹ On this topic see S. BROCK, «Clothing metaphors»; B. EBEID, «Ουμβολισμός του 'ενδύματος'».

³² Cfr. M. NIN, «La lettera ai monaci di Senun», 94.

repeat what has been said and written. I will, however, present here a summary of Philoxenus' Christology in order to answer the two questions mentioned above.

The Christology of Philoxenus is a *Christology from above* that has as center the verse of John 1:14 and therefore it must be considered *the Christology of becoming*. "The Word became flesh" is the starting point in the thought of the bishop of Mabbug. The Word, however, becoming man does not at all mean that His unchangeable nature was changed or transformed, but rather it means that the Word of God willed and took for Himself a flesh animated with a rational soul, that is, a perfect human body, and united Himself to it, making this body His own. For Philoxenus just such a way could save the uniqueness of the subject of *incorporation*.

Philoxenus rejects any expression that alludes to dualism because dualism does not express a true union. Therefore, duality of natures, of persons, hypostases and of wills is rejected. In addition, he does not accept an application of the terms "conjunction" and "indwelling" to the union in Christ. For him, any distinction in Christ means division, that is, two subjects in Christ. To avoid this risk he denies the fact that the human nature preexisted its union with the Word. Humanity was not formed separately and therefore it did not have its own hypostasis. For Philoxenus, the humanity of Christ was not a single nature separate from the Word, it was created and united immediately to the Word Himself, in His hypostasis, forming one composed nature of divinity and humanity.

The incorporation of the Word, therefore, means that He took a single body, and not many bodies or a general human nature. This body was animated with a rational soul. The body and the soul were formed in the nature of the Word, and had as hypostasis that of the Word. Thus, in fact, the Word became incorporated, but remained one.

Philoxenus rejects dualism because it leads to an addition in the Trinity. The Trinity becomes Quaternity, that is, considering that the humanity of Christ as a separated hypostasis added to the Trinity means that a creature is worshiped along with the Creator, that is, paganism. On the other hand, Philoxenus always defends his doctrine from a soteriological point of view. The Savior is God Himself and not a man to whom God entrusted the task of salvation. Thus there would not be two sons, one according to nature, (the Son and Word of the Father) and the other according to grace (the son of the Virgin).

Avoiding distinction in Christ also means attributing all works, activities, characteristics and properties to the one subject, to the incorporated Word. However, the Word, being incorporated, manifested the diversity of the natures, that is, the different natural properties, demonstrating in this way the fact that He is God and man. According to the same understanding, Philoxenus spoke of the "one of Trinity who was crucified". Certainly, such theopaschism is interpreted soteriologically, however, our bishop always highlights that suffering, death and all human weaknesses were

made by the single subject, the Word of God, but through His body, while His divine nature remained unchangeable and immortal.

To maintain the uniqueness of the subject, Philoxenus does not dare to call the union in Christ with ambiguous terms such as "mixture". For him, however, this term does not signify any confusion, because natures did not change and did not even transform the one into the other, but it means true union without division and without confusion. It is the composition of the incorporated Word. Since, in addition, the beginning of the action of incorporation and its end is the same: the Word as nature and hypostasis, simple before the incarnation and composed after it, it is much easier to identify Christ with the eternal Word.

Nature does not exist without hypostasis, and even hypostasis does not exist without nature. Neither hypostasis is inferior to its nature nor is nature inferior to its hypostasis. Hypostasis has its properties and nature has its own, in the case that nature and hypostasis are of the same species, then the properties are identical. All these philosophical rules were used by Philoxenus in order that he might explain the uniqueness of the subject and its consequences for Christology and soteriology. The subject, therefore, is one, the Word, who remained one after His incorporation. The Word is a nature, and so is also a hypostasis. With His incarnation, the subject became the incarnate God, that is, an incorporated divine nature and an incorporated divine hypostasis. This subject had divine-embodied properties, that is,

He manifested both realities of the single subject. In this way we can understand that the subject is not only God, nor only man, but God and man together, that is, the incorporated Word.

The incarnation and the whole Economy of the Word, finally, is according to His will. God the Word willed and was incarnated, crucified and died to save humanity. It is the action of the Word's *kenosis* according to His will, and of His love. Just from this soteriological vision, one might affirm that God was born and crucified in flesh in order to save us.

After having presented his Christological doctrine we can now see how such doctrine could help us to answer the main two questions I made above. To realize this I will highlight some principle points of his Christology and its consequences in his anthropological and soteriological doctrine. Before starting, however, it should be mentioned that Philoxenus developed his doctrines in a polemical context. In this paper here I shall not analyze this side of Philoxenus' Christology; that is, how he understood the doctrine of Nestorians and Chalcedonians and why he rejected them. What is important for us is to know that for Philoxenus both Nestorianism and Chalcedonism were incorrect Christological doctrines based on dualism. Even if Nestorians and Chalcedonians themselves denied such accusations, Philoxenus, along with his tradition, considered these two Christologies as heresies because, for him, they taught a duality of persons, i.e. two sons and

two christs, and, as a consequence, they added a fourth person to the Trinity making it become a Quaternity.

The Savior is God and not a simple man

As said above, for Philoxenus the savior is God and not a simple man. If the salvation of the world was accomplished by Christ, it is because He was the Incarnate Word and not a simple man who became God by grace. In his *Letter to the monks of Tell 'Addâ* Philoxenus argues the importance of affirming that God Himself, and not a man, willed to be crucified for us:

What do you want to say, oh heretics? that a mortal has died and a passible has suffered? ... They say that a man is mortal according to nature. If it is as you say, that an immortal do not die, and that who died is mortal according to nature, then he did not die for us. In any case, he died for himself and the death of Christ was not for us, but He died for himself ... [Martyrs] according to their wisdom made [their natural death] voluntary ... they died when they willed and not when death willed, so, by this, their death would be similar to the death of their God, Who died according to His will, and not according to the necessity of the power of death, so according to their holy death, they preferred to change for themselves [the time of] death before its coming naturally. If [Christ] was a man, like one of us, and not God who by His grace willed and became a man, He would be mortal and would have not died for us. If one denies that God was crucified,

doctrine,⁴³ however, it was a special humanity as he explains again in his *Letter to the monks of Tell 'Addâ*:

And if they say that being just he was saved from his death and since he was without sin he was not subject to death ... and if because of their sin, we say, that men must die ... Because death is mixed with their nature [through concupiscence], God, however, willed to become man from a Virgin ... He was not incorporated and born through concupiscence, according to the old law, but through His incorporation He was superior to death. Therefore it is right to say that the immortal died for us, -immortal according to His nature-, and not because of being just, as they say. Since, then, He was born immortal from His Father, and remained as so [i.e. immortal] in His incorporation, and since He was incorporated without concupiscence it is correct [to say] that the immortal was crucified for us...⁴⁴

Mortal humans, because of the first sin, are judged of death. They, whether they sin or not, must die of necessity, because they are born as a result of

⁴³ For the relation between the knowledge of Christ through Scriptures, the interpretation of Scriptures and Orthodox Christology in Philoxenus' thought expressed in his commentaries on the Gospels see D. A. MICHELSON, *Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug*, 113-143.

⁴⁴ The main studies regarding the Christology of Philoxenus are the following: A. DE HALLEUX, *Philoxène de Mabbog*; R. CHESNUT, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, 57-132; A. GRILLMEIR - Th. HAINTHALER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2/3, 478-544; D. A. MICHELSON, *Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug*; D. I. VIEZURE, «Philoxenus of Mabbug and the Controversies over the 'Theopaschite' Trisagion . See also some other references given in the bibliography of this paper.

The body of the Word is therefore His own, and not of someone else. [He is not] a man, known in his own hypostasis, [who] was born of the Virgin and joined God ... But the Word, according to the flesh, was born of the Virgin and, in His flesh, He condemned sin...⁵²

The rule of the Word's humanity in salvation is very important. Philoxenus does not limit himself just to describing this humanity as a sacrifice of new creation. Since the body is united to the Word, it became of Him, that is, it did not possess its own hypostasis through which it could be known, but through the hypostasis of the same Word, it became known to others. Therefore, since the divinity and the humanity were united without separation in one hypostasis forming the one nature of the incorporated Word, Philoxenus, as read in the above quotation from his *Second letter to the pure Monks of Bēth-Gaugal*, was able to arrive at the affirmation that the Word condemned sin (ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ) in His own flesh (ܥܡܫܝܚܐ). This last affirmation demonstrates the

⁵² Just taking in consideration his *Letter to Abraham and Orestes* where he refutes the doctrine of Stephen bar Sudaili the edessene regarding the consubstantiality of humanity of Christ and ours with the one of God; and its consequences on soteriology -cfr. Philoxenus of Mabbog, *Letter to Abraham and Orestes*- one might understand how it is important for Philoxenus to underline the consubstantiality of Christ's humanity with our nature, except sin, and its ontological difference from the divine nature. See also A. DE HALLEUX, *Philoxène de Mabbog*, 363-378; A. GRILLMEIR - Th. HAINTHALER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2/3, 502-510.

humanity has been honored (ܠܗܘܢܐ) in God. In his *First letter to the pure Monks of Bēth-Gaugal* the bishop of Mabbug mentions the same idea but in a different way:

They [the heretics] try to show that His glory is not His own; that He received everything from the favor of another; that He is not God by His own nature, but was made God recently. For these devils [the heretics], without being ashamed, speak of Christ as one speaks of idols, because they are idols who are turned into gods when they are not such. It is not so, however, with Christ, O godless man, but by nature He is God. If then He became what He was not, as it is written of Him, it is not that from man He became God, but from God He became man and remained as He is, God. A body did not take Him, but He took [a body]. For He did not receive any glory from the body that He took, but by His embodiment He gave glory to our miserable nature. He did not come to a creature to be made God, but to be known as God.⁵⁵

For Philoxenus, then, His incarnation honored our nature, giving it glory (ܠܗܘܢܐ). Christ is not a man who received the honor to be God, which would be paganism; Christ's humanity, although it is consubstantial with us, being, however, united with the divinity of the Word, in His hypostasis it received the honor and the glory of divinity. The main question one might have directly is how our nature was honored?

⁵⁵ See also in regards A. DE HALLEUX, *Philoxène de Mabbog*, 494-498.

A. de Halleux notes,⁵⁶ that for Philoxenus, humanity in Christ was incorrupt and immortal, in it He truly died on the Cross, not by necessity but by will, for our salvation. Philoxenus, in addition, gives an answer to the same monks in his *Second letter to the pure Monks of Bēth-Gaugal* where he declares the following:

So all our imperfections have been improved in our God and our ignominies have been honored in our Creator. And [because] He became with us in His grace, we became with Him in His favor...⁵⁷

We already saw how he explained for the tempted lawyer that the imperfections of our humanity were removed in Christ's body: Mary gave birth to him without pain; he suffered upon the Cross transforming suffering into victory and death into life. In conclusion, it can be asserted that for our author, Christ, the embodied Word, manifested glorious humanity, the uncorrupted and immortal body, the real Adam, real and true image of God. He affirms also, in the above passage, that since God became with us by His grace and by His will, we became with him in His favor. How could, then, such doctrine be accomplished in us? In other words, how can we become 'new Adams'?

⁵⁶ Cfr. Mar Severios Mathews, «The Suffering, Death and Resurrection of Christ», 62-64.

⁵⁷ See also on this doctrine A. DE HALLEUX, *Philoxène de Mabbog*, 408-412.

we baptized? Is not this the Word, Who is the Son by nature? [But] then, this man, [invented] by you, is outside the Trinity, and he can not receive praise or worship, since it is forbidden to worship as God what is not of the Trinity!⁷¹

To be baptized in the name of Trinity also means to affirm Orthodox Christology, that is, the oneness of the Son. In his *Spiritual discourses*, Philoxenus, in addition, affirms that believers should be baptized: 1) in the name of God, whereby they are called godly (ⲕⲁⲛⲟⲩ); 2) in the name of Christ, whereby they are named Christians (ⲕⲁⲥⲏⲩⲁⲛⲟⲩ), 3) while being baptized in the name of faith makes them be faithful (ⲛⲟⲩⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ). Only an authentic faith, however, makes the baptized member of the Church a real believer:

A name is established for us by faith because it has caused us to be born from error to the knowledge of God. On account of this, everyone who approaches Christ and becomes a disciple of His Gospel receives his name by faith and is called "a believer". Since faith is our mother and the one that gives birth to us, it is excellent that we should be named by the name of the One that gives birth to us. This is a wondrous thing that the greatness of faith has reached the point that people shall be named by [faith] just as by the name of God and of his Christ. For by the name of God we shall be called godly ones, and by the name of Christ we shall be named Christians, and by

⁷¹ «ⲕⲁⲛⲟⲩ, ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲛ ...», Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The second letter to the pure Monks of Bēth-Gaugal*, 63; English translation is mine.

the name of faith we shall be named faithful. This is the name that distinguishes us from all [other] religions and makes us strangers to all teachings of error. No one is called faithful except one who has been born out of authentic faith, and [faith] is his mother and the one who has reared [him].⁷²

With Orthodox baptism which is according to an authentic faith (ἰσχυρὸν εὐαγγελίον) and Orthodox Christological doctrine, man becomes a member of the body of Christ, that is, the new Creation, through which he gets freedom, joy and redemption from the One who give birth (γεννητὴρ) to His followers; therefore the follower of Christ is called a true faithful and believer.⁷³

Being baptized, however, does not mean an automatic salvation. According to Philoxenus' *Letter to someone who left Judaism and came to the life of perfection* one may feel the new Man (νέαν ἀνθρώπον) that he puts on (ἐνδύσασθαι), so He can live really in him:

You then strove well to feel the new man, Whom you have put on, and not like the others who buried him inside them, and their old man became a grave for the new man that they put on in the waters [of baptism]. And He does not live in them, does not feel, does not turn around, and does not care for anything that belongs to Him, as someone dead in the grave does not do any of these [activities].⁷⁴

⁷² Cfr. R. CHESNUT, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, 85-87.

⁷³ Cfr. M. NIN, «La lettera ai monaci di Senun», 98.

⁷⁴ « ἡμεῖς οὖν ἐπιθυμοῦμεν νῦν ἰσχυρῶς νῦν ἀνθρώπον, ὃς ἐν ἡμῖν ἐνδύσασθαι, ὡς ἂν ἐν ἡμῖν ζῆται ὁ ἀνθρώπος οὗτος, ὅτι οὐκ ἐστὶν ἐν ἡμῖν, οὐκ αἰσθάνεται, οὐκ ἐπιστρέφεται, οὐκ ἐπιθυμῶν οὐδὲν ἐκ τῶν ἐκείνου, ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἐν ταφῇ οὐκ ἐπιθυμῶν οὐδὲν ἐκ τῶν ἐκείνου. » Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The first letter to the pure Monks of Bêth-Gaugal*, 153; English translation is of the same reference, page 110.

Invisible, we see Him; not tangible, we handle Him; not capable of being eaten, we eat Him; not capable of being tasted, we drink Him; we embrace Him Who is all powerful; we kiss Him Who is infinite. Of Him, Who is immortal, we believe that He died for us; of Him, Who is impassable we confess that He suffered for us.⁷⁹

In order that the Eucharist grants real communication with God, it must be Orthodox. This means that for Philoxenus, only those who believe in the reality of the body of Christ, and that this body is of God the Word, united with His divinity in His hypostasis, can celebrate an Orthodox Eucharist, because, through this sacrament the believer receives the living body (ܐܢܐ ܝܗܘܘܫܥ) and the living and life-giving blood (ܕܡܘܫܘܫܐ ܕܐܝܘܒܐ ܕܚܝܘܢܐ) of the living God (ܝܗܘܘܫܥ ܩܕܝܫܐ) and not an ordinary body (ܐܢܐ ܝܗܘܫܥ ܕܥܡܘܢܐ) of a mortal and ordinary man:

This is why we confess to receive the living body of the living God, and not the ordinary body of any man, who would be mortal. And [it is] the living and life-giving blood [that] we receive every time [we] absorb it with a holy disposition, and it is not the ordinary blood of one of us, i.e. of a corruptible man, as we see in the imagination of the heretics.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ « ܐܢܐ ܝܗܘܫܥ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܘܫܘܒܐ ܕܠܗ ܕܡܘܫܘܫܐ ܕܚܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܗܘܘܫܥ ܩܕܝܫܐ. ܕܡܘܫܘܫܐ ܕܠܗ ܕܝܗܘܘܫܥ ܩܕܝܫܐ », Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The first letter to the pure Monks of Bēth-Gaugal*, 157; English translation is of the same reference, page 114.

⁸⁰ « ܐܢܐ ܝܗܘܫܥ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܝܗܘܘܫܥ ܩܕܝܫܐ. ܕܡܘܫܘܫܐ ܕܠܗ ܕܝܗܘܘܫܥ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܝܗܘܘܫܥ ܩܕܝܫܐ », Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The first letter to the pure Monks of Bēth-Gaugal*, 156; English translation is of the same reference, page 113.

What follows, then, is that Orthodox Christology celebrates an Orthodox Eucharist and that this Eucharist is really the body of the living God, who grants redemption, joy, and freedom of sin. With an Orthodox baptism, man becomes a member of the body of Christ, of this real humanity and new creation; with an Orthodox Eucharist, he receives the body of the living God. In this way he remains in communication and communion with this new creation, that is, he becomes a new Adam, a real man, as the humanity of Christ.

Salvation through Christ is divinization of humanity

As said above, for Philoxenus salvation means redemption of the first sin which had cut the relation between God and Man. Salvation can then be called reconciliation (ⲁⲓϥⲟⲩⲁⲓⲛ), with God realized truly and perfectly in Christ, since He is God and man. In fact, in Philoxenus' *Letter to the monks of Tell 'Addâ* it is mentioned the following:

We confess that He put in the hands of His Father His human life and offered it for all. Christ, in fact, became sacrifice for His Father and through this offer the reconciliation was done for all. With the Father He received the offer, and with Him He reconciled all, and since He became [man] He received and [at the same time] He offered ... With His Father He is the Word, with us He is a man, with the Father He is God and with us He is human ... It is not because He became a man that He showed natural communion with the Father,

of Mabbug belonged to the group that held this worldview. He was a theologian and a spiritual leader for numerous Miaphysite monastic communities in Syria and Mesopotamia. In this paper I have attempted to understand why for him, Miaphysite Christology is the most correct Christological doctrine, in order to offer the believer, especially the monk, a perfect anthropological model. In other words, I have tried to illustrate the link between Christology, spirituality, anthropology and soteriology according to Philoxenus' doctrine expressed in some of his letters directed to monks and monastic communities.

The scope of the spiritual doctrine of Philoxenus, as advised to the monks, is to live the life of perfection, that is, to become sons of God. Such doctrine is based on his Miaphysite Christology, in which he developed an anthropological model, the ontology of the participation in the new Adam's humanity, the body of the same Word of God, i.e. the humanity united with the divinity of the Son and Word of God in His own hypostasis. Christ's humanity was perfect and uncorrupt, purified, sanctified, justified and honored through the glory of the Word's divinity, because it existed in the hypostasis of the Son. Because, in addition, of the union between divinity and humanity in the hypostasis of the Word, forming one nature and one hypostasis, a real communion between these two realities was able to be effected, and this humanity was divinized. According to Philoxenus, Miaphysite Christology alone expresses this truth since it is authentic and orthodox. He who follows an orthodox doctrine can arrive at the end to an

