
NARSAI'S DEPENDENCE ON THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA



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Narsai stands out as the preeminent theologian among the fifth-century East Syrian Christians. While acknowledged as an ardent defender of Theodore of Mopsuestia and hailed as both the founder of the School of Nisibis and an unusually skilled poet, almost no attention has been paid—until recently—to his writings and to his person. Fortunately, some 80 of his homilies are extant,¹ but with only a few having been translated into modern languages. These nevertheless provide more than ample grounds for justifying the critical judgement that Narsai is indeed a committed follower of Theodore of Mopsuestia's christological thought and well honored with the title "the Harp of the Spirit."² To spell out in some detail how Narsai mirrors Theodore's outlook will now be the object of this paper.

While Theodore and Narsai overlap in their theological positions, they do differ in their purposes, styles and the audiences to and for whom they were writing. Theodore was a biblical theologian who wrote well-reasoned commentaries in Greek that remained faithful to what any given Scripture text actually states. While Narsai followed Theodore's literal, historical and rational method of interpreting Scripture, he wrote in

a much wider vein, more interested in the overall spiritual and occasionally polemical themes that a scriptural passage might contain or suggest. In today's context, Theodore would be viewed as a systematic theologian, and Narsai a gifted, poetic popularizer.³

Because our time is limited, I intend now to restrict my comments to two areas where both Theodore and Narsai can be clearly shown to be close, if not identical, in their thought, despite their other differences. The first will treat in detail how they understand Adam and Christ's humanity to be God's "image." This will provide insight into how they both interpret scriptural texts and how they understand salvation as a transformation from a state of earthly mortality, to one of immortality as well as how baptism plays a central role in this drama. The second stress will center on the meaning Theodore and Narsai attach to the christological terms that they use to express Christ as being one person (*prosôpon/parsôpâ*) with two *hypostaseis/qnôme* and two natures (*physeis/kyane*). Afterwards we will expand upon this to illustrate how their functional understanding has impacted upon their usual ways of speaking about Christ. In developing these points, we will discover how Theodore and Narsai enrich our under-

standing of what each other holds, especially Theodore's influence upon Narsai's understanding of Christ. But first, they need to be placed in their own historical relationship to one another.

THE HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP

Theodore lived from ca. 350 to 428, mostly at Antioch, possibly staying at Tarsus with Diodore from ca. 383 to 392⁴ and later on until his death at Mopsuestia as its bishop.⁵ Narsai's life span may have briefly overlapped with Theodore's—depending on whether Narsai lived 90 or 100 years and whether he was born about 400 or ca. 410 to 420.⁶ We know that he was raised in the Persian empire, studied at Edessa (then under Byzantine control) and eventually became the head of the Persian school there for twenty years until he was forced to flee for safety to the Persian empire. With the assistance of Bishop Barsauma, he founded a school at Nisibis that soon became the intellectual and religious center and a source of vocations for the East Syrians in the Persian empire. As regards what most interests us, Narsai lived—at least for some time at Edessa either as a student or the head of its school or both—when Ibas was the bishop there from 436 to 457.⁷ The fathers at the Second Council of Ephesus condemned Ibas in 449 for being a staunch defender of Theodore, citing as evidence Ibas' controversial letter to Mari the Persian in which he praises "the blessed Theodore [as] a preacher of the truth and teacher of the faith [as] he not only subdued the heretics by the true faith while alive, but also after his death he left behind in his writings spiritual weapons to the children of the Church...who through zeal for God not only changed his city from error to

truth, but also by his teaching instructed churches far distant."⁸ Two years later in 451 the fathers at the council of Chalcedon restored Ibas to his see. At his rehabilitation, he insisted that his letter praising Theodore be read to the council as a probative sign that he as well as his letter were orthodox.⁹ Ibas is also credited with having played a pivotal role in translating Theodore's works from Greek into Syriac.¹⁰ The point here is that Narsai would have known of Ibas' defense of Theodore during the time he spent at Edessa and doubtless read Theodore's works in Syriac.¹¹

This brief historical summary is meant to focus attention on how Narsai doubtless came into contact with Theodore's writings and thought during the formative years of his life. But not only was Narsai acquainted with Theodore's works, he also affirms how firmly committed he was to Theodore's thought and his method of interpretation:

All who have grown rich from the treasure of his books have been very well rewarded and have acquired an ability to interpret as he has done. I who learned [to do] this in a stammering way have learned from him, and by my involvement with him I have acquired a way to be involved in the study of [scriptural] words. I consider [my] study of him has guided me to [interpret rightly] what has been written (there).¹²

THEODORE'S AND NARSAI'S METHOD OF INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE

Theodore is acknowledged as one of the two outstanding biblical interpreters in patristic times, Origen being the other. He is recog-

nized as the foremost proponent of the Antiochene literal, historical and rational approach to exegesis, while Origen is acclaimed as the leading exponent of a Christian allegorical interpretation. Many factors likely influenced Theodore in arriving at his final hermeneutical stance, specifically his rhetorical education, his training in the Antiochene tradition under Diodore, his own temperament and the evolution within his own thought.¹³ He believed that his method was the best way to interpret what God was revealing in a divinely inspired Scripture. He insisted that the only assured way to know God's real intent was to center on what the words explicitly state and mean in the text itself.¹⁴ He, however, was not a fundamentalist. For he admitted that words can have a metaphorical as well as a strictly literal sense. While he was opposed to and rejected an allegorical interpretation, he was open to the presence of a spiritual meaning when it arises out of a true typology. He disapproved of allegory because it employs the use of one's imagination to discover a meaning that may be inspiring but is, in fact, wholly subjective, lacking any rationally acceptable way to prove itself. Who is to say that this possibility rather than innumerable other imaginative ones is what God intends? In other words, Theodore insists on a standard that interpreters can agree upon as not merely explaining a text but justifying it in a way that reasonable people can agree as to what a text is actually asserting in its own context. This is what he means by a literal interpretation.

Besides seeking a meaning that can be explicitly warranted by the wording of a text, Theodore insists that at least its narrative parts must contain historical or factual information. Since God is the ultimate au-

thor of the Scriptures, he believes that whatever God reveals there must be true. This became a major concern for Diodore and Theodore when the emperor Julian in the early 360's attacked the Christian Scriptures as being mythic creations whose value lay in their underlying universal philosophical meanings. Julian claimed that the Christian Scriptures ought to be interpreted for their hidden spiritual meanings as the philosophers were doing with Homer. In his *Reply to the Emperor Julian*,¹⁵ Theodore sought to justify the Gospels as having an actual basis in fact. He realized that a faith commitment ought to be based on what has truly happened. A contemporary issue may help to exemplify why Theodore was so adamant on this point. Today many believe that Christ's bodily resurrection was a figment of Peter's imagination. While this happening cannot be proven according to modern scientific historical methods, this does not mean that it did not actually occur. When a believer accepts it as factually true, then one ought to reflect on its implications, as St. Paul has done, to realize its full significance for one's life and one's relationship to God.

While Narsai faithfully adheres to Theodore's literal, historical and rational methods of interpreting the Scriptures, he applies these in a different way because his purpose, medium of expression and audience are not the same as Theodore's. Narsai's metrical homilies are written in verse form with a greater thrust aimed at instructing, exhorting and defending a scriptural message than Theodore's close theological scrutinizing of lines or passages that are difficult to interpret. Because it is a vast undertaking to substantiate how Narsai depends upon Theodore's exegetical method, and since our time is circumscribed, I want chiefly to discuss at

this point two areas of dependence: namely, how Narsai mirrors Theodore's understanding of the ways Adam typifies Christ's humanity as God's true "image", and how the sacrament of baptism typifies the salvation to be attained in an immortal heavenly existence with God.

The most striking and the easiest example to illustrate Narsai's close dependence on Theodore is how Adam's and Christ's humanity are God's "image."¹⁶ When commenting on the Genesis passage where Adam is said to be God's "image," Theodore affirms:

So also has the Artisan of creation made the whole cosmos, embellishing it with diverse and varied works and at the end established a human being to serve as the image for his household, so that all would render the honor due to God by their care for and veneration toward him.¹⁷

It is important to note that Theodore considers "image" applicable not to Adam as an individual but to human nature as such whose head is Adam:

So also when pondering upon God's word, (Moses) interpreted 'He made the human being' in a general sense, namely that it refers in a general way to man and woman together. For after he said in the narrative account that 'God made a human being in the image of God,' he added 'He made them male and female,' thereby [affirming] that the generic nature is what is designated.¹⁸

We see the same kind of generic understanding in Narsai where he too applies "image" to the whole human being: "The Creator) depicted the power of His creatorship in him as an image, mute beings

[united] to his body and likewise rational beings to his soul."¹⁹ Theodore and Narsai's understanding of "image" differs from that of most non-Antiochene Fathers who understood "image" to be somehow spiritual and located in the human *voûç*. They argue that the human body cannot image the transcendent Creator. Theodore, however, responds:

It is impossible that an image be made such that it is not seen, since it is evident that images are customarily made among those who make them either for honor or affection, on this account so that they may be a remembrance of those unseen for those who nevertheless can see.²⁰

What is interesting for this study is how Theodore and Narsai—and for that matter all the Antiochenes—accept what the Scriptures explicitly state about Adam being made God's image as a human being as such. They reject the view of those who hold "image" to be somehow a spiritual reflection of God as not taking into account what God has explicitly revealed in the text. Yet the Antiochenes differ among themselves. Diodore, John Chrysostom and Theodoret associate the meaning of "image" with the authority that God has bestowed upon humans for rule over the material world.²¹ Since Narsai follows Theodore's rather than their thought on this point, it is clear what is his source. While Theodore and Narsai do not deny that God's bestowal of "image" upon Adam entails some authoritative role over material creation, they also teach that being God's "image" means that Adam has a revelatory and a binding role to play in the universe.²² For Adam reveals God's existence and will to the rest of creation and stands as the visible bond uniting the spiritual powers and the material world together as one, the

spiritual powers to his soul and the material world to his body, thus enabling them to be joined to God through their unity with humans:

Indeed the one universal bonding was seen to be made for this purpose: because of the kindred relationship that the universe has to the human being, all come together so that by their solicitous care they might render with one consent their worship due to God.²³

Narsai is even more explicit in that he links the revelatory role of "image" to that of the "bond" of the universe:

(God's) nature is immeasurably more than created things and does not possess a visible image as mortals have. With the name of image, He has magnified His image so as to bind the universe in order that (all) might acquire love [for God] by knowing Him by knowing His image.

Theodore and Narsai reflect the same functional outlook on "image" that is not only revelatory but mediating. For if all creation is bound together in Adam's human nature, then he serves both as the head of all creation uniting them among themselves and as their mediator with God. Narsai expresses this well when affirming how Adam as well as Christ fulfills this role:

Through a human being I accomplish My transcendent will, and I make him to be the one mediator between Me and human beings. By his mediation I show my love before all creatures, just as I showed it in the fashioning [of Adam] at the beginning of the ages.²⁴

As long as Adam remains faithful to God's

will, all of creation experiences peace. When, however, Adam sins, he undermines his dignity and role as God's "image," with grievous repercussions for all. He is the cause of his human nature remaining mortal. This in turn affects his offspring and all the rest of creation. For what he does as head affects the members of his body. When, therefore, the human body separates from its soul at death, it also severs the bond, uniting the spiritual and material worlds with human nature, depriving them thereby of their appointed way to be one with God in peace. This chaotic situation appears to be utterly hopeless to the angelic powers, although God provides throughout the Hebrew Testament hopeful signs that He has chosen from all eternity another to be his true perfect "image."

Theodore sees the restoration of all creation coming through Christ. Likely inspired by Colossians 1:13-20 and Ephesian 2:13-22, Theodore accepts these passages as affirming in a literal, historical way God's own revelation of how salvation is to be attained through Christ as his perfect "image" within creation. These verses proclaim Christ to be His Son and His visible "image" for whom, through whom and in whom all things in heaven and earth are bound and recapitulated as the head of his Body, the Church and the head of all creation. Theodore appears then to have seen how St. Paul's remark in Romans 5:14 that Adam is a type of the one to come can be applied to the Scripture's revelation that both Adam and Christ are God's "images." As a type, Adam must possess similarities to Christ's archetypal and perfect role as God's visible "image." However to grasp Theodore's and Narsai's thought here, we need

to understand the relationship he sees existing between a true type and its archetype.

First, Theodore believed that a true type and its archetype had to be historical; that is, to both be real persons, events, places or situations that are actually existing, have existed or will exist in the future. One of the reasons he rejected allegory is that the archetype would exist only in the imagination of the interpreter. This means that he regarded Adam and Christ to be real as well as the two states of which they are heads. Secondly, there must exist some real similarities between a type and its archetype, with the archetype being the actual fulfillment of the type; in Theodore's words:

This was the reason why he made a great number of dispositions in the Old covenant that the happenings both provided the people of the time with the greatest benefit and also contained a revelation of the developments that would emerge later, as well as the fact that the excellence of these latter would be seen to surpass the former. In this way the events in the former times were found to be a kind of type of what came later containing some outline of them as well as meeting needs at the time, while suggesting by the events themselves how far they were inferior to the later ones.²⁵

Thirdly—and this is critical for understanding the effects of baptism and the eucharist—there exists a dynamic bond existing between and uniting the two in the sense that a type is like a seed being destined to attain its flowering in its archetype. The reason for this certainty is that God is the Lord of history and can bring about its fulfillment in a mysterious but effective way. In this sense, a type can be said to have a spiritual meaning but it is one that is dynamically

rooted in a reality that will take place in the future. Finally, Theodore requires a typical/archetypal relationship to be explicitly acknowledged in the Scriptures. For God's revelation guarantees that a type will achieve its end.

If Colossians is accepted as the source of Theodore's understanding of "image," then it makes eminent sense that Theodore (and later Narsai) attaches the notion of bond to Adam's role as "image." For all his requirements for typology are met. Adam and Christ qua man are both historical figures. So too is Adam's role as "image" similar to Christ's, with Christ's role being the completion of Adam's. Theodore expresses this when he is commenting on how "Christ in the flesh" will recapitulate the universe:

Therefore in our renovation when the interconnection of all creation is reintegrated, our first fruits is Christ according to the flesh in whom the perfect and, as I have said, the comprehensive re-creation of all creatures will be accomplished....Well, therefore, did he state 'in him are created all beings,' not only because we have all obtained through his deeds the promise of future benefits, but also because the perfect binding together of all beings will be preserved in him because of the divine nature dwelling [within him], so that nothing can cut us off from what is common to us.²⁶

In other words, for Theodore and Narsai, "image" needs to be grasped as indicating how Christ's humanity reveals the visible way that all creation can know and be united to God through the mediating role his humanity plays because of its close union with the Word of God.

Narsai likewise clearly affirms, as Theodore does, the type/antitype relationship be-

tween the roles of Adam's and Christ's humanity as God's visible "image":

He called the First Adam by the name of 'image' in a secondary sense, and the 'image' was, in fact, in the Messiah, the Second Adam. Thus [the words] "Come. Let us make man in our image" were fulfilled in that the Creator took His 'image' and made it a dwelling place for his honor. The promises to Adam came to be, in fact, in the Messiah; the one whom He called His 'image' but who was corrupted has returned and been renewed in the Messiah.²⁷

Narsai also affirms that Christ's humanity is the mediating way for other humans and angels in heaven to be joined with each other and to be able to know, worship and be united with God:

Angels and human beings will be united together by the yoke of his love, and they will celebrate him as the 'image' of the transcendent King....They continually worship in the temple of his body that One who is hidden in him and they offer therein the pure sacrifices of their minds. In the haven of his body come to rest their thought impulses, as they become worn out in search of the incomprehensible hidden One. For this reason, the Fashioner of the universe chose him from the universe, so that by his visible body he might satisfy the need of the universe. A creature needs to search out what is hidden and discover its secret meaning and intent. Because it is impossible that the hidden One's nature appear in an open way, He limited their inquiries to His visible 'image'.²⁸

BAPTISM AS A TYPE

Theodore and Narsai also refer to baptism and the eucharist as types and symbols. But because of our time limitation, we will discuss only baptism, though what we say is applicable in general to the eucharist.²⁹ In his Catechetical Homilies, Theodore is instructing adults who are preparing for baptism, while Narsai is more interested in explaining the underlying meaning of the ritual involved. As Theodore affirms, those seeking to be baptized need instruction if they are to understand what they are doing and entering into: "A revelation and an explanation are required for these, if the one coming forward to receive [baptism] is to know the power of these mysteries."³⁰ Theodore and Narsai do this by showing how baptism fulfills what a true type requires. First, one's baptism and the heavenly resurrection it symbolizes are actual events in the sense that Christ's humanity now enjoys immortal life with God—a state that the baptized are assured too of achieving if they remain faithful to the new life they received at baptism. There also exists a real similarity between the life attained at baptism and the future immortal life to be acquired in heaven. One's baptismal life shares even now in an inchoative, dynamic way the immortal life promised by the Holy Spirit for a future heavenly life with God, in Theodore's words: "When we also receive 'the first fruits of the Holy Spirit' by sharing in the mysteries, we believe that we already exist in these realities,"³¹ and in a more explicit way: "(Believers) regard the first fruits [to be] the small amount of grace [bestowed] in the present life [accepting them] as a confirmation of the things to come."³² Narsai expresses this too as being a certainty when he writes: "For what we possess in a myste-

rious way by faith in the matter of types and signs is assuring us that we will pass from one [state] to the other.”³³

It is important to realize and stress that both Theodore and Narsai say that the immortal life a baptized person acquires and shares in ought to be considered as really existing on the level of a potentiality that is actively affecting one's life in a radical way here and now: “When one has become baptized and has received the [Spirit's] divine and spiritual grace, he has become totally other in an absolute sense... The one who descends into the water is reformed by the grace of the Holy Spirit and is born again to another superior human nature.... You set aside the former mortality and take on a nature that is wholly immortal and incorruptible.”³⁴ Theodore likens this “new superior nature” to the potentiality laying dormant in a new born baby:

Just as one born of a woman possesses the power to speak, hear, walk and work with his hands but is now completely undeveloped for all (these actions), but afterwards with time he will receive these according to the divine decree. So likewise the one now born at baptism possesses in himself all the power of an immortal and incorruptible nature and possesses all these, although he is not now capable of operating them and making them work and act until the moment that God has determined for us.³⁵

Connected with this idea of an inchoative sharing in Christ's immortal life is another result of baptism: to become bonded as a living member of Christ's Body. Theodore relates this to his understanding of typology:

Since we believe that we have been generated in these matters in a typical

way through baptism, Paul states that we have also become a member of Christ's body because of our communion [with him] in his resurrection the type of which we believe is being brought to fulfillment in baptism.³⁶

Theodore insists that those baptized are assured that they are no longer under the spell of Adam, the head of mortality, but are now under Christ, who is the head of an immortal life that the members of his Body now share: “Therefore they will no longer be thought of as part of Adam but of Christ; and they will no longer name Adam their head but Christ the one renewing them.”³⁷ Christ not only bestows a new life with the Spirit but also nourishes those who are members of his Body and unites them indirectly to God because of his humanity's mediating direct union with the Word:

Therefore God the Word was united to His Father according to nature. So too through the union with Him, the assumed man also receives a union with the Father. And we in a similar way with the natural union we have with Christ in the flesh, receive, insofar as it can be done, a spiritual participation with him and become his body, [with] each one of us truly a member. So we hope to rise at the end [of time] as he has, and be regenerated into eternal life. So by going through him to God, we possess necessarily a family relationship with the Father.³⁸

THEODORE AND NARSAI'S UNDERSTANDING OF CHRIST'S PERSONAL UNION

Theodore and Narsai are identical in their christological positions. This is especially

evident in the terms they use to describe the union. Theodore sums up his position thus:

For when we distinguish the natures (*physeis*), we assert that the nature of God the Word is perfect and [His] *prosôpon* is perfect. For it is not [possible] to affirm that there exists a hypostasis without a *prosôpon*. The human *physis* is perfect and likewise [its] *prosôpon*...But when we look to the union, then we say one *prosôpon*.³⁹

Narsai asserts the same position, in a slightly different way: "Our Lord, it is said, possesses two natures (*kyane*) and two hypostases (*qnômê*) in one person (*parsôpâ*) of the Godhead."⁴⁰ In fact, Narsai is careful to insist that he does not hold for the existence of two *parsôpe* in the sense of two individuals: "I am not introducing two *parsôpe* like the unjust do. The Word of the Father and the Body⁴¹ which is from us—I know as one."⁴² When both Theodore and Narsai's statements are assessed together, their stance on the union is that there are two natures, each with its own hypostasis and *prosôpon* united in one *prosôpon*. But what do they mean by these terms, especially when they state that two *prosôpa* become one *prosôpon*—a statement that is certainly confusing, if not contradictory.

While there was a lack of clarity in the late fourth century as to what is exactly meant by the christological terms, there was a general agreement by the fifth century regarding the terms *ousia* and *physis* for "nature," and hypostasis and *prosôpon* for "person," though, of course, with nuances. After the Council of Nicaea, the Trinity was regarded as having three hypostaseis and *prosôpa* in one *ousia*, with *ousia* being the fundamental substance of a specific real-

ity.⁴³ The term *physis* signified "nature" but with all the unique properties belonging to it as this concrete nature and not another. *Ousia* and *physis* can be generally differentiated as being the genus and the species. Yet it is not clear how the Fathers distinguished between hypostasis and *prosôpon* in the Trinity other than the terms suggest the difference between the inner and outer aspects of an existing individual. When Cyril chose hypostasis as the term to express the unity in Christ, this appears to have been an innovation. Theodoret chided Cyril: "We are entirely ignorant of the union according to a hypostasis regarding it to be alien and foreign to the divine Scriptures and to the Fathers who have interpreted them."⁴⁴ In other words, up to this time, hypostasis was a term used in trinitarian theology, not Christology. It would appear that Cyril saw hypostasis as a term that any and all human beings could relate to as expressing a unity that they knew about from their own experience, specifically that a human being is one and the same despite accidental changes. Such an understanding of a person as a substantial unity Cyril saw would also justify the position of the Nicene Creed when it asserts that the Word was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered and died.

While Cyril saw hypostasis as expressing the substantial unity present in Christ, yet he initially failed to grasp fully that the term connoted the presence of a rational "nature." It is only later that the terms "person" and "nature" were distinguished from one another. Nestorius and the Monophysites, however, both understood Cyril's hypostasis as asserting there was only one nature in Christ, that of the divinity.⁴⁵ Eventually the Orthodox agreed to the formula that there was one Person (hypostasis) in

Christ but with two complete natures (*physeis*). As regards the term *prosôpon*, Cyril avoided it as the Antiochenes did hypostasis. Cyril doubtless rejected the term because it connoted the exterior appearance of a person. He also suspected that Nestorius' willingness to affirm the presence of two hypostaseis in Christ meant that Nestorius held for two separate existing individuals who are united under umbrella term *prosôpon* in some sort of a moral union.

Doubtless reflecting Theodore's thought, Nestorius exemplifies his understanding of all the christological terms by appealing to the example of a king who exchanges his regal clothing for that of an ordinary soldier.⁴⁶ The king's *ousia* is his generic nature as a human being. *Physis* adds to *ousia* all that is proper to the king as this unique individual. Hypostasis then expands upon this, by denoting that this king is really existing within his own specific nature. The term *prosôpon* primarily connotes the external aspects of a person. Nestorius brings out what is at the heart of *prosôpon*'s meaning when he distinguishes it from *skêsis*. The latter indicates what is the temporary appearance that a person may have at this time. In Nestorius' example, the term signifies how the king appears externally when he puts on an ordinary soldier's attire. *Prosôpon*, however, would denote how the king's actions reflect who he is as this particular king. It connotes how a nature will manifest itself in ways wholly consonant with its nature, so that one can argue from one's exterior deeds and speech to one's inner self. While a person can deceive others as to what is one's true intent, still there does exist an essential relationship between one's outer and inner self. So when Theodore states that each hypostasis and physis

has its own *prosôpon*, he simply means that every existing concrete nature can manifest itself externally according to its natural powers.⁴⁷ As such, it is a functional term in Theodore and Narsai's Christology.

When, therefore, Theodore and Narsai assert that the *prosôpon* of the Word and that of Christ's humanity comprise one common *prosôpon*, they are simply affirming, as the Synoptics do, that Christ's external, visible acts are visibly revealing how his natures are inwardly acting together as one reality. This means that a *prosopic* union should be regarded as expressing not a person in a metaphysical sense but rather the ways Christ's human and divine wills can operate together as one in such a mysterious way that one can rightly say there is truly one will and one "person."⁴⁸ In other words, according to the way that Theodore and Narsai conceive of the unity, the salvific roles that Christ plays throughout his earthly life disclose the mystery of who he is inwardly as a true person. It highlights why a functional, soteriological approach ought to be joined to a metaphysical, Christological one. For both are necessary and essential to understand each other.

To summarize briefly, when Theodore asserts that Christ possesses two hypostaseis, each with its own *prosôpon*, he is not affirming two existing "persons" in Christ, but rather the presence of two existing realities with their own natural properties and abilities to express these in outward ways.⁴⁹ To highlight the difference between Theodore and Cyril's approaches, it is helpful to see these in relationship to the various ways that the term "person" is understood in our contemporary culture. Some understand a "person" in a philosophical sense as a complete, incommunicable, individual "substance" with

a rational nature. This metaphysical emphasis is manifested in the abortion controversy today. Those insisting that a "person" is present from the first moment of conception are convinced that the mass of cells formed there with its own DNA and dynamic thrust towards growth fulfills the definition of a "person" in a substantial sense. Many reject this emphasis upon an individual "substance" because it cannot be seen and evaluated in a true scientific way. Others prefer to hold that a "person" becomes known from his or her activity on the presumption that the outer nature of every person can functionally reveal one's inner nature as a person. A person can also be understood to be such in a psychological sense when an individual is conscious in one's ego of being a true unity and the source of one's acts of reasoning and willing to the point of being responsible for what one intends. When understood in this way, the Word as the Person of unity in Christ may be regarded as the One who is the ultimate cause and/or source of Christ's divine and human operations. The central question then becomes whether the "ego" of the unity or the will of each nature is the principle of its own operations.

"Person" can also be taken as it is in the Trinity as a real relationship existing between persons. This accentuates a necessary element often overlooked when speaking of the meaning of the term. "Person" is so stressed as a free, responsible individual that one can overlook that the idea of "person" contains an essential communal dimension and that a "person" becomes a "true person" only in relationships with others. In other words, a "person" is not merely a self-sufficient individual but also one who must relate to others in a family, community, and society. Perhaps one can say that as the Per-

sons of the Trinity are necessarily relating as Persons to each other, the humanity of Christ has been destined to find its fulfillment as a person in the Person of the Word. The last two aspects of "person" are arbitrary moral and legal determinations whereby a corporation is considered to be like a person and can be treated as if it were morally responsible for its actions and can be sued. The other is exemplified today by the *Roe v. Wade* and *Roe v. Bolton* Supreme Court decisions that have established as a constitutional fact that a fetus is to be considered a "person" with legal rights only when it is viable outside his or her mother's womb.

Thus when one speaks of the meaning of "person," one may emphasize one dimension or aspect but not necessarily reject another. For Cyril, hypostasis signifies the substantial union of the Word and Jesus in a metaphysical sense. Its value is that it shows that what is said of Jesus can be asserted of the Word; for example that the Word truly suffered and died. But for Theodore and Narsai, such a statement means that the Word has actually suffered in His divine nature. For they believe that the act of suffering belongs to Christ's human nature and not to the Word's hypostasis. Such a rejection is understood by Cyril as a clear denial of the substantial unity of Christ's natures. Theodore and Narsai, on the other hand, were totally convinced that to avoid confusion over the natures, one ought to refer to the unity as "one common *prosôpon*." For this signifies that the subject of unity must always include both natures somehow operating as one. This is why they insist on those titles that express this functional unity (presuming that in some mysterious way the divine and the human wills act as one will).

This is conveyed by such titles as “Christ,” the “Lord Jesus Christ,” the “assuming One,” the “assumed one,” and, if Theodore were aware of its use, the “Incarnate Word.” But while asserting this, Theodore and Narsai are adamant that human attributes can be applied only to Christ’s human nature and not at all to the divine. For Christ’s human acts flow from his human nature, not his divine nature. Theodore justifies this by appealing to how the soul and body are different natures⁵⁰ but function as one:

When (Paul) spoke of the two natures as two diverse realities, aptly according to the difference of natures, he posited this “I” [as belonging] to each one of them as one; i.e., he speaks of the two of them as [pertaining] to [his] common person (*prosôpon*). To make known that he is speaking in these instances not of one and the same nature, he showed [this] by distinguishing his words.⁵¹

He expands upon what he means by the need for distinctions:

In the same way, even though some natures differ by nature, it [can] happen that they are truly united in another way. Thus they do not lose their distinction as natures [while still] having their own unity, just as the soul is united to its body, [with] one human being resulting from both... A human being *in se* is never affirmed to be in an absolute and proper sense to be one [the soul] or the other [the body], unless perhaps with some addition, such as an ‘interior man’ and an ‘exterior man,’ not a human being in an absolute sense but [one who is] interior and exterior. So we also say in the case of Christ our Lord, O amazing one, that the form of the

slave exists in the form of God, not that the One assuming is the one assumed. The unity of the assumed one with the assuming One is inseparable, incapable of being sundered in any way.⁵²

Narsai expresses the same outlook:

(The natures) are like the soul and the body which fit together and are called one *parsôpâ*, the soul being the vivifying nature, and the body, the human nature; and the two which are distinct from one another are called one *parsôpâ*. The Word is the nature of the divine essence, and the body the human nature, one being the Creator and the other the creature.⁵³ They are one by their union... The soul does not suffer in the body when its limbs are scourged, and the Divinity did not suffer in the sufferings of the body in which it dwelt. If it is true that the soul which is something created like the body does not suffer, how then does the divine essence suffer whose nature is exalted above passions? The soul suffers with the body in love and not by nature. And also the sufferings of the body are predicated of the soul in a secondary sense.⁵⁴

Narsai is holding here, as Theodore does, that the soul and the body and the divine and human natures in Christ are each a reality *in se* that can act fully according to its own natures without any diminishment and yet be considered truly one in the overall unity. They also regard a concrete nature to be the source of its own activity—as commonly accepted in regard to the Trinity where the activity of the triune Persons flows from their common nature. How Christ as a unified “person” can act in and through His two natures is the fundamental

mystery in Christology—an issue that the council fathers have not addressed in their definitions.⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

Although limited in scope, the present paper has fleshed out two areas that corroborate Narsai's declared commitment to Theodore's exegetical and theological inspiration.⁵⁶ The first reveals how Narsai closely followed Theodore's literal understanding of the functional ways Adam's and Christ's humanity serve as "images of God." Both Theodore and Narsai accepted what the Genesis and Colossians texts actually state about how Adam and Christ in the flesh fulfill the roles of "image." We have argued that they derived their views by regarding Adam's role as "image" as a type of Christ's humanity, which acts as the true, perfect, visible "image" of the invisible Word. They both apply "image" to Adam's human nature in two ways: first, Adam as the head of mortal existence reveals the existence and will of God and serves as the visible way for other creatures to show their praise and worship of God by caring for human needs, and second, Theodore connects Adam's role as "image" with his nature's role as the bond uniting the spiritual powers to his soul and the material worlds to his body and, in this recapitulating way, enabling all to share in his union with God the Word.⁵⁷

Our second major area for comparison was Theodore and Narsai's understanding of Christology. They reject or at least do not understand Cyril's stress upon the term *hypostasis* as the best way to express the union of Christ's natures. They believe that Cyril is holding for the presence of only one na-

ture in Christ, the divine nature of the Word and that the Word qua God can be said to have really been born of Mary and suffered on the cross. Since Theodore cannot separate hypostasis from a concrete existing nature, he has opted rather for the phrase the "one common *prosôpon*" which should be understood as a soteriological approach to the mystery of who Christ is as a person. It is the way that the Synoptics portray Christ as acting as one in human and divine ways. Theodore and Narsai presume that their functional understanding of "person" accurately reflects the ways Christ's two natures act and are one internally. The consequences of this, of course, reveal themselves in the ways that Cyril and Theodore express how properties can be attributed to Christ. Theodore does allow that the "I" of the common *prosôpon* can speak as one in divine and human ways insofar as it comprises both natures. But when one wants to speak of the natures separately, one must attribute human acts to the humanity and divine to the divine nature. This explains why Theodore wants to qualify Cyril's statement that Mary is the mother of God by asserting that she is the mother of Christ in whom the Word dwells. This, of course, opens Theodore and Narsai to the charge that they have so separated the natures that they have made Word and Jesus to be two completely different individual "persons."

In conclusion, this paper does not want merely to sketch the dependence of Narsai upon Theodore but also to indicate the richness of their theological thought. Too often they are cited for their positions on Christ and solely evaluated in light of Cyril's Twelve Anathemas and his understanding of what the christological terms mean. Much more needs to be said beyond the limited

boundaries of this paper, especially regarding Narsai's role in forming the Church of the East's theological outlook and expressing this metrically in far-ranging spiritual themes. Narsai may not be an original theological thinker but he is certainly a gifted poetic composer who has assimilated Theodore's thought and language and applied them in his writings. He is a valuable source too for understanding the Antiochene tradition as represented in the writings of Dio-

dore, Theodore and Nestorius. Unfortunately other Christian traditions—the Orthodox, the various non-Chalcedonian communities and the Christian West—have failed to fully understand the Church of the East's own rich tradition that stresses a functional, soteriological Christology that is arguably complementary to Cyril's essentialist approach. Such a misunderstanding has resulted in a centuries-long, tragic ecclesial separation and alienation.

NOTES

¹Alphonse Mingana provides a listing of the homilies attributed to Narsai in his "Introduction," to *Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina*, 2 vols., ed. A. Mingana (Mosul, 1905), 1, 26-31. His two volume work, however, does not include the *memre* that he considers to be doctrinally suspect. For a critical edition and translation of five of these, see Frederick G. McLeod, ed. and trans., *Narsai's Metrical Homilies on the Nativity, Epiphany, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension*, PO XL, 182 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979). For a discussion of the *memre* manuscript history and a listing of the primary sources about Narsai's life and published studies about him up to 1979, see McLeod, 7-34. William Macomber provides a comprehensive listing of manuscripts containing Narsai's *memre* in his article "The Manuscripts of the Metrical Homilies of Narsai," *OCP* 39 (1973). Ibrahim Ibrahim, in his unpublished dissertation, *La doctrine christologique de Narsai*, Thoma Aquino, Rome, 1974-75, offers brief summaries (97-222) of all the *memre* in Mingana's listing. He also considers 84 and 85 as authentic and strongly argues for Narsai's christological orthodoxy.

²A. Scher, ed., *Histoire Nestorienne* (Chronique de Seert, PO VII [Turnhout: Brepols, 1910]), 114.

³The different emphases are even evident in Theodore's Catechetical Homilies and Narsai's most doctrinal works, his liturgical homilies. Narsai is more concerned to sum up and elucidate the spiritual meaning contained in the ritual symbolism of baptism, whereas Theodore is more interested in explaining the theological thought contained in the verses of the Nicene Creed, the "Our Father" and the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist.

⁴See the entry on "Theodore of Mopsuestia" in *Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects, and Doctrines*, ed. W. Smith and H. Wace, IV (London: Murray, 1887). The article is unsigned but appears to have been written by H. B. Swete.

⁵For a recent well-documented summary of Theodore's life and works, see *Teodoro di Mopsuestia: Replica a Giuliano Imperatore*, trans. Augusto Guida (Firenze: Nardini, 1994), 9-30.

⁶Unfortunately scholars have had to draw their biographical data on Narsai mainly from two sixth century contemporaries who have the exact first name but are cited as coming from different cities: Barhadbšabba of Arbaye and Barhadbšabba of Halwan. While these two accounts agree, more or less, on the skeletal outline of Narsai's life, scholars are frequently unable to verify their details and, in fact, when these scholars compare their accounts with one another and with other sources, they find them to be confusing and even contradictory. For an exhaustive (but unpublished) dissertation study of all the sources dealing with Narsai's life, see Ibrahim Ibrahim (1-84). Ibrahim also examines all the internal evidence present in Narsai's metric homilies as well as the opinions of those who have speculated on how to reconcile all the conflicting data about his life. Ibrahim believes that Narsai was born ca. 415 in a village northeast of the present Mosul, went for schooling at Edessa in 422, returned to his uncle's monastery in Kefar-Mari around 441-442, spent another 10 years at Edessa, returning to Kefar-Mari for a year after which he returned to Edessa to become the director of the school in 452. After being expelled sometime after 471, he then helped Bishop Barsauma to establish the School of Nisibis in the Persian empire. He died ca. 502-503.

⁷The fathers at the Second Council of Ephesus (better known as the "Robbers' Council") deposed Ibas in 449. He was restored to office in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon.

⁸For an English translation of the letter, see Robert Doran, trans., *Stewards of the Poor: The Man of God, Rabbula, and Hiba in Fifth-century Edessa*, Cistercian Studies 208 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 2006), 171-72.

⁹The Non-Chalcedonians regarded the fact that the fathers at Chalcedon accepted Ibas' let-

ter, when taken together with the language the fathers used to express their formula of faith, as clear proof that the Council was undoubtedly Nestorian. In the sixth century when the emperor Justinian vainly attempted to reconcile the non-Chalcedonians with the Orthodox at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, he was able to have Theodore and—what he dubbed the “so-called”—letter of Ibas condemned. He claimed that the letter lauding Theodore was not the true letter read at Chalcedon but one that is fraudulent. For a discussion of this letter, see, Alois Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition from the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, 2 vols. 2nd rev. ed., trans. J. Cawte and P. Allen (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 2:414-15.

¹⁰ See the article “Ibas” in the *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (New York: Oxford, 1992). From a comment that James of Sarug makes about the years he spent as a student at Edessa (see G. Olinder, *Jacobi Sarugensis Epistolae quotquot supersunt*, CSCO 110, 58-60), it appears that Diodore's writings were also translated about the same time.

¹¹ Narsai makes no mention of Ibas in his extant works, possibly because Ibas assented to the condemnation of Nestorius at Chalcedon.

¹² Narsai also mentions Theodore when he affirms: “Thus does all the Church of the orthodox confess this [view]; so also have the approved doctors of the Church taught: Diodore, Theodore and Mar Nestorius” (Connolly, 14); he also refers to Theodore when speaking about the Eucharist: “The great teacher and interpreter Theodore has handed down the tradition that our Lord spoke thus when he took the bread” (Connolly, 16).

¹³ For a treatment of Theodore's method of interpretation, see Frederick McLeod, *The Roles of Christ's Humanity in Salvation: Insights from Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington: The Catholic University Press, 2005), 20-57.

¹⁴ For an understanding of Theodore's exegetical thought, see Lucas van Rompay, trans., *Théodore de Mopsueste: Fragments syriaques du Commentaire des Psaumes* (Psaume 118 et

Psaumes 138-148), CSCO, *Scriptores Syri* 190 (Louvain: Peeters, 1982), 1-18, esp. 10-18.

¹⁵ See Augusto Guida, trans., *Teodoro di Mopsuestia: Replica a Giuliano Imperatore* (Florence: Nardino, 1994).

¹⁶ For a treatment of Theodore's understanding of the “image of God,” see Frederick McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 62-70; and *Roles of Christ's Humanity*, 124-43.

¹⁷ Theodore of Mopsuestia, “L'homme créé ‘à l'image de Dieu’: quelques fragments grecs inédits de Théodore de Mopsueste,” ed. and trans. Francoise Petit, *Le Muséon* 100 (1987) 276. The same view is expressed in Theodore, CH 12:8: “Our Lord God made a human being in His image from the earth and honored him in many other ways. He then conferred especially on (Adam) the honor of being His image whereby a human being alone is called God and the Son of God.” The same thought is expressed in E. Sachau, ed. and trans., *Theodori Mopsuesteni Fragmenta Syriaca* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1969), 27 (Latin) / 15 (Syriac); also in H. B. Swete, ed., *Theodori Episcopi Mopsuesteni in Epistolas B. Pauli Commentarii*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1880, 1882), I, 261-62: “Well does (Paul) add ‘invisible’—not that God may also be visible but for the manifestation of His greatness. If, nevertheless, we will see that invisible nature in Christ as though in an image, in that he has been united to God the Word and will judge the whole world when he appears according to his own nature, as is right, coming in the future age from heaven with great glory, he maintains for us the rank of image. It is evident that we all attribute the divine Nature, to which is referred the greatness of whatever is effected, to him as though to some image, although we do not impute authority [to be] the judge to a visible nature. I am amazed, however, at those who have accepted this [as applicable] to the divine nature... For blessed Moses also says of man ‘God made him to [His] image;’ and likewise blessed Paul, ‘man ought not indeed to cover his head, being the image and glory of

God.' For this could never be said of man, if it were proper to the divine nature."

¹⁸ Sachau, 28 a-b/16. This passage indicates that Theodore believed that "image" refers to human beings, not merely to men as males.

¹⁹ Mingana, 2:239. See also 2:251: "(The Creator) fashioned and skillfully made a double vessel: a visible body and a hidden soul—one human being." For a treatment of Narsai's view of "image," see McLeod, *Image of God*, 70-74, and *The Soteriology of Narsai* (Rome: Institutum Orientalium, 1973). This is an offprint of a chapter from my unpublished dissertation that treats of Narsai's view on the "image of God."

²⁰ Swete, 1:262-63.

²¹ Diodore, Chrysostom and Theodoret likely drew their understanding from the Genesis story where God allows Adam to name the animals and perhaps also from Paul's remark in 1 Corinthians 11:7 where the notion of "image" is associated with that of authority.

²² For a treatment of this view, see McLeod, *Image of God*, 58-61 and 78-80; and R. A. Norris, Jr., *Manhood and Christ: A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 140-48.

²³ Swete, 1:lxxx.

²⁴ Mingana I, 7.

²⁵ Robert C. Hill, trans., *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on the Twelve Prophets* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 186.

²⁶ Swete, 1:269. Theodore leaves no doubt that the Son as the visible "image" is Christ in his human nature: "For it is evident that these things [God's bestowal of the divine *plerôma* and universal domination upon Christ *qua man*] pertain to the human nature which receives domination over everything by [its] union with God the Word;" J.-M. Vosté, ed. and trans., *Theodori Mopsuesteni Commentarius in Evangelium Johannis Apostoli*, CSCO 15-16/Syr. 62-63 (Louvain: Officina orientali, 1940), 83/59.

²⁷ Mingana II, 190.

²⁸ McLeod, *Narsai's Metrical Homilies*, 176/77.

²⁹ Briefly Theodore emphasizes the role of the eucharist as a necessary means to remain faithful to the new state achieved at baptism. For this new inchoative life can be lost as long as a persona is free to turn from God's will during one's earthly life. As an aid to avoid falling in this way, the eucharist nourishes a baptized person's spiritual life within the Body of Christ: "When all of us are nourished by the same body of our Lord, we participate in him by means of this nourishment. All of us become the one Body of Christ and receive thereby a participation in and union with him as our head." Theodore likens this nourishment to what a mother provides for her newborn child: "For every animal born naturally from another animal receives its nourishment from the body of the one giving it birth. So also from the beginning God has ordered this to take place among created beings that every female animal engendering life has within herself the nourishment befitting those she has engendered. It is necessary then that we who have partaken of divine grace in a typical way also receive our nourishment from above" (CH 1:4). While it is difficult to show a direct link between Theodore and Narsai because they are both reflecting Paul's thought, Narsai appears to be closely dependent on Theodore's language. For instance, Theodore asserts: "It is well, then, that when giving the bread, (Jesus) did not say: 'This is a type of my body,' but 'This is my body'; and likewise with the chalice [of wine], [he did] not [say]: 'This is a type of my blood,' but: 'This is my blood.' For after these have received the grace and the coming of the Holy Spirit, he wanted that we too not regard their own nature but take them as being the body and blood of our Lord" (CH 15:10). Narsai writes in a similar vein: "The (Lifegiver) did not express them as a type or a similitude, but as his Body in reality and Blood in truth... Wherefore the bread is strictly the Body of our Lord, and the wine is His Blood properly and truly" (Connolly, 17). Both Theodore and Narsai are emphatic that the bread and wine are truly transformed by the Spirit into the body and blood of Christ's humanity.

³⁰Theodore, CH 12:2. Theodore has an eschatological understanding of salvation but one possessing an incarnational aspect. Wilhelm de Vries, in his "Der Nestorianismus' Theodors von Mopsuestia in seiner Sakramentenlehre," OCP 7 (1941) 91-148, maintains that Theodore considered baptism as simply providing only forgiveness of sins, special graces to live a good life and a mere hope for the attainment of a future life. Ignatius Oñatibia, in his "La vida cristiana, tipode las realidad celestes. Un concepto basico de la teologia de Theodore de Mopsuestia," *Scriptorum Victoriense* 1 (1954) 107; and Luise Abramowski in her "Zur Theologia Theodors von Mopsuestia," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 72 (1961) 263-93 insist that de Vries' view misses the implications present in Theodore's understanding of how a type participates in the reality of its archetype. This can be seen in Theodore's statement that "It is through this mystery which you are about to receive that from now on you will share without doubt in these future goods" (CH 14:2). While Theodore does not hold for a divinization in the sense that one can share directly in the life of God, he does hold that one can share inchoatively in the immortal life one will attain fully in the next life. Oñatibia points out that the sacraments and their heavenly fulfillment are two poles bound to one another as a type to its archetype in a way that reveals the unity of God's plan for salvation. Abramowski observes that if de Vries' interpretation was actually the correct one, Syriac translators would not have used the word "participation" and "sharing" but rather such phrases as "in the name of" and "under the appearance of" to express Theodore's thought here.

³¹Theodore, CH 16:30.

³²Swete 1:132-33. See also Theodore, CH 12:6: "(The assumed man) mounted to heaven in order that henceforth we might have a surety of a possessed participation because of [our] sharing in [his] nature."

³³Theodore, CH 14:28. See also CH 12:2: "For every sacrament is an indication in signs and mysteries of invisible and ineffable things." Theodore and Narsai regard salvation history as

encompassing two states or ages: the present life of mortality that will continue until the end of this world and the heavenly, immortal and immutable life to which all the faithful will rise. We see this expressed in the excerpts #55-61 presented to the Second Council of Constantinople; to cite but one: "What pleased God was to divide the creation into two states: the one which is present in which he made all things mutable; the other which is future, when he will renew all things and bring them to immutability," *Concilium Universale Constantinopolitanum Sub Iustiniano Habitum*, ed. Johannes Straub, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, tom. 4, vol. 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971), 44-72. see excerpts #55-61. Straub, I: 14, and PG 66:1009.

³⁴Theodore, CH 14:9-11.

³⁵Ibid., CH 14:10.

³⁶Staub, 124. See also Vosté, 80-81/57: "(God) made everyone a sharer in the Spirit whereby we are reborn in a spiritual way. And as we possess a union of nature with him by a similar birth, so we receive by his means a household relationship with God the Word."

³⁷Theodore, CH 1:4.

³⁸Vosté, 315-16/225-26. I have translated οἰκειότης as "a family relationship" as a better way to express the kind of communion and partnership existing between a baptized person and the Word.

³⁹Swete 2:299.

⁴⁰Mingana I:17. The Syriac word *ithay* means existence in se, and *kyana* "nature" as *physis* has been just described. Hypostasis appears to denote an existing inner self: "It is not the hypostasis that carnal eyes have seen, but the sign of its visible image" (Mingana I, 73).

⁴¹Like Theodore, Narsai refers to Christ's humanity as the "Body." It exemplifies too how the concrete and the abstract can be used interchangeably for one another.

⁴²McLeod, *Narsai's Metrical Homilies*, 64/65.

⁴³The term *prosôpon* is cited together with hypostasis in the case of the Trinity. In a Synodal Letter that most likely expresses the official Tome of the First Council of Constantinople

(381), the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are said to possess "a single Godhead and power and... three most perfect *hypostaseis* or three perfect *prosôpa*" (Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils 1: Nicaea I to Lateran V* [Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990], 28). The two terms appear to have the same or very similar meaning, though hypostasis is said to be most perfect, perhaps to indicate that no divine Person is greater than the others as they are all most perfect.

⁴⁴ Straub, I: 14.

⁴⁵ Narsai expresses Theodore's view that one cannot separate hypostasis (*qnôma*) from nature *physis* (*kyana*) when he states that the Word cannot become flesh in his *qnôma*: "If it is true that His *qnôma* became flesh and did not assume flesh from Mary, how did it help our nature that He became flesh in His own nature?" This is found on p. 5 of the 69th *memra* contained in the Syriac manuscript 5463 of the British Museum. Mingana lists it as *Memra* 81 but did not publish it in his two volume work.

⁴⁶ Nestorius, *The Bazaar of Heracleides*, ed. and trans. Godfrey L. Driver and Leonard Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 20-23.

⁴⁷ See Sachau, 51-52/92-93. Sachau translates the last word of this section as *naturae*, while the Syriac has *parsôpa*. The sense is that the actions of the two natures are united and expressed as one *parsôpa*: "For there is a unity of all [attributes] when they are asserted about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but when the natures are examined separately as to what each expresses, [one must note] how this coheres with its nature and how this accords with the rule as to how things are to be said of each of the natures. But when they are joined together in a unity of person (*parsôpa*), both of the natures are said to be [united] in a participatory way in a case where they are in an agreement because of the unity. For in this situation, what is distinct by nature is also affirmed to be clearly existing in a conjoined way [to the other nature] because of the unity of the person (*parsôpa*)."

⁴⁸ Theodore expresses this unity of will when he asserts: "When our Savior said to the

leper, "I will it: be clean," He showed here that there exists one will and one operation according to one and the same power. This takes place not on the level of nature but on the level where he was honored to be united to God the Word. For in accordance with God's foreknowledge, he was made a man from the seed of David, possessing an affectionate kindred relationship with the Word from [his time of conception in] the womb" (PG 66: 1003).

⁴⁹ Those asserting that Theodore's willingness to assert the presence of two *hypostaseis* in Christ means that he is holding for two separate persons must confront the use of the term to express the three Persons in the Trinity. The term indicates that there are existing real substantial relational differences between the Father, Son and Spirit but not that there are three separate Gods. This is evident in the way that Theodore regards the soul to be a hypostasis: "The soul of men, however, is not like this, but it resides in its own hypostasis and is much higher than the body seeing that the body is mortal and acquires its life from the soul and dies and perishes whenever the soul happens to leave it. As regards the [human] soul, when it goes out, it remains and does not perish but lasts forever in its own hypostasis. For it is immortal" (Swete, 2:318). So understood, Christ's human hypostasis ought not to be considered in Theodore's thought a separate individual from the Word, just as the body ought to be viewed as an individual existing apart from its soul. Since each hypostasis has its own *prosôpon*, this explains why Jesus' existing human nature was bodily capable of dying on the cross. But as Theodore continually insists, this nature is so intimately united with the Word's divine nature in a true *prosopic* unity that worship can be shown it, but not to Christ's humanity in se but because his humanity serves as the true "image" of God: "For such was the dignity of the assumed man that God dwelt in him; and believing this, we also adore him. Otherwise who would be so mad that he would adore the man separately?" (Swete, 2:222).

⁵⁰ Theodore's opposition to Apollinaris' use of the analogy shows that he is aware of its seri-

ous limitations: to express the true unity in Christ. Three are especially telling: 1) the natures of the soul and the body are incomplete; 2) the soul comes into existence out of necessity, whereas the Word preexists Christ's humanity from all eternity; and 3) the Word has freely entered into His union with the humanity of Jesus.

⁵¹ Staab, 167-68.

⁵² Swete 2:318-19.

⁵³ Theodore and Narsai have no problem in interchanging an abstract term with a concrete one and vice versa, such the divine nature for the Word, and the human nature for "Body."

⁵⁴ Mingana II, 229. It is interesting to point out here how Theodore and Narsai follow the Jewish manner of speaking and writing that looks upon the abstract as contained in the concrete and the concrete as revelatory of the abstract. In other words, one recognizes the abstract as being real only when it exists visibly in the concrete. Narsai expresses the soul/body analogy also in *Memra* 81 (see McLeod, *Narsai's Metrical Homilies*, 27 for the Syriac text and an English translation): "When I say that the Word and the Body are two in nature, it is like (saying) that the body and the soul within it are one man. The soul with the body and the body with the soul are distinct but fit together and every one testifies that they are two but called one." For a carefully worded passage where Narsai qualifies his statements about the Word, see Mingana I, 336: "He has revealed before all creatures His divinity thanks to his humanity. He has showed that even if He has suffered qua man, he is the Son of God. The Jews have crucified the Son of God in a corporeal sense. They have not crucified the Word of the Father who is generated from Him."

⁵⁵ The Third Council of Constantinople (680-681) does address the issue of whether there are two or only will in the union of Christ's natures. Because so many identified the notion of "nature" with that of "person," the fathers insisted on the presence of two will faculties and operations, in order to safeguard the integrity of Christ's human nature. But wisely the fathers did

not enter into the question of how the two function together as one other than the fact that they ultimately do form one will.

⁵⁶ The time and space limitations placed upon this paper prevent an elaboration of what Theodore and Narsai mean when they speak of the union as being an "indwelling." For an in-depth study, see McLeod, *Roles of Christ's Humanity*, 176-204. Theodore's choice of the phrase "an indwelling of good pleasure" must be interpreted, in my opinion, in light of Colossians 1 and 2, especially 2:9 where the divine fullness (plerôma) is said to dwell in Christ "in a bodily way." Theodore expresses this when he says: "For the entire grace of the Spirit has been given to me because I am joined to God the Word and have received true Sonship... This cannot happen to you, as you can acquire a small share but not at all equal to mine" (Vosté, 297-98/213). Narsai expresses a similar outlook in *Memra* 4: "God formed him by the Spirit, and the Spirit filled him with the power of His will, so that he might give life from his fullness and vivify all. He made him whole and perfect in body and soul, so that through him He might free the body and the soul from slavery" (McLeod, *Narsai's Metrical Homilies*, 48/49). Norris sums up insightfully the relationship between Theodore's prosopic unity and his stress on an "indwelling of good pleasure" when he affirms: "The union [by indwelling] is logically prior both to the prosopic unity which it effects, and to the sort of cooperation to which, as we have seen, Theodore alludes in other passages" (222). This cooperation occurs in the prosopic union.

⁵⁷ The initial peace that all creation enjoyed is presaging the universal peace that Christ is to establish in the future when he will recapitulate all creation within his humanity and unite all to God. Because the fullness of God dwells in Christ in a bodily way (Col. 2:9), he serves as the mediator whose humanity contains and sums up all creation and whose intimate union with the Word enables all creatures to be at one with God. It is easy, therefore, to detect how Theodore, relying on Pauline thought, has found traces of these revelatory, mediating and unify-

ing roles in Adam as a type of Christ's humanity and why he has proposed salvation to be a movement from a state where Adam acts as the head of mortality to one where Christ's humanity is the head of an immortal existence. It is within such a salvational framework that Theodore seeks to explain how baptism and the eucharist typify a real participation in Christ's death and resurrection and provide those who become members of his Body a true initial sharing in the

immortal life that Christ's humanity now possesses in heaven. He is now the first fruits that anticipates the future immortality that awaits all who remain vitally united to his Body and through his human nature also to God. Since such a world view is mirrored in Narsai's writings, there exists grounds for asserting that he was indeed close to Theodore's method of interpreting the scriptural passages that treat of the "image" of God, the sacraments and salvation.