

# *The Book of the Elucidation*

*Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa‘*

## ch. 4 (excerpt)

I will demonstrate to you how the bread becomes the flesh of Christ, and how the mixture of water and wine becomes the blood of Christ, so that you will know his scope, his splendour, and his honour, and so that you will be convinced that Christ our God is present (with us) just as he was present with his disciples. That is, the disciples did not see him except in so far as he was incarnate in his body, because he is God, the Son of God, Light from Light, begotten of the Father before all times and ages, and he does not possess flesh and blood that is invisible, incomprehensible, intangible, or incapable of being touched. But when he took to himself flesh and blood from the Virgin Mary, and united with it, he became visible, tangible, and capable of being touched in that body.

The body that he took from the Virgin Mary came from bread, and from water and wine. Every day, yellow fever (cholera) prevails over the flesh of a human being and eats away at it so that he hungers, but if he eats bread, it becomes for him flesh that takes the place of (the flesh) of which he was deprived. So, the flesh of the human being comes from bread. And every day, yellow fever prevails over his blood and depletes it so that he thirsts, but if he drinks water, it becomes for him blood that takes

<sup>109</sup> The editor has misprinted the verb *tubayyan* as *tubayyar* (*sic*).

<sup>110</sup> Here, Sāwīrus invokes three more of the 99 names of God recognized in Islam—*al-Khāliq*, *al-Hayy*, and *al-Ālim*—applying them to the divine person of Christ. The remain-ing term, *al-Rāziq*, is a cognate and synonym of another official divine name (*al-Razzaq*, ‘the Provider’).

the place of (the blood) of which he was deprived. So, his blood also comes from water. Out of bread and water, the flesh and blood of the human being are produced, from the very moment of his creation.

The same is the case for the woman when she receives the seed. She eats bread, and God naturally causes part of that bread to flow to the seed, so that it becomes blood for it. By the power of God, nature continues to do this every day for the entire duration of her pregnancy. And when the woman gives birth, God causes the bread and water, out of which comes flesh and blood for the woman, to flow to her breasts, which nurse the child. It is milk before it coagulates into flesh and blood. Wondrous nature cooks it in the child through the power of the body's heat, and (the child) derives from it flesh and blood, so that he does not cease growing in this way until he becomes strong enough to eat bread and drink water, just like his parents, until the day of his death.

Now when the Virgin Mary was pregnant with our Lord Jesus Christ, she did not have a seed with which she became pregnant, because she was a virgin; but rather, (Christ) came to dwell in her through the Holy Spirit,<sup>111</sup> and he took to himself in one part the flesh that was produced for her from the bread, and in the other part the blood that was produced for her from the water and wine, and from this, he raised up for himself a body. (For the Virgin Mary did not drink unmixed water, nor does anyone from all the peoples (on earth), apart from the Arabs, North Africans, and Sudanese, on account of the lack of wine in their countries. Indeed, no people in any age have spread a table without their being upon it a cup of wine mixed with water.) From the water and wine and from the bread, our Lord Jesus Christ took to himself a body in the womb of his mother, and when she had given birth to him, she nursed him with her milk, which was also from those things. Then his body grew just like our bodies grow. He ate bread and drank water mixed with wine,<sup>112</sup> and he was like us in everything apart from sin.

When he wanted to redeem us through himself and to raise us up to heaven, he established for us an economy (*dabbara lanā tadbīran*), so that he would remain with us forever, just as he was with his disciples. He commanded us to take the bread (from which comes our flesh as well as his flesh) and the water and wine (from which comes our blood as well as his blood), to raise them up on the holy altar, and to ask him in his name for what he taught us, so that he might descend upon them through his Holy Spirit, through whom he descended upon the flesh and blood of Mary, and so that he might transform them into his body and blood. (He did this) so that he might truly come to be with us in a visible, comprehensible, and tangible way, just as he was with the apostles—so that he might die for our sakes, just as he died for the people at that time; that he might be twisted up by being torn and discarded on the plate, just as he was wrapped up in linen bands and discarded in the tomb, and that he might pour out his blood for our sake in the cup, just as he poured out his blood on Golgotha.

<sup>111</sup> Luke 1: 35.

<sup>112</sup> Luke 7: 34.