

SYNOPSIS OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE IN THE FOURTH CENTURY ACCORDING TO THEO- DORE OF MOPSUESTIA.

EDITED BY ALPHONSE MINGANA, D.D.

FOREWORD.

THE following pages contain the translation of a Syriac Text purporting to give in a concise form the opinion of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the principal questions of Christian Theology. The keen interest shown by many Theologians in the writings of this illustrious Father of the Church justifies the translator's hope that the same welcome will be extended to the outcome of his labour. We may say of Theodore that not the least of his misfortunes is that he lived in the fourth instead of the twentieth century where he would have possibly had more favourable and sympathetic readers. The epithet "father of rationalism" applied to him by some church historians is true in a sense; his mind so far as known to us from some stray and scanty extracts could not acquiesce in the acceptance of an article of faith which was not proved to be in conformity with a sound judgment and the revealed word of God; he was an independent inquirer laying one hand on his Greek Aristotle and the other on his Semitic Bible, and trying to reconcile both and to direct them to one end; whether he succeeded or not it is not a matter of concern to us, but the fact remains that he was the first writer who systematically introduced the rational element into Christian apologetics, and living fifteen centuries after him we cannot but deprecate, for no other reason than the preservation of Christian unity, the action taken against him after his death by some over-zealous and hasty bishops.

That the extracts here printed are truly Theodore's, anyone acquainted with the inner life of the East Syrian Church will readily admit. This so-called Nestorian Church possessed at a very early date nearly all Theodore's writings in a Syriac translation, and ascribed to him without qualification the title of "The Interpreter" *par*

excellence. When we find, therefore, an East Syrian writer quoting Theodore or Theodore's writings, we may *a priori* conclude that we are truly dealing with Theodore himself. A Christian theologian would find it difficult in our days to misquote Paul, and for all practical purposes the interpreter's name was only one degree below that of the Apostle.

That the Syriac text is in its main lines a translation from the Greek is borne out by the following remarks :—

In question 5 the translator under the influence of the Greek text lying before him used Ammon with an *Alaph* instead of 'Ammon with a guttural ' of the Peshitta. Similarly in question 5 the quotation from Luke i. 35 proves that the Syriac translator has preferred the use of "to come" in masculine as it is in the Greek text, to the feminine form of the same verb found in the Peshitta. See also question 24 in which the derivation of the words "Episcopus" and "Catholicos" is discussed.

Theodore knew probably some Hebrew. In question 2 he seems to be playing on the word דָּן to find in it the meaning of "judge" which in his opinion underlies the name of God, and in question 23 he is endeavouring to derive the word "Nazarene" from נָצַר , but instead of resorting to the usual interpretation of the Hebraic word, he gives to it the uncommon meaning of "new".

Although the substance of these questions and answers is undoubtedly taken from Theodore, it is probable that the Syrian editor (as he himself suggests) allowed himself a certain amount of freedom in his work. In question 22 the disciple is inquiring about the meaning of the word "Christianity" and the teacher is appealing to its Aramaic equivalent of *Mshihāyūtha* as if he was writing to readers not necessarily familiar with Greek. Similarly, in question 5 the pith of the difficulty of the word "power" turns on the pivot of the Hebrew-Aramaic "ḥail" which has the meaning of "power" both in *abstracto* and in *concreto*, i.e. army, forces. In question 35 there is a play on the Aramaic word *dukhrāna*, meaning "commemoration of a saint," "feast," and "in remembrance".

As the 36 questions of the treatise (the numerical division is our own), embrace nearly all points of Christian dogma, it will be useful to give under a few headings a short summary of some of the author's Theological views :—

His Trinitarian doctrine is post-Nicene, and it explicitly or implicitly embodies the teaching and the technology of the first general council (cf. questions 1, 16, and especially 18).

His Christology is that which is generally ascribed to him. Christ is a second Adam (questions 8, 31), but he is God (question 18, etc.) acting in harmony with his Father (question 12, etc.).

Theodore was certainly a sacramentarian ; he frequently mentions baptism, Eucharist, and ordination, but in the mysteries of the four other sacraments of the early mediæval Theology he is not versed. His view on baptism is that it is necessary for salvation, but pagans and children of pagans, and even Christians who *involuntarily*, i.e. not of their own fault, die without baptism, will not go to torment. In question 14 we read the following words : " He, therefore, who is unclean and is baptized, is justified, and he who has no sins and is baptized, is marked with the sufferings of Christ ; further, he who is baptized, is circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, and becomes a temple to God. Those who died without baptism—I am speaking of those who lived prior to the coming of Christ—are not to be blamed, because Christ had not yet died for them ; they were not even ordered to be baptized, but now that He has come and has been killed, he who refuses to be baptized shows that he rejects the baptism of Christ and is a stranger to his life." For more details see questions 13-18 in which the doctrine of baptism is fully elaborated.

So far as Eucharist is concerned Theodore may possibly have believed that the bread and the wine of the Sacramental service are only the symbols of the body and blood of Christ. " We are baptized," he says, " once only, because our Lord died once only, but we perform the symbol of his body many times because it¹ has been given unto us as food of life everlasting " (question 17).

As for ordination he is strongly of opinion that the imposition of hands gives real power to the one who receives it, but nothing is said about the vexed question of who is the right person to impose hands ; must he be an Episcopus, a Presbyter, or any other person appointed by the congregation over which the *ordinandus* is going to preside ? Theodore makes mention, in this occurrence, of the right hand of God, but it is probable that we are to understand this metaphor in a figura-

¹ Or " He ".

tive sense and refer it to the minister's power bestowed upon him by God himself. We quote here in full a remarkable passage the emphasis of which will not escape notice (question 28).

Although there are in the Church priests sinful and false (to their obligations), yet the right hand of God which has been imposed upon their heads is true, and the sacrifice they offer is pure, and because the Holy Spirit is obedient it will come down and flutter over the sacrifice they offer, and it will become propitiation to those who receive it. If a priest is false because of his odious conduct, the baptism which he administers is true, because of the (imposition of the) right hand (which he has received) and if his works are sinful, the sacrifice which he offers is genuine, because of the Holy Spirit, and if he sins, the people will not be punished for his prevarications. It is not the holy who make the Holy Spirit come down by their holiness, nor is it the sinners who prevent it from coming down by their sins; it is a gift which has been bestowed by God's grace for the pardon of mankind. A priest who defrauds invokes it, and it comes down for the sake of those who do not defraud; an impure man invokes it, and it answers him for the sake of those who are pure; a prodigal invokes it, and it obeys him for the sake of those who hunger for it; a wretched man invokes it, and it submits to him for the sake of those who thirst for it. It does not come down through the works of the man who invokes it, but through the intercession of those who stand behind the minister who is turning his eyes towards it; it does not look at the sins of the man who invokes it, but it takes into consideration the expectations of those who are asking its intercession. If the priest is a sinner, his iniquity, like his justice, is upon himself alone; every one is smitten with his own sins. Those who assert that the sacrifice of a sinful priest is not holy, assert wrongly. I shall go even so far as to assert to thee, O my son, and confirm my assertion by an oath, that if a hand is imposed upon Satan, there is in him the hand of priesthood, and if he breaks the sanctified bread and give me of it, I shall receive it from him, and regard it as lacking nothing, and as if Simon Cephas had broken it for me. Do not be in doubt about these things as some people are."

From this long citation we infer that Theodore is in agreement with the rest of Eastern Fathers that the consecratory words of bread and wine in the mass are those contained in the "Epiclesis" and not

“Hoc est enim corpus meum” as stated by the scholastic Theologians of the middle ages.

The eschatology of the author deserves also some notice. It is well known that he disbelieved in the eternity of torments in hell ; this view is implicitly borne out by the present extracts in which he makes no mention of this important point of orthodox Christianity. Whenever he has occasion to treat of after-death torments, he carefully avoids the use of any term savouring of eternity (cf. questions 27, 33). He is also very emphatic on the subject that there is no remuneration of the saints and no punishment of the sinners till the day of Resurrection (question 33).

The following passage is worth quoting : “ In the wombs the wealthy and the poor, the slaves and the freemen, the Kings and the wretched are equal ; neither the rich feel any delight nor the poor any want ; but when they come to the world, the Kings are distinguished by their dresses and their honour, and the wretched are known by their lowness and poverty. In this same way, the souls of the just and of the unjust are equal till the day of Resurrection, in which the bodies are born [again] of the earth, their mother, and the souls put on their bodies, as children put on dresses of all kind, then the well-doers will receive their reward and dwell in light and the evil-doers will be thrown into darkness.”

Other theories upheld by Theodore in connection with the time and the order of the events dealing with the day of Resurrection and last judgment are expounded at length in question 26.

A few words would suffice to describe the manuscript which contains the present extracts. It formerly belonged to Rendel Harris's collection and it was then labelled “Cod. Syr. 146”. It is now preserved in the John Rylands Library and consists of mixed contents, the chief among which are (a) an interpretation of the difficult words found in the Old and New Testaments ; (b) a historical discourse by Epiphanius on the Prophets ; (c) a biographical treatise by Eusebius of Cæsarea on the Apostles and disciples ; (d) a small Græco-Syriac vocabulary ; (e) the *Capita Scientiæ* of Rabban Aphnimaran (VIIIth cent.) ; (f) the extracts from Theodore of which we give a translation.

The manuscript is dated in the year of the Seleucids, 1861, which corresponds with A.D. 1550. The copyist complains of the bad state

of the manuscript from which he was transcribing, but apart from some easily detectable errors we are glad to say that his *lapsus calami* have been few and on the whole unimportant.

All the above treatises saw the light at a time preceding the Arab invasion. The Syriac style used in them is modelled on that of the Peshitta, and a few Greek or Latin words are explained in old Persian and not in Arabic, such, for instance, is the case with *καθαίρεσις* and *Dux*. The Persian equivalent of the former is *Nawinshtang* (fol. 177^b) and of the latter *Marzubān* (fol. 171^a).

TRANSLATION.

By the strength of our Lord Jesus Christ, we begin to write selected questions excerpted from the works of the blessed Theodore, the Interpreter, and briefly arranged.

1. *Question*.—Is God good by His nature or by His will ?

Answer.—God is the source of all good attributes and power ; the goodness and justice which He possesses are the summit of perfect goodness and justice. He is not circumscribed by the requirements of (human) nature, nor is He subordinated to the order of (worldly) knowledge, because goodness, justice, power, and wisdom are (essentially) His. He is remote from wrong-doing, because He is the Supreme Being capable of creating what He wishes and justly judging what He wills without iniquity ; and since He is above all the imperfections and higher than the intelligence of every created thing, a made man cannot define His maker, nor is a creature able to confine its creator within the limits of its knowledge. In proportion as His nature is above all beginning, His definition is beyond the capacity of a creature with a beginning. As a proof to thee that the Creator is good, men did not perform any good work before they were created, that we may say that they received this favour from the Just One, as a reward of their action. Because God is good (by His Nature) He began with goodness and created man.

2. *Question*.—What is the meaning and the *raison d'être* of the word "God". Are we to refer it to things connected with nature or actions ?

Answer.—There are people who say that the meaning of the word *God* is *judge*. When, therefore, I say that "God is a righteous

Judge,"¹ there is reason for my saying so ; indeed there is no name without reason ; He is thus called *maker*, because He makes ; *creator*, because He creates ; *judge*, because He judges ; *Lord*, because He has servants ; *All-Seer*, because He sees everything. This is the reason of all these (adjectives).

3. *Question*.—What is the extension and the significance of the word *God* ?

Answer.—The word *God* refers to nature, and is of the category of names which can be applied to other natures without essential transformation of their nature ; in this way the name " *God* " extends to other natures, such as " I made thee god to Pharaoh,"² and " I have said ye are gods,"³ etc. From these it is evident that *God's* nature is not removed from Him with the removal of His name to other natures. Why ? Because the Lord of these names has no grudging. Those who received this name have only received it figuratively without having been gods by nature. It is a name which involves lordship, and thus it fits in with the attributes of nature and extends to other natures.

4. *Question*.—Is *God* separable from His will, or are *God* and His will one *God* ?

Answer.—*God* is *God*, and His will is not His nature, nor has will any person, because will is in itself an act. It has been said in this respect " *God* desired the descendants of Noah and Abraham to be without baptism, but now He desires their baptism, and in the world to come He will not desire the baptism of people who were not baptized ".

5. *Question*.—It is written that the Angel said to Mary, " The Holy Ghost shall come, and the *power* of the Most High shall descend upon thee,"⁴ and the Apostle said, " *Christ* the *power* of *God*,"⁵ but *God* also called locusts His power, because He said, " I sent against you my great *power* " ;⁶ *Christ* and locusts are, therefore, the *power* of *God*.⁷

¹ Ps. vii. 12. The author is probably working on אֲדִינִי from דִּין " to judge ".

² Ex. vii. 1.

³ Ps. lxxxii. 6.

⁴ Luke i. 35. The translator, under the influence of the Greek text, used the verb " to come " in masculine instead of feminine as in the Peshitta.

⁵ I Cor. i. 24.

⁶ I.e. Army (Joel ii. 25).

⁷ In Hebrew and Aramaic the word *hail* means both " army " (in concreto) and " power " (in abstracto).

Answer.—Locusts have been called the power of God figuratively only, and not because they were from the nature of God.¹ Similarly Israel has been called “the powers (= armies) of God,” and in this sense it is written, “The king of Babylon sent his power (= army) and besieged Jerusalem”.² Could he have sent his nature? No. When it is written, “The power (= army) of the King of Egypt came,” can it mean that his nature came? No. Was it not called his power simply because of its subjection to him? Likewise in the following sentence, “He sent another one from the King of Ammon³ and he was unwilling to send his power (= army),”⁴ power has been used to denote subjection to the King its sender and accomplishment of his will; locusts, therefore, have been called the power of God because they came to accomplish the will of God, in a manner similar to the expression “power of the King,” and not because they were from the nature of God, like the Son proceeding from Himself, who put on our humanity.

6. *Question.*—It is written, “There shall no man see me and live,”⁵ why will the man who sees Him die, is it because of the “intensity of His anger”⁶ or “the brightness of His essence?”⁷

Answer.—It is because of the brightness of His essence that no man shall see Him and live; because created and corporeal eyes cannot see the uncreated essence. Lo we cannot look and gaze intently at the sun of this world, how can we then look at the creator of the sun?

7. *Question.*—Why was our Lord bõrn of a woman instead of fashioning a body to Himself in the same manner as He moulded and fashioned Adam, the head of our race?

Answer.—Our Lord was born of a woman because men before as after His coming, pronounced unclean the nature of womanhood, and despised the order sanctioned by the Creator; He was born, therefore, of a woman to teach and demonstrate that her members were not unclean, and that the order He had made was not to be despised and abhorred, as the Heretics asserted.

¹ 1 Sam. xvii. 36, 45.

² Cf. Jer. xxxiii. 2; xxxix. 1.

³ By an oversight the translator used Ammon instead of ‘Ammon, under the influence of the Greek text.

⁴ Cf. 1 Sam. x. 1-19; 1 Chron. 1-19.

⁵ Exod. xxxiii. 20.

⁶ Ps. lxxviii. 49.

⁷ Heb. i. 3.

8. *Question.*—Why was He born of a Virgin without marriage ?

Answer.—He was born of a Virgin without marriage to show that He was the Creator who created also the first Adam¹ without marriage. Further, He fashioned to Himself a body in the womb without marriage and put it on and came out in order to show that inasmuch as sin entered the world by means of the first virgin, and a woman was the cause of our death, so also life was to be given unto us by means of a woman.²

9. *Question.*—Why (was He born) of a betrothed and not of an unbetrothed virgin ?

Answer.—He was born of a betrothed virgin in order that it might be proved that she did not commit adultery ; (the girl) who is betrothed is indeed kept under great care, and (in the case) the testimony of Joseph is to the effect that she did not commit any adultery, and that he found nothing blameable in her.

10. *Question.*—Why did our Lord appear from the progeny of David and Judah and not from another tribe ?

Answer.—He appeared from the tribe of Judah in order that the prediction of the prophets might be fulfilled. Jacob said in his prophecy, “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a prophet from between his feet, until the Christ to whom government belongs comes, and Him shall nations expect”.³ Another Book says, “The King Messiah will come out of Judah”.⁴

11. *Question.*—Why was our Lord circumcised, and why did He offer sacrifices ? There are Heretics who say “If your Lord was circumcised, circumcise also yourselves”.

Answer.—Our Lord was not circumcised for the sake of a personal profit, and He did not offer sacrifices in order to be justified by them ; the giver of all these was in no need of them. His only aim in His circumcision was to proclaim, teach, and demonstrate that He was the Son of God, the Maker and the establisher of the Law, and that circumcision was not a point excluded from the Law as the Heretics asserted.

12. *Question.*—Did our Lord die willingly or forcibly ? If He

¹ Note Theodore's doctrine of the first and second Adam.

² Cf. Rom. v. 12.

³ Gen. xlix. 10.

⁴ I Chron. v. 2 (Peshitta) ; cf. Testament of Levi, p. 309, v. 14 in Charles' “Apocrypha,” and also *ibid.*, p. 323, xxiv. 1.

died willingly, He agreed with His murderers, who in this case would not deserve the pain of death, but are all the more to be rewarded because they have accomplished His will.

Answer.—He did not die forcibly, and He was not weaker than His murderers, who murdered Him because they hated Him and His sender. He died by God's tacit permission, which preserves the free-will of man. If He had saved Himself from the cross He would have coerced His free-will and required that it should not accomplish His desire. He did not coerce His free-will, but He tacitly permitted the act of His crucifixion, and, although able to save Himself from the cross, He did not do so in order to safeguard His free-will and act spontaneously.

13. *Question.*—Was the baptism of John a Jewish institution? If they answer in the affirmative, ask them, "Why did He then baptize publicans and adulteresses, a thing which is forbidden by the Jews, and by their Law? Further, if it was a Jewish institution, why were not all Jews baptized by him?" If they answer, "It was our Lord's [institution]," tell them what John himself made manifest, viz. "He that cometh after me, is mightier than I, and he shall baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost".¹ From this it is evident that it was not our Lord's.

Answer.—John's baptism was neither from Jews nor from Christ, but it was an institution set apart to be administered only in the water, after repentance from sins and rejection of trespasses. It was thus not more than remission (of sins) to those who believed in it. As to the baptism of Christ, all those who are baptized in it are clad with the Holy Ghost, and filled with the power of God.

14. *Question.*—The baptism thou hast received, what is it and for what? If thou sayest, "For the remission of sins," we would have then been baptized to no purpose,² and if thou sayest, "For our purification," I will say, "Therefore, all those who receive it without previous uncleanness, do not profit by it".

Answer.—Baptism is, as it is written, a circumcision made without hands,³ and renders those who receive it partakers of the sufferings of Christ.⁴ A sinner who is baptized, his sins are remitted to him, if

¹ Matt. iii. 11.

² Since penitence itself can have the same effect.

³ Col. ii. 11.

⁴ 2 Cor. i. 7; Phil. iii. 10.

he turns away from his previous life, but he who has no sins and is baptized, partakes of the sufferings of Christ and receives His mark ;¹ as it is written, "Ye are buried with Him in baptism wherein also ye live with Him".² He, therefore, who is unclean and is baptized, is justified, and he who has no sins and is baptized, is marked with the sufferings of Christ ; further, he who is baptized, is circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, and becomes a temple to God.³ Those who died without baptism—I am speaking of those who lived prior to the coming of Christ—are not to be blamed, because Christ had not yet died for them ; they were not even ordered to be baptized ; but now that He has come and has been killed, he who refuses to be baptized shows that he rejects the baptism of Christ, and is a stranger to His life.

15. *Question.*—If a God-loving man who had wished to partake of the sacrament of Baptism happens to die suddenly in a country where no priest is found, what shall we say about him, is he a Christian or not ?

Answer.—We say about such a man that if he had Christianity in his mind all the days of his life, and if knowingly and lovingly his soul was longing to partake of the sacrament of Baptism, but happened to die, not from culpable negligence but by the will of his Creator who shortened his life, that he is a Christian and has everlasting life.

16. *Question.*—Because some false religions have usurped the august names of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and use them only symbolically while they are alien to the force of their names, and strangers to the very truth of their symbol, if a Christian—man, woman, or baby—happens to be nearing his death, and in that locality where he is there is no believing priest to baptize him, is he allowed to follow a heretic⁴ in order to receive baptism from him or not ?

Answer.—He is not allowed to receive baptism from such people, even if he should die, because they do not believe in the true religion, and the symbols which they perform are not genuine. If such a one happens to die, and perseveres in not following them and receiving from them the vain names which they possess, he is an excellent Christian ; because he trusted in the truth and believed that the truth

¹ Not Peshitta.

² Col. ii. 12 ; cf. Rom. vi. 3.

³ Cf. 1 Cor. iii. 16-17.

⁴ Note *Bar Yulpāna* in the sense of "heretic".

of his faith would purify him, and because he persevered and did not lend his mind to error, nor turn his intelligence to imposters, he is an excellent man.

17. *Question.*—Why are we baptized once only, while we receive the body of our Lord many times and continually ?

Answer.—We are baptized once only because our Lord died once only, but we perform the symbol of His body ¹ many times, because it ² has been given unto us as food of life everlasting and drink of life. Our Lord ordered that it should be prepared and performed on the earth by the faithful and the saints till the end of the world. For this reason, as long as we are in this world, we must not neglect the food of life and the commemoration and the symbol of the passion of Christ, in order that He may be in us and we in Him, according to His firm promises to us.

18. *Question.*—What is Christianity and of what does it consist ? Of works or of faith ? If he says “of works” ask him, “What are these works ? Are they chastity, holiness, asceticism, fasting, prayer, etc. ?” If Christianity consists of these, among the Heretics also there are people who are ascetic and abstaining from food, who would then constitute Christianity ; nay even among pagans there are people who give alms and worship idols, who in this case would also be Christian.

Answer.—Christianity does not consist of good works, but of solid faith in which one believes in God as an essential being, and in the Son proceeding from Him, as Saviour of mankind who put on our humanity, and in the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, as consubstantial with God. This is the august Trinity who created the created things from nothing. In pronouncing three names we do not believe in three Gods ; the Father in His person, the Son in His person, and the Spirit in His person, are one nature, one Godhead, and one power. It is, therefore, obvious that Christianity does not consist solely of good works, but of the knowledge of God. It consists of a solid faith, and of good and pious works.

19. *Question.*—Are all those who love God Christian ?

Answer.—No ; the ancient Patriarchs were God-loving men, but

¹ Note that Theodore believes the Eucharist to be only the *symbol* of the body of Christ.

² Or “He”.

were not counted in Christianity, because it was not found in their days.¹

20. *Question.*—Are there people who do not know of Christianity and are Christian ?

Answer.—Yes ; the baptized children and babes do not know of Christianity and are Christian.

21. *Question.*—Are there people who are not Christian and know not what is Christianity ?

Answer.—Yes ; there are pagans and infidels who are not Christian and know not what is Christianity.²

22. *Question.*—What is the meaning of the name “ Christianity ” ?

Answer.—The name Christianity is of Greek origin. It is translated into Aramaic by “ *Meshihāyūtha* ”. Christians are “ *Meshihāyē*,” and Christ “ *Meshīha* ”. True Christians are, therefore, obliged to know the mysteries of Christianity and make use of them in loving and honouring the Christ who died for them, in order that they may not be unworthy of the salvation to come.

23. *Question.*—What is the meaning of the words “ Nazarenes,” “ Nazarenism,” and “ Nazareth ” ?

Answer.—The word “ Nazarene ” is of Hebraic origin. The prophet Isaiah says, “ And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a *Neşer* out of his roots ”.³ Again he says, “ And the *Neşer* which I have planted, the work of my hands, will be glorified ”.⁴ The meaning of *Neşer* is “ new ”.⁵ The prophet did not call the teaching of our Lord by this name because it was “ novel,” but because God was to clothe Himself with a body from the Virgin without marriage in a “ novel ” way. That is why the prophet called it “ new ”. Our Lord was called “ Nazarene,” i.e. from Nazareth, because He was brought up in the Nazareth of Galilee, and Nazareth of Galilee is called the “ new ” of Galilee, which is interpreted as referring to the Torah and the New Testament.

¹ There is here a question, the answer to which has been omitted by the copyist.

² There is here a short and unimportant question.

³ Is. xi. 1.

⁴ Is. lx. 21 (Peshitta).

⁵ That the word נצר means “ new ” is not warranted by the Hebrew lexicography known to us ; the author may possibly have had in his mind “ new shoot,” “ young growth,” “ sprout ”.

24. *Question.*—What is the meaning of the words “Church,” “Catholicos,” and “Bishops”?

Answer.—The words “Catholic Church,” mean a perfect congregation, that is to say blameless in truth and fulfilling all obligations. The words “Catholic, Church” are never applied to a congregation of Heretics, because they are not blameless in the true faith, and they do not fulfil the obligations of God’s cult. The word “Bishop” means *bearer of hardships*; as to the word “Catholicos” it means “protected” and “perfect,” that is to say, his mind is protected from vain thoughts and perfect in the obligations of God’s cult.¹

25. *Question.*—Why do we pray in the direction of the East, and not in the direction of North, South, and West, from which are the Prophets, the Apostles, and the Saviour of the World?²

Answer.—God is in height, depth, East, West, North, and South; space does not circumscribe Him, nor does place confine Him; we pray in the direction of the East solely in order that our eyes may gaze in the direction of Paradise and that we may remember our first place which our first father lost by his will. Further, the direction of the East is more noble than the other directions, according to the testimony of the prophet who says, “He brought me to the gate that looked toward the East, and behold, I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the way of the East, and his voice was like a noise of many waters and the earth quaked³ from His glory. And I fell upon my face, and the glory of the Lord came into the house by the gate⁴ whose prospect is towards the East”.⁵

26. *Question.*—Those who lived in this world in the true faith, while in the knowledge of God they were not less perfect than the faithful, but perpetrated sinful works and committed criminal and impure acts, such as unchastity in their mouth, and bad thoughts in their

¹ He appears to be deriving *ἐπίσκοπος* from *κόπος* (labour, toil), and *καθολικός* from *ὅλος* (whole, complete), or more directly from *καθόλου*.

² The sanctuary in all the Christian Churches in Syria and Mesopotamia looks towards the East, and all Christians pray in that direction; even the dead are so disposed in their graves as to have their faces towards the sunrise. The direction in which people pray has a great importance in the East, and we notice that special legislation has been enacted for the *Qiblah* in the Mohammedan jurisprudence, the source of which is Koran II, 136-145.

³ Peshitta = “Shone”.

⁴ By the way of the gate (Peshitta).

⁵ Ezek. xliii. 1-14.

mind, while as we have said, they were unshakable in the true faith, what shall we say of such people, and what shall we think about them? Are they impious, or just? Will not they enter heaven at all?

Answer.—Those who in this world did not hesitate to live in the true faith, but made use of bad works, and so left this world, it is possible that they might be, for the sake of the honour due to their true faith, set free from the bad works which they had committed by receiving previously the chastisement due to their bad works. Every work is measured and valued by the All-Seer whose knowledge nothing escapes; neither the sins of the body of men, nor the odious speech which comes out of their mouth, nor their thoughts and the bad designs of their minds escape Him; that is why He knows also the measure of their chastisement; and after He has inflicted disciplinary correction on them according to the measure of their works, they will live again, for the sake of the honour of their faith and other prescriptions which they have kept.

27. *Question.*—A man who holds to the faith and to the knowledge of truth, but conducts himself in this world in a disgraceful way, inclines towards sorcerers, diviners, or augurs, and consults¹ outsiders and astrologers, and puts in practice every small or great augury of demons, what shall we say about such a one, and how can we praise him?

Answer.—Those who made us of such bad works in this world, and denied the true faith, it is on them that the word of the Apostle is fulfilled, who says, “They profess that they know God, but in their works they deny Him”.² If such people turn away from their odious works towards God, they will be accepted, but if they go out of the world in their bad works, they are sinful, and will not receive disciplinary measures, nor will they enter heaven, but will be thrown into the torment.

28. *Question.*—Since there are many who object to the priests who are in the Church, saying, “The Holy Spirit does not come down and flutter over the sacrifice they offer,³ because there are among them

¹ Note that the verb *sha"el* with a *baith* has the sense of “to consult an augur”.

² Tit. i. 16.

³ The Eastern Churches believe that the consecratory words of the bread and the wine of the mass are those contained in the *Epiclesis*, and not “Hoc est enim corpus meum”.

men who steal, commit adultery, defraud, do violence, and forswear themselves ; how can the Holy Spirit obey these men and flutter over the sacrifice they offer, while they commit such bad works ? ”

Answer.—Although there are in the Church priests sinful and false (to their obligations), yet the right hand of God which has been imposed upon their heads is true, and the sacrifice they offer is pure, and because the Holy Spirit is obedient it will come down and flutter over the sacrifice they offer, and it will become propitiation to those who receive it. If a priest is false because of his odious conduct, the baptism which he administers is true because of the (imposition of the) right hand (which he has received), and if his works are sinful, the sacrifice which he offers is genuine because of the Holy Spirit, and if he sins, the people will not be punished for his prevarications. It is not the holy who make the Holy Spirit come down by their holiness, nor is it the sinners who prevent it from coming down by their sins ; it is a gift which has been bestowed by God’s grace for the pardon of mankind. A priest who defrauds invokes it, and it comes down for the sake of those who do not defraud ; an impure man invokes it, and it answers him for the sake of those who are pure ; a prodigal invokes it, and it obeys him for the sake of those who hunger for it ; a wretched man invokes it, and it submits to him for the sake of those who thirst for it. It does not come down through the works of the man who invokes it, but through the intercession of those who stand behind the minister who is turning his eyes towards it ; it does not look at the sins of the man who invokes it, but it takes into consideration the expectations of those who are asking its intercession. If the priest is a sinner, his iniquity, like his justice, is upon himself alone ; every one is smitten with his own sins. Those who assert that the sacrifice of a sinful priest is not holy, assert wrongly. I shall go even so far as to assert to thee, O my son, and confirm my assertion by an oath, that if a hand is imposed upon Satan there is in him the hand of priesthood, and if he breaks the sanctified bread and give me of it, I shall receive it from him, and regard it as lacking nothing and as if Simon Cephas had broken it for me. Do not be in doubt about these things as some people are.

29. *Question.*—Children and babes who quit this world without having committed any iniquity and sins, nor done any good and praiseworthy work, where shall we put them or what shall we say about

them ? Will they go to heaven or to torment ? Is there another place which is neither heaven nor torment ?

Answer.—About which children hast thou asked ? The children of the faithful or the children of the unbelievers ?—because we must separate them in our answer. If thou hast asked about the children of the faithful, it is evident that there is no believer who leaves his child without the sacrament of baptism unless (this child) has been taken away by force. The babes who are baptized in the Divine sacrament of our Lord are in heaven, and those who are not baptized through the negligence of their parents go also to heaven, because it was not their own fault that they had not participated in the holy sacrament ; they are not, however, as honourable (in heaven) as those who have the mark of the holy sacrament, because baptism and Eucharist are acknowledged there.¹ As to the children of infidels who leave the world in their childhood without having done anything good or bad, iniquitous or godly, it is obvious that these also are in heaven, because they have committed no sins, but they have not the honour of the baptized, and they are in an intermediary state ; they will not be in torment because they have not perpetrated any crime, and they will not be debarred from heaven because they have not sinned, and thus the grace of God will nowhere be unjust to them.

30. *Question.*—Our Lord asserted to Nicodemus saying, “ Verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God ”.² And He said to the Jews, “ Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you ”.³ How can we listen to these words while the above people were neither baptized nor were they eaters of the flesh and drinkers of the blood of our Lord, and have life in heaven ?

Answer.—I have told thee to listen to the inspired books with a discriminating mind. Our Lord told these things to those who *voluntarily* refrained from baptism and from His flesh and blood, and He did not tell them to the believers who *involuntarily* abstained from baptism and from His holy body and blood ; behold to the scribe who had accepted His word He said, “ Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God,”⁴ and not “ Thou art the heir of *Gehenna* ”.

¹ Lit. “ Because the affair of baptism and of the Holy Body is called from where it is imparted ”.

² John iii. 5.

³ John vi. 53.

⁴ Mark xii. 34.

31. *Question.*—I accept with reverence all the solutions you gave to these questions, and I want to ask one more question : “ Will children and babes who quit this world rise in the day of Resurrection at the same age as that they had when they departed, or will they rise at a mature age ? ”

Answer.—In the Resurrection the Creator will by His power remove all the defects which the bodies of men had in this world, and will quicken the bodies blameless and perfect in form, at the age of thirty years. If somebody says “ How do you know that ? ” we will answer, “ Immediately after the creation of Adam (God’s) order was imposed upon him ”.¹ Further, after the law was given to the Israelites God ordered them that a man of thirty years shall do the work of the tabernacle and of priesthood.² Our Lord also came to baptism at the age of thirty years.³ The Messiah, our Lord, is called the second Adam, because He is from His race and family, because He is similar to him, and because He paid his debt ; and inasmuch as Adam was created at the age of thirty years, and our Lord came to baptism at the age of thirty years, at this same age shall we all rise up without any sickness, fracture, mutilation, and wounds in our limbs. There is there neither old nor young, but all mankind will rise up at the same age.

32. *Question.*—Is the death of all men from God, or is their death and their departure from this world from other causes of a diverse character ?

Answer.—The death of all men may be from God and may also be from various causes. There is a natural death, a violent death, and there is death by misadventure, and by suicide. Men die by one of these four deaths and depart. The natural death is that which has been imposed by God upon Adam and all his posterity, because he transgressed His commandment. The violent death is that of Abel and of the prophets, and of all those who are killed by the kings and the rulers of this world. The death by suicide is that of Saul and his armour-bearer, of Ahithophel, of Judas and of all those who voluntarily throw themselves into the sea or take a deadly poison. The

¹ The Eastern commentators, as we shall presently see, believed that God created Adam at the age of thirty years, and that immediately after his creation the order not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge was imposed upon him.

² Num. iv. 3.

³ Luke iii. 23.

death by misadventure is that of a man who throws a stone on another man or strikes him violently with his fist, or hurls at him something else, without having previously seen him. The Law has already warned us that "if a man goeth into the forest to hew wood, and the iron slippeth and striketh a man, that he die, the murderer is not liable to death, inasmuch as he did not desire it, and did not hate him from yesterday the third day".¹

33. *Question.*—The Agapæ which we hold at the commemoration of the dead what are they, and what is the reason of our holding them? There are people who say that it is in order that the souls of the dead may receive rest. It would be for the same reason that we feed the orphans, clothe the widows and the naked, and give rest to the weary.

Answer.—Those who utter such things are alien to the sacred Books, and on them is fulfilled the sentence of our Lord who said "Verily, verily, I say unto you, they have received their reward".² If the souls and spirits of men are to-day given rest, as they say, by the Agapæ which are held in their honour, what kind of rest will they be given in the day of Resurrection?³ The body having remained under earth, it would only be the soul that would receive a good reward both in this world and in the world to come; but the question is not as they assert, because the soul feels neither rest nor unrest apart from the body; neither the just have joy and happiness before the day of Resurrection, nor the unjust have fear and fright before the day of Resurrection. The souls of the dead have no perception, no consciousness that they may feel, as they say, joys or torments, rest or unrest. When the wife of a king and the wife of a beggar are pregnant, the son of the king has no rest while in the womb, nor has the son of the beggar any unhappiness while in the womb, until both are born, and then they are separated; for while the son of the king is luxuriously placed on the purple, the son of the beggar is thrown on mean stuff and worn-out patches. In this same manner the just and the sinners are equal in their deaths, till the day of Resurrection; neither the souls of the just receive the reward of their good works in order that God's promise may not be revoked, nor the souls of the sinners are

¹ Deut. xix. 5-6.

² Matt. vi. 2.

³ I.e. What, then, will be the reason of the day of Resurrection, since the reward has already been awarded and the punishment inflicted?

judged and tormented, in order that the judgment to come may not be without object ; they remain like foetuses in the wombs without knowledge, discernment, rest, or unrest.

In the wombs the wealthy and the poor, the slaves and the freemen, the kings and the wretched are equal ; neither the rich feel any delight nor the poor any want, but when they come to the world, the kings are distinguished by their dresses and their honour, and the wretched are known by their lowness and poverty. In this same way the souls of the just and of the unjust are equal till the day of Resurrection in which the bodies are born of the earth their mother, and the souls put on their bodies, as children put on dresses of all kind ; then the well-doers will receive their reward and dwell in light, and the evildoers will be thrown into the darkness.

The Agapæ, however, which we hold for our departed ones, are not held in vain, but in order that their sins and small imperfections, like light swearing and incontinence of the body, may be forgiven them. This we know from the kindness of our Lord, because there is no one amongst us who does not sin before Him. Behold, I have shown thee that the soul and the body rest together, and that the soul does not rest alone, as the feeble-minded have believed.

34. *Question.*—If a man is nominally Christian, while in his conduct he is wicked and perverse, indulging in sorcery, blasphemy, and other things of this kind, and if after his death Agapæ are held at his commemoration, and on their occasion the poor and the wretched eat and rest, how will he be helped in the day of Resurrection ?

Answer.—On him will be fulfilled the word of the Apostle, “ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned in the fire, and have not love, I am nothing, and it profiteth me nothing ”.¹

35. *Question.*—What profit can, therefore, martyrs and children gather from their own commemorations ? Since our Lord said to His disciples when giving them His body and His blood, “ This do in commemoration (remembrance) of me ”.² What utility can martyrs and children have for this same commemoration, while they are themselves a commemoration to themselves ?

Answer.—It is neither our Lord nor the martyrs who profit by

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

² Luke xxii. 19.

the commemorations held for them, but it is those who hold these [festivals] who are to be guerdoned in the day of Resurrection on account of their love to their Lord, who is the requiter of their good works, and of the honour shown to His martyrs, who will be their intermediary rewarders, and of that shown to the children to whom heaven belongs.¹

36. *Question.*—Will the world disappear and end before the rising of the dead ?

Answer.—The world will not disappear and end before the rising of the dead, but our Lord will appear first and come with holy men and multitudes of angels, as it is written.² When the coming of our Lord has taken place, then His force will compel the nature of the earth to give back the dead, and the bodies of the men who were buried in it, and there will be for the souls a time of getting ready and preparation to enable them to receive their bodies together. If the world and all that it contains is to disappear before the rising of the dead, from where will the dead whose bodies are mixed up in the earth, rise up ? Those who say that the world will disappear before the rising of the dead are ignorant and stupid. (God) will not destroy the world before the rising of the dead, but will first quicken the dead to witness the passing away of this world, the vanishing of the elements, and the destruction of heaven and earth. The sun, the moon, and the stars will disappear, and then affliction will begin to overtake the mind of the wicked, and joy that of the just, for ever and ever.

¹ Cf. Matt. xix. 14.

² Cf. Matt. xxiv., Mark xiii., Luke xix.