

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN THE SYRIAC TREATISE “THE CAUSE OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE SCHOOLS”

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ABSTRACT. The article analyzes the Doctrine of God in the Syriac treatise “The Cause of the Foundation of the Schools”, written by Barḥadbšabbā ‘Arbaya, Bishop of Hulwan. The purpose of the article is to examine the factors that influenced the formation of the original teaching on the divine role in the world and the educational process. The works of Aristotle and Porphyry, as well as the theology of Ephrem the Syrian, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Narsai, had a direct influence on this teaching. On this basis, Barḥadbšabbā builds his teaching about God as the First Cause not only of all that exists, but also of the educational process as such, arguing that God created the first school and strives to teach His creation. Using the philosophical language of Porphyry, Barḥadbšabbā establishes the superior essence of God’s being and also links His activity with events in human history. The results of the study indicate not only the impact of the aforementioned authors on Barḥadbšabbā’s work, but also the formation of an original idea, which intends to provide a theological justification for the importance of the pedagogical process in the School of Nisibis.

KEYWORDS: accident, Barḥadbšabbā, Christology, the Tree of Porphyry, School of Nisibis, substance, Theodore of Mopsuestia.

The treatise “The Cause of the Foundation of the Schools” was written at the turn of the 6th and 7th centuries and is a recorded speech given at the beginning of the academic year at the School of Nisibis. The author of the treatise is given as follows: Barḥadbšabbā ‘Arbaya, Bishop of Ḥulwān¹. The text of this document was first pub-

¹ There are two Barḥadbšabbās mentioned in the sources: Barḥadbšabbā ‘Arbaia and Barḥadbšabbā from Hulwan. There is a published text of the Syriac “History of the Holy Fathers” published by French researcher Francois Nau in 1913 and 1932, the author of which is listed as Barḥadbšabbā ‘Arbaia (Nau 1913, 489–631; Nau 1932, 177–343). Due to certain differences between the data in “The History of the Holy Fathers” and “The Cause of the

lished by Mar Addai Scher in 1907, accompanied by a French translation and critical commentary². The publisher notes that the treatise is a composite document consisting of several manuscripts, which he designates as C (manuscript 109 from the library of the monastery of Siirt, dated 1609), T (manuscript 82 from the same library, dated to the 16th century), M (manuscript Ms from the church of Mar-Gourya, Siirt diocese, date unknown), and A (manuscript edited by A. Mingana, translated by J.-B. Chabo and published in the *Journal Asiatique* in 1905)³.

Mar Addai Scher divides the treatise into seven parts:

1. Introduction (327.1–333.7)⁴;
2. Philosophical and theological reflections on God, angels, and creation (333.8–352.4);
3. The tradition of divine and pagan schools from Adam to Jesus Christ (352.5–367.9);
4. The school established by Jesus Christ and the apostles (367.10–374.12);
5. The School of Alexandria and Antiochia, the Ecumenical Councils (375.1 – 381.4);
6. The School in Edessa and Nisibis (381.5 – 393.3);
7. Conclusion (393.4 – 397.5).

The treatise became the subject of serious study by scholars immediately after its publication. Notable researchers include A. P. D'jakonov⁵, Th. Hermann⁶, E.-R. Hayes⁷, A. Vööbus⁸. Particularly noteworthy are scientists such as N. V. Pigulevskaja⁹, I. Ramelli¹⁰ and A. Becker¹¹, who conducted a thorough study of "Cause" and published important articles and monographs, using this source as one of the main historical documents on the functioning of the School of Nisibis. However, despite this, virtually all researchers ignored the analysis of the theological part of

Foundation of the Schools", historiography has come to believe that there were two authors rather than one. This opinion was first expressed by a German scholar Anton Baumstark (Baumstark 1922, 136). However, there is a view that this refers to one person who wrote these works at different periods of his life (Becker 2006, 100, 199).

² Scher 1907, 321–404. In the following, the title of this document will be referred to as "Cause."

³ *Journal Asiatique* de juillet-août 1905, 157–177.

⁴ The numbers are taken from the text in A. Scher's publication (note 2).

⁵ D'jakonov 1913, 597–629.

⁶ Hermann 1926, 89–122.

⁷ Hayes 1930.

⁸ Vööbus 1965.

⁹ Pigulevskaja 1979.

¹⁰ Ramelli 2004, 127–181. Ilaria Ramelli also prepared an annotated translation of the treatise into Italian: Ramelli 2005, 127–170.

¹¹ Becker 2006. He also prepared an annotated translation of the treatise into English, which will be used here when quoting the text of the treatise: Becker 2008, 86–162.

the treatise, merely describing it in general terms or evaluating it from a philosophical point of view. This article will attempt to at least partially fill this gap and analyze the main theological idea put forward by Barḥadbšabbā, as well as show its significance in the context of the entire treatise.

Substance and order of God

It must be noted that the entirety of the first half of the second part of the treatise centers the question of the Divine essence and is clearly apologetic in nature. Although Barḥadbšabbā addresses his speech to an audience (and readers) sympathetic to his views, it is fundamentally important for him to explore the question of the essence of God. To convey his idea, the author begins his treatise with an allegory. Referring to Jesus Christ's parable about a man who built his house on a rock (Matthew 7:24-27), he says that "*wise architects set a firm stone in the foundation of their building*"¹². According to Barḥadbšabbā, this is precisely how one should behave when speaking about God. In this part, discourse about the Divine resembles a building, which must rest on a solid foundation. According to Barḥadbšabbā, the foundation must be laid with three "stones": *thanksgiving* (or "*grace*", ܬܝܒܘܬܐ *ṭaybūtā*) *to the Creator, His inscrutable wisdom* (ܬܚܝܡܬܐ *ḥēkmtā*) *and His invincible power* (ܬܗܝܠܐ *ḥaylā*). All these qualities are present in one form or another in ordinary people, but thanksgiving is hindered by evil, wisdom by foolishness, and power by weakness. Here, the author emphasizes that nothing hinders God and His attributes, since He is perfect. To validate the point, Barḥadbšabbā quotes a large number of biblical quotations to support his words. Hence, the author says: "*Because of this it is also right for us to observe carefully these (attributes) of God and whatsoever seems to be troublesome to us let us cast from our mind, while we scrutinize these (attributes) of God, by whose grace without request... us into being*".¹³

This statement, in addition to indicating the basis of his argument, also makes it clear that the question of the Divine essence is an important part of his treatise. Barḥadbšabbā chooses the second part of the treatise as the primary place to discuss this question. However, unlike the introduction, this part begins not with biblical quotations, but with a discussion of the ideas presented in Porphyry the Phoenician's *Isagoge*, and their theological interpretation:

¹² Cause 327.1.

¹³ Cause 329.8–10.

Everything that exists (ܟܠ ܗܝܐ *kōl 'itaw(hy)*) is comprehended and investigated in three orders (ܬܟܣܐ *taksē*): either "according to the order", or "above the order", or "below the order"; just as we say about a human being that he is soul and body; for this is said about him "according to the order"; or we say that he is God; and this is "above the order" in respect to him (i.e. the human being); or we call him bull, eagle, worm, and flea, and these things are "below the order" to him¹⁴.

This line of thought refers the audience (or readers) to the aforementioned work by Porphyry, which marked the beginning of the study of philosophy at the School of Nisibis. In the book, he discusses the interaction between genus (γένος) and species (εἶδος), indicating that substance (οὐσία) is a genus within which there are species. Porphyry generally identifies five main logical characteristics related to substance: genus (γένος), species (εἶδος), difference (διαφορά)¹⁵, property (ἰδιος)¹⁶ and accident (συμβεβηκός)¹⁷. The latter three characteristics are relevant to the species, and the species, accordingly, is directly related to the genus. He also notes that nothing existed prior to substance, and therefore, it is a genus in the highest degree, while "man" is a genus in relation to the species¹⁸.

In the passage quoted above, Barḥadbšabbā uses the word ܬܟܣܐ *taksā* derived from the Greek τάξις (order) to denote the categories by which one can talk about the substance of anything. He further points out that one can only talk about God "according to the order" and "below the order" because there is no substance above the Divine.

Further in the text, in order to emphasize the qualitative difference between the Creator and the creation, Barḥadbšabbā applies to God the name "TAM WHO I AM" to God. However, unlike the Peshitta (Ex. 3:14), where this term is represented by the transliterated Tetragrammaton (Syr. ܬܡܪܐ *'ehyeh*, Heb. יהוה YHWH), in the treatise the word ܬܝܐ *'ityā* (lit. *the existing*) is used, which is equivalent to the

¹⁴ Cause 333.8–12.

¹⁵ The difference is necessary for qualitative separation by type. For example, humans and horses are living beings, but humans are rational, while horses are not. Here and below are examples taken directly from Porphyry's work.

¹⁶ The property is one that is possessed by a single specific species. For example, humans have the ability to engage in science, heal, and laugh, while horses have the ability to neigh.

¹⁷ The accident is one that can appear and disappear without causing any qualitative change in its owner. Examples include the color of human skin or the plumage of birds. Porphyry also includes sleeping as a separable accident.

¹⁸ Isag. 2a.25–42.

Greek τὸ ὄν¹⁹. Its use is very contextual, as this Divine Name appears only in the passage devoted to reflection on the order of all that exists²⁰ and occurs seven times, creating an interesting play on words. Reflecting on the existence of things (ܐܡܪܐܝܬܐ *'itaw(hy)*, lit. he is existing), which can be anything from stone to man, Barḥadbšabbā employs terminology from Porphyry's *Isagoge*. The Greek verbs εἶναι (*to be, existing*) and γίγνεσθαι (*remain, come into being*) are translated by Barḥadbšabbā as ܐܡܪܐܝܬܐ *'itaw(hy)* and ܠܐܡܐ *hwā* (*"to be, remain"*). And to illustrate the difference between the Creator and creation, the author again refers the listener (and reader) to Porphyry: if *come into being* (ܠܐܡܐ *hwāyā*) precedes *existence* (ܐܡܪܐܝܬܐ *'itaw(hy)*), since the former is the cause of the latter, then the cause of *come into being* is the *Existent and Eternal* (ܠܐܡܐܝܬܐ ܠܐܡܐ *'ityā wamtūmāyā*), Who is as real as His creation, but is Existent Being, not "entity that his come into being".

Such a use of the word ܠܐܡܐ *'ityā* is not an invention of Barḥadbšabbā. For example, in the theology of Ephrem the Syrian, this word has enormous significance and reflects the existential nature of God²¹. For him, the terms ܠܐܡܐ *'ityā* and ܠܐܡܐܝܬܐ *'itūtā* (*essence*) are synonymous, and he therefore uses them both to refer to the Divine substance and to speak of God as *"I AM WHO I AM"* (Ex. 3:14). U. Possekel²² offers as an example of such usage a passage from Ephrem the Syrian's "Hymns Against Heresies":

Moses testified for us, for he did not give to another one
The name ܠܐܡܐܝܬܐ *'itūtā*. They were called "gods,"
But they were not called ܠܐܡܐ *'ityā*...
To Moses (God) revealed the name: God called Himself ܠܐܡܐ *'ehyeh*,
Which is the name of the ܠܐܡܐܝܬܐ *'itūtā*. And never did (God) give
This name to another one, as he gave his (other) names
To the many, so that by the one name, which He left out
He would make known that only He is ܠܐܡܐ *'ityā* and not another one²³.

¹⁹ Nöldeke 1904, 148–149.

²⁰ Cause 333.8–335.13.

²¹ For more details on the concept of ܠܐܡܐ *'ityā* in Ephrem the Syrian see: Zabolotnyj 2020, 112–116. Possekel 2009, 215–217.

²² Ibid., 216.

²³ Beck 1957, 204.

This example shows that, although Barḥadbšabbā uses ܐܬܝܐ *'ityā* in line with its established theological meaning within the Church of the East, he nevertheless places it in a philosophical context as well. Within the context of the Divine essence this term is contrasted with another – ܐܬܐܘܐ *'itaw(hy)*, which refers exclusively to creation, thereby elevating the Creator and the Existent Being above creation and essences.

However, Barḥadbšabbā not only modifies Porphyry's idea regarding the position of substance, but also draws upon what later came to be known as “The Tree of Porphyry” to justify such an elevation of the Divine substance:

Substance (οὐσία) is itself a genus (γένος); under this is body; and under body animate body, and under which is animal; under animal is rational animal, under which is man; under man are Socrates, Plato and particular men. Of these substance (οὐσία) is the highest genus (γένος), and it is a genus (γένος) only, while man is the lowest species (εἶδος), and it is a species (εἶδος) only. Body is a species of substance but a genus of animate body. Animate body is a species of body but a genus of animal. Animal is a species of animal body, but a genus of rational animal. Rational animal is a species of animal, but a genus of man. Man is a species of rational animal, but it is not also a genus of particular man. It is a species only. Every species which is predicated immediately prior to individual will be a species only, never a genus²⁴.

The gradation by genus can be schematically represented as follows: Substance – Body – Animate body – Animal – Rational animal – Man. The substance determines the genus of all subsequent manifestations of this essence—from an indefinite body to man in general, within which there is a division into species. Hence the image of a tree: the genus as the trunk and the species as the branches of the tree. A. Becker notes that this passage from Porphyry's work was quite well known and was even copied separately from the main text. This is evidenced by independent manuscripts that contain this particular passage in the Syriac translation. For instance, A. Becker cites manuscript Add 14658 from the catalog of Syriac manuscripts in the British Museum²⁵, which contains the text of “The Tree of Porphyry” in a translation by Paul the Persian dating to the 6th century²⁶.

As mentioned above, it is on this idea, expounded by Porphyry, that Barḥadbšabbā builds his argument concerning the Divine essence that transcends all else. With this question, which is of paramount importance, he introduces his

²⁴ Isag. 2a.13–25 (trans. E. W. Warren).

²⁵ Wright 1872, 1156.

²⁶ Becker 2008, 174.

main theological reflections in order to indicate the point from which the discussion he has planned must begin. First and foremost, the following point is emphasized:

But because that (divine) essence (ܐܬܘܬܐܪ ʾitūtā) is such a thing as this, let us see in what way we receive learning concerning it, and what is the difference between creatures and their creator. For although the names "created"²⁷ (ܒܪܝܐ bāryā) and "creature" (ܒܝܕܐ ʾbīdā) are general, they nevertheless include under themselves many genera (ܓܝܢܝܐ ܓēnsē) and species (ܐܕܫܐ ʾādšē). Just as the name "spirit", "body", "nature", or "exists", although it is equal in its external naming capacity, nevertheless each one of them applies to many different, dissimilar, various, and unequal things; thus also the names "created" and "coming into being" (ܠܘܬܐ ܠܘܬܐ hwāyā), although equal, there are nevertheless many things under them²⁸.

Barḥadbšabbā provides an example that establishes a kind of bridge between "The Tree of Porphyry" and the main theological idea toward which the author leads the reader. He uses the two words *creating* (ܒܪܝܐ bāryā) and *creature* (ܒܝܕܐ ʾbīdā) to illustrate how Porphyry's idea of genus and species works. To accomplish this, he draws on two important ideas, the origins of which again lead back to Aristotle's *Categories*. The first idea, reflected in the commentary on this work attributed to Ammonius, concerns polyonyms – words that have different names but the same meaning. "If they (i.e., words) have the same meaning but different names, then they are called polyonyms (πολυώνυμα)".²⁹ Barḥadbšabbā employs words that are functionally similar, as they describe a certain agent, but are essentially completely different, as ܒܪܝܐ bāryā can only refer to the Deity. The second idea highlights Aristotle's thesis on the homonymity of words, with which his work *Categories* begins: "Those things are called homonymous (ὁμώνυμα) which have only a common name, but the corresponding concept-definition of their essence – is different".³⁰ Barḥadbšabbā develops the idea through a number of nouns that can refer to different things and, as a result, change their meaning. For example, the Syriac word ܠܘܬܐ rūḥā can mean either 'spirit' or 'wind', depending on the context. It is noteworthy that Barḥadbšabbā directly borrows vocabulary from Porphyry:

²⁷ In this case, we tend to disagree with A. Becker's translation of this word, which is an active participle and should mean 'creating'. It is in this sense that it will be used below in our study.

²⁸ Cause 337.7–13.

²⁹ In Cat. 16.4–6.

³⁰ Cat. 1a.1–2.

the Syriac words ܓܝܢܫܐ *gēnsā* and ܐܕܫܐ *ʾādšā* represent the Greek γένος ἢ εἶδος. Emphasizing the earlier idea that coming into being precedes existence, he replaces the word ܒܝܕܐ *ʾbīdā* with *coming into being* (ܠܡܝܬܐ *hwāyā*), again employing the idea of polyonyms³¹. Nevertheless, Barḥadbšabbā develops the idea further. He reinterprets “The Tree of Porphyry”, thereby drawing a conclusion of crucial importance for the entire treatise:

Since everything that exists (ܡܠܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ *kōl ʾitaw(hy)*) is either substance (ܡܠܬܐ *ʾusyā*) or accident (ܓܝܕܫܐ *gēdšā*), each of these divisions is divided into many species (ܐܕܫܐ *ʾādšē*), these (entities) that are included under it. Therefore, all substance (ܡܠܬܐ *ʾusyā*) that exists is either corporeal or incorporeal. Body too is divided into the many distinctions that are under it: that is, then, the ensouled body and the one without soul, the one endowed with sense and the other deprived of it. Thus also the ensouled body is arranged into other distinctions: the body that is living and the one that is not, the one that moves, and the other deprived of movement; and again that one that is living and moves is divided also into other distinctions that are under it, that is, the rational and the non-rational, and again the rational into the spiritual and the psychic, and the non-rational into the living and the non-living; and again the spiritual is divided also into the limited and the unlimited, the one eternal and the other temporal, the one the cause of all things, the other is the effect that is from the cause of all things, which is (ܡܠܬܐ *ʾitaw(hy)*) God³².

A notable play on words occurs here. Denoting *everything that exists* using the Syriac expression ܡܠܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ *kōl ʾitaw(hy)*, Barḥadbšabbā divides them into two categories, employing very distinctive terms. For *substance* he uses the word ܡܠܬܐ *ʾusyā* – a direct borrowing from the Greek οὐσία. The second category is

³¹ The idea that come into being precedes existence is found in ancient philosophy. For example, in the *Timaeus*, Plato puts the following words into the mouth of the eponymous hero: “For there were no days and nights and months and years before the heaven was created, but when he constructed the heaven he created them also. They are all parts of time, and the past and future are created species of time, which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to the eternal essence; for we say that he “was,” he “is”, he “will be”, but the truth is that “is” alone is properly attributed to him, and that “was” and “will be” only to be spoken of becoming in time, for they are motions, but that which is immovably the same cannot become older or younger by time, nor ever did or has become, or hereafter will be, older or younger, nor is subject at all to any of those states which affect moving and sensible things and of which generation is the cause” (Ti. 37e–38a, trans. B. Jowett. The Greek text: Hermann 1866).

³² Cause 337.13–338.10.

designated by the word ܓܕܫܐ *gēdšā*, literally *accident* thereby referring listeners and readers directly to Aristotle, who introduced into philosophy the term συμβεβηκός, which Porphyry used in his work to denote the characteristic of property. For Aristotle συμβεβηκός is a characteristic that is possessed impermanently³³, such as human pallor, which fades, or the shape of a metal object, which may change for various reasons. Since Barḥadbšabbā's goal is to demonstrate the superiority of the Divine essence, he presents the concept of ܐܬܐܘܪ ܝܬܐܘܪ (*hy*) as fundamental when speaking about God, relegating Porphyry's οὐσία alongside Aristotle's συμβεβηκός to a subordinate role. For the Syriac author, it is important to show that substance and accident, despite their qualitative difference, possess not only 'existence' but also 'coming into being', while God merely exists, never having come into being, since He is the cause of the remain and existence of everything. The importance of such a statement lies in the fact that Barḥadbšabbā, throughout his treatise, demonstrates that God is the *Cause* not only of the founding of schools, but of everything that surrounds us. His first argument derives from philosophy, and only afterward from theology and history.

Divine Names

The treatise presents a rather extensive list of Divine Names. The first of these appears already in the first paragraph – the author uses the word ܐܒܘܕܐ *ʾābūdā* and its synonym ܒܪܝܐ *bārōyā*. Barḥadbšabbā uses them almost equally: ܐܒܘܕܐ *ʾābūdā* appears six times and ܒܪܝܐ *bārōyā* seven times. Both terms appear in the Peshitta, but with completely different meanings. While ܒܪܝܐ *bārōyā* (1 Pet. 4:19; Rom. 1:25³⁴) refers exclusively to God and can be translated as *Creator* or *Maker* (from Syr. ܒܪܐ *brā* – to create), ܐܒܘܕܐ *ʾābūdā* is a much more polysemous term. Coming from Syriac ܒܕܐ *bad* (*to work, to do*), it can refer to *Maker* (Job 4:17; Isaiah 27:11), *builder* (Heb. 11:10), and *doer* (James 1:25), with only the first two examples referring to God.

Although both terms may be translated in the same way, Barḥadbšabbā uses them rather selectively and in specific contexts. For the author, God as ܐܒܘܕܐ *ʾābūdā* is presented as the Creator – the One is literally the cause for the coming

³³ Met. V.30.1.

³⁴ Barḥadbšabbā quotes this text in 363.6. We used the following as our main biblical text New Revised Standard Version.

into being of various things: time³⁵, creation³⁶, intelligence³⁷ and indeed everything³⁸. By applying this term, Barḥadbšabbā draws attention to the function of the Deity—He is Who created this world and everything in it. In a certain sense, God as ܐܒܘܕܐ *ʾābūdā* assumes the role of a Neoplatonic Demiurge, especially since ܐܒܘܕܐ *ʾābūdā* could be used in Syriac literature to designate Him. An example of this can be found in Theodore bar Kōnī's work, *Liber Scholiorum*³⁹, composed at the end of the 8th century, where the following mention occurs:

Porphry testified about Plato, saying that he spoke about the divine nature existing in three states. "The highest, he says, is the good God (ܐܠܠܗܐ *ʾallāhā*), second after him is the Demiurge (ܐܒܘܕܐ *ʾābūdā*), and third is the Soul of the world. For he says that divinity extends to the Soul"⁴⁰.

Here, bar Kōnī cites Porphyry's lost work, "History of Philosophy", which survives only in the citations by various authors. One such author is Cyril of Alexandria, who, in his work *Contra Julianum*⁴¹ cites this very passage, where the Greek word δημιουργός is explicitly used⁴². It is worth noting that for Barḥadbšabbā, this reinterpretation of the Neoplatonic triad in relation to the Christian concept of the

³⁵ Cause 328.7.

³⁶ Cause 327.4; 337.8.

³⁷ Cause 341.3; 344.13.

³⁸ Cause 365.12.

³⁹ Scher 1910.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 292–293. It can be compared with the statement of Numenius of Apamea: "Since Plato knew that people know only the Demiurge, and the first Mind, called the Being in itself, is completely unknown to them, therefore he spoke to them as if someone were saying: 'O people, what you consider the Mind is not the first, but before it there is another Mind, more ancient and more divine.'" See: Bradshaw 2012, 103.

⁴¹ Burguère & Éviéux 1985, 200.

⁴² Porphyry's missing text raises certain questions regarding the authenticity of this quotation. According to S. V. Mesyats, Cyril of Alexandria does not quote, but rather paraphrases and supplements Porphyry in a distinctly Christian vein. This is indicated by the difference in their understanding of the term 'hypostasis'. While for Porphyry it signifies the works of the One, for Cyril it is the embodiment of the Divine substance. (Mesyats 2013, 327–334). However, this raises a question regarding this same statement by Theodore bar Kōnī. In his work, he directly accuses Cyril of Alexandria of heresy and denounces him in every way, defending Nestorius and his teachings (Scher 1910, 337–340). Could he, then, have used Cyril's works and quoted Porphyry through them? Or is this quotation authentic? Unfortunately, until Porphyry's own text is found, the question remains open.

Deity is embodied in the One God, Who is God in the fullest sense of the word. He is also the cause of the creation of this world—unlike the Demiurge, He is not something separate from Himself, yet He is open to His creation. In this sense, the author also demonstrates another important aspect of God: God as Creator acts as an object of knowledge. The word ܒܪܝܐ *bārōyā* is used to convey this idea. According to Barḥadbšabbā, God not only brings creation into being, but He desires that His creation come to know Him. This idea is present in all seven occurrences of the term: it applies to angels and humans together, as well as to angels⁴³ and humans⁴⁴ separately.

Given this context, it is important to note that Barḥadbšabbā also presents God as a *Teacher* (ܡܠܦܗܢܐ *mallphānā*), Who rises above creation not only by virtue of being its Creator, but in order to impart His teaching to it. The term "Teacher" in reference to God appears nine times in the text from 349.3 to 374.11, in the section describing the process of creation and development of Divine schools, where teachers (ܡܠܦܗܢܐ *mallphānē*), appointed by God for instruction are also mentioned. However, in the parallel tradition of false schools, teachers also exist, but their qualitative difference lies in the fact that for Barḥadbšabbā, they are not teachers in essence, but merely bear the name. An example of this is the story of the golden calf (Ex. 32) retold in the treatise⁴⁵. Moses, whom God had appointed as the school's *steward* (ܪܒܝܐ *rabbaytā*), heard the noise and descended to the Israelites. He saw them worshipping a golden calf, which the tractate calls the "*deaf-mute teacher*" (ܡܠܦܗܢܐ ܚܪܫܐ *mallphānā ḥaršā*), Moses then "struck" this teacher and destroyed him, for which God granted him the status of school teacher. The story carries not only moral significance, but also describes the importance of the status of teacher – such a position must be sanctioned from above, otherwise it is not legitimate, since God was the original teacher.

This is not the only example of God sharing His name or status with His creation. In 351.3–352.4, the Creator, here called "the Lord" (ܡܪܝܬܐ *mārūtā*) rewards diligent angels and grants them various ranks⁴⁶. One of them is called "the Lords of the Nations" (ܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܐܠܐܝܡܐ *mārūtā d-al'ammē*)⁴⁷. It must be noted that the term ܡܪܝܬܐ *mārūtā* appears only twice in the treatise, with both instances being

⁴³ Cause 348.11; 349.11; 350.9.

⁴⁴ Cause 363.6.

⁴⁵ Cause 357.4–359.2.

⁴⁶ Here, Barḥadbšabbā clearly uses Pseudo-Dionysius's work "On the Celestial Hierarchy" with certain modifications. He cites the same nine ranks, but does not divide them into three degrees, distinguishing them only functionally.

⁴⁷ In Pseudo-Dionysius – ἐξουσίαι ("authorities").

limited to this passage. Thus, the text once again presents an image of God sharing a part of His powers as a reward for certain achievements – in this instance, for diligence and success in learning.

It is clear that Barḥadbšabbā employs Divine names from two perspectives. Quite evidently, he operates entirely within the tradition of the Church of the East, and the parallels with the example of Ephrem the Syrian's *memra* present here illustrate this well. However, the author adopts a demonstrably selective approach. Some names are used by Barḥadbšabbā rarely, yet their use is grounded not only in literary context but also in historical and cultural contexts, linking heavenly and earthly realms and drawing parallels between Divine and human teaching. The latter, however, is only considered legitimate when it functions within the Divine Plan.

The Attributes of God

In addition to the Divine properties mentioned above—such as wisdom, grace and power, it is also worth drawing attention to three theological components that most clearly reflect the Divine attributes in the examined treatise: the Divine abode, the comprehensibility of God and the manifestation of God to His creation (theophany).

The Abode of God is not mentioned in the treatise, but is described indirectly through such terms as *heaven* (ܫܡܝܐ *šmayā*), *highest heaven* (ܫܡܝܐ ܥܠܝܐ *šmayē 'alyē*), *firmament* (ܒܝܬ ܩܝܐ *bēt rqi'ā*), *highest vaults* (ܩܦܝܦܗ *gphīphē 'alyē*), *highest chambers* (ܩܦܝܦܗ ܥܠܝܐ *trīqlīnē 'alyē*). However, according to the treatise, during the creation of the Universe, God is present in the heavenly *school* (ܡܕܪܫܐ *'ēskolā*), where he teaches the angels how He creates the world. The influence of the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia is noticeable here. His works contain ideas that contributed to the emergence of the East Syriac version of the Divine cosmology of the educational process. In his commentaries on the book of Genesis, Theodore writes that, in creating the world, God taught the angels the secrets of creation and the Universe, and also explained to them that He is the cause of the existence of all things⁴⁸. Based on this idea, Barḥadbšabbā develops the doctrine of Divine schools, which originate with the angels, then descend to earth for man, continuing this tradition all the way to the Nisibis Academy⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ Sachau 1869, 3–4.

⁴⁹ For more information on the influence of Theodore of Mopsuestia, as well as other authors, on this concept, see: Antonyuk 2024, 596–609.

This also parallels Theodore of Mopsuestia's two-stage view of creation. He argued that Gen. 1:1 describes the creation of the Universe, while the subsequent narrative describes the creation of earth. This doctrine is not original to Theodore—for example, Basil the Great espoused a similar view⁵⁰. However, an important development in Theodore's thought is his emphasis on the reason for such division. According to him, God intended this division for the purpose of educating angels. And although Theodore does not specifically mention a school, this idea is actively developed by Barḥadbšabbā. Although God possesses heavenly abodes, He devotes Himself entirely to teaching His creation the foundations of this world and His law. After the angels are instructed, God also creates schools for humans as well. However, He no longer resides there, but remaining present as an educator, gradually delegating His authority to humans.

The very creation of first a heavenly and then earthly school already suggests the idea of the necessity of knowledge of the Divine. However, the matter is somewhat more complex. Barḥadbšabbā expresses a view of God as simultaneously knowable and unknowable. He draws attention to several important points concerning the comprehensibility of the Creator. First, only three entities can comprehend God: God Himself⁵¹, angels, and humans⁵². Second, God can be known to a certain degree, since it is impossible to comprehend Him completely. Moreover, Barḥadbšabbā says that man only knows God when he recognizes the incomprehensibility of the Divine: *"For also what we should know that we do not know, in my opinion, transcends knowledge. Therefore, he who has determined that he has attained knowledge even about things that are unknowable – an abortion is better than him, since it is complete stupidity⁵³. But if he knew God as unknowable, this one would*

⁵⁰ Bednas 2025, 6–12.

⁵¹ "But he existed alone existentially, while having an essence, rich in blessings, and he abided in joyous light, just as also now, being ineffable and inscrutable, yet he knew himself and he was known from himself and through himself and about himself, just as also now, although it is not possible for that manner, by which he knew himself, to be spoken or conceived of by reasoning beings" (Cause 335.6–10).

⁵² "Nevertheless, although everything that exists is divided into all these distinctions, learning about the creator and creation is only found in these two orders, I mean angels and human beings" (Cause 340.1–3).

⁵³ The image of a miscarriage was quite common in Gnostic literature. According to Gnostic teaching, the miscarriage of the archons, the demiurge Sakla (from syr. ܫܠܐ *skālā* "foolish") created Adam and Eve. It is significant that here Barḥadbšabbā compares a person who possesses "secret" knowledge to a miscarriage and calls such a person a fool. More on this: Hosroev 2016, 66; Smagina 2011, 128.

be known by God as wise".⁵⁴ And third, the author describes possible ways of knowing the Deity, which requires closer examination.

For Barḥadbšabbā, knowledge of God occurs on four planes, which can express not only a spatial but also a temporal aspect. They can be designated as follows: heavenly (348.4-352.4), biblical (352.5-374.12), historical (375.1-381.4), and contemporary (384.5-393.3) for the author. Each of these eras is connected with an important event: the heavenly is connected with the biblical through the descent of the school of angels to earth, the biblical with the historical through the coming of Jesus Christ, and the historical with the contemporary of the author through the transfer of the school from Edessa to Nisibis. Moreover, in each of these planes, study of God is rewarded, as indicated in paragraph 3.1.1.1, while resistance to God is punished or, at a minimum, openly condemned. From the point of the heavenly plane, it appears that the process by which creation comes to know its Creator is initiated by the Deity Himself. He creates angels, who witnessed the creation of the earth. This model is used by God to teach the angels His truth and essence. Diligent angels were rewarded, and the negligent were expelled. Such motifs were not new in the Church of the East; in particular, references to this form of interaction between the Creator and creation are present, for example, in the memres of Narsai, who, in turn, develops the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia in his works.

In the biblical plane, God also continues to interact with His creation through schools, but this time with people, not angels. Here, episodes of theophany, when God directly reveals Himself to man, are presented in the most detailed manner. Acting as a teacher, the Creator literally teaches Adam to read, demands payment for his education from Cain and Abel in the form of sacrifices, appoints Moses as a head of a school, etc. An organized chain of transmission of the school tradition from one patriarch to the next is formed. However, when the narrative reaches King Solomon, he is said to have 'founded' the school, although it is clearly part of the Divine pedagogical tradition. The same is said of Elisha and the 'other prophets', who founded schools according to the same principles. Thus, we see a functional transformation: God, acting as a teacher, teaches people; then, beginning with Moses, He delegates a part of His powers to people, and, beginning with Solomon, people themselves act as teachers in Divine schools.

As for the historical plane, Barḥadbšabbā creates a somewhat different image. It begins after the description of the coming of Jesus Christ, His ministry, and the work of the apostles. Then, Barḥadbšabbā focuses exclusively on human activity. In other words, people should already be able to distinguish truth from falsehood. The audience is given a description of Philo's error and the heresy of Arius, which

⁵⁴ Cause 337.4-6.

the author characterizes as Alexandria's clear deviation from the Divine Plan. The focus then shifts eastward toward Antioch, specifically to the 'three Greek teachers': Diodorus of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Nestorius of Constantinople. There is no direct mention of any reward from God here, but the way in which Barḥadbšabbā constructs descriptions and expresses his attitude toward certain characters in his treatise suggests that belonging to the Divine tradition is, first, correct and righteous, and, second, should evoke a favorable response from listeners and readers. In a similar manner, in the author's contemporary he describes the transfer of the school from Edessa to Nisibin, and speaks about all the heads of the schools, starting with Narsai and ending with the then still living Henana of Adiabene.

It is also worth noting that each of these time planes have antagonists—those who, for various reason, failed to follow the path of knowledge of God. In the heavenly plane, these are the negligent angels who studied poorly and failed to follow God's commands. They were expelled from the heavenly school. In the following time plane, the biblical, the main antagonists are the founders of false schools, led by Plato, whom Barḥadbšabbā reproaches for the fact that he *"knew God, he did not praise and confess him as God, but he was lacking in his thoughts and darkened in misunderstanding."*⁵⁵ The author also lists other Greek philosophers, as well as the Chaldean, Indian, and Zoroastrian schools. Here, and in subsequent eras, there is no direct Divine punishment, only the fact of deviation from God's will. In the historical plane, Alexandria and its theologians function as the antagonists, whose teachings led to the heresy of Philo and Arius, the expulsion of Nestorius from Constantinople, and the transfer of the school from Edessa to Nisibis. In the author's contemporary plane, the antagonists are the unnamed targets of his polemical works: Zoroastrian priests, Jews, and heretics. The table below provides schematic representation of the time planes outlined above.

This concept is evidently dictated by the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia. Within the framework of his Christology, Theodore develops a doctrine of two ages: the first – temporal, changeable, and the second – eternal, unchangeable. The first age is the period from the moment of creation to the Second Coming of Christ, when imperfection prevails in the world, but man has the opportunity to know good and evil through instruction in God's law. The second age is when man has attained immortality and is freed from sin, made possible by the resurrection of Jesus Christ⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ Cause 364.3–4. The author here uses a singular paraphrase of Rom. 1:21.

⁵⁶ Gur'ev 1890, 266–272.

Table 1

**Distribution of time places in the treatise
“The Cause of the Foundation of the Schools”**

	Heavenly	Biblical	Historical	Contemporary for the author
Protagonists	Obedient angels	The Patriarchs, Kings of Israel, and Prophets	The Fathers of Syriac Church	The teachers of the School of Nisibis
Antagonists	Negligent angels	The founders of false schools	The Alexandrian School and Its Theological Influence	Their opponents
Transitional event	The expulsion of some angels from the heavenly school	Events of the New Testament: the coming of Jesus Christ and the ministry of the apostles	The transfer of the school from Edessa to Nisibis	

W. F. Macomber notes certain characteristics of this first century, which Barḥadbšabbā focuses on. He argues that Theodore taught the Divine presence in history through certain signs that could serve as landmarks on the path to knowledge of God: the death of Abel, the ascension of Enoch and Elijah, the story of Jeremiah, etc. The coming of Christ into this world, although the most important sign and the beginning of the second age, is merely one link in the chain of man's journey to God⁵⁷. In this sense, Barḥadbšabbā's history of the first age is a process of knowledge of God and theophany through the Divine schools, by means of which humans are instructed. Thus, it becomes clear that for the author of the treatise, the schools themselves serve as such signs, while those that contradict this tradition are seen adversaries of God. R. Norris argues that the principal task of humanity in the first age is submission to Divine law. Through this process of maturation and instruction, human free will comes to wisely distinguish good from evil. The law becomes the primary instrument of instruction, intended to teach

⁵⁷ Macomber 1964, 5–38, 363–384.

theory to the mind and practice to the mortal body⁵⁸. This dualism appears quite frequently in the treatise, manifesting itself typologically in the theoretical and practical aspects of the educational process.

To summarize, it can be said that theophany – the encounter between God and man – occurs precisely through the educational process. God reveals Himself to humans in order to teach them His law and entrust them with the stewardship of His schools. Moreover, the closer the time period to the moment of creation is, the more direct this encounter becomes. The culmination of theophany is the coming of Jesus Christ, after which God's explicit presence in history ceases. From this point on, responsibility for teaching people God's law is entrusted to the Church and the schools established within the Divine tradition.

Christology

The teaching on Jesus Christ in the treatise does not have a polemical character. This is hardly surprising: if the text of the treatise reproduces a public speech delivered at the beginning of the academic year at the Academy of Nisibis, then it is directed toward an internal audience that shares the author's views. Nevertheless, the Christological material contained in the document includes a number of important aspects that deserve attention.

It is noteworthy that Barḥadbšabbā makes a very clear functional distinction between the Persons of the Trinity. The description of creation and the events of the Old Testament mentions exclusively the activity of God the Father, and with the coming of Jesus Christ – God the Son. Because of this distinction, the treatise contains a significant passage devoted to the person of Christ⁵⁹, which begins in a significant manner:

On account of this, the circumstances demanded that the illuminated mind, the great teacher, the eternal radiance, the living Word of God, should come. He renewed the first school of his father, which the errant ones had corrupted⁶⁰.

The name of Jesus Christ is not mentioned here, nor does the text refer to Him as Lord or God. Instead, a number of rather remarkable titles, as well as his connection to the Father through the renewal of the school. Jesus is named *illuminated mind* (ܡܕܐ ܢܗܝܪܐ *mad'ā nahīrā*). This word for *mind* appears repeatedly in the

⁵⁸ Norris 1963, 166–168.

⁵⁹ Cause 367.10–374.12.

⁶⁰ Cause 367.10–12.

text of the treatise in a synonymic set of terms (ܡܕܐܢܐ *mad'ā*, ܝܕܐܬܐ *yda'tā*) and can refer to both an independent agent and one who is participating in the Divine essence. Moreover, a similar title applied to the mind as something created by God – ܡܕܐܢܐ ܡܠܝܠܐ ܡܢ ܡܕܐܢܐ *mad'ā mlilā w-nahīrā* (*rational and illuminated mind*). When the passage is cited in full, an important point becomes apparent:

Therefore, it is the lot of this rational and illuminated mind, which is the likeness of God, its Creator, to dwell in two places: the one, upon the earth while clothed in a corporeal garment, going about within a fleshy enclosure; the other, in turn, up above – the portion fell to it that it might walk within the open plain of air; for such as these are all the spiritual orders⁶¹.

This passage includes an interesting typological reference to Jesus Christ. The mind dwells in two places: on earth in corporeal form and 'above' as if the 'spiritual orders'. This resembles a reference to the two natures of Christ–human and Divine–with the only difference being that Jesus was not 'in the likeness of God, his Creator'. Barḥadbšabbā writes about Him as the Lord and as the Son of God. This point will be discussed in more detail below. Moreover, the 'mind' in this context can also be associated both with man, who is in the likeness of God and creation of the Creator, and with angels, who are 'spiritual orders'. Nevertheless, the significance of the passage is in that it typologically links creation and the Creator, although, Jesus Christ is not called 'the Creator' in the treatise. However, by the mind, He is also linked to God the Father, who is once called *intelligence which knows all* (ܝܕܐܬܐ ܗܝܟܡܐܬ ܟܠܐ *yda'tā hēkmat kōl*) in the treatise⁶², specifically in the context of the creation of the world. A semantic connection can be observed here, conveyed through the synonymy of words ܡܕܐܢܐ *mad'ā* and ܝܕܐܬܐ *yda'tā*, which is intensified by the phrase ܡܕܐܢܐ ܡܠܝܠܐ *mad'ā 'allāhyā* (*the Divine mind*).

Likewise, Jesus is referred to as *the great teacher* (ܡܠܠܦܢܐ ܪܒܒܐ *mallphānā rabbā*), which highlights several important points. First, this title appears three times in the passage above, and in one case it is assigned to God the Father. This is due to Jesus' functioning primarily as the Head of the school, who gathers disciples and appoints teaching staff: John the Baptist becomes a reader and instructor on philosophy, (ܡܩܪܝܢܐ ܡܢ ܡܕܐܢܐ *maqryānā w-baḏōqā*), the apostle Peter is a steward of the school (ܪܒܒܐܬܐ ܕ-ܝܬܐ *rabbaytā d-'eskolē*), and the apostle Paul becomes the teacher (ܡܠܠܦܢܐ *mallphānā*). Second, this title linked to Divine attributes: God the

⁶¹ Cause 341.3–7.

⁶² Cause 335.6.

Father is also referred to in the treatise as *the eternal teacher* (ܡܠܟܗܢܐ ܡܬܡܝܢܐ *mallphānā mṭūmāyā*), which emphasizes the connection between the Father and the Son through teaching. Finally, the title shows the superiority of Jesus Christ as the teacher over all other teachers. This becomes particularly evident in the fact that the narrative about the activities of God the Son is preceded by a description of the creation of false schools by fallen teachers. In this sense, attention must be paid to the title *the living Word of God* (ܡܠܬܐ ܚܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܐܡܐ *mellṭah ḥayā d-ʿallāhā*). It first appears in the description of false schools; in particular, Barḥadbšabbā says of Plato that he “*taught correctly about God and spoke about his only-begotten son as the word begotten from him according to nature*”.⁶³ but reproaches him for his devotion to paganism⁶⁴. The Syriac word ܡܠܬܐ *mellṭā* is equivalent to the Greek λόγος, which leads the author of the treatise to conclude that when Plato spoke of the Logos, he was referring to Jesus Christ.

The ministry of God the Son is typologically similar to the activity of God the Father. In passages 369.4–370.2, Barḥadbšabbā describes an artist and a smelter who, before creating a particular work, sketch out the contours and only then fill them with paint or molten metal. He compares this image to the actions of the Persons of the Divine Trinity: The Father outlined the contours, and The Son – “*was melted and poured His teachings*”.⁶⁵ The calling of the disciples corresponds to the establishment of schools, the Sermon on the Mount to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, and the Last Supper to the conclusion of the Covenant between God and His people.

We turn our attention to the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia, on which Barḥadbšabbā relies. The teachings of the ‘great interpreter’ on two worlds – the changeable and the eternal – were mentioned above. This is not directly stated in the treatise, but the coming of Jesus Christ implies the beginning of a new era. The activity of God the Father is replaced by the activity of God the Son, Who takes the administration of the schools into His own hands. In the treatise, Jesus is referred to primarily as God, with virtually no mention of His human nature. Moreover, Barḥadbšabbā makes no mention of the death of Christ, but gives considerable attention to His resurrection. A similar approach is applied in the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who also attached greater importance to the resurrection of Jesus. In this regard, according to the author, the life of Christ is also divided into two

⁶³ Cause 363.12–13.

⁶⁴ For more details on the description of Plato's teachings in the treatise, see: Antonjuk 2024, 74–91; Arzhanov 2019, 21–22.

⁶⁵ Cause 370.5.

parts: before the resurrection, He was subject to sinful influence, and after, He became immortal and eternal⁶⁶. In his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Theodore explicitly states that resurrection is much more important for human redemption, as it signifies the possibility for humans to achieve a state of sinlessness and permanence. In other words, Christ's resurrection signifies the second creation of man, which makes the advent of the second age possible⁶⁷, and consequently it also marks a new era in the existence of the Divine schools. In the description of Christ's resurrection, Barḥadbšabbā always refers to God the Son using the term "(our) Lord" (ܐܡܪܢ *māran*).

Thus, it must be noted that the author does not raise polemical topics in relation to Jesus Christ and speaks of him as God the Son, emphasizing his divine nature and direct connection with God the Father. Continuing the tradition of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Barḥadbšabbā, although not directly stating it, shows that with the coming and resurrection of Christ, a new era begins in the history of humanity and divine schools in particular. The Son's ministry is typologically similar to the Father's ministry, and thus it is precisely His activity in guiding the schools that will be paramount in the following age.

Use of Sacred Texts

Barḥadbšabbā actively uses the Peshitta⁶⁸ as his primary biblical source. A brief statistical overview of the use of various passages from sacred texts, yields the following data⁶⁹. Of the entire Pentateuch, the author quotes only the Book of Genesis (9) and the Book of Exodus (4). From the historical books of the Old Testament, the treatise cites the Book of Joshua (1), the Book of Judges (1), the Third Book of Kings (4), and the Fourth Book of Kings (2). Among the prophetic books, references occur to the books of Isaiah (3), Jeremiah (3), Ezekiel (1), Daniel (3), and Micah (1).

⁶⁶ Gur'ev 1890, 272.

⁶⁷ Migne 1859, 856.

⁶⁸ The Peshitta includes the Old Testament and the New Testament, with the exception of the following books: 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, the Epistle of Jude, and the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse). For more information, see: Metzger 2011, 214–219.

⁶⁹ Regarding the Old Testament, the books are not divided into the sections found in the Tanakh (Torah, Prophets, Writings), but rather by their subject matter. This is why the section on historical books was created, and the Book of Daniel is classified as prophetic literature.

Poetic books are also cited: the Book of Job (1)⁷⁰, the Book of Psalms (6), the Book of Proverbs (3), and the Book of Ecclesiastes (6).

The data regarding the New Testament are as follows. Barḥadbšabbā quotes all four canonical Gospels: Matthew (16), Mark (2), Luke (6), and John (11). There are quotations from the Acts of the Apostles (4). There are also quotations from the epistles of the Apostle Paul: the Epistles to the Romans (6), 1 Corinthians (3), 2 Corinthians (1), Ephesians (2), Philippians (1), Colossians (1), 1 Timothy (1), and Hebrews (1)⁷¹.

Thus, Barḥadbšabbā references the Old Testament 48 times and the New Testament 55 times. However, some quotations raise questions about their content. For example, in 367.6–7, the author, referring to the words of David, writes: “*As David said: The trust has perished from the earth*” (ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܠܘܬܐ ܡܪܝܬܐ ܡܢ ܗܝܐ ܕܐܪܥܐ ܕܐܝܬܝܢ ‘ayk d-’amar dawīd d-’ēbad šrārā men ’ar’ā). A. Scher, and subsequently I. Ramelli, suggest that this refers to Psalm 11:2⁷², while A. Becker proposes Micah 7:2⁷³. The problem is that none of these texts contain the quoted expression, although both are consistent in meaning with the context in which Barḥadbšabbā places these lines. It can be assumed that the author quoted them from memory, hence the inaccuracy. In this case, A. Scher's version would be closer to the author's intention.

The third part of the treaties is concluded with another similar example (367.9). Referencing the prophet Jeremiah, Barḥadbšabbā quotes the following lines: “*they were ashamed of the thing in which they put their trust*” (ܐܠܬܗܝܬܝܢ ܒܚܝܬܐ ܕܐܬܝܬܝܬܝܢ *bhetw b-medem d’ēttkelw*). A. Scher points out that these words are absent from manuscript T, hence he does not identify them⁷⁴. I. Ramelli again follows A. Scher and does not indicate the quotation⁷⁵. A. Becker supposes that this is a reference to Jer.

⁷⁰ Theodore of Mopsuestia did not acknowledge the divine inspiration of the Book of Job, although it is present in the Peshitta and considered a full part of the canon. For more information on Theodore of Mopsuestia's position on biblical interpretation, see: Savrej 2012, 103–109.

⁷¹ Today, most researchers do not accept Paul's authorship of the Epistle to the Ephesians, 1 Timothy, and the Epistle to the Hebrews. However, they are included here in the corpus of Paul's epistles for the simple reason that Barḥadbšabbā himself considered the Apostle Paul to be the author of these epistles.

⁷² Cause 367.7 (French text, note 1); Ramelli 2005, 147 (note 109).

⁷³ Becker 2008, 137 (note 350).

⁷⁴ Cause 367.9 (Syriac text, note 8).

⁷⁵ Ramelli 2005, 148.

48:12⁷⁶, which, although it corresponds with the context of the quotation, does not contain similar phrases and wordings.

It's worth noting that Barḥadbšabbā often uses contextual references rather than direct quotations, as may have been the case in the previous example. However, these examples often refer to more well-known biblical passages. For example, in the description of the conversation between Barḥaumā and Narsai (385.5-6), in which the former persuades the latter to head the school in Nisibis, a reference to the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24) is made as an argument of persuasion. Numerous biblical references, mainly to the Apostle Paul, occur in the last part of the treatise, in which Barḥadbšabbā uses them to reveal the practical dimension of teaching at the school in Nisibis. In this sense, the treatise presents a rather interesting picture: the theological and philosophical part mainly includes direct quotations, while the narrative part often contains references to various biblical texts along with explicit mentions. Only a selection of examples is presented here to illustrate the use of quotations and references from the Holy Scriptures. As already mentioned, Barḥadbšabbā uses the Syriac text, only rarely quoting the Peshitta from memory, and for the most part referring to the exact wording of the sacred text.

Conclusion

While presenting his theological concept within the framework of the theology of the Church of the East, Barḥadbšabbā nevertheless introduces important aspects that go beyond a purely dogmatic exposition of various points of doctrine, and are closely intertwined with the pedagogical process at the School of Nisibis. The author's fundamental idea is simple: God is the cause of all that exists, both in a literal and a philosophical sense. He is not simply the Existent and Eternal God; He is the Great Teacher, Who makes His creation teach the Divine truth and come to know its Creator. Using Porphyry's terminology and philosophical conclusions, while also drawing on the Holy Fathers of the Church of the East, Barḥadbšabbā presents the doctrine of God within the framework of academic theology, closely connected with the theoretical and practical life of a teacher and a student, as reflected throughout his discourse in the treatise.

⁷⁶ Becker 2008, 137 (note 354).

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