

MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

Jacob of Serug

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Jacob of Serug

- 450-520 AD.
- Bishop of Serug (part of the Persian Empire). Formed at the school of Edessa (Church of the East), Jacob succeeded in uniting the Ephremian tradition with the Alexandrian tradition in the exegetical domain, finding Christ throughout the Bible.
- The “center of the Bible is Christ whose two arms stretched out on the Cross are symbolized by the two Testaments.”



Lorenzo Ghiberti

Sacrifice of Isaac

Bronze relief
Museo Nazionale del
Bargello, Florence

The Sacrifice of Abraham and Isaac

- Jacob combined the traditions of the “binding” (Akedah) of Isaac as sacrifice and atonement with the vision of Abraham (Gen 22:1-14).
- “Abraham longed to see my day; he saw it and rejoiced.” (Jo 8:56) Abraham saw the “day” of salvation depicted by mystical symbols in the lamb.

- Isaac, the “only one”, shows forth the great murder of the Son of God in the mystical symbol.
- This is not a testing of Abraham because the Lord knew well of Abraham’s faith and love. While both Isaac (who accepted the decision to be the sacrifice) and Abraham surrendered morally to the demands of God, the command of God to sacrifice Isaac is that this would “depict a type of the Only One Christ)...and would bring joy to the Elder by means of the day of His crucifixion.”

- Abraham did not stop to ask questions about what is clearly revealed by God, but responded with joy to God whom he loved and trusted. God asks Abraham to imitate Him: not to be sad but to rejoice that God will bind His Son at the appropriate time.
- Abraham did not inform Sarah as he did not want to be held back by her mourning for her beloved. (Sarah dies when Satan informs her of the sacrifice.)
- The journey took three days. The mountain is not named; Abraham knew it was Golgotha. The youths who accompanied him were not permitted to ascend. Isaac is given wood to carry on his shoulders (and shone with beauty).

- Isaac calls out, “Father, where is the lamb?” Abraham replies, “God will provide the lamb for sacrifice, my son.”
- “For if it were not with the mystical symbol of the Son that Isaac was clothed in what time would Abraham see the day of the Son? How did he fix his eyes and see the crucifixion. Except if on his son it was drawn mystically when and where was he glad in the Messiah or how except in that type that was drawn on his only one.”

- Abraham sets about building the altar for the holocaust, assisted by Isaac. “Who has ever seen a lamb who builds the altar for his killing!”
- Isaac is a rational youth, intelligent, brave, and ready for sacrifice. (“Not my will, but yours.” Lk 22:42) He freely held out his hands to be bound and rejoiced as he stretched out his throat.
- God calls twice to Abraham. It would be senseless to kill Isaac because his blood does not save.

- “The shadow is given to you that you would see the type. Rejoice in the image and observe the equivalence to that which is his.” Only Christ will destroy death.
- The ram appears miraculously. “If you wish to see his birth look out at the tree. And if also his death and his sacrifice, behold it is before you.”
- “Abraham rejoiced in the day of the Son that he saw in his son, and he understood in the whole matter the reason of the crucifixion...”

- Abraham actually sees Jesus' saving actions played out before him in his own actions.
- Truth no longer means verification but manifestation. The mystical symbol is not static but is rather an epiphany.
- The Pasch as atonement is the central event in the economy of salvation.
- "By humility the heroic in every generation have been pleasing because it is the great way by which one draws near to God."
- The sage is called to humility.

- “Humility is total perfection, so that when man first beholds God, then he behaves humbly.
- For Moses was humble, a great one among all men; God descended to him on the mountain in revelation.
- Again, humility is seen in Abraham for although he was just, he called himself dust and ashes.
- Again, also John was humble because he was proclaiming that he was not worthy to loose the sandals of the Bridegroom, his Lord...
- But no one on Earth was brought low like Mary...He made her His mother and who is like her in humility?”

- “Let everything created abide in what is its own, as at its creation...the sea for fish and the earth that it may bear the sons of men...And the image with speech, that it may be stirred all the day to Your praise. ‘The very pulse of my created being requires Your praise.’”
- “The Power abides in the creation as a soul abides in its members...Heaven does not contain the Lord although He dwells in it, nor does the body contain the intellect, though it sojourns in it.”

The Chariot of Ezekiel

- “Whosoever pries into the unsearchably Begotten (of the Father) no longer has wonder...Christ in himself...O soul, make haste rather to wonder, and take care to love. Be ready to worship. Keep yourself in a state of wonder...Open the door of your spirit to wonder.”
- “If your intellect obeys you, confine it to the place of the body, that it may gaze within.”
- Ezekiel beheld “the high throne...and, glorious upon the backs of the ministering cherubim of fire who bear it, the wondrous Glory...the Son of the Creator, Who is seated there on the high place.”

- The vision of the heavenly throne and its ministering angels which the questing intellect seeks is dreadful and terrible. The vision, the forms which the angels take on within it, and the appearance of the Lamp and Glory as a Man overwhelm rational thought.
- However, “The table of the King is full of blessing for whomever reclines at it.” Not for us is the vision of the chariot assigned to the angels, but rather the altar of the Eucharist.
- The chariot is created for the sake of the angels as otherwise God who in Himself is hidden even from them, would have given these sons of light cause for alarm.

- “And they would have been looking in all directions in order to see Him. And the assembly of the choirs on high would have been scattered by this, And the powers would have disintegrated without any order...Debates would have multiplied even there...saying, ‘Where is He...the exalted One who is hidden, that we may praise Him in His place? For this reason He harnessed the chariot and made the place known...and depicted a place for His Glory, that there it might dwell, and He made it like a chariot that on it He might be carried in state...All the choirs gather and stand at the gate of the King.”



Mary Enthroned with the Christ

- Ezekiel was granted this vision because God's ministry in Judea had ceased... "His praise thunders richly among the cherubim!"
- The Incarnation is the mystery of all the mysteries.
- It is Mary "who became like the heavenly chariot, and solemnly carried that Mighty One, bearing all Creation... Fair palace which the King built and entered and dwelt in it; the doors were not opened before Him when He was going out."
- "Daniel saw Him borne on the clouds, and coming as a Man to judge the kings and their empires. Ezekiel, too, sees Him on the high throne, (He) who was also God. That likeness of the servant that He assumed within the womb (of Mary) was whispered on the wings of the heavenly beings."

- The “appearance as a man” and simultaneously “as God in great splendor” is “the way that was trodden by the Son of God both divinely and humanly though He is One.”
- “Why was it necessary for the prophet to repeat...the vision, then to say ‘above’ and repeat about (what is) below?...He wanted to show...how that supernal Being had become earthly and that He had become a mediator because he stood...between... Heaven and Earth in order to make peace between those on high and those below.”

- “Ezekiel saw something in the likeness of a rainbow in the clouds accompanying Him, a sign of peace that He would come and make with those below...And that strife which the serpent had started...(in Eden, the Son) will remove, and the quarrel will cease...And the hidden Father and the great Adam”, who were at enmity, will be reconciled in the Son who stands as the mediator.”
- The whole Gospel of Christ is given in this chariot vision. If it were not a revelation of the Incarnation, the vision would have been inexplicable and ignored.

- “(It is) for this that the chariot came down on Earth, that through prophecy it might represent the descent of its Lord. And the glorious throne and blue of chastity that (Ezekiel) saw there (is) the womb of Mary, which (the Lord) kept closed in order to bear the Son of God. Also, that likeness which was seen upon the throne (is) the Son of God who came in the flesh as a man.”
- For in the Godhead “there is no chariot there, either to ascend to, or to seek out, nor are there wheels, nor creatures... where the Trinity dwells in great splendor.”

- “O sinner! In your seeking, do not look for Him on high!”
- The angel in white linen approaching the chariot in order to receive coals of fire from the band beneath the throne (which the angel then scatters over Jerusalem as a sign of judgment, Ezek 10) is a type of the priest clothed with the form of the Son of God while the hand beneath the chariot is an image of the Holy Spirit as it is the Holy Spirit who is the agent of Eucharistic change.

- “The Son of God is all the beauty of prophecy, and without Him there is neither prophecy nor revelation. In the coals of fire are depicted the pearls of His body, and in the chariot (is a portrait of) the holy altar of divinity... These coals of fire that are in the chariot depict His body. They were placed in it both for retribution and for forgiveness. One was given to Isaiah, to forgive his iniquity, (others) were scattered in Jerusalem for punishment. The liturgy of Heaven and the worship of the Church are therefore one and the same. Within the Chariot (were) holy coals of fire; in the holy altar (are) precious pearls. On the altar is the body, and on the chariot the fire abides; Since both above and below there is a single mystery (sacrament) of the Only One.”

- It is not the priest who has authority to sacrifice the Only One and to lift Him up before His Father as a sacrifice for sinners. Rather, the Holy Spirit comes forth from the Father, and descending, He overshadows and dwells within the bread and makes it the Body...And the Spirit who is within stretches out to the priest who is outside, as the cherub stretched out to the man who was in white linen, and (the priest) takes from Him the propitiatory fire in the hollow of his hand. And, taking it out, (the priest) gives flowing wealth to the world.”

- “The priests of (Israel) were clothed in (white) linen within the Holy of Holies just as the angel at the chariot was clothed...It was not the angel who took his cue from the priest who was clothed, but rather the priest who was made like that angel...”
- “Moses saw the whole form of these mysteries, and he came down to trace it in the tabernacle and its furnishings...the mystery of the Church.”



Sanzo Raffaello Moses at the Burning Bush
Fresco Stanza di Eliodoro, Palazzi Pontifici, Vatican
<http://www.wga.hu>

- “He has come to you, to your place. Look at Him! For He is with you at the altar as (at) a meeting place with you, so that you may see Him as He rests upon the table, and from the particles of His body all creation is satisfied...All the wealth of (Heaven) has descended to Earth in Immanuel, Who is with us and is our God. The hidden altar, which is ministered to in mystery – Look! (It) is revealed, and stands among earthly angels. Look! In the ministry of the holy altar, at the time of the Mysteries, are (present the heavenly) powers, standing with their cries of ‘Holy’.”

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