SYNAXIS

merely religiously anamnestic function (see ICONS AND ICONOGRAPHY). This function is preserved in CATHOLIC THEOLOGY, for which objects called sacramentals (e.g., crucifixes, rosaries) work like signs. In some Reformed traditions, by contrast, the aesthetic sign used religiously is considered a blasphemous image.

R. Haight, *Jesus: Symbol of God* (Orbis, 1999).

H. P. Joseph, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner* (Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1984).

STEPHEN FIELDS

SYNAXIS: see EUCHARIST.

SYNERGISM Derived from the Greek for 'working together', synergism (or synergy) refers to the co-operation between divine and human agency in conversion and, more broadly, to the nature and extent of human participation in the processes of JUSTIFICATION and SANCTIFICATION. The term is generally used to describe a model of divine–human relationship according to which the success of any of God's efforts to effect some change of disposition or behaviour in human beings is contingent upon some independent activity of the human will. It is thus opposed to monergism, according to which God is the sole efficient cause of human conversion.

Though M. LUTHER had denied that human beings possessed any FREE WILL that contributed to their own salvation, after his death Lutherans involved in the so-called 'synergistic controversy' debated whether humans had any inherent disposition towards God that might enable them to prepare for GRACE. The dispute was resolved in favour of monergism: though it was acknowledged that the HOLY SPIRIT effects conversion by renewing the will, the idea that human beings possess any capacity whatsoever to either turn or respond to God was firmly denied (*FC, SD* 2). In the wake of the Council of DORT, Reformed theologians rejected synergism even more firmly by emphasizing the irresistible character of the Spirit's work in conversion (see IRRESISTIBLE GRACE). Both traditions regard synergism as a form of PELAGIANISM that compromises the sufficiency of divine GRACE for human salvation. By contrast, figures like J. WESLEY and the overwhelming majority of Orthodox theologians defend divine–human co-operation as a necessary implication of Christian belief in human freedom.

IAN A. MCFARLAND

SYRIAC CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY Syriac Christian theology has been preserved in a substantial corpus of ecclesiastical literature written in or translated into Syriac and belonging to different Syriac-speaking Christian denominations. Syriac language developed as a dialect of Aramaic in Edessa from the second century and spread over a vast territory from the eastern Mediterranean coast through Mesopotamia and Central Asia as far as the Malabar Coast of India and China. Two major trends in theology are represented by the main denominations of Syriac Christianity, both of which reject the CHRISTOLOGY of the Council of CHALCEDON: the Assyrian Church of the East (the East Syrian tradition; see NESTORIANISM), and the Syriac Orthodox Churches (the West Syrian tradition; see ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES).

Syriac theology, rooted in the bilingual Arameo-Greek milieu, developed under the influence of Greek philosophy. Another factor was its engagement in polemic with Judaism and with dualistic teachings which spread through Palestine, Syria, and Iran, especially those of MARCION, Bardaisan (154–222) and Mani (216–76). Bardaisan was the first who wrote his philosophical and theological works in Syriac, and thus is considered as a creator of Syriac literary language. Equally influential for the Syriac tradition was Tatian (d. *ca* 175), the author of the *Diatessaron*. His thoughts on the nature of salvation as the union of God's spirit and human SOUL (the abode of the spirit) found their reflection in the early Syriac apocrypha, the *Acts of Judas Thomas* and the *Odes of Solomon*.

The most outstanding early Syriac theologians, Aphrahat (d. *ca* 345) and Ephrem the Syrian (*ca* 305–73), worked out a special system of theology built up mainly on ascetical practice (see ASCETICISM) and spiritual meditation. Its language was not that of Greek philosophy, but a sequence of images and metaphors. The main common idea of all the early Syriac theology is absolute transcendence and incomprehensibility of God. There are only three ways for humans to get knowledge of God: through FAITH and LOVE, through the types of God in SCRIPTURE (see TYPOLOGY) and SYMBOLS of God in nature (viz., CREATION), and, finally, through the INCARNATION, which is the only moment when God fully reveals God's self to the world by 'putting on the body'.

As already indicated, further development of Syriac theology focused mainly on the Christological controversies that divided the Churches over the course of the fifth century, leading to splits within Syriac Christianity itself and the formation of the major independent Syriac-speaking Churches. The major complicating feature of Syriac Christology is disagreement over the interpretation of the key Christological terms: *itūtā* (Greek *ousia*, 'essence/substance'), *kyānā* (Greek *physis*, 'nature'), *qnōmā* (roughly corresponding to HYPOSTASIS), and *parsōpā* (Greek *prosôpon*, 'person') by the opposing Syriac traditions. However, the common point of the Syriac theology (in both its Chalcedonian and its various non-Chalcedonian forms) is the confession of the Holy TRINITY as the three hypostases (*qnōmē*): the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in one essence of God. All the three *qnōmē* are consubstantial (Greek HOMOOUSIOS) with each other and the Trinity is itself without beginning, without change, and without division. Thus, all denominations of Syriac

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Christianity officially recognize the Councils of NICAEA and CONSTANTINOPLE. In addition, the Syriac Orthodox Churches also recognize the Council of EPHESUS.

In the West Syrian Christology, systematized by Severus of Antioch (ca 465–538), itûtâ is an abstract reality or a generic feature, while qnômâ is a reality endowed with individual properties. Kyânâ has a dual meaning – first, as a general nature (synonymous to itûtâ), second, and most important, as an individual expression of the general essence (synonymous to qnômâ). Parsôpâ is understood as an individual reality and is apparently equivalent to qnômâ. Strongly committed to MIAPHYSITISM, West Syrian theology teaches that Jesus Christ was born out of the two perfect natures – the divine and the human, which united incomprehensibly in one person of Christ and became 'one incarnate nature [had kyânâmbasrâ] of God the Word' and one composite hypostasis. In the incarnation God the Word united to God's self, as an act of God's single will and through God's single operation, the human flesh endowed with the rational soul, assumed from the Virgin Mary (who is thus recognized, in line with the canons of the Council of Ephesus, as the Mother of God). In this natural and hypostatic union there is neither mixture or confusion, nor division or separation.

In the strongly diaphysite East Syrian Christology, developed systematically by Babai the Great (ca 551–628), kyânâ is the complete and abstract nature, a generic feature (equivalent to itûtâ), and qnômâ is the concrete nature, an individual manifestation of kyânâ. Thus the two kyânê of Christ respectively imply the two qnômê. Parsôpâ means a set of the individual characteristics of a subject, which make it unique; thus it cannot be identified with qnômâ. In line with these definitions, the main East Syrian Christological formula is 'two natures [kyânin] with two hypostases [qnômin] united in one person [parsôpâ] of the Son'. In the moment of the ANNUNCIATION, God the Word, the second qnômâ of the Trinity, united to God's self, by God's own will, the qnômâ of humanity. Thus the two perfect natures (kyânê) in Christ, the divine and the human, were ineffably and unchangeably joined in an inseparable 'prosopic union', which cannot be considered as mixture, mingling, or confusion.

Syriac-speaking Chalcedonian Orthodox Christians (historically known as Melkites) confessed the union of two natures (kyânê) in one hypostasis (qnômâ) and one person (parsôpâ) without confusion. They translated Greek ecclesiastical literature into Syriac but did not produce their own theologians, and by the seventeenth century Arabic eventually replaced Syriac as their liturgical language.

The EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES, which continue to use Syriac in liturgy and often as a vernacular language, follow the doctrinal teaching of the Catholic Church. The theology of the Maronite Church is thought to have undergone the influence of MONOTHELITISM around the seventh century. The reformed Malankara Marthoma Syrian Church follows ANGLICAN THEOLOGY.

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NATALIA SMELOVA

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY The phrase 'systematic theology' came into common use in eighteenth-century Europe to refer to analytical (as opposed to biblical or historical) reflection on Christian DOCTRINE. J. Buddeus (1667–1729), one of the first to use it, defined the task of systematic theology as twofold: first, to give a comprehensive and logically ordered presentation of Christian belief, and, second, to explain, test, and prove it (Isagoge, 303–4). Its appropriateness has been questioned by some (most famously K. BARTH, who preferred the term 'dogmatics'), on the grounds that calling a theology 'systematic' implies that the theologian has a degree of methodological control over her subject matter that is inconsistent with the Christian belief that God cannot be contained by human categories or concepts. More recently, similar concern that the metaphor of a theological 'system' fails to attend to the inherently open-ended and dialogical character of the discipline has led others (especially in North America) to describe their work as 'constructive theology'.

Although systematic theology can be undertaken with the aim of interpreting the Christian faith in terms of a single, overarching metaphysical framework (as in, e.g., the work of P. TILLICH), it can also be conceived more modestly. The literal meaning of theology is 'God talk', and systematic theology can be understood as the task of showing how the various things Christian communities say about God either do or do not 'stand together' (the literal meaning of the Greek verb from which the word 'systematic' derives) in a coherent and credible way. This process of describing, analyzing, and assessing the relationships among various Christian beliefs is arguably the central task of systematic theology, as well as the primary interest of those who describe their work as dogmatic or constructive theology.

Already in the NT PAUL attempts to explain how confession of Jesus as the definitive revelation of God's righteousness holds together with the belief in the divine origin of the Mosaic LAW (see, e.g., Rom.