

‘Syriac Dialogue’ – An Example from the Past

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His Grace Mar Aprem, Metropolitan of Trichur, has been a valued and regular participant in PRO ORIENTE’s series of meetings on ecumenical dialogue within the Syriac tradition, entitled ‘Syriac Dialogue’¹, bringing together the three different christological traditions that became separated in the course of the controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries, namely those of the Church of the East, the Maronite and Eastern Rite Catholic (Chaldean, Syro-Malabar, Syrian Catholic, Syro-Malankara), and the Syrian Orthodox Churches. It is a particular pleasure for me, as a fellow participant at some of these meetings of ‘Syriac Dialogue’ to offer, in honour of Mar Aprem, a translation of a much earlier literary ‘Syriac Dialogue’, in the form of a dispute poem, or *soghitha*, on christology where the protagonists for the two christological traditions, Antiochene and Alexandrian, are the Greek theologians Nestorius and Cyril. In effect, they speak for the East and West Syriac christological traditions.

The distinctive Syriac genre of the dispute poem, where two characters conduct an argument in alternating verses, has its roots in the ancient Mesopotamian precedence disputes, composed in Sumerian and Akkadian and going back to late third and the second millennium BC. Within the Syriac literary tradition, where the earliest examples of such poems are found in the writings of St Ephrem, the dispute between Nestorius and Cyril is unusual, in that here two historical figures are presented as arguing, whereas in the great majority of the dialogue *soghyatha* it is pairs of biblical characters who are the [306] participants (for example, Cain and Abel, Mary and Joseph, John the Baptist and Christ, etc.).² Furthermore, considering the harsh tones of much of the polemical literature on either side of the christological controversy from the fifth century onwards, the tone of the present poem is remarkably, and laudably, restrained.

¹ PRO ORIENTE, *Syriac Dialogue*, I-III. *Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition* (Vienna, 1994–8). [The present article was originally published in the Festschrift for His Grace Mar Aprem, Metropolitan of Trissur, in *The Harp* 15 (2002), pp.305-18. It is republished here (with some small changes) by kind permission of the Editor of *The Harp*, the Revd Dr Jacob Thekeparampil, Director of the St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI), Kottayam, Kerala; the page numbers of the original are given in square brackets.]

² For these dispute poems and their ancestry, see especially R. Murray, “Aramaic and Syriac dispute poems and their connections”, in M.J.Geller, J.C.Greenfield, and M.P.Weitzman (eds), *Studia Aramaica* (Supplement 4, Journal of Semitic Studies; Oxford, 1995), pp.157-87, and my “The Syriac dispute poems: the various types”, in G.J.Reinink and H.L.J. Vanstiphout (eds), *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the ancient and Mediaeval Near East* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 42; Louvain, 1991), pp.109-19; also my “The Dispute Poem: from Sumer to Syriac”, *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 1 (2001), pp.3-10.

Perhaps even more surprising is the fact that the Cyrilline position is represented in reasonably fair way, and that, unusually, no ‘winner’ is announced at the end of the poem. Could it be that the unknown author had anticipated the conclusion reached by theologians in modern ecumenical dialogue, namely that both sides were trying to express the same mystery, but each approaching the subject from a different angle and theological tradition? Although ‘heretics’ are indeed mentioned near the end, their identity is left unspecified: was their inclusion just a sop for less open-minded readers, who would have assumed that Cyril was among them?

The *soghitha* is among a number of *soghyatha* transmitted along with the *memre* of Narsai, and this particular one is attached to the *memra* on the Three Doctors.³ These *soghyatha* were all included in A. Mingana’s edition of Narsai’s verse homilies – with the sole exception of the present *soghitha*, seeing that it was considered unsuitable for a Chaldean readership. Fortunately, however, it was included in earlier editions by F. Feldmann, *Syrische Wechsellieder von Narsai* (Leipzig, 1896), and by F. Martin, in his “Homélie de Narsès sur les trois docteurs nestoriens”, *Journal Asiatique* 14 (1899), 484-92, 15 (1900), 515-24; it will also be found in the much more recent edition of Narsai’s homilies, published by the Patriarchal Press.⁴

Since many of the *soghyatha* transmitted in manuscripts of Narsai’s homilies are also known in the Syrian Orthodox manuscript tradition, it is most unlikely that they are really by Narsai, though a fifth- or sixth-century date is quite possible for them. In the case of the *soghitha* on Nestorius and Cyril, however, no separate manuscript tradition [307] seems to be known,⁵ though it remains likely that this *soghitha* too is not the work of Narsai himself. It is always difficult to date anonymous works, and all that one can say with certainty is that there is nothing in it which would require a date after about the ninth or tenth century, and nothing that would militate against a date of about the sixth century.

Following the translation, some short comments on some particular problematic points are offered.

Translation

1. The priests who have loved their Creator
And did not reduce Him to suffering

³ Ed. F. Martin, “Homélie de Narsès sur les trois docteurs nestoriens”, *Journal asiatique* IX.14 (1899), pp.446-92; tr. in IX.15 (1900), pp.409-525.

⁴ *Homilies of Mar Narsai*, I (San Francisco, 1970), pp. 287-92. Although the manuscript used for this photographic edition is late, it provides a better reading on a few occasions (notably for stanzas 36-37).

⁵ Unless it features in some copies of the *Ḥudra* at the Friday of the Greek Fathers (variously given as the 4th or 5th week after Epiphany); it is not to be found at this commemoration in Mar Toma Darmo’s printed edition (Trichur, 1960).

Through the power of the Son have vanquished the perverse
By means of Him, overthrowing their forces.

2. O resplendent and glorious priests
Who are filled with love for your Creator,
Make request and supplication to the Lord
That there be mercy for the world.
3. Blessed is the Compassionate One who trained you,
O resplendent priests who have loved your Lord,
For the Word of the Father who was clothed in the body
Will strengthen you against the foes.
4. The ravening wolf of Egypt
Stands opposing your company,
Saying that the Lord
Lowered Himself and became flesh.
5. A resplendent priest, one of your number,
Set himself apart in order to prove him wrong:
Into his hands he took the power of the Father,
Like some invincible armour.
6. CYRIL If it is the case, o wolf (?),
That the Word of the Father has put on the body,
You are believing in a son who is a fourth (person of the Trinity),
So leave the Church which drives you out. [308]
7. NESTORIUS If I should say as you say,
that the Word of the Father became flesh
then the Church will eject me
for blaspheming and speaking as you have.
8. CYRIL The eternal Son became flesh John 1:14
And His great glory came down to earth;
He contained Himself in the Virgin
And suspended Himself from the top of the Cross.
9. NESTORIUS The eternal Son became flesh -
From the house of David they proclaimed Him: Matt. 1:1
Prophets and apostles too indicated this,
(thus too) did the Watcher announce to the Virgin. Luke 1:32
10. CYRIL He completed the Law through His coming,

- He fulfilled the prophets through the shedding of His blood,
 The announcement of the Watcher that was sent
 Was intended for the hearing of His mother.
11. NESTORIUS Remove the veil over your hearts
 And look at the Scriptures which say
 That the Child of the Father took from us
 A visible body and dwelt in it. Col. 2:9
12. CYRIL You are a source of amazement (to me), not having heard
 From the son of thunder (Mark 3:17) who proclaimed it,
 That the Word Himself (*qnomeh*) became flesh. John 1:14
 Why are you arguing and fail to agree?
13. NESTORIUS You are a source of amazement (to me), seeing that all
 the Scriptures
 And Writings too have knocked on your ears
 (proclaiming) that (with) Jesus, the Saviour of the world,
 His glory has shone forth from David's house. Matt.1:1, 21:9;Rom.1:3
14. CYRIL Look, there is a mediator between me and you,
 The great Paul; (so) listen, my man:
 Gods sent His Son Gal. 4:4
 And He became flesh in the Virgin.
15. NESTORIUS Paul himself cries out concerning Him
 That He is a mediator between His Father and us. I Tim. 2:5
 Why do you so boldly abuse
 The Son of the Father who put on the body? [309]
16. CYRIL And if it is our body that died,
 Enduring the sufferings, and was crucified,
 Then the Jews killed a man,
 So why are you abusing their envy?
17. NESTORIUS And if the Word of the Father became
 Despicable flesh, as you say,
 You are a companion of that band
 Which insulted and slew its Lord.
18. CYRIL The earthquake which occurred at that hour Matt.27:51
 Testifies to me for what I have said,
 For rocks have never been rent apart
 Because of a man when he was slain.

19. NESTORIUS The earthquake which occurred at that hour
Which slew the People who did not believe
Was (the work) of/ That He is the Son of God, as the Watcher
Proclaimed to His mother when he made to her the announcement.
20. CYRIL It was the mercy and compassion which proclaimed Him,
How the Word of the Father was at the beginning, John 1:1
Who descended and dwelt in the Virgin
And became flesh and tasted death.
21. NESTORIUS Look at what Peter said to Him,
Calling Him 'made' and 'master'. Acts 2:36
If he named Him 'made',
He is less than the Father who established Him.
22. CYRIL You have gone astray, for you do not listen
To what all the Scriptures are saying,
For it was 'Lord of glory' that the great Paul I Cor. 2:8
Proclaimed Him when he taught.
23. NESTORIUS You have gone astray, audacious man: do not dispute,
(saying) that He who gives life to the dead (Rom. 8:11) tasted death
(Heb.2:9),
(claiming that Paul) of Tarsus proclaimed it –
whereas you are wicked, so do not dispute.
24. CYRIL John, furthermore, baptized Him:
He himself did not want to baptize Him, Matt. 3:14
For he was quaking and terrified with fear
To lay his hand on the Lord of all. [310]
25. NESTORIUS John, furthermore, baptized Him,
Calling him 'the Lamb' (from) before the ages, John 1:29
And the water too, in which He was baptized
Covered the flesh, and not the Word.
26. CYRIL The writings of Paul have assured us
That it was in His Son that the Father taught concerning Him,
Heb.1:2
Whereas you cry out and proclaim
That the Word of the Father put on a body.
27. NESTORIUS How blind is your heart, and you do not listen,
For Matthew proclaimed Him Son of David Matt. 1:1
And with him Luke too agrees

(saying) that it is the Son of Joseph who bore the sufferings.

Luke 3:23, cp 4:22

28. CYRIL You do not listen when the great Moses,
Who spoke (in agreement) with me, cried out
'I saw His glory face to face'. Exod. 33:11
Be persuaded, man, and do not dispute.

29. NESTORIUS Have you not heard Moses who asked
'Show me Your glory and let me gaze on You' Exod. 33:18
but the Lord of all replied to him
'You cannot gaze upon Me'. Exod. 33:20

30. CYRIL The Son Himself I heard saying
'I am in the Father, and He is in Me'. John 10:38, 14:11
How (=where) did He cry out to you, o man,
(saying) the Word put on the body of man?

31. NESTORIUS From Him I learnt how He said
That 'I was from the race of mortals',
For He called Himself a 'human being',
And you, my man, are wronging Him.

32. CYRIL The fiery beings and the hosts on high
Were downcast at the time of his suffering cp Matt. 27:45, Luke
23:44f
For they saw the glory of the Lord of all
Being outraged by hostile men.

33. NESTORIUS To the fiery beings He called out for help
At the time of His suffering, when He was being crucified,
And if He is the Word, why did He need
An angel to come and give Him strength? Luke 22:43 [311]

34. CYRIL The Gospel of Paul cries out
That He who came down is the one who ascended too, Eph. 4:10
Whereas you, o man, are disputing,
(saying) that the Word put on a human being.

35. NESTORIUS The Gospel of Paul cries out
That 'He seated Him on the throne of glory', Eph.1:10
And if He indeed gave Him a seat
Then His throne was not eternal.

36. CYRIL <missing stanza>.
37. NESTORIUS Your heart is blind and you are not aware
That the same Paul proclaims concerning Him
That the Divinity dwells in Him Col. 2:9
And He is the dwelling place of God the Word.
38. CYRIL Open the Scriptures and read them,
Listen with attention to the Fathers
Who say that God the Word
Endured suffering and was crucified too.
39. NESTORIUS Open your ears, wretched man,
And listen to Kephass who proclaimed
That it was the human Jesus who died. Acts 2:22f
Restrain your blasphemies and do not dispute.
40. CYRIL The son of thunder wished to teach us
When he called Him God the Word,
Proclaiming that He became flesh John 1:14
And descended and ascended just as He willed. Eph. 4:10
41. NESTORIUS The prayer that took place, wretched man,
Matt.26:39-46
At the time of the suffering – whose was it?
It was hardly (that of) God the Word!
Restrain your blasphemies, why are you arguing?
42. CYRIL The Scriptures cry out and say
That God died and was buried cp I Cor. 15.3,4
Whereas you, o man, are saying
That a human died, and not the Lord.
43. NESTORIUS Christ cried out, and you are not listening,
'I am clothed in the body of mortals' Heb. 10:5
whereas you are in the wrong, and here you are disputing,
(saying) that God the Word was crucified. [312]
44. CYRIL The great Paul cried out as follows,
Proclaiming Him Lord of glory, I Cor. 2:8
And not a human being, as you are saying;
Why are you disputing, refusing to agree?
45. NESTORIUS The Master of Paul (Gal 1:12) cried out as follows,
'I am a human being, in me dwells

the Father who sent me into the world John 3:17, 5:37, 17:18
to deliver Adam from the curse. Gal. 3:13

46. CYRIL The sun and the rocks are witnesses,
And the temple veil too, when it was torn,
 Matt. 27:51, Mark 15:38, Luke 23:45
For these things did not happen because of a human being,
But because of their Maker.
47. NESTORIUS Listen to the prophet who called out concerning Him
‘Emmanuel shall His name be called’. Isaiah 7:14
To whom did this name thus imposed belong,
If not to the human being who was conceived?
48. (CHURCH) Thanksgiving be to You, O Lord of all,
Who taught Your children to worship You.
As for the heretics who have wronged Your Son,
You have hidden Your glory from their hearts.
49. Let the Church sing out in joy
Praise at the commemoration of priests,
For His mighty power resides in them
And they have shone out, resplendent by the power of His wisdom.

Comments

Stanza 4 The last two words reflect John 1:14, which is more explicitly quoted in stanzas 7, 8, 12, and 40. The precise meaning and interpretation of this key verse was a matter of great controversy between the Antiochene and Alexandrine christological traditions. According to Cyril of Alexandria, the phrase “the Word became flesh” meant “became a partaker of flesh and blood like us” (Second Letter to Nestorius), and he saw the verse as supporting his view of the single “nature” of the incarnate Christ. In the eyes of the Antiochenes, however, the Alexandrine understanding seemed to imply “change”, with the Word “coming into being” and as it were “turning into flesh”. [313]

The Antiochenes themselves understood the Johannine phrase “became flesh” as synonymous with “took our humanity” (thus the Synod of Isho`yahb I, 585)⁶, or “took flesh” (so Babai the Great).⁷ Similarly, in a florilegium of christological texts, it is stressed that the phrase in John 1:14 should be

⁶ J.B.Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale* (Paris, 1902), p.135 (text)/396 (translation).

⁷ See note 9 below.

understood in the light of 1 Timothy 3:16, "He was revealed in the flesh".⁸ The diphysite Antiochene understanding of the phrase, with its emphasis on the distinction between the Word (i.e. the divine nature) and the flesh (i.e. the human nature), was of course seen as objectionable to the miaphysite Alexandrian tradition.

Exactly the same sort of differences between the two traditions emerge in their understandings of the next phrase, translated rather vaguely as "and dwelt among us" in most modern English translations (the Greek original and the Syriac have "and tabernacled in us"). Here the Antiochene tradition normally sees "in us" as meaning "in our humanity", that is, in our human nature. Babai glosses the two phrases in John with the words "(the Word) took flesh and made a dwelling in it",⁹ introducing the characteristic East Syriac theme of the divinity indwelling in the humanity, whose New Testament origins are to be found in John 2:21 (Christ's body as a temple, according to his own words) and Colossians 2:9 ("in him [Christ] the whole fullness of divinity *dwells* bodily"). Such a diphysite interpretation is of course anathema to the Alexandrine tradition, and Philoxenos further misinterprets the East Syriac understanding by supposing that "in us" was understood as meaning "in a single *qnoma* [which for him means 'hypostasis'] of a particular human being".¹⁰

The normal Syrian Orthodox understanding of "in us" is that it refers to "one of us", that is, in the Virgin Mary.¹¹ This understanding was helped by the fact that all the Syriac versions use the same verb, [314] *aggen*, in both Luke 1:35 and John 1:14.¹² An alternative view (held, for example, by Severus)¹³ was that, whereas "he became flesh" referred to the conception, "he tabernacled" refers to the nativity, and so "in us" is the equivalent of "among human beings" (in agreement with "among us" of most modern translations).

Curiously enough, one can find a few East Syriac passages where "in us" is taken as "in the womb of Mary", though with the distinctively diphysite gloss

⁸ L. Abramowski and A.E. Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts* (Cambridge, 1972), I, p.99 (text), II, p.58 (translation).

⁹ *Liber de Unione* (CSCO Scr. Syri 34-5; ed. A. Vaschalde), p.126 (text)/101 (tr.). See also p.252/205, where he specifies that the passage points to the two "natures" and *qnome*.

¹⁰ *Tractatus tres* (CSCO Scr. Syri 9-10; ed. A. Vaschalde), p. 168 (text)/127 (tr.).

¹¹ Thus, e.g. in a Sedro in the Fenqitho (Mosul edition, II, p.256b): "You became flesh and You tabernacled in the Virgin...". Babai also specifically states that this is how his opponents took it, *Liber de unione*, p.255-6 (text)/207 (tr.).

¹² See my "From Annunciation to Pentecost: the travels of a technical term", in *Eulogema. Studies in Honor of Robert Taft S.J.* (Studia Anselmiana 110; Rome, 1993), pp.71-91 (esp. 71-71).

¹³ Homily 23 on John 1:14, in *Patrologia Orientalis* 37, pp.120-22.

“having woven for himself a human robe and clothed himself in it”.¹⁴ Conversely, Philoxenus once paraphrases “(the Word) tabernacled in human beings, that is, the common nature (of humanity)”; but he may well be understanding the phrase of John to include a proleptic sense, referring to the indwelling of Christ in the baptized.¹⁵

In the polemical literature, West Syriac writers sometimes claim that, in effect, the East Syriac interpretation implies an alteration of the Gospel wording, with “in it” instead of “in us”, so that the verse can be read “As for the Word, there came into being flesh, and He tabernacled in it”.¹⁶

Stanza 6 The first line of this stanza is very puzzling. I follow Feldmann (p.31) and Martin (p.516) in translating the second word, *d'b*, as “wolf” (that is, *di'ba*), a term normally used (as in stanza 4) of Cyril. The vocalized text of the Patriarchal Press edition, however, reads *d-aba*, “of the Father”, but I am at a loss how to make any sense of this that conforms to the syntax of the rest of the stanza.

In line 2, “who has put on a body” reflects the standard early Syriac term for the incarnation (thus, for example, it represents Greek *esarkothe*, “was incarnated” in the earliest Syriac translation of the Nicene Creed). As a result of the christological controversies of the 5th/6th centuries, the phrase came to be dropped by some Syriac writers in the Alexandrine christological tradition (notably Philoxenos) as being too diphysite in its implications, or even as implying a pre-[315]existing human body (rather than one fashioned by the Word at the very moment of the conception, which is how the phrase is understood in the East Syriac tradition). The phrase *lbesh pagra*, as with the phrase *lbesh barnasha*, became open to misinterpretation, depending on whether one takes the object as generic (as it is certainly intended, ‘he put on the body’/ ‘he put on man’ (= ‘humanity’, i.e. human nature), or particular (which is clearly unsatisfactory – hence Philoxenos’ dislike of such phraseology). It should be noted that many later Syrian Orthodox writers still continue to use the traditional phrase ‘he put on the body’ (i.e. bodily nature) perfectly happily.

In line 3 of the present stanza ‘Cyril’ (perversely) sees the phrase as meaning “put on a (particular) body”, thus implying two sons, the Son of God/the Word, and the son of Mary/the body (in which the Word is clothed), thus introducing a quaternity into the Trinity at the Ascension, when the son of Mary

¹⁴ *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts*, I, p.48 (text), II, p.31 (tr.).

¹⁵ *Tractatus tres*, p.168 (text)/127 (tr.).

¹⁶ Thus Philoxenos in his Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO Scr. Syri 165-6; ed. A. de Halleux), p.53 (text)/52 (tr.), and elsewhere. Though this indeed represents the East Syriac understanding, the assertion that the Gospel text has been altered, or misquoted, is not correct; the nearest one finds is the altered word order in the *Liber Heracleidis* (ed. Bedjan, p.279) where the verse is paraphrased “his flesh came into being and God the Word tabernacled in us”.

(i.e. Christ's humanity) was divinized and raised to heaven. Cyril of Alexandria, in his Second Letter to Nestorius, had already asserted that Nestorius's teaching implied two sons, but it was Proclus, slightly later, who first brought the accusation that this teaching of Nestorius implied a quaternity in the Godhead, instead of a Trinity.¹⁷ (The accusation of introducing a quaternity had already been made in anti-Apollinarian argument by Athanasius).¹⁸

Stanza 7 In line 2 'Nestorius' evidently understands this as implying change, with the verb more or less meaning "turned into".

Stanza 9 The adjective *mtomaya* 'eternal' provides the *terminus post quem* for the date of the *soghitha*, for this adjective is not attested until the end of the fifth century (when it appears in Narsai – though the phrase 'eternal Son' in Syriac does not appear until slightly later, in both Jacob of Serugh and Philoxenos, after which it features in sixth-century East Syriac writers such as Cyrus and Thomas of Edessa).

Stanza 12 The words of 'Cyril' in the third line may be contrasted with those of Narsai in his Memra on the Nativity¹⁹ where he comments on John 1:14 as follows:

"The Word", he has written, "became flesh" – not by nature, but only that "the Word tabernacled" in flesh, the Hidden in the visible. "He tabernacled", he said, - not that He changed from what He is, for it is not possible for Him to "come to be" and to "tabernacle" in his own self (*qnomeh*). [316]

Stanza 14 The last two lines paraphrase Gal.4:4, which in fact reads "God sent his Son and he was born of a woman". For 'Cyril', the Son here is the Word, whereas in the East Syriac understanding this passage combines reference to the two natures, divine and human²⁰

Stanza 16 This is a frequent point made by opponents of the Antiochene christological tradition, and even led to the forging of a letter, allegedly addressed to the emperor Marcian by the Jews, thanking him for exonerating them from blame for alleged deicide. This curious piece of anti-Chalcedonian propaganda is preserved in the Chronicles of Ps.Dionysius and Michael the

¹⁷ *Patrologia Graeca* 65, col. 689A).

¹⁸ Letter to Epictetus, *Patrologia Graeca* 26, col. 1064C.

¹⁹ *Patrologia Orientalis* 40 (ed. F.G. McLeod), pp.62-3 (lines 409-12).

²⁰ Thus explicitly in the *Liber Heraclidis* (ed. P Bedjan, p.141; tr. F.Nau, p.166; tr. G.R.Driver and L.Hodgson, p.188).

Syrian (as well as an addition in some manuscripts of the Didascalia); it reads as follows:

To the merciful Emperor Marcian, the people of the Hebrews. For such a long time we have been regarded as though our fathers had crucified God and not the man. Since, however, this Holy Synod of Chalcedon has assembled and has demonstrated that they crucified the man, and not God, we request for this reason that this fault should be pardoned to us and that our synagogues should be returned to us.²¹

Stanza 19 Feldmann's edition has (*d-bar*) *alaha hwa* in the third line, but the reading *hu* in the editions by Martin and the Patriarchal Press is to be preferred.

Stanza 21 In line's 2-3 'made' (*'bida*) is based on Acts 2:36 'God made him (*'abdeh*) both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified'. Presumably 'Nestorius' is referring to Christ's human body (cp Heb. 10:5). This verse from Acts, which had previously frequently featured in the Arian controversy, is quoted a number of times by Babai as referring specifically to the human nature of Christ.²²

Stanza 23 Though "He who gives life" is based on Rom.8:11, "tasted death" certainly refers to Heb. 2:9, where there is a major difference of reading between the East and West Syriac manuscript traditions of the Peshitta.²³ the West Syriac manuscripts read "for God in his grace for the sake of everyone tasted death" (the standard Greek [317] text has "by the grace of God...he tasted death"), whereas the East Syriac ones (along with a very small number of Greek witnesses) have "for he, apart from God, for the sake of everyone tasted death" (i.e. emphasizing that only the humanity of Christ tasted death). The difference in readings here is of central relevance for the theopaschite issue which constituted a major point of difference between the East and West Syriac traditions. In the present stanza 'Nestorius' is in effect saying that 'Cyril' is alleging that the West Syriac (and Greek) reading of Heb. 2:9a is the correct one, whereas for 'Nestorius' (as for some modern textual critics of the New Testament) the reading 'without God' (i.e. apart from Jesus's divine nature) is the original.

²¹ Translation by L. van Rompay, "A Letter of the Jews to the Emperor Marcian concerning the Council of Chalcedon", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 12 (1981), pp. 215-24 (tr. on p. 215).

²² Notably *Liber de Unione*, pp.66-7 (text)/54 (tr.).

²³ See my "Hebrew 2:9a in Syriac tradition", in *Novum Testamentum* 27 (1983), pp.236-44. Philoxenos specifically comments on the two readings in his Commentary on the Prologue of John (ed. de Halleux), p.53 (text)/52 (tr.), while Babai bases himself on the East Syriac reading in an anti-Theopaschite passage, *Liber de Unione*, p.60 (text)/49 (tr.).

Stanza 30 In the third line one could read *qre* instead of *qra*, giving the sense “where have you read...?”

Stanza 31 It is not clear to which (evidently Gospel) passages lines 2 and 3 refer. Possibly *barnasha* ‘human being’ has in mind passages such as Matt. 8:20 where Jesus speaks of himself as ‘son of man’ (*breh d-nasha*). The same will apply in line 2 of stanza 45. Outside the Gospels, Christ is indeed described as *barnasha* in 1 Tim. 2:5 (a passage used, for example, by Babai, *Liber de Unione*, p.213 (text)/172 (tr.)).

Stanzas 36-37 Here my translation follows the Patriarchal Press edition where it is Cyril’s stanza that is lost, which is clearly much more satisfactory. In the editions by Feldmann and Martin my stanza 37 is their stanza 36, attributed to ‘Cyril’ (most anomalously, given the content!), while my stanza 36 is their stanza 37, attributed to a lost reply by ‘Nestorius’.

Stanza 43 In line 2 ‘Nestorius’ quotes the Peshitta’s rendering of the Greek text of Heb. 10:5 (“a body you have prepared for me”). In his Commentary on the Prologue of John Philoxenos strongly objects to the Peshitta’s free translation and proposes another which represents the Greek more closely.²⁴ This is all part of his general objection to clothing phraseology in connection with the incarnation, which he sees as dangerously supportive of Nestorius’s views.

Stanza 45 In line 2 Feldmann’s edition has ‘in me speaks’ (*amar*), but my translation follows the reading ‘*amar* dwells’ of Martin’s edition and that of the Patriarchal Press.

Stanza 48 In the second line Feldmann’s and Martin’s editions have *la-bnay* ‘my children’ (in which case the Church is understood as speaking); Feldmann [318] suggests that this may be an error for *la-bnayk* ‘your children’, which is in fact the reading of the Patriarchal Press edition, followed in my translation.

The dialogue covers most of the main points of contention between the two christological traditions,²⁵ and thus helpfully provides an opportunity for the modern reader to try to trace the ways in which the unfortunate

²⁴ Ed. de Halleux, pp.53-4 (text)/53 (tr.).

²⁵ One prominent issue, however, is surprisingly not present: the question whether Mary should properly be termed ‘bearer of God’ or ‘bearer of Christ’. For the very misleading term “Nestorian”, see my “The ‘Nestorian’ Church: a lamentable misnomer”, in J.F. Coakley and K. Parry (eds), *The Church of the East: Life and Thought* (= *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78:3 (1996), pp.23-35.

misunderstandings of the past on either side arose. Only by discovering and explaining how these have come about will it be possible to make real and lasting progress in the contemporary 'Syriac Dialogue'.