

## Philoxenos of Mabbug: Life and Reputation in 1500-Year Perspective

### Biographical Periods:

1. Origins and Education (Mid-Fifth Century)
2. The Antioch Period (470s to 484)
3. Early Episcopate in Mabbug (485-498)
4. Campaign against Flavian, Patriarch of Antioch (498-512)
5. The Patriarchate of Severus of Antioch (512-519)
6. Exile and Death (519-523)

### Genres of Writings:

1. Confessions of Faith
2. Doctrinal Discourses
3. Disputations
4. Florilegia
5. Heresiologies
6. Letters: Polemical and Monastic
7. Monastic Discourses
8. Biblical Commentary and Translation

### Christological Vocabulary:

1. Incarnation as Becoming (ܐܘܢܝܢܘܬܐ)
2. Economy of Salvation (ܩܘܨܝܢܐܘܬܐ)
3. Unity and Trinity (ܐܘܢܝܢܘܬܐ and ܩܘܨܝܢܐܘܬܐ)
4. Faith and Simplicity (ܦܝܬܘܬܐ and ܩܘܨܝܢܐܘܬܐ)

### Bibliography:

- A. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie, ses écrits, sa théologie* (Louvain 1963).
- T. Bou Mansour, “Die Christologie des Philoxenos von Mabbug,” in A. Grillmeier and T. Hainthaler, eds., *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche: Die Kirchen von Jerusalem und Antiochien nach 451 bis 600* (Freiburg 2002), 500–569.
- D. Michelson, “A Bibliographic Clavis to the Works of Philoxenos of Mabbug,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 13.2 (2010): 273–338.
- R. Kitchen, *The Discourses of Philoxenos of Mabbug* (Collegeville, MN, 2014)
- D. Michelson, *The Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug* (Oxford, 2014).



## *PHILOXENOS OF MABBUG IN MONASTIC CONTEXT*

### 1. Commentary on the Prologue of John, 172-174

Because those who are about to learn this [the mystery of the incarnation] are for the most part adults, it is necessary that they are born again and become children. And in this order they should come to receive the doctrine concerning it. And they should grow in it by milk through faith until they become adults.... For thus have said some of the fathers and the ancient doctors [i.e. Evagrius], who thus knew how to understand the meanings of the words of the holy scriptures, that each one who wishes to become a full man in Christ, and a seer of the knowledge of his mysteries, that he must be born again of water and the Spirit, as Our Lord said. And instead of the milk that feeds the natural born, he must suckle and grow through faith and learn by that to fear God and to keep the commandments. And here are the words said by them on this subject: "My sons, the fear of God confirms faith, and abstinence from food guards faith, hope and perseverance keep abstinence unwavering, and by these is also acquired impassibility, which begets spiritual love, which is the door to the vision of natural knowledge, from whence one is transported to divine words and another kind of blessedness."

### 2. Commentary on Matthew and Luke, 6-7 (translation by J. Watt)

It is necessary therefore for those who desire that they might become receivers of the knowledge about these mysteries that instead of study in words (and especially of those words which engender controversy), they should persevere in the toils of life and keep the commandments which were entrusted (to us) by our Savior, from which they are able to gain wholeness of soul and a pure mind and to come into impassibility, which is the demonstration of the life of the new man... And from there they will be able to receive inside themselves the knowledge of these things--things which are inward beyond the body and about which we first receive instruction through the obedience of faith...

### 3. Commentary on the Prologue of John, 11

It is not permitted to ask how it was that He was when He had not yet become, nor how he became although he was not changed. For the act of incarnation is a wonder and it is not the custom of a wonder to be inquired after or commented upon (استفسار)... For every wonder is either above nature, or not in nature, or apart from nature, or contrary to nature. And because it is thus, it is not permitted to ask about it, nor to judge it, nor to seek it out.

### 4. Commentary on the Prologue of John, 187

Worldly knowledge is usually found through readings, and words, and vocabulary (which are newly taught), and through disputation and proof which is gathered from every thing. But that knowledge which is above such knowledge is divine and of the Spirit. And it is not formed out of research, nor discussion, nor probing, nor by controversy; those things which are at motion in every one who inquires after words and nouns!

5. Commentary on Matthew and Luke, 67 (translation by J. Watt)

...the expressions which are said about the faith [in scripture] do not allow commentary (فهمها). Thus, 'God sent his Son and he became of a woman'—as it is written, so it is to be believed and it does not admit another meaning. 'The Word became flesh and came to dwell in us'—its commentary (فهمها) is its reading and faith accepts the same.

6. Commentary on the Prologue of John, 194-195

It is seen then in every place that the heretics suppose that the "becoming (flesh)" of the Word must be explained (يشرحون) as "assuming (a body)." But this is the meaning only of their own supposition and it is not the true meaning of the phrase (in question). And do not think that because the phrase "becoming flesh": cannot be explained that it is meaningless. Rather its greatness is clearly revealed through the fact that the phrase cannot reveal its own explanation. For it is known to every Christian that for the sake of these words faith was placed in us by the Lord that in the manner of faith we might hold and guard such things.

7. Commentary on the Prologue of John, 185

For not only does the faith which is put in natural simplicity appear before faith in Christ, but also in all human doctrine. And everyone who learns is still a child and simple with respect to that which is handed on to him. And when each one of the students has grown...they become also seers of the hidden wisdom in both doctrines, divine and human.

8. Commentary on the Prologue of John, 147

And it is known that in every place Faith corresponds to simplicity.... For thus Abraham also took simplicity upon himself when he believed in God and it was not by the craftiness of his thoughts that he heard Him.... But the simplicity of Abraham was natural, that of a baby toward its mother or wet-nurse.... Therefore, if we also listen in simplicity to the things which God has said to us through the scriptures, and especially those which are words about the mysteries, our faith will be like that of Abraham.

9. Discourses, 129 (translation by R. Kitchen)

the true fear of God is born out of true faith. Whoever believes truly, also truly fears what he believes. Just as his faith exists not by strategies, so also his fear does not come from craftiness; When a person believes that God exists, he begins to receive the learning of His commandments, for faith is born out of the natural simplicity and moreover is established and guarded by this same simplicity. But the commandments that faith hears and receives, fear of God guards. For in the same way that simplicity guards faith, the fear of God keeps God's commandments.

10. Letter to Patricius (Longer Recension), 812, §65

And if you say to me that it is written by one of the blessed ones [Evagrius], that readings of the scriptures collect the thoughts, I say that also this is true. It does collect the thoughts of he who answers the world or he who turns toward the world and of he whose whole self is apart from himself. Thus it is necessary for one to read in the scripture for a short time until one becomes conscious that one's thought has been collected and then one should turn from reading to purity of prayer lest in reading one seek the knowledge and explanation (فهمه) of the words and fall again into the same state of distraction. Instead, one should seek the spiritual contemplation of the words, for in that alone does the heart take delight.

11. Letter to Patricius (Longer Recension), 812, §66

For not everyone reads the scriptures well or with knowledge, so there is one who reads the scriptures in order to recite it, and another to memorize it, and another desires to learn commentary (فهمه), and another to learn exercises of the knowledge of the soul, and another disputation with heretics, and another is moved by passion for learning—though to tell the truth it is vainglory. And in any one of these goals or in all of them, the mind reads until it is looking outside [itself]. For what need does a solitary have for what the explanation (فهمه) of a certain word is or for what the meaning of such-and-such phrase is? Walk the path before you and stand in the place of [spiritual] knowledge and you will have no need for questions about it [spiritual knowledge]. If then you do ask concerning it, it will be known that you stand outside of the place of knowledge. For the eye of the body does not ask but it sees the sun [directly], and the mind's eye does not investigate and then see spiritual knowledge, rather it [works] just the same as when the eye in the sun comes upon its sight and is illuminated by it... For it is sufficient for the solitary that he should only wonder at the expression of scripture. And if it is a commandment, he should keep it. And if it is a story, he should know who told it and for what reason. And if it is a parable, he should not allow himself the liberty to explain it (يفهمه). And if it is a mystery, it suffices for him to know it and not to reveal it... For we can take only a word on these things from the scriptures and not the knowledge about them; for all the words of the scriptures are given to the hearing of faith.

12. On Prayer, 3 (translation S. Brock)

Prayer such as is worthy of God, O disciple of God, is not uttered by means of composite words. Prayer which is worthy of God consists in this: that one gather in one's mind from the entire world, and not let it be secretly bound to anything; let it be one place it entirely at God's disposal and forget, during the time of prayer, everything that is material, including one's own self and the place where one is standing. One should be secretly swallowed up in the spirit in God, and one should clothe oneself in God at the time of prayer both outwardly and inwardly, set on fire with ardent love for him, and entirely engulfed in all of him, entirely commingled in all of him, with the movements of one's thoughts suffused with wondrous recollection of God, while the soul has gone out in love to seek him whom she loves, just as David said, "My soul has gone out after you"