The Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug

DAVID A. MICHELSON

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The World of Philoxenos of Mabbug—A Practical Context for Understanding Late-Antique Christology

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF PHILOXENOS OF MABBUG

> …some of them turned aside toward falsehood out of prejudice, and some of them on account of bodily affection, and others because they were [already] heretics, and others because they were troubled, and again others because the fear of God was contemptible in their eyes, and others from ignorance, and again others because they were flattered, and others because it did not concern them if error should seize the Church instead of faith, and again others because it happened that they were angry with their neighbors, because those neighbors were honored more than them and pressed upon by the visits from the faithful. And for that reason, they preferred—miserable ones—to move to the side of the heretics because they saw that the orthodox faithful did not wish to agree with them. And while the reasons vary why the whole lot of those monks who were traitors are counted among the heretics, they are gathered under one head: because they were not willing to acknowledge the truth. Indeed, they did not know it because they were not worthy to know it. For this reason they have held to falsehood instead of the truth, just as was said about similar ones by the Apostle, "They held wickedness as truth" and again "Because they did not choose to acquire the knowledge of God, he handed them over to a reprobate mind."[1]
>
> —Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun*

[1] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun*, published as *Lettre aux moines de Senoun (texte)*, edited by André de Halleux, CSCO 231 (Leuven: Secrétariat

Born in the mid-fifth century, Philoxenos of Mabbug (d. 523) was a prolific author and polemicist who left behind the largest surviving body of work in all of Syriac literature.[2] A metropolitan bishop in Syria from 485 onward, he was one of the last ecclesiastical and intellectual leaders of the one-nature theological party before the permanent separation of the eastern churches over Christology. As a subject for scholarly study, Philoxenos has been known (when he is known at all) either for his ardent attachment to the one-nature Christological doctrine or for his ascetic theology.[3] This book, *Practical Christology*, offers a new holistic view of Philoxenos' life and works as a means of better understanding the post-Chalcedonian Christological controversies.

Engaging with Philoxenos' Christological polemics from the perspective of various practical contexts, this study argues that Philoxenos' overarching concern in the Christological controversies was to promote and safeguard proper access to divine knowledge. For Philoxenos, knowledge of God was attained or preserved largely

du CorpusSCO, 1963), 89–90. The final allusion is likely a literal or mirror-style Philoxenian rendering of the Greek text of Romans 1:18 & 28. In his *Lexicon Syriacum,* Sokoloff notes that Philoxenos frequently employed "صدر" as his verb of choice for the "acquisition" of knowledge. Michael Sokoloff, *Lexicon syriacum* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press and Eisenbrauns, 2009), s.v. صدر.

[2] Philoxenos' corpus has been estimated to be over 500,000 words (see David A. Michelson, "A Bibliographic Clavis to the Works of Philoxenos of Mabbug," *Hugoye* 13.2 (Summer 2010), 278. <http://www.bethmardutho.org/index.php/hugoye/volume-index/443.html>.

[3] The existing secondary literature on Philoxenos is limited but useful. Specifically, there are five monographs of note. Four are theologically or philosophically oriented: Joseph Lebon, *Le Monophysisme sévérien: Étude historique, littéraire et théologique sur la résistance monophysite au Concile de Chalcédoine jusqu'à la constitution de l'Église jacobite* (Leuven: Josephus Van Linthout, 1909); Roberta C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and Jacob of Sarug* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); Guy Lardreau, *Discours philosophique et discours spirituel: autour de la philosophie spirituelle de Philoxène de Mabboug* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985); Jad Hatem, *La Gloire de l'un: Philoxène de Mabboug et Laurent de la résurrection* (Paris: Harmattan, 2003). The fifth study is broader and more historically oriented: André de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie, ses écrits, sa theologie* (Leuven: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1963). The present study is designed to complement de Halleux's work, which has done much of the requisite chronological, codicological, and textual work needed for a cultural and historical study of Philoxenos. Of recent scholarship, particular mention should be made of 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: Herder Verlag GmbH, 2004), 500–69 which synthesizes the work of de Halleux and brings some additional insights as well.

through forms of praxis such as the oversight of religious communities, mystical contemplation, the reading of scripture, participation in the liturgical mysteries, and ascetic practices of spiritual combat. This theological epistemology gave Philoxenos' anti-Chalcedonian writings their rhetorical strength. Philoxenos' Christological polemics were not just ideological exercises; they had practical implications for those seeking knowledge of God. Accordingly, Philoxenos' ardent attachment to the one-nature Christological doctrine must be understood in the light of the role he assigned right practice in the attainment of divine knowledge. In fact, one might say that for Philoxenos, "practice led to theory." Such an observation should not be mistaken for a Hegelian cliché—a deeper sense of the word practice is intended here. The defense of Christian orthodoxy was one practice among many in a larger spiritual struggle. In technical terms, Philoxenos saw this struggle as part of the divine economy of salvation (drawing on the Greek concept of *oikonomia*, referring to the divine design, governance, and action in the created world). Philoxenos' polemical concerns over the economy of the Incarnation took their meaning from this context, i.e. his larger vision of the divine economy of creation and salvation.

This practical yet theoretical contextualization of the Christological controversies is evident in the above passage from Philoxenos' *Letter to the Monks of Senun.* His remark offers a convenient starting point for this inquiry because it is a retrospective written at the end of his life, after Philoxenos' deposition by his theological opponents. In this letter Philoxenos makes a concise and impassioned appeal to his monastic followers at Senun, urging them to maintain the "confession of the true faith" and exhorting them to anathematize Christological heretics.[4] Writing from exile just before his death in 523, Philoxenos sought thus to explain to the monks of Senun why so many of their brethren from other monasteries of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine had changed sides and abandoned the miaphysite creed when its fortunes fell in 519. His explanation reveals the lens through which he viewed the Christological controversies. Of the many reasons he listed as to why monks might join those they had previously considered heretics, doctrinal agreement was only one among many. In addition to indifference to doctrine, Philoxenos mentions a variety of reasons that he classified as failure in ascesis, ignorance, or the

[4] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun*, CSCO 231, 95.

result of turmoil within the ecclesiastical community. Summing up these practical explanations for why the monks would change their Christological position, Philoxenos offered one overarching reason—failure in the knowledge of God: "Indeed, they did not know it because they were not worthy to know it."[5] For Philoxenos, finding the right path to the knowledge of God was the theological thread connecting both Christological controversy and the practice of the Christian life in contemplation, reading scripture, liturgical participation, and ascesis.

"Heresy" and "orthodoxy" have long been of interest to scholars of early Christianity.[6] While the descriptive value of such concepts is a highly debatable question, there is little doubt that the rhetoric of struggle between heresy and orthodoxy profoundly shaped both the production of Christian texts and the resolution of ecclesiastical conflicts in late antiquity.[7] This study of Philoxenos offers an opportunity to reconfigure some of these scholarly paradigms. Traditionally, the procession of theological debates, creeds, and ecumenical church councils of the fourth through eighth centuries has been described as a progressive triumph of Orthodoxy, a teleological and dialectical process of doctrinal divergence and correction.[8] More recently, scholars have been quick to point out that many of the events which have traditionally been acclaimed as markers of unity in orthodoxy, i.e. the ecumenical councils, in fact served to intensify and exacerbate the intense intra-Christian disputes of the era.[9] Indeed, one such case,

[5] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun*, CSCO 231, 89–90.

[6] See the broad range of literature stretching from Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1934 [1964]) and *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. by a team from the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, ed. by Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) to the essays in Holger M. Zellentin and Eduard Iricinschi, eds, *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

[7] See Holger M. Zellentin and Eduard Iricinschi, "Making Selves and Marking Others: Identity and Late Antique Heresiologies," in *Heresy and Identity*, 1–27, and Averil Cameron, "The Violence of Orthodoxy," in *Heresy and Identity*, 102–14.

[8] See for example the teleological language in Alois Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975). In this regard, Grillmeier's nevertheless valuable work is a product of its era. The teleological approach, however, is notably reduced in the subsequent volumes in the series edited by Theresia Hainthaler.

[9] Kurt Aland has eloquently summed up the failure of the Chalcedonian formula this way: "Thus they believed they had solved the problem. In fact, as in the Arian controversy, they had only created a formula. With it they described the unity of God

the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), proved so divisive that permanently separate churches formed based on acceptance or rejection of the Christology of the council.[10] The doctrinal and ecclesiastical break at Chalcedon proved to be enduring, lasting into the present era.[11]

Although the central point in dispute at Chalcedon has been summarized as the deceptively simple theological difference between "one" and "two," *Practical Christology* argues that the differences between the two sides went deeper than doctrinal formulations can indicate. The theological question was in what way Christ was to be considered both human and divine—did he have one nature (i.e. Christ's single nature was at the same time human and divine, the miaphysite position) or two natures (i.e. Christ had two separate natures for his humanity and divinity, the dyophysite position)?[12] As simple as the mathematical rigor of this question may seem, adherence to the various Christological positions turns out to be determined by complex factors.[13] Through the life and works of Philoxenos, it is evident that doctrinal disagreement over the number of natures should be understood as only the formal cause of the Christological controversies. These doctrinal positions were shaped and informed by a variety of

and man in Christ, but the *how* still remained unexplained, just as before, simply because it was inexplicable.… Instead, the controversy about Christology really began to take on its full force after Chalcedon after the argument had theoretically come to a conclusion." Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, trans. James L. Schaaf, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 1:202.

[10] These separations have persisted to the present in the division between the Chalcedonian churches (e.g. Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Melkite) and the non-Chalcedonian churches (e.g. Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, and Armenian Orthodox).

[11] In the twentieth century these divisions were lessened to some degree by ecumenical dialogue and new scholarly research into the nature of the distinctions. See S. P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78, 3 (1996): 23–35.

[12] The preferred usage is now "miaphysite," which is both grammatically correct and not considered a term of opprobrium. The older term "monophysite" should be abandoned as it both misrepresents the views of the one-nature party and has its origins as a term of derision. For a further discussion see Dietmar W. Winkler, "Monophysites," in G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, eds, *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 586–8.

[13] I do not mean to imply that the numerical difference was of no consequence or something to be deconstructed or reduced to social factors, but I do argue that any approaches which attempt to take the numeric quarrel seriously must be sensitive to the cultural and religious contexts for Christology which the adherents themselves experienced. In this regard, I disagree with L. R. Wickham over the simplicity of the dispute but do agree with him that "to enter sympathetically into this ancient

overlapping or even overdetermining contexts of practice which made the Christological formulas meaningful to adherents.[14] This monograph is an investigation into those historical contexts. Specifically, *Practical Christology* asks the following questions: What were the contexts that informed and gave import to the post-Chalcedonian theological conflicts? How was adherence to a particular Christology shaped by the perceived place of Christological doctrine within larger social, intellectual, and spiritual contexts? What can the doctrinal polemicists' rhetorical strategies reveal about the construction of Christological allegiances?

New answers to these questions can be found by viewing theological controversy as one among many intertwined religious practices in late-antique Christianity. Adherence to a particular Christology must be understood through the lens of its relationship to other authoritative forms of Christian praxis. Doctrinal disputes over creedal statements certainly played a role in the rejection of the Council of Chalcedon, but at a deeper level opposition to the Council and its creed arose from competing visions of the right path to divine knowledge. This interpretation is not to suggest either that Christology was simply a matter of empty words (ματαιολογίαις as the miaphysites' opponents might have put it) or that Christological doctrine can be explained through reduction to its social or political contexts.[15] Instead, I argue that at least in some cases the clash over Chalcedonian orthodoxy must be understood as being the product not just of doctrinal disagreement but of competing epistemologies and orthopraxies. This anti-Chalcedonian nexus of theology and practice can be seen vividly in the world of Philoxenos of Mabbug.

quarrel…one must feel the sharp paradoxes" (L. Wickham, review of R. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 28 [1977], 567–571).

[14] In terms of the classical Aristotelian divisions of causes, doctrinal divergence may be taken as the formal cause, but not to the exclusion of other "final causes" which made the doctrinal divergence a matter worth fighting over. In this regard, the interpretive work of I. A. Richards concerning the overdetermination of meaning is suggestive; see I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965). Further insights can be found in Louis Mackey, "Theory and Practice in the Rhetoric of I. A. Richards," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 27, 2 (April 1997): 51–68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3886360>.

[15] See the ancient slurs in Leontius of Jerusalem's *Against the Monophysites* published as Patrick Gray, ed. and trans., *Leontius of Jerusalem: Against the Monophysites* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). For modern equivalents, see the theories rebuffed by A. H. M. Jones in "Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 10, pt 2 (1959): 280–98.

WHY MIAPHYSITE CHRISTOLOGY AND WHY PHILOXENOS?

My purpose here is not to propose a new universal interpretation that can explain the entire formation of Christian orthodoxy. Such an attempt would be to repeat the errors of previous monolithic approaches to historical questions concerning Christology. Nevertheless, the aim of this book is to open up new avenues for understanding adherence to doctrinal formulations in late-antique Christianity. To do so, we must consider new and neglected source materials.

In particular, *Practical Christology* is focused on the post-Chalcedonian Christological disputes because they remain some of the most complex and, as yet, understudied theological conflicts of late antiquity. Ancient observers marveled (or despaired) at the labyrinthine alliances, formulae, anathemas, and compromises over the long period of debate.[16] Given how such a summary judgment was attractive to participants in the controversies, it should not be surprising that this view has continued, *mutatis mutandis*, to shape our views in the present.[17] Indeed, this judgment, compounded with the historical marginalization of the losing side as heretical, has meant that for many scholars of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages much of the Christological controversies remain *terra incognita*, with "miaphysites" as an exotic species of that land.[18]

The scholarly neglect of the one-nature party has been further compounded by a problem of source materials. Only recently have

[16] See Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* published as *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, trans. Michael Whitby, TTH 33 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 166–7.

[17] Thus one recent textbook describes the arguments as "abstruse" and marked by "obduracy." While such a description is in some ways accurate (and the textbook in question does make a good faith effort to trace the outlines of the controversies), such judgments have also served in some instances as justification for scholarly neglect. Even a scholar who clearly has a profound grasp of the minutiae can be found to lament "the confusion and embarrassment which predominated in the church's Christology from Ephesus right up to the Monothelete dispute" (Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. I, 445).

[18] Happily it does not seem that this will be the case for much longer in the field, as any number of the recent publications in the bibliography of this study will witness. See for instance Volker Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Pauline Allen and Robert Hayward, *Severus of Antioch* (London: Routledge, 2004).

historians of late antiquity begun to turn to the sources in Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian which can provide primary access to the development of the one-nature vision of orthodoxy.[19] The geographic divide between the western Greek and Latin sources and the eastern Syriac and Coptic sources maps almost perfectly onto the doctrinal split between one-nature and two-nature forms of Christianity. In the end, scholarship has been hampered by these two overlapping blind spots. The end result has been that the one-nature side in the Christological disputes has been relatively neglected both because it was the losing side and because its Syriac sources have not been as readily accessible to scholars. As a correction, my study takes as its focus the life, work, and theology of Philoxenos, a prolific author and key Syriac bishop in the controversies of the late fifth century, who has only gradually been rediscovered in the past century.

PHILOXENOS: SURVEY OF HIS LIFE AND WORKS

From his birth in Persia to his exile and death in Thrace, Philoxenos' life spanned remarkably varied geographic, political, and religious environments (for the geographical context, see the map at the beginning of the chapter). Strategically positioned in his bishopric on the Euphrates, Philoxenos took on theological opponents in both Persia and Antioch and was willing to travel to Constantinople as needed. Given the differing settings and levels of success that met Philoxenos' polemical endeavors, a brief outline of his biography is in order. This task is greatly facilitated by the biographical study of André de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie, ses écrits, sa théologie*, to which the reader is referred for more detail.[20] For additional information concerning the corpus of Philoxenos' works (including manuscript and textual history), readers are also referred to my own bibliographic "*Clavis*" which provides an update to de Halleux.[21]

[19] Indeed, I claim no extraordinary expertise in all of these languages; the scope of this present study is largely confined to sources in Greek and Syriac.

[20] De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 3–105. A more recent brief biography is found in T. Hainthaler, "Philoxenos von Mabbug," in *Syrische Kirchenväter*, ed. W. Klein (Stuttgart, 2004), 180–90.

[21] Michelson, "A Bibliographic Clavis," 273–338.

Origins (Mid-Fifth Century)

Little is known about Philoxenos' origins.[22] He was born in the mid-fifth century (perhaps the 440s or 450s) in the Persian region of Beth Garmai (the Tigris river valley). Eventually either he or his family settled in Roman Mesopotamia, and at an undetermined date Philoxenos was educated at the School of the Persians in Edessa.[23] Later allegations against Philoxenos indicate that this education was dyophysite.[24] At some point, however, Philoxenos came to side with the miaphysite Christology. Little else is known from this early period. De Halleux has convincingly argued that later medieval traditions which claim that Philoxenos sojourned in various monasteries in this period are not reliable.[25] Nevertheless, Philoxenos' training at the School of the Persians would have involved exposure to asceticism in Edessa and classic texts of monasticism such as the works of Evagrius.[26] Given the paucity of

[22] There are a few medieval hagiographies of Philoxenos. The most notable is a thirteenth-century vita: Eli of Qartamin, *Memra on Mar Philoxenos*, published as *Memra sur S. Mar Philoxène de Mabbog Texte*, ed. André de Halleux, CSCO 233 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1963). Eli's vita was adapted in a later anonymous life translated by Alphonse Mingana and edited by Sebastian Brock: *History of Mar Philoxenos*, published as "New Documents on Philoxenus of Heirapolis and the Philoxenian Version of the Bible," trans. Alphonse Mingana, *The Expositor* 19, 110 (1920); *History of Mar Philoxenos*, published as "Tash`ita d-Mar Aksenaya," ed. Sebastian Brock, *Qolo Suryoyo* 110 (1996). Biographical details on Philoxenos as well as an analysis of the reliability of the various ancient sources can be found in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 3–17. A review of further manuscripts by Vööbus should be used with care: Arthur Vööbus, "La Biographie de Philoxène: Tradition des manuscrits," *Annalecta Bollandiana* 93 (1975): 187–93.

[23] See Simeon of Beth Arsham, *Letter on Nestorianism* published as *Epistola Simeonis Beth-Arsamensis de Barsauma episcopo Nisibeno, deque haeresi Nestorianorum*, in *Bibliotheca orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, ed. and trans. Giuseppe Simone Assemani (Rome: Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719), 353.

[24] See the comment on this by Habib recorded by Philoxenos. See Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Memre Against Habib (IX–X)* published as *Sancti Philoxeni episcopi Mabbugensis dissertationes decem de uno e sancta trinitate incorporato et passo (Memre contre Habib)*, ed. and trans. M. Brière and F. Graffin, PO 40.2 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1980), 344, 10§186–7.

[25] De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 2. Andrew Palmer is similarly inclined, but does suggest that there were relations between Philoxenos and Tur Abdin monasteries later in Philoxenos' career. Andrew Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Tur Abdin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 113–16.

[26] Adam Becker has rightly cautioned, however, against making overly specific claims about the School of the Persians given the problems with the sources. Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: the School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 41–3.

comments from Philoxenos about this early dyophysite period, little more can be said. Moreover, no works from this early period survive or have been identified.

Early Polemical Engagement (470s to 484)

More details are available for the next period in Philoxenos' life. In the 470s, Philoxenos came to Antioch to join the growing circle of miaphysites under the patriarch Peter the Fuller (either in 470–471 or 475–476).[27] At this point, he became involved in the dispute over Peter's miaphysite addition to the *Trisagion* hymn.[28] These were tumultuous years for the miaphysites. While in Antioch, Philoxenos would have experienced rapid shifts in ecclesiastical and imperial authority.[29] In 475–476, the Emperor Zeno was challenged by a usurper, Basiliscus. To gain support in Antioch and Alexandria, Basiliscus (who had seized power in Constantinople) condemned Chalcedon. Peter the Fuller then endorsed Basiliscus. In retribution, after Zeno had defeated Basiliscus, he also removed Peter from the Antiochene patriarchate. It appears that Philoxenos remained in the vicinity of Antioch in this period. It is also likely that he began to compose polemical letters to continue the debate which Peter had begun over the *Trisagion*. His *Letter to the Monks on Faith* was written for this purpose circa 482.[30]

The year 482 brought yet another disruption. Tensions between the competing miaphysite and Chalcedonian claims to the patriarchal throne in Antioch had heated up with the murder of the Chalcedonian patriarch Stephen II in 479.[31] In 482, the Emperor Zeno issued the *Henoticon*—a

[27] De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 33.

[28] See the discussion of this controversy in Dana Iuliana Viezure, "Verbum crucis, virtus dei: A study of Theopaschism from the Council of Chalcedon (451) to the Age of Justinian," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 2009.

[29] For a general history of the Antiochene Patriarchate, see the data assembled in Robert Devreesse, *Le Patriarcat d'Antioche, depuis la paix de l'église jusqu'à la conquête arabe* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1945).

[30] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks on Faith*, in *Three Letters of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbogh (485–519): Being the Letter to the Monks, the First Letter to the Monks of Beth-Gaugal, and the Letter to Emperor Zeno*, ed. and trans. Arthur Adolphe Vaschalde (Rome: Tipografia della R. Accademia dei Lincei, 1902), 93–105, 127–45.

[31] Alois Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: Volume Two: From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590–604)*, trans. Pauline Allen and John Cawte (London: Mowbray, 1987), 250.

restraining order on theological debate that he hoped would end the controversy. Nevertheless in Antioch, the new Chalcedonian patriarch Calendion was taking a hard line against miaphysites and expelled Philoxenos from the city. Philoxenos was quite prolific during this exile (482–484) as he traveled from monastery to monastery rallying support.[32] In particular, he traveled to Constantinople in 484 to lobby the Emperor Zeno for the deposition of Calendion. A profession of faith made to Zeno by Philoxenos survives from this audience.[33] Other works from this period include several letters to various monasteries (Beth Gaugal and Tell ʿAda among others).[34] Perhaps most significantly, Philoxenos wrote his first extended piece of polemic in this period (482–484), the *Volume against Habib*. This *Volume* eventually came to contain an initial letter by Philoxenos, excerpts from a rebuttal by a dyophysite monk named Habib, two responses by Philoxenos (one short and the other consisting of ten treatises, collectively titled *Memre against Habib*), and a lengthy florilegium of Christological citations from earlier authors.[35]

Early Episcopal Administration (485–498)

In 484, Philoxenos' fortunes changed again. His enemy, Calendion, had sided with the pro-Chalcedonian usurpers Leontius and Illus. When Zeno regained control of Antioch in 484, Calendion was deposed and Peter the Fuller restored yet again to the patriarchal

[32] De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 37.

[33] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Emperor Zeno*, in *Three Letters of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbogh (485–519)* (ed. Vaschalde), 118–26, 163–73.

[34] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *First Letter to the Monks of Beth Gaugal*, in *Three Letters of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbogh (485–519)* (ed. Vaschalde), 105–18, 146–162; Philoxenos of Mabbug, *First Letter to the Monks of Tell ʿAda*., published as *La lettera di Filosseno; Ai monaci di Tell'addâ: Memoria del socio Ignazio Guidi*, ed. and trans. Ignazio Guidi (Rome: Tipografia della R. Accademia dei Lincei, 1886).

[35] The *Volume against Habib* was published in several parts: Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Memre Against Habib (I–II)*, published as *Sancti Philoxeni episcopi Mabbugensis dissertationes decem de uno e sancta trinitate incorporato et passo (Memre contre Habib)*, ed. and trans. Maurice Brière, PO 15 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1920); Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Memre Against Habib (III–V)*, published as *Sancti Philoxeni episcopi Mabbugensis dissertationes decem de uno e sancta trinitate incorporato et passo (Memre contre Habib)*, ed. and trans. M. Brière and F. Graffin, PO 38.3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1977); Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Memre Against Habib (VI–VIII)*, published as *Sancti Philoxeni episcopi Mabbugensis dissertationes decem de uno e sancta trinitate incorporato et passo (Memre contre Habib)*, ed. and trans. M. Brière and F. Graffin, PO 39.4 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1979); Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Memre Against Habib (IX–X)*, PO 40.2 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1980).

throne. In addition to Calendion, Zeno deposed nine other bishops throughout the diocese of the *Oriens*. Thus in 485, Peter the Fuller chose Philoxenos to fill one of these sees as the metropolitan bishop of Mabbug (ancient Hierapolis), a see which he would hold until 519.[36]

As he settled into his new episcopal duties in Mabbug/Heirapolis (capital of the eastern border province of Euphratensis), Philoxenos had time to devote to writing. In the period from 485 to 498, Philoxenos most likely wrote his most elaborate Christological treatise, the lengthy *Book of Sentences*, and also his most developed ascetic writings, the *Discourses*.[37] In addition to these works, Philoxenos gave his attention to cultivating the Christian community under his pastoral care. Hierapolis was still the cult center for the worship of the Syrian goddess Attargatis. Although evidence is limited, it appears that Philoxenos contributed to the increasing Christianization of the city.[38] He also established several new monastic communities throughout his diocese and elsewhere. While most were small (five to ten monks), these new establishments did include the large monastery of Senun near Edessa, of which Philoxenos spoke proudly at the end of his life.

In this same period, Philoxenos continued his efforts to oppose the Council of Chalcedon under the banner of the *Henoticon* that had been maintained by Zeno's successor, the Emperor Anastasius (r. 491–518). While Anastasius' ecclesiastical politics were not overtly pro-miaphysite, he did facilitate the expansion of miaphysites in Syria. Judging from the fact that Mabbug quickly reverted back to Chalcedonian orthodoxy after Philoxenos' tenure, it seems that Philoxenos was not particularly successful in converting his city to a miaphysite theology.[39] Nevertheless, he held his bishopric for more than three decades and used its influence and authority to bolster

[36] See the summary of this in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 38–9.

[37] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *The Book of Sentences*, published as *Tractatus tres de trinitate et incarnatione (textus)*, ed. Arthur Adolphe Vaschalde, CSCO 9 (Leuven: Peeters, 1907); Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses*, in *The Discourses of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbôgh, A.D. 485–519*, ed. and trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (London: Asher & Co., 1894). On the *Discourses*, readers are advised to consult the new translation by Robert Kitchen which was released too late to be taken fully into account for this study: Robert A. Kitchen, *The Discourses of Philoxenos of Mabbug*, Cistercian Studies 235 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2013).

[38] For a discussion of Philoxenos' claims to have Christianized Mabbug, see de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 42–5.

[39] Philoxenos' predecessors on the episcopal throne of Mabbug had been committed dyophysites for several generations (back to the time of Alexander of Mabbug,

the miaphysite cause throughout the Roman East and beyond. From Mabbug, he kept alert to the spread of dyophysite theology in Persia and was perhaps involved in the closure of the School of the Persians in 489. Of even greater strategic importance were his ordinations. The miaphysite missionary Simeon of Beth Arsham reported that Philoxenos had ordained the first two bishops of Najran on the Arabian Peninsula, including the martyr-bishop Paul II.[40] More significantly for the miaphysite ascendancy, it was Philoxenos and his five loyal suffragen bishops of Euphratensis who formed the miaphysite core leadership in the period before Severus' ordination.[41]

Campaign against Flavian of Antioch (498–512)

Philoxenos' success at rallying the church hierarchy for the miaphysites led him to an even bolder endeavor. In 498, the pro-Chalcedonian Flavian was made patriarch in Antioch. Philoxenos, who had now assumed a senior position among the miaphysite leadership, spent the next fourteen years trying to unseat Flavian. His strategy for this endeavor is discussed in Chapter 2, but it should be noted here that this period was also one of the most productive for Philoxenos in terms of scholarship and polemic. By this point, he had set up a scriptorium in Mabbug whose crowning achievement was a fresh translation of the New Testament into Syriac, completed in 507 or 508. Based on this translation, Philoxenos himself wrote polemical commentaries on portions of Matthew, Luke, and John.[42] He also continued to write lengthy letters, mainly to monks and monastic

who had refused to compromise with Cyril at Ephesus in 431). Though de Halleux is perhaps too optimistic about what Philoxenos achieved in Mabbug, nevertheless he is right to point out that Philoxenos was successful in Syria if not in his own city. De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 46.

[40] Simeon of Beth Arsham, *New Letter*, published as *Simeon's New Letter (G)*, in *The Martyrs of Najrân: New Documents*, ed. and trans. Irfan Shahîd, Subsidia Hagiographica 49 (Bruxelles: Soc. des Bollandistes, 1971), vi.

[41] De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 78.

[42] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on the Prologue of John*, published as *Commentaire du prologue johannique (Ms. Br. Mus. Add. 14,534), texte*, ed. André de Halleux, CSCO 380 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1977); Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on Matthew and Luke*, published as *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke (Text)*, ed. J. W. Watt, CSCO 392 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1978).

communities on both ascetic and doctrinal topics such as his *Letter to Patricius*.[43]

From Philoxenos' correspondence, it can be seen that the struggle in Antioch was not his sole focus. In 502–505, the Roman Empire was at war with Persia. Mabbug was a garrison town that saw substantial troop presences during this period.[44] Philoxenos also waged his own theological conflict across the Persian border with attacks on the dyophysite leadership in the Church of the East. Strikingly, sometime during or just after the war, he composed a heresiology against the dyophysites that he sent as a letter to the Lakhmid Phylarch, the main ally of the Persians along their Roman frontier.[45] Moreover, after the war was completed, Philoxenos played a role in supporting the work of Simeon of Beth Arsham in Armenia against the dyophysites. Finally, it is likely that Philoxenos had both the conflict with Flavian and the fate of the miaphysites in Persia on his agenda when he undertook an embassy to the Emperor Anastasius in Constantinople in 507.[46] Philoxenos enjoyed imperial support (or at least imperial toleration) in his attempts to force out Flavian as the patriarch of Antioch at synods in Antioch (509) and Sidon (511).

Later Episcopal Administration (512–519)

With the tacit support of Anastasius, Philoxenos' struggle against Flavian led to one of the greatest (and last) victories for the miaphysites of Syria and Anatolia—the consecration of Severus as patriarch of Antioch in 512. Chapter 2 will consider the challenges of this period in detail. It suffices here to note that Philoxenos served as a senior and seasoned advisor to Severus. In particular, Philoxenos and Severus struck a moderate tone as they now sought to consolidate and expand the miaphysite control of the churches in Syria and Anatolia. Philoxenos continued to write letters advising both Severus and various monasteries

[43] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to Patricius (Longer Recension)*, published as *La lettre à Patricius de Philoxène de Mabboug*, ed. and trans. René Lavenant, PO 30.5 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1963).

[44] Geoffrey Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War, 502–532* (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1998), 106, 116.

[45] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to Abu Yaʿfur*, published as "*Lettre de Philoxène de Mabbūg au phylarque Abū Yaʿfūr de Hīrtā de Bētnaʾmān (selon le manuscrit no 115 du fond patriarcat de Šarfet)*," ed. and trans. Paul Harb, *Melto* 3, 1–2 (1967): 183–222.

[46] De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 64.

in this period, such as his *Letter to the Lector Maron of Anazarbus* and his *Letter to Abraham and Orestes.*[47]

Exile (519–523)

The miaphysite ascendancy, which culminated in Severus' ordination, was short-lived. In 518, Justin I succeeded Anastasius as Emperor and declared himself in favor of the Chalcedonians and the Christology of the church in Rome. Severus, Philoxenos, and most of the miaphysite hierarchy in Syria and Anatolia were driven into exile in Philippopolis (in Thrace). Nevertheless, even in these final four years of his life, Philoxenos continued what had been one of his main polemical activities, writing letters to monks encouraging them to fight for the miaphysite Christology. Such exhortation can be found in all three of his surviving exilic letters: the *Letter to the Monks of Senun*, which included another patristic florilegium; his *Letter to Simeon, Abbot of Tell ʿAda*; and his *Letter to the Monks of the Orient.*[48]

Philoxenos died in 523 under house arrest while in exile. While later reports that he was murdered are difficult to substantiate, it is likely that the stress of deportation combined with his old age was the cause. Due to his prolific writings and successful leadership of the Syriac-speaking miaphysites, Philoxenos' reputation continued to grow after his death. Numerous sixth- and seventh-century manuscripts survive with portions of his works.[49] Indeed due to the changing circumstance of preservation in the period, the early manuscript evidence for Philoxenos'

[47] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Lector Maron of Anazarbus*, published as "*Textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabboug*," ed. and trans. J. Lebon, *Le Muséon* 43, 1–2 (1930): 17–84; Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to Abraham and Orestes*, published as *Letter of Mar Xenaias of Mabûg to Abraham and Orestes, Presbyters of Edessa, Concerning Stephen Bar Sudaili the Edessene*, in *Stephen Bar Sudaili the Syrian Mystic and the Book of the Hierotheos*, ed. and trans. A. L. Frothingham, Jr (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1886), 44.

[48] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231); Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of the Orient (Part I)*, published as "*Textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabboug*," ed. and trans. J. Lebon, *Le Muséon* 43, 1–2 (1930): 57, 83–4; Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of the Orient (Part II)*, published as "*Nouveaux textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabbog: II. Lettre aux moines d'orient*," ed. and trans. André de Halleux, *Le Muséon* 76 (1963): 5–26; Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to Simeon, Abbot of Tell ʿAda*, published as "*Textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabboug*," ed. and trans. J. Lebon, *Le Muséon* 43, 1–2 (1930): 150–220.

[49] Unfortunately, they are preserved primarily in catenae and florilegia rather than in their entirety.

works is unprecedented compared to earlier late-antique authors or even to his Latin and Greek contemporaries.[50]

As we return to consider various aspects of Philoxenos' career in the chapters that follow, it will be useful to keep in mind the five periods just discussed: his early polemical engagement (470s–484); his early episcopal administration (485–498); his leadership in the struggle against Flavian of Antioch (498–512); his later episcopal administration under the patriarchate of Severus (512–519); and his exile (519–523).[51] Having played the many roles of experienced bishop, proven monastic leader, rigorous theologian, learned exegete, prolific polemicist, and would-be imperial counselor in these periods, Philoxenos' theological agenda was tightly interwoven with his vision of Christian practice and community. Accordingly, his diverse ecclesiastical career and writings provide ample material to contextualize the late-antique Christological conflicts.

PHILOXENOS' CHRISTOLOGY

Although the primary focus of this book is on the contexts which shaped Philoxenos' Christological polemics, it will be useful to briefly survey at the outset the main intellectual themes of Philoxenos' approach to Christological doctrine and debate. An overview is sufficient, because we can draw on reliable scholarly analysis of Philoxenos' Christology, notably the magisterial monograph of de Halleux and a more recent synthesis by Tanios Tanios Bou Mansour.[52] Their interpretations provide an accurate foundation for our inquiry.

In particular, both de Halleux and Bou Mansour forefront the "intuitive" character of Philoxenos' theology.[53] For de Halleux, Philoxenos

[50] This is in part due to the separation of the Syrian Orthodox Church shortly after Philoxenos' death. See the list of manuscript evidence in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 517–20.

[51] It should again be emphasized that this periodization, as well as much of the preceding survey, is dependent on de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 3–105.

[52] See the second half of de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 311ff, and 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: Herder, 2002), 500–69. It would be redundant to reproduce their work here in detail, so the reader is referred to the works.

[53] De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 311, 314–15 and Bou Mansour, "Christologie," 567. This concept is independent of the more general "intuitive theologian" concept developed by Philip Tetlock in the field of social psychology.

was not an analytic or systematic theologian in the sense of adhering to a particular philosophical method.[54] Instead, Philoxenos seems to have been guided by an allegiance to certain fundamental convictions that shaped all of his Christological statements.[55] Bou Mansour concurs with this interpretation, arguing that Philoxenos is best understood through the interrelation of foundational ideas concerning Christology, soteriology, and epistemology.[56] Questions of Christology and the anti-Chalcedonian struggles occasioned the majority of Philoxenos' works and determined their content. Judging by pages filled and energy spent in controversy, there is little doubt that the Christological debates had a consuming importance for Philoxenos. De Halleux and Bou Mansour have noted that nearly all of Philoxenos' works are marked by repeated appeals to only a small core set of Christological concepts, most of which remained constant over the course of Philoxenos' career. For our purposes, a brief examination of two works will suffice to give a summary of these Christological commitments. The first work is one of Philoxenos' earliest, *Letter to the Monks on Faith* (written before he became a bishop in 485). The second work, *Letter to the Monks of Senun*, is one we have already encountered. This work is also an apt source because it is a retrospective written after 519. In his letters, whose composition spans his career, Philoxenos gives a concise and impassioned appeal to his monastic followers to maintain the "confession of the true faith" and exhorts them to anathematize Christological heretics.[57]

At this point one caveat is in order. While a theological overview is an essential starting point for the study of Philoxenos, we must not make the mistake of reducing Philoxenos merely to his legacy as a Christological controversialist or even his role as a late-antique theologian. Indeed some of the most striking aspects of Philoxenos' theological writings are their opposition to doctrinal

[54] "Das Denken des Philoxenus is weniger analytisch und systematisch als vielmehr intuitiv und repetitiv angelegt." A. de Halleux, "Philoxenos von Mabbug" in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. XXVI (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 578.

[55] De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 316.

[56] Bou Mansour, "Christologie," 505. De Halleux and Bou Mansour also refer to the useful schema of describing Philoxenos' incarnational theology according to its answers to the questions of the "who, whence, why ["quoi et pourquoi"], and how" of the incarnation. Cf. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 330.

[57] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 95.

speculation and an emphasis on the human limits of theological knowledge. On one hand, a certain inconsistency is suggested by the fact that Philoxenos spent so much effort writing theological treatises that discouraged doctrinal speculation. On the other, it cannot be denied that Philoxenos consistently, and across all genres of his work, pointed his readers away from speculative theology towards a practical, ascetic, and mystical apprehension of God. It is this central paradox in the intellectual world of Philoxenos that will be explored in the chapters that follow. Our entry point into that paradox is to investigate the primary theological themes of his works, both his Christological concepts and the underlying epistemology grounded in praxis.

Letter to the Monks on Faith

This letter was written to an unidentified miaphysite monastic community during a period of pro-Chalcedonian ascendancy (very likely 476–484).[58] From allusions in the letter, one may conclude that the community was, like Philoxenos himself, subject to political and ecclesiastical pressure because of its Christology.[59] The occasion for the letter was Philoxenos' campaign to defend the miaphysite doctrine known as theopaschism—the view that the unity of the Incarnation included the Divine nature experiencing suffering and death.[60] Philoxenos acknowledged that some might have been troubled by the statement "God was crucified for us," but he argued that such a paradoxical becoming (in which God seemingly defied His own nature) was essential for the economy of salvation:

> The Ancient of days became a child; the Most High became an infant in the womb, and God became man in the womb. The Spiritual One became corporeal; the Invisible One was seen; the Intangible One was handled…. Invisible, we see Him; not tangible, we handle Him; not capable of being eaten, we eat Him; not capable of being tasted, we drink Him; we embrace Him Who is all powerful; we kiss Him Who is infinite. Of Him, Who is immortal, we believe that He died for us; of Him, Who is impassible, we confess that He suffered for us.[61]

[58] See discussion of the date in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 189.

[59] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks on Faith* published in *Three Letters of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbogh (485–519)* (ed. Vaschalde), 128–9.

[60] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks on Faith* (ed. Vaschalde), 137–8.

[61] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks on Faith* (ed. Vaschalde), 139–40.

Philoxenos then condemned both Eutyches and Nestorius, each for failing to fully comprehend one half of the paradox. Philoxenos condemned Eutyches for denying Christ's humanity and Nestorius for denying that His divinity was completely united with that humanity. The letter concludes with a brief anathema (a genre which Philoxenos would come to employ to rhetorical effect): "Anathema upon Nestorius and Eutyches, and their doctrines and their disciples; upon every one who agrees with them; upon every one who does not anathematize them with mouth and heart, and does not confess that Christ, God the Word, one of the Trinity, was crucified for us."[62] Although this letter by Philoxenos is short, it contains the seeds of many common themes that would play out across his career and find much fuller expression in his lengthy *Letter to the Monks of Senun*.

Letter to the Monks of Senun

This letter begins with the central concept of incarnation as "becoming."[63] Next, Philoxenos proceeds to the soteriological imperative of this "becoming" which he finds in the subsequent phrase in John 1:14, "the Word became flesh and dwelt in us."[64] Philoxenos reminds the monks that the Incarnation occurred "for us" so that Christ might dwell "in us."[65] Following Alexandrian tradition, Philoxenos argues that through the Incarnation the unique son of God became human and by his act opened the possibility for all humankind to become children of God through a restoration (or re-creation) of human nature in the new pattern of Christ where "God is man and man [is] God."[66]

Having explained the "why" of the Incarnation, Philoxenos raises the question of "how."[67] This, he insists, is a question which cannot be answered due to the limits of human knowledge and the deficiency of natural ability to comprehend the miracle of the Incarnation. Following this argument, Philoxenos condemns the

[62] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks on Faith* (ed. Vaschalde), 144.
[63] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 4.
[64] Philoxenos interprets this passage not as "dwelt among us" but more literally "dwelt in us," i.e. the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is made possible because the Incarnation has bridged the gap between humanity and divinity.
[65] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 6–8.
[66] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 6–8.
[67] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 9–10 and explicitly at 60–1.

errors of the heretics and those at Chalcedon for their lack of humility concerning human knowledge and their futile efforts to explain the miraculous.[68] In opposition to Chalcedon, Philoxenos develops a Christology which defends the reality of the divine Incarnation based on Nicene Trinitarian doctrine.[69] He argues that the crucified Christ must be considered as fully one of the Trinity.[70] To support his position, he then introduces a lengthy florilegium of patristic quotations which situate opposition to Chalcedon as an extension of Nicene orthodoxy.[71] Following the florilegium, Philoxenos returns to the paradoxical nature of the Incarnation which is beyond human comprehension. He argues that the paradox of the Trinity provides the model for understanding the mystery of the Incarnation, particularly the simplicity and unity of the persons of Christ and the Father.[72] Just as the Father is simple, i.e. perfect, and not a composite being, so the incarnate Christ could not be a divided being, but must have one simple and unified nature. Finally, Philoxenos concludes the doctrinal portion of his letter with a last attack on the pretensions of heretics who presume to explain the Incarnation.[73] In all, Philoxenos devotes about two-thirds of his letter to developing his Christological position.

Because it was written at the end of Philoxenos' career, the letter reveals some shifts in Philoxenos' Christological views over time. Nevertheless, it also offers the reader ready access to the core Christological ideas which de Halleux and Bou Mansour have identified as persisting across the whole Philoxenian corpus: "becoming," "the economy of salvation," "unity and trinity," "the mystery of the Incarnation," "error and heresy," and "faith and simplicity."[74] Since these are terms which will recur in the chapters that follow, a brief definition for each is given here.[75]

[68] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 13–27.
[69] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 27–8.
[70] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 28.
[71] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 32–58.
[72] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 60–1, 64, 65–8.
[73] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 72 ff.
[74] Compare the tables of contents in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 569–70 and Bou Mansour, "Christologie," xxii–xxiii.
[75] Since the place of these terms in the works of Philoxenos has been adequately documented in both de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie* and Bou Mansour,

Incarnation as Becoming

Perhaps the most significant concept for Philoxenos' Christology, indeed even for his entire theology, is that of "becoming" (ܗܘܝܐ), a concept which he develops out of John 1:14.[76] For Philoxenos this is the preferred scriptural phrase for describing the Incarnation (an allocution less susceptible to misunderstanding than language of assumption, clothing, or indwelling). In addition to giving this term an extended analysis in his "Commentary on the Prologue of John," Philoxenos invoked the concept of "becoming" frequently in his anti-dyophysite polemics. "Becoming" referred to the ontological miracle and act of the Incarnation. This "becoming" occurred without any change in the divinity of Christ; without compromising the unity of his person or his position in the Trinity. "Becoming" also held an even broader import since Christ's Incarnation served as the mirror model for humankind's "becoming" or *theosis* in union with Christ.[77] Indeed, it was this "becoming" that provided Philoxenos with the soteriological purpose (the "why") for Christ's "becoming." The significance of "becoming" is so strong that de Halleux made the following observation:

> The two terms "become" (ܗܘܝܐ) and "economy" (ܐܘܟܝܢܘܬܐ) are moreover synonyms under the pen of Philoxenos: for example by "economy" he regularly indicates the act of divine providence toward which all others converge, i.e. the mystery of the incarnate word; and on the other hand, if he intends properly at first by "becoming" the economy [of the Incarnation] in its inaugural act, i.e. the inhomination of God the Word, he subsequently applies the principle [of becoming] to the whole course of the life of the Savior, as if he sees the primordial mystery progressing in some way from the birth to the redemptive death of God the Word.[78]

In short, "becoming" was not only a Johannine description of the moment of incarnation but a description of the entire mechanism and process of salvation—the "economy of salvation."

"Christologie," I add minimal references in the section that follows. Readers are referred to the above works for a more detailed analysis.

[76] Philoxenos' most extended discussion of this concept comes in his *Commentary on the Prologue of John* (CSCO 380). See also the *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 3 ff. Further references are found in *The Commentary on Matthew and Luke, Letter to the Monks on Faith*, and *The Book of Sentences* among others.

[77] See Bou Mansour, "Christologie," 548–50.

[78] De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 320.

Economy of Salvation

In late-antique theological parlance, the term "economy"—a term perhaps best left transliterated as *oikonomia* (οἰκονομία in Greek or the synonyms in Syriac ܐܝܟܢܘܡܝܐ and ܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ)—referred to God's providential workings. This term applied specifically to the Incarnation, which Philoxenos described as the "*oikonomia* which is in the flesh of Christ (ܐܝܟܢܘܡܝܐ ܕܒܦܓܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ)."[79] Given that the post-Chalcedonian controversies centered on issues of the Incarnation, Philoxenos had plenty of opportunities to reflect on the nature of the "*oikonomia* which is in the flesh."[80] For example, in his *Commentary on the Prologue of John*, Philoxenos declared the "becoming" of John 1:14 to be "the foundation of the entire edifice of the *oikonomia* in the flesh."[81]

Certainly the concept of *oikonomia* (in its incarnational and soteriological sense) was foundational to Philoxenos' polemics. In the *Commentary on the Prologue of John* alone he discussed it over forty times.[82] In his *Commentary on Matthew and Luke*, Philoxenos charged that the error of his opponents was that "they reject the corporality of God and his *oikonomia* for our salvation (ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܥܠܟ ܕܐܬܥܒܕ ܒܦܓܪܢ)."[83] This two-part phrase reveals what for Philoxenos was the natural extension of the doctrine of the Incarnation: God became flesh, "for our sake."[84] In Philoxenos' Christological polemic, he created a strong rhetorical tie between the Incarnation and its salvific purpose. Christological errors were not merely misguided philosophical formulations but implicit denials of God's purposes for human salvation. The importance of the Incarnation came from its status as the central act of God in "his *oikonomia* for our salvation."

Unity and Trinity

Following Cyril and Athanasius, Philoxenos was strongly committed to an understanding of salvation as a form of union between the human and the divine. The purpose of the Incarnation for Philoxenos

[79] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Book of Sentences* (CSCO 9), 152.
[80] See for example: Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Book of Sentences* (CSCO 9), 33ff; Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on the Prologue of John* (CSCO 380), 31–2.
[81] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on the Prologue of John* (CSCO 380), 207.
[82] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on the Prologue of John* (CSCO 381), 26.
[83] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on Matthew and Luke* (CSCO 392), 65.
[84] See Bou Mansour, "Christologie," 550–1.

was to bring humanity and divinity into union so as to effect a renewal or re-creation of human nature. The fallen nature of humanity would be restored through its union with Christ, who as the second Adam was both creator and perfect creature. This concept of unity (ܚܕܘܬܐ) in Christ held a prominent place in Philoxenos' Christology.[85] The source of the Philoxenian emphasis on unity was not, however, Christological but Trinitarian. As de Halleux notes, according to Philoxenos all technical Christological discussion was an extension of Trinitarian theology which informed his understanding of Christ.[86] In this way the "unity" of the natures in Christ was closely tied to the "unicity" of Christ in the Trinity.[87]

Philoxenos argued that the single person of Christ could have only one nature, because he was, like the other members of the Trinity, a simple (i.e. perfect) and single hypostasis within the Trinity.[88] Philoxenos argued that to allow division in Christ (as he interpreted the dyophysite and Chalcedonian positions to be doing) was incompatible with Nicene understanding of the Son's equality with the Father. If both natures of the divided Christ were fully a part of the Trinity, then, in Philoxenos' estimation the Trinity had become a quaternity.[89] On the other hand, if Christ's humanity was not closely united with his divinity then only half of Christ was part of the Godhead.[90] In that scenario, Philoxenos would argue, the divine purpose of the Incarnation—to bring humanity into contact with God—had not been accomplished.

The Mystery of the Incarnation

Following a familiar pattern, Philoxenos' anti-dyophysite polemics tended to eventually circle back around to the paradoxical nature of the Incarnation—the fact that the ontological gulf between creature and creator had been bridged in the Incarnation. This mystery of the Incarnation served as the irreducible fideist core to Philoxenos'

[85] Cf. Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Book of Sentences* (CSCO 9), 47, and *Memre Against Habib (III–IV)*, 494–6.

[86] De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 363.

[87] Bou Mansour, "Christologie," 537.

[88] See Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 54 and 56, and also the discussion in Bou Mansour, "Christologie," 513.

[89] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks on Faith* (ed. Vaschalde), 142.

[90] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 28.

Christology, a mystery that could not be explained or elaborated through human knowledge.[91] To the monks of Senun, he observed:

> For the mystery of the union is incomprehensible, and the act of the assumption is ineffable; because that which occurs in the divine hypostasis is miraculous, and cannot be caught by the mind of creatures.[92]

In this view, the Incarnation was an act which rested beyond the limits of human knowledge.[93] This mystery was accessible only through revelation (such as the words of John 1:14) and through the act of the Incarnation itself (and thus by extension through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the divine presence in Baptism and the Eucharist).[94] The miraculous access to the Divine made possible in the Incarnation should be approached with humility and wonder and not as the subject of human explanation or speculation.[95]

Error and Multiplicity/Faith and Simplicity

Given Philoxenos' emphasis on the mystery of the Incarnation, it should come as little surprise that one of his primary charges against his opponents was the impropriety of their inquiry into a subject which was incomprehensible. In this regard, Philoxenos followed the pattern of Ephrem's pro-Nicene polemics, which accused the Arians of falling into error through illicit investigation of the Incarnation.[96] For Philoxenos the only result of such misguided human attempts to "explain" the ineffable "how" of the Incarnation would be the proliferation of errors. Against this rationalistic stance of his opponents and their multiplicity of false Christologies, Philoxenos advocated approaching the mystery of the Incarnation through the eyes of faith (which functioned for Philoxenos as a "sixth" spiritual sense).[97] With faith, Philoxenos paired simplicity as the state of the mind and the soul that enabled knowledge of Christ (who was himself, like his Father, defined as perfect in simplicity).

[91] De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 430. See also de Halleux, "Monophysitismus und Spiritualität nach dem Johanneskommentar des Philoxenos von Mabbug," *Theologie und Philosophie* 53:1 (1978), 359 *et passim*.
[92] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 9.
[93] See the discussion in Bou Mansour, "Christologie," 559–64.
[94] See Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (CSCO 231), 5–6.
[95] See de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 423 ff.
[96] Bou Mansour, "Christologie," 560.
[97] Bou Mansour, "Christologie," 564.

In this regard, Philoxenos' Christological polemic did not always offer an explicit Christology. His polemics were marked by a call to faith, simplicity and direct revelation of the mystery of the Incarnation. Although he did argue in favor of a "one-nature" miaphysite Christology, it was not the number of natures that interested him.[98] Instead, he was interested in opposing those who, guided by a spirit of error, approached the mystery of the Incarnation outside of what he considered to be the bounds of faith and simplicity.

As Philoxenos saw it, the post-Chalcedonian controversies were less a question of conflicting doctrinal formulations and more a matter of competing understandings of the nature of divine knowledge. While he did object to the conclusions of dyophysite Christology, it was its speculative method that disturbed him more. It is in this regard that the importance of epistemology for Philoxenos' Christology becomes clear. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, a variety of Nicene, anti-Eunomian, and Evagrian influences underlay Philoxenos' Christology and anchored his approach to divine knowledge.

CONTEXTS OF PRAXIS

The aim of this study is to demonstrate how the pursuit of divine knowledge linked disputes over Christology to contexts of praxis. Taking Philoxenos as a profitable and understudied source, the chapters which follow build up a cumulative context for his opposition to the Council of Chalcedon. In particular they examine how he understood the Christological disputes in relation to arenas of practice, including: the oversight of religious communities, contemplative practices, the reading of scripture, participating in the liturgical mysteries, and ascetic practices of spiritual struggle. Each chapter places Philoxenos' polemics within an increasingly wide contextual circle of praxis in order to demonstrate how

[98] Indeed he often attacks the idea of numeration within the Trinity or the incarnate Christ, c.f. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 357.

competing approaches to religious knowledge shaped his concerns over Christology.

Chapter 2: *Oikonomia*

We begin our contextualization of Philoxenos' Christological polemics by considering them through the lens of his episcopal administration. While Philoxenos has attracted scholarly attention for the vehemence and partisan nature of his polemics, few have examined his record as an administrator and strategist. His ardent opposition to heresy notwithstanding, details of his episcopal administration reveal that Philoxenos was actually highly pragmatic in the oversight of his clergy, monks, and laity—many of whom were not supportive of his theology. This chapter examines how Philoxenos and his colleague Severus of Antioch tolerated and even promoted a remarkable level of compromise when it fit their vision of divine "*oikonomia*." Philoxenos' and Severus' embrace of *oikonomia* (and its inherent pragmatism) may seem startling given their reputations as ardent polemicists, commited to the miaphysite agenda. It is, however, this very juxtaposition that suggests we must find a more nuanced understanding of how miaphysites viewed the Chalcedonian controversy.

The term *oikonomia* was used by Philoxenos to describe both episcopal administration and his vision of God's providential workings for human salvation, in particular God's condescension in the Incarnation to make divine knowledge possible. In advocating compromise in the name of *oikonomia*, Philoxenos was appealing to a concept of a higher order beyond the disputes over Christology. Accordingly, Philoxenos' involvement in the Christological controversies cannot be reduced to a single-minded attachment to a particular theological expression. At the same time, however, it is evident from Philoxenos' life and writings that these conflicts over Christological formulae were of paramount importance to him. Theology as a practice both informed and was itself informed by other practices, including contemplation, scriptural interpretation, liturgical rites, and ascetic piety. It was to this realm of praxis that Philoxenos appealed when he sought to rally support against his theological opponents. In his holistic vision of *oikonomia*, the conflict between heresy and orthodoxy was but one constituent part of a cosmic scheme of divine revelation. For Philoxenos, success in defeating Chalcedon was not merely winning an intellectual

argument over doctrine, but ensuring that laity, monastics, and clergy had right access to God.

Chapter 3: Sources of Theological Epistemology

If, for Philoxenos, both his own Christological polemics and the larger divine *oikonomia* of the Incarnation shared a common end of enabling human knowledge of the divine, then it is worth inquiring into the epistemology that shaped this vision of divine knowledge. This chapter demonstrates that Philoxenos' Christology was grounded in what he construed as a broadly Nicene anti-speculative epistemological tradition. Philoxenos' theology of divine knowledge echoed both anti-Eunomian exhortations to theological humility in Basil of Ceasarea and the Cappadocians and also Ephrem's anti-speculative theology of wonder.

In addition, Philoxenos also drew a similar anti-speculative theological epistemology from the fifth-century Syriac adaptation of Evagrius Ponticus (*c.*345–399). The roots of Philoxenos' "practical" Christology are closely tied to the reception history of Evagrius in Syriac. Philoxenos was a beneficiary of a Syriac redaction tradition which privileged the practical elements in Evagrian asceticism while obscuring or purging Evagrian tendencies toward speculation. Working in this Syriac redaction tradition, Philoxenos argued that divine knowledge was a matter of proper ascetic practice and not of human speculation. Philoxenos followed Evagrius' two-fold system of spiritual progress through ascesis. The monk began with ascetic practice (*praktike*) and used it to subdue the passions and demons which troubled his soul. Once a state of stillness had been reached, the ascetic turned away from bodily practice to spiritual knowing. The monk then progressed through stages of spiritual contemplation (*theoria)* until his soul was directly receiving infinite and ineffable knowledge of God. Philoxenos did not allow doctrinal reflection at either stage of the path to divine knowledge, because the ultimate goal was to move beyond the use of words (hence beyond theology in the doctrinal sense) to an ineffable knowledge of God.

As will become apparent in Chapters 4 through 6, a common theological epistemology tied Philoxenos' vision of divine knowledge through ascetic practice to his Christological polemics. In both cases, Philoxenos was motivated by a strong epistemological opposition to speculative attempts to know God. It was epistemologically impossible

for humans to know God through the natural means of human knowledge. For Philoxenos, practice was the true path to divine knowledge. In claiming to offer an alternate path, Christological speculation was a false means of divine knowledge that must be opposed.

Chapter 4: Reading Scripture

The next three chapters present case studies of arenas of practice which Philoxenos promoted as paths to divine knowledge. In each case, these practices are then used to contextualize Philoxenos' Christological polemics within his larger concern for access to divine knowledge. The first of these practical contexts to be considered is the role of reading and interpreting scripture. Philoxenos' invested significant energy into promoting and safeguarding the right reading and interpretation of scripture. His scriptorium in Mabbug undertook to retranslate the New Testament into Syriac to rectify certain passages of the earlier Syriac translation (the *Peshitta*) that Philoxenos felt earlier translators had left open to misinterpretation. Moreover, he also wrote his own lengthy Gospel commentaries in part to counter the authority that the dyophysite commentaries of Theodore of Mopsuestia enjoyed. In these commentaries, Philoxenos did not merely offer alternative proof texts to support his miaphysite Christology; his disagreement with Theodore went deeper. The miaphysite and dyophysite approaches to scripture reflected conflicting ways of knowing God. Philoxenos objected that in their speculative method of interpretation, the dyophysites impeded the process of simple faith through which scripture would deliver the mysteries of the Incarnation to the believer. His commentaries instructed the readers to eschew speculation. Here Philoxenos drew upon his anti-speculative theological epistemology with its roots in the Cappadocians and the Syriac version of Evagrius. In this model, scripture was an aid to ascetic contemplation and achieving mystical divine knowledge and as such was to be read in a simple and straightforward manner. Philoxenos was keen to remind those under his care that knowledge of divine things was not acquired "by research, nor discussion, nor probing, nor by controversy."[99]

In short, while Philoxenos' disagreement with the dyophysite commentators focused on interpreting Christological passages, that was

[99] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on the Prologue of John* (CSCO 380), 187.

only an initial point of conflict. At its core, the disagreement was a deeper one about the correct way to gain knowledge of God from scripture. And since for Philoxenos such divine knowledge was ultimately ineffable, commentary and explanation, as such, were inappropriate. Accordingly, we may interpret his efforts to rebuff dyophysite commentary as an extension of his endeavor to promote a wordless Evagrian contemplation of the divine.

Chapter 5: Liturgical Practice

For another context of praxis, we move from the practices of reading to the ritual mysteries of baptism and the Eucharist. As in his polemics against dyophysite commentary, Philoxenos was concerned with access to the Divine in his polemical appeal to the liturgy. Specifically, he had three related concerns about dyophysite Christology vis-à-vis the liturgy.

In the first place he continued his attack against theological investigation, per se, as incompatible with right worship. Following the position of Ephrem against the Arians, Philoxenos maintained that Christ and the Incarnation should be adored in silence, not subjected to theological speculation. In this regard, he was being true to the Evagrian system of contemplation, where knowledge of the Divine and even the divine presence are received passively and directly. A similar function occurred in the Eucharist and baptism where the faithful had direct access to the divine. This access was threatened, however, by theological error.

His second liturgical objection to the dyophysite Christology was that in setting an impenetrable boundary between God and humanity, the dyophysites ended up denying the central mysteries of the liturgy, thereby cutting off human access to the divine. Philoxenos maintained that if Christ's humanity and divinity were separate (as the dyophysites claimed), then Christ's divinity could not be present in the Eucharist. Moreover, Philoxenos argued that if humanity and divinity remained separate in Christ, then human aspirations to divinization through baptism could not be realized. In short, for Philoxenos, the implications of the dyophysite theology contravened the logic of the liturgy and the symmetry of the Incarnation.

This led him to a final, grave charge. Philoxenos maintained that in disrupting the bridge between humanity and the Divine in the mysteries, dyophysite theology hindered the work of the Holy Spirit both in Christ's Incarnation and in its indwelling in each believer. This sin

against the Holy Spirit was grievous and subject to the strongest of Philoxenos' polemical attacks.

Chapter 6: Asceticism and Spiritual Struggle

This chapter reveals how Philoxenos subsumed theological conflicts with heretics as a category within a greater "contest of the spirit."[100] In his polemics, Philoxenos urged monks to join him in the theological struggle as part of their monastic labors. Such an appeal couched in monastic vocabulary was more than a pragmatic attempt to rally monastic centers. A detailed examination of Philoxenos' main Christological arguments reveals that his response to dyophysite theology was largely drawn from the concepts of his ascetic system (i.e. the Evagrian concepts discussed in Chapter 3). In particular, three aspects of Philoxenos' anti-dyophysite polemics stand out as originating from his ascetic schema: his dogmatic approach to doctrine, his rejection of human knowledge in favor of a hermeneutic of simplicity, and his model of spiritual combat. All three of these themes are readily apparent in Philoxenos' ascetic *magnum opus*, the *Discourses*. In the context of the *Discourses*, however, these concepts were applied not to doctrinal controversy but to the monk's internal spiritual battle undertaken in pursuit of the discipleship of Christ. In this light, Philoxenos' polemic can be understood as a constituent part of a larger mystical enterprise. Contention over Christology was only one aspect, albeit a pressing one, of a larger spiritual endeavor of the discipleship of Christ.

In sum, there were concerns beyond "right doctrine" which motivated the monks to eschew the supposed error and craftiness of the heretics. Philoxenos held that heresy stood in the way of the life of perfection, which is the ultimate goal of Christ's disciples. Thus for Philoxenos, attaining and keeping the true faith were integral and essential parts of the path to perfection.

Chapter 7: Christological Polemics and Spiritual Practice

This final chapter draws on the many contexts considered through the book to show how Philoxenos explained Christological "heresy" in

[100] Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses* (ed. Budge), 1:12–18, 316.

terms of epistemological concerns. He understood the Christological controversies as part of a cosmic struggle in which God was working, through the *oikonomia* of the Incarnation, to bring humanity into divine knowledge. This progress in divine knowledge, however, faced spiritual opposition from the demonic forces who used Christological heresy as a barrier to divine knowledge. By situating the Christological controversies in this spiritual context, Philoxenos subsumed his fight against heresy within a larger struggle to attain the knowledge of God. Divine knowledge was not achieved through human understanding or doctrinal inquiry but through a variety of practices including contemplation, scripture reading, the liturgical mysteries, and ascetic discipline. Seen in this practical context, it is apparent that the Christological controversies of late-antique Syria were more than merely semantic, numerical, or doctrinal disagreements over Christ's nature(s). These conflicts represented epistemic clashes between competing paradigms of religious knowledge and practice.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the contexts under consideration in this book (the practice of Evagrian contemplation, reading scripture, liturgical action, monastic life, and the pragmatic constraints of ecclesiastical community) demonstrate that Philoxenos' participation in the late-antique Christological controversies must be understood within a framework of praxis. His objection to dyophysite Christology stemmed from more than just a desire for exactitude in doctrinal terminology. He held pastoral, liturgical, and spiritual duties that he believed were threatened by his opponents' Christology. His response was, therefore, not merely that of a theologian, but that of a bishop, and it was guided by a desire to ensure the proper functioning of the *oikonomia* of salvation. The priorities he placed on the divine *oikonomia* meant that Philoxenos had to be zealous to prevent false teaching from obscuring the *oikonomia* of the Incarnation, but also to check zeal for right doctrine when it threatened the ability of the church to play its role in the *oikonomia* of salvation. In short, Philoxenos rightly earned a reputation as an ardent opponent of heresy, but he did not do so in the service of theological erudition or controversy. The potency of his miaphysite

rhetoric had its anchor in the concrete realities of Christian practice. In the end, Philoxenos conceived of theological polemics as part of a larger ascetic and spiritual struggle, rather than simply as an intellectual exercise. In the end, miaphysite Christology offered an answer to a deeper core question than merely how many natures Christ had. Miaphysite Christology addressed the question "How does one know the divine?"—a question to which Philoxenos was determined to give a "practical" answer.

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