

# The Motherhood of Virgin Mary and the Motherhood of the Spiritual Man (and the Church) in the Syriac Tradition. Kinship and Imagery

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SOMMARIO: 1. The “overshadowing” at Annunciation; 2. The Liturgical “overshadowing”; 3. The “Overshadowing” in the Spiritual Life; 4. The saint as “conceiver” of the Word of God; Conclusion

There is a common imagery in the Syriac tradition that describes the intervention of the Holy Spirit at Christ’s conception in the womb of Virgin Mary, in the liturgical epiclesis and the sanctification of the spiritual man. This term is “*overshadowing*” (*maggnanuta*) and refers to the action of the Holy Spirit that, firstly, makes possible the inhomination of Christ, secondly, performs the transformation of the liturgical gifts into His body and blood, as well as generates Christ’s “engendering” within the spiritual man. The use of the same term in all these three situations evokes a methodological and a theological kinship, reflecting a prolongation of Christ’s conception in Virgin Mary’s womb in the people’s liturgical and spiritual life, and reveals the motherhood function of the Church itself, following this pattern. In this frame, the present paper will be focused on the Syriac imagery of “shadowing”, while describing the *motherhood ability*, in reference to these three moments, culminating with the spiritual life, when human spiritually becomes a God-bearer (*theophoros*), as physically occurred in the case of the Virgin.

1. The “overshadowing” at Annunciation

On the connection between Incarnation and Eucharist, Saint Ephraim symbolically states: “Fire and Spirit in the womb of her who bore you,/ Fire and Spirit were in the river in which you were baptized./ Fire and Spirit are in our baptismal font,/ in the Bread and Cup are Fire and the Holy Spirit”<sup>1</sup>. The presence of the Word of God incarnate in Christ is prolonged in the sacramental body of Christ. For him, by the “overshadowing” of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ similarly with Christ’s incarnation in the womb of Virgin Mary.

Dionysius bar Salibi identifies the correspondence between, on one side, the physical Jesus and Christ, the Son of God, and, on the other side, the physical appearance of the Eucharistic elements and the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine. Both of them are called by him “mysteries (ܡܝܫܬܝܘܬܝܘܢ)”. He states:

*The Body and Blood are called “Mysteries” because they are not what they appear to the physical eye to be; for to look at they are just bread and wine, but properly understood, they are Body and Blood of God. Just as Jesus was seen by the physical eye as man, yet he is also God; similarly, the mysteries are seen outwardly to be bread and wine, but they are in fact the Body and Blood. And although the Spirit makes the mysteries the Body and Blood they are nevertheless the Body and Blood of the Son. It is like what was done in the Virgin; although the Spirit embodied the Son, it was nevertheless the Son who was embodied<sup>2</sup>.*

The key term from the Eucharistic anaphora is strictly connected with the angel Gabriel’s words of Annunciation, mentioned in Luke

1 Cf. Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnem de Fide*, CSCO154-155, 1955, X, 17.

2 Hieronymus Labourt, *Commentary on the Liturgy*, CSCO 13, 1903, pp. 61-62; for the English translation Sidney H. Griffith, “*The Spirit in the Bread; Fire in the Wine: the Eucharist as Living Medicine in the Thought of Ephraim the Syrian*”, *Modern Theology*, 15 (1999), 2, p. 231.

1:35: “The Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of Most High shall *overshadow* (ἐπισκιάσει σοι) you; for this reason that which is born of you shall be called holy, the Son of God”; and the prologue of John 1:14: “The Word became flesh and *dwelt*” (ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν) in/ among us”.

While interpreting the two verses regarding Christ’s Incarnation, this term provoked Christological disputes between the East and West Syrians. Sebastian Brock states that for the East Syriac writers the “overshadowing” refers to the Holy Spirit, designated with “the Most High” too, while for the West Syriac authors, the Holy Spirit comes first to sanctify Virgin Mary and then follows the Logos, the “Most High”, who will “overshadow” Virgin Mary. The second verse brought too different interpretations in the fifth-sixth century. The difficult place was the expression “dwelt in/ among us”. The Antiochene writers understood “in us” as “in the flesh”, in one of us, that is the assumed Man. Therefore, the verse describes the relationship between the Word of God and the assumed Man. The Western interpretation points to a difference between “became flesh”, as referring to the conception, and “dwelt in us” to the birth. In this case “aggen” is synonym with “was born”. The expression “in us”, transformed into “among us”, “one of us”, “in Mary”, occasionally has been freely interpreted as “in us, who have received Christ’s Spirit and baptism”<sup>3</sup>. This final commentary gives us a generous space for using this element so that to symbolically describe the mystical life.

## 2. The Liturgical “overshadowing”

In the Eastern Eucharistic tradition, the climax of the service comes with the celebrant’s invocation of the Holy Spirit to consecrate

3 For details see Sebastian Brock, “Maggnanuta: a Technical Term in East Syrian Spirituality”, *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont. Contribution à l’étude des christianismes orientaux*, Patrick Cramer ed., Geneve, 1988, p. 125-126.

the gifts of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, as well as to descend upon the faithful who are present there. For instance, in the byzantine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, the priest prays to God – the Father:

*We call on you, we pray and humbly supplicate you: Send your Holy Spirit on us and these Gifts<sup>4</sup> here offered (κατάπεμνον τὸ Πνεῦμά σου τὸ Ἅγιον ἐφ' ἡμᾶς, και ἐπὶ τὰ προκείμενα Δῶρα ταῦτα). And make this bread the precious body of your Christ. And that which is in the cup, the precious blood of your Christ, Changing them by your Holy Spirit. So that, for those who partake of the, they may be for awakening of the soul, for forgiveness of sins, communion with your Holy Spirit, for fulfillment of the Kingdom of heaven, for confidence towards You but neither to judgment nor to condemnation<sup>5</sup>.*

And the Priest incenses the Holy Gifts, symbolizing the descent and the action of the Holy Spirit.

One can identify the same idea in the Liturgy of Saint Jacob, celebrated by the West Syriac Church (The Syrian Orthodox Church). I will quote a short fragment:

*Send upon us and upon these offerings Your Holy Spirit, the Lord Who is equal to You and to the Son in dominion, reign and eternal substance; Who spoke through Your Old and New Testaments; and descended in the likeness of a dove on our Lord Jesus Christ in the Jordan River and in the likeness of tongues of fire on the apostles in the Upper Room. So that, by His indwelling (↪ ↻), He may make this bread the life-giving Body, the Redeeming*

- 4 The same expression in Saint Basil's epiclesis: "We beg You, most Holy God, in your kindness and goodness, may your all-holy Spirit come upon us and upon these gifts set out, to bless and sanctify them, making this bread the Precious Body of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ; and this cup the Precious Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, which was shed for the salvation of the world".
- 5 *The Divine and Holy Liturgy according to Saint John Chrysostom*, Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America, Michigan, 2005, p. 72-73.

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*Body and the Body of Christ our God. And may He perfect this cup into the Blood of the New Covenant, the Redeeming Blood and the Blood of Christ our God. So that they may sanctify the souls and bodies of those who partake of them for the bearing of the fruit of good deeds<sup>6</sup>.*

I will give a third example so that to underline the role of the Holy Spirit in the service of Eucharist, this time from the East Syriac tradition, the anaphora of Theodore of Mopsuestia:

*May the grace of the Holy Spirit come upon us and upon this Qurbana and may she dwell (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ) and rest upon this bread and upon this cup and may she bless, sanctify and seal them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And by the power of your name, may this bread become the holy body of our Lord Jesus Christ and this cup the precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. And whosoever in true faith eats from this bread and drinks from this cup may they become to him, oh my Lord, for the pardons of debts, remission of sins, the great hope of resurrection for among the dead, the salvation of his body and soul, the new life in the kingdom of heaven and glory for ever<sup>8</sup>.*

6 For the English translation see the official site of the Syrian Orthodox Church <http://sor.cua.edu/Liturgy/Anaphora/James.html>.

7 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ), term that appears in some other liturgical anaphora as the Anaphora of the XII Apostles, the Anaphora of Patriarch John I, of Xystus, Dionysius the Areopagite, Eustathius of Antioch, Ignatius the Maphrian, Jacob Baradeus, Ignatius of Antioch or Moses bar Kepha. For details see Sebastian Brock, "Maggnanuta: a Techinal Term in East Syrian Spirituality and its background", p. 127.

8 Cf. Jacob Vadakkal, *The East Syrian Anaphora of Mar Theodore of Mopsuestia*, Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, Kottayam, 1989, p. 90-91.

### 3. The “Overshadowing” in the Spiritual Life

So far we have analyzed the use of overshadowing (*maggnanuta*) referring to and Christ’s conception in the womb of Virgin Mary and to the liturgical epiclesis. As anticipated, in consequence, it is very interesting to go further to identifying places where this concept is used when applying to the action of the Holy Spirit in the context of spiritual life, describing human’s capacity of spiritually giving birth to Christ and, in consequence, the motherhood role of the Church as the communion of people.

Philoxen of Mabbug interprets John 1:14 as referring to the Spirit of Christ dwelling in the baptized<sup>9</sup>. Probably this is one of the first clues of using this concept in an interiorized way. Sebastian Brock identifies other sources which make clearer this connection, as for instance the Makarian Homilies<sup>10</sup>, where, while interpreting Luke 1:35, the author describes the influence of the Holy Spirit upon the soul. One can find a good example for that in the 9<sup>th</sup> Homily Letter, attributed to Makarios of Alexandria: “Those who rely on the power of God are very few; to them applies that which is written: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow them* (ܩܘܠ ܩܘܢܐ)”<sup>11</sup>.

Isaac of Niniveh is faithful to his Syriac tradition and dedicates an entire discourse to describe the meaning of the term. I will quote an excerpt:

*“Maggnanutha” is a term designating help and protection and also the receiving of a heavenly gift; for example: “The Holy Spirit shall come and the Power of the Most High shall overshadow you” (Luke 1:35). The former kind*

9 Letter to Monks of Senoun, ed. A. de Halleux, CSCO 231, p. 4; *Tractus tres*, ed. A. Vaschalde, CSCO 9, p. 168-169.

10 Cf. “Maggnanuta: a Technical Term in East Syrian Spirituality”, p. 129.

11 W. Strothmann, *Die syrische Überlieferung der Schriften des Makarios* 9, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1981, p. 248.

is involved in “Cause your right hand, Lord, to overshadow me” (Psalm 138:7), which is a request for help... We understand two kinds of action in the *maggnautha* granted by God unto mankind: one is symbolical (ܡܘܨܝܘܿܬܐ) and intelligible (ܡܘܨܝܘܿܬܐ ܡܘܨܝܘܿܬܐ); the other is practical (ܡܘܨܝܘܿܬܐ ܡܘܨܝܘܿܬܐ). The former is connected with the holiness which is received through divine grace; in other words, when, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, someone is sanctified in his body and soul, as was the case with Elisha, John the Baptist and the Holy Mary, blessed among women – although in her case it was unique, going beyond the case of other created beings; turning to partial *maggnanutha* which occurs with other holy men and women, the mysterious variety of *maggnanutha* such as takes place with any holy person, is an active power which overshadows (ܡܘܨܝܘܿܬܐ) the mind and when someone is held worthy of this *maggnanutha*, the mind is seized and dilated (ܡܘܨܝܘܿܬܐ ܡܘܨܝܘܿܬܐ) with the sense of wonder (ܡܘܨܝܘܿܬܐ), in a sort of divine revelation (ܡܘܨܝܘܿܬܐ ܡܘܨܝܘܿܬܐ). As long as this divine action overshadows the mind, that person is raised above the emotions brought about by the thoughts of his soul, thanks to the participation of the Holy Spirit... This is one mysterious kind of *maggnanutha*: when this power overshadows a person, he is held worthy of the glory of the New World by means of revelation. This is partial *maggnautha* which has been lot of the saints in light... on account of their holy and excellent behaviour.

The other *maggnautha*, whose working is experienced in practical terms, is a spiritual power which protects and hovers over someone continuously, driving from him anything harmful which may happen to approach his body or soul<sup>12</sup>.

We are interested more in the former type of overshadowing, that occurs fully with Virgin Mary and partially and temporarily with the saints. This leads to mystical life. In the excerpt quoted above

12 *Mystic treatises by Isaac of Nineveh* (abbreviated I), Nieuwe Reeks, Deel XXIII, 1, 1969, LIV, p. 261-262 (Paul Bedjan (ed.), *Mar Isaacus Ninivita. De perfectione religiosa*, Parisiis – Lipsiae 1909. p. 390-391); the same idea in S. Brock (ed.), *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian). ‘The Second Part’, Chapters IV-XLI* (abbreviated II), Lovanii, 1995 (CSCO 554-555, Script. Syr. 224-225), XVI, 5.

there are some fundamental expressions that describe the personal experience of receiving the Holy Spirit. First of all, Isaac mentions that this action occurs at the noetic level by the means of the grace of the Holy Spirit, but touches the entire human being (body and soul), as happened with Virgin Mary at Christ's conception. Here clearly appears the parallelism between these two situations. This mysterious experience takes place during divine revelation when the mind is seized and dilated, surpassing any emotions, in a state of wonder. Finally, this state is assimilated to a foretaste of the glory of the New Kingdom already experienced by the saints "in the light"<sup>13</sup>. In some other place, Isaac calls this spiritual state "wonder" (ܠܘܬܘܒܐ), "drunkenness" (ܠܫܘܒܘܬܐ), "un-knowledge" (ܠܫܘܒܘܬܐ ܠܐ), "spiritual vision" (ܘܘܝܢ ܠܝܘܠܐܐܐ), or "spiritual prayer" (ܠܫܘܒܘܬܐ ܠܫܘܒܘܬܐ).

What interests us more is the last concept, described at large by Saint Isaac in his first collection, the 22<sup>nd</sup> discourse, the "spiritual prayer", assimilated to the highest level of the spiritual life, pertaining to spiritual conduct. Isaac clearly points to this aspect when he mentions that this state is called sometimes "theoria" (ܠܝܘܠܐܐܐ), or "knowledge" (ܠܫܘܒܘܬܐ), or "revelation of intelligible things" (ܠܫܘܒܘܬܐ ܠܫܘܒܘܬܐ ܠܝܘܠܐܐܐ)<sup>14</sup>. All this names partially describe what means participation in the divine mysteries, are based on God's revelation, but the exact reality remains transcendent. During spiritual prayer, the mind, "the treasurer of the senses" is swallowed up in the Spirit, in rapture and stupor, when there is no movement anymore. Stressing the idea that the generator of such state is the Holy Spirit, Isaac condemns those "ignorant" (Messalians) who argue that they can experience spiritual prayer whenever they like<sup>15</sup>. Quoting Evagrius, he states that prayer

13 The use of "glory" and "light" come close to the byzantine doctrine of transfiguration.

14 I, XXII, p. 114 (Bedjan, p. 168).

15 On the relation between Isaac and the Messalians see Patrick Hagman, "St. Isaac of Niniveh and the Massalians", in N. Tamcke (ed.), *Mystik – Mataphor-*



ends in the moment when, under the light of the Holy Trinity, one experiences stupor (ecstasy)<sup>16</sup>. This condition goes beyond what is called knowledge, in the “knowledge beyond knowledge”<sup>17</sup>. Interestingly, in the last part of the discourse, appears a parallelism between the spiritual prayer and the Eucharistic prayer: “when we offer the visible sacrifice, while everyone is prepared and standing in prayer, supplicating and beseeching, the mind being concentrated upon God, the gift of the Spirit descends upon the bread and wine which we lay on the altar”<sup>18</sup>.

Despite the fact, Saint Isaac does not use here the term in discussion, yet one can intuit the Eucharistic resonances it has and the connection he develops between Christ’s conception, Eucharist and mystical life, the first one representing the very base for the next two, the second the ecclesial way of actualizing the mystery of Incarnation and the last one the perfect state pertaining to a Christform life, in eastern terms “deification” or the motherhood ability of spiritual man.

Regarding the “overshadowing” in all these three situations, there is a common metaphor that seems specifically to the Syriac theological language. It is about the image of pearls. According to a well-k-

- Bild. Beiträge des VII. Makarios –Symposiums. Göttingen 2007*, Universitätsreilrag Göttingen, 2008, p. 55-66; Nestor Kavvadas, “Theodore of Mopsuestia as a Source of Isaac of Niniveh’s Pneumatology”, *Parole de l’Orient*, 35 (2010), p. 1-13.
- 16 *Gnostikos* 30, J. Muyldermans, “Note additionelle à: Evagriana”, *Le Museon*, 44 (1931), p. 377 (see the debate between Irinée Hausherr, “Par delà l’oraison pure grace à une coquille. A propos d’un texte d’Evagre”, *Hésychasme et prière*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 176, Roma, p. 8-12, and Elie Khalifé Hachem, “La prière pure et la prière spirituelle selon Isaac de Ninive”, *Mémorial Mgr Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis*, Louvain, 1968, p. 157-176).
- 17 Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* III, 88, Antoine Guillaumont, *Les six centuries des „Kephalaia Gnostica” d’Evagre le Pontique*, PO 28/1, Paris, 1958, p. 134.
- 18 I, XXII, p. 116-117 (Bedjan, p. 172); a similar parallelism occurs with the prayer of Zacharias in the temple, Apostle Peter in the sixth hour, Cornelius or Joshua the son of Nun.

noun myth in antiquity, they were created when lightning struck the mussel in the sea. Similarly happens in Incarnation as well as in the Eucharistic epiclesis or mystic experience. In consequence, Christ was conceived in the womb of Virgin Mary when the Spirit and the Light came upon her, and the bread and wine become the Body and the Blood of Christ by the action of the Spirit and the Fire. Saint Ephraim asserts: “Christ gave us pearls, his Body and Blood”<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, the great poet, Jacob of Sarug, pictures the same idea, giving a double sense – the pearl as image for the Holy Sacraments, as well as for the descending upon the gifts of the Spirit. I will quote two suggestive examples to expressing that. Referring to the Offering, he says: “It is not the priest who is authorized to sacrifice the Only-Begotten or to raise up that sacrifice for sinners to the Father’s presence: rather, the Holy Spirit goes forth from the Father and descends, overshadows and resides in the bread, making it the Body, and making it treasured pearls to adorn the souls that are betrothed by him”<sup>20</sup>. In another homily, calls the Eucharistic elements “pearls”: “The Body and the Blood are living pearls; let them not be demeaned in soul and body that are unclean vessels”<sup>21</sup>.

The same metaphor is involved by Isaac the Syrian when expressing the ascetic struggle and the spiritual state. Similarly with a swimmer who dives into the sea to get a pearl, the hermit, naked of all worldly things, will go through creation so that to find the Pearl Jesus Christ and to “preserve” him in solitude, like in a treasury<sup>22</sup>. In another discourse, he constructs a comparison between the fruits of the soul and

19 Cf. Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnem de Fide*, IV: 9-10.

20 Paul Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* (5 vol.), Paris and Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1905-1910, vol. IV, p. 597. For the English translation Sebastian Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, Gorgias Press, 2013, p. 14.

21 Paul Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, vol. II, p. 222.

22 I, XLV, p. 218 (Bedjan, p. 326).

the formation of the pearls: “The Spirit of God makes ripe the fruits in the soul. The shell in which the pearl is formed receives its full form from the air, as then saying has it still then, it is only mere flash. Until the heart of the monk receives its heavenly fullness by understanding, its service is still simple and it has no consolation within its shell”<sup>23</sup>. The hard and risky work to get a pearl that makes one rich is similar with the ascetic struggle that makes a person experiencing the treasures of the Kingdom: “If the diver found a pearl in every oyster, then everyone would quickly become rich! And if he brought one up the moment he dived, without the waves beating against him, without any sharks encountering him, without having to hold his breath until he almost expires, without being deprived of the clear air which is granted to everyone and having to descend to the abyss, pearls would come more thick and fast than lightning flashes... Let us consider as oysters the prayers upon which the intellect alights, the contemplative insights (ጥራሮ ግዳጥራሮ), divine knowledge (ጥራሮ ጥራሮ), wisdom (ጥራሮ), and joy in spirit (ግዳጥራሮ ጥራሮ)”<sup>24</sup>.

In all the three situations there is a constant element that builds bridges between them – the primate of the Holy Spirit’s intervention followed by human cooperation. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Virgin Mary is the effect of her acceptance to God’s invitation to (re)establish a dialog with humankind. In this way, she becomes the temple, the tabernacle, the throne or the altar of Christ. Similarly, the bread and the wine provide the recipients for Christ Himself, while the priest, the representative of the people of God, invokes the coming of the Holy Spirit. Finally, human too becomes God’s dwelling in the partaking of the Holy Spirit. One can identify here human’s spiritual motherhood ability during spiritual conduct.

23 I, XLV, p. 219 (Bedjan, p. 328).

24 II, XXXIV, 4-5.

#### 4. The saint as “conceiver” of the Word of God

The very base for the contact of the human reality with the divine reality, as suggestively states Paolo Bettiolo, is the mystery of Incarnation: “The union of Christ with the godhead revealed to us the mysterious unity of all things with Christ”<sup>25</sup>. Christ assumes the matter, and creation “mingles” with God: “The world has become mingled with God: creation and Creator have become one”<sup>26</sup>. The Incarnation and the Eucharist provide the perfect model for the unity between divine and human, between the heavenly world and the material world. By this unity, the world too becomes a sacrament. Virgin Mary is the fruit of humankind and becomes the “temple” of God; the bread and the wine are the fruits of the created world and the material recipients of the Eucharistic Christ, as they themselves are transformed into His Holy Body and Blood. Both of the gifts, by the means of the descent of the Holy Spirit, assume a new mode of being and become a paradigm and an indication of how the Christians suffer transformation under the Holy Spirit’s overshadowing as well as the entire world.

In this line, Saint Symeon the New Theologian, while interpreting the parable of the marriage feast (Mathew 22), he argues that the bride represents the Virgin Mary and the perfect marriage feast is consummated in the very moment of Annunciation. But this mystical feast is prolonged with the baptised in a mysterious way, idea supported by the use of plural “marriage feasts”. The same marriage is mystically taking place with the faithful. The “marriage” of Christ and the Church is mirrored in each of the saints: “The saints conceive the Word of God within themselves in an analogous way to the Mother of God: as they give birth to him, he is born in them and they them-

25 P. Bettiolo, „Dieu et création chez Isaac de Ninive”, *Irénikon*, tome LXIII, 3, 1990, p. 338.

26 II, V,18.

selves are given birth by him... They are described as his mothers as well as children and brothers”<sup>27</sup>.

In the patristic commentaries, Virgin Mary is the symbol of the Church as the source of sacraments. But, in the same time, she is also the life-giving of Christ, the generator of these sacraments. Regarding the faithful, she is also the model for those living the sacraments and experiencing a spiritual life, guided by the Holy Spirit. This connection is suggestively expressed by the same patristic author, while speaking about the conscious meeting with God in the sacraments as well as on the conversation of the soul alone with God alone in the mystical life:

*The Son of God, who is God himself, by entering the womb of the all-holy Virgin and taking flesh from her and becoming man, was born, perfect God and perfect man, being both at one and the same time without confusion. Consider how this compares with what has happened to us. Each of us believes in the same Son of God and Son of the ever Virgin Mary, Mother of God; if, truly, believing, we receive the message concerning him in our hearts and confess him with our mouths, repenting for our former sins with all our soul, then, immediately, just as God the Word of the Father entered into the Virgin’s womb, so too the Word which we receive in our religious teaching takes seed within us too... We conceive him not in body as the Virgin Mother of God conceived him, but spiritually – though none the less really. We have him, whom the chaste Virgin conceived, in our own hearts... If we believe with all our soul and repent with real fervour, we shall conceive the Word of God in our hearts, just as the Virgin did...*

*The same undefiled flesh which He accepted from the pure loins of Mary... and with which He was given birth in the body, He gives to us as food. And when we eat of it...each one of us receives within himself the entirety of God made flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ...present in the body bodilessly, mingled with our essence and nature, and deifying us who share His body, who are become flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone*<sup>28</sup>.

27 Symeon the New Theologian (ed. J. Darrouzès), *Traité théologiques et éthiques*, in SOURCES CHRÉTIENNES, vol. 122 (1966), I. 10, 185-186.

28 Symeon the New Theologian, *Traité théologiques et éthiques*, I.10, 55-72.

There is clearly an interweaving of the ecclesial and the mystical. More, there is a real identity. The Church is truly the “Temple of the King”, but so equally the Christian is the “temple of the Holy Spirit” and “tabernacle” of Christ<sup>29</sup>. The “Body of Christ” in Symeon’s understanding has multiple meanings. Firstly, it refers to the flesh of Lord Jesus, transmuted through the Resurrection in the Holy Spirit. In this body, secondly, we are incorporated as the Church, the “Israel of God”, which is realized in the liturgical assembly. There, thirdly, we receive the Body of Christ as Eucharist, so that, fourthly, to become its concrete manifestation in the sense of the realization of humans’ divine image and likeness. At this point it would be important to underline the connection between the Church, as liturgical assembly, and the believer, as the “form of God”, or, the coordination between the ecclesial and the mystical, rapport detailed along all my paper.

### Conclusion

The fact the Syriac Theology implies the image of “overshadowing”, referring to Christ’s conception, Eucharist and to the spiritual life, broadens its signification and pictures it as model, so that to describing a valid communication between the spiritual realities of the Kingdom and the earthly ones, as well as between the public liturgical dimension of Christian life and its mystical personal sector. All the three situations develop the same paradigm illustrated by Christ’s conception in the Virgin’s womb – the motherhood ability of the Church as the liturgical assembly of faithful and the spiritual man, in particular, by the means of the Holy Spirit’s intervention, while making Christ present, as a synergic process inaugurated by human’s free affirmative answer to God’s invitation. Finally, their very common scope is to picture the world as a permanent sacrament by the dwelling of God within it.

29 Symeon the New Theologian, *Traité théologiques et éthiques*, I. 10, 44-45.