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Human Freedom in the Context of the Theological Anthropology
Of St. Ephrem the Syrian

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Human Freedom in the Context of the Theological Anthropology
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Since around the middle of the last century, Ephrem the Syrian has received an increasing amount of scholarly attention. Yet, amid all the literary and topical studies of his works, his understanding of human freedom, which occupies a central place in his thought, has gone largely unexamined. This dissertation contributes to the task of filling in that gap.

The structure of this dissertation takes its cue from two sources. The first source, the order of salvation history as it appears in the Bible and in Ephrem's works, begins with the Creation, the Fall, and the expulsion from Paradise; it finds its center in the incarnate Word; and it looks forward to pilgrim humanity's return to the renewed Paradise. The second source is Ephrem's two-fold conception of the way in which we are conformed ever more clearly and fully to

the divine image in which we were created: by coming to know the truth and by living in accordance with it.

Closely examining texts of different genres across Ephrem's literary corpus, this study brings into clear view his doctrine of human freedom, in both its positive and its polemical dimensions. It shows that Ephrem placed freedom firmly at the center of the human person, in an intimate, inseparable connection with the "authority" (*shultana*) that Ephrem singles out as the core component of humanity's possession of the divine image. The study then explores Ephrem's expositions of the Fall and the attendant decree of death for humanity and its exile from Paradise. In charting humanity's way forward, the study examines Ephrem's understanding of the relationship between knowledge and freedom, especially in its bearing on his doctrine of divine revelation, his critique of the Arians' theological and epistemological method, and his battle with opponents outside the Church over the reality and efficacy of freedom itself. The study closes with a discussion of the second aspect of our perfection in the divine image, life lived according to the truth: we discuss Ephrem's understanding of the relationship between grace and freedom, his use of moral exempla, and his vision of humanity's return to the renewed Paradise.

This dissertation by Mark J. Mourachian fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Early Christian Studies approved by Sidney Griffith, Ph.D., as Director, and by Susan Wessel, Ph.D., and Robin Darling Young, Ph.D., as Readers.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Beginning around the middle of the twentieth century, when Edmund Beck began publishing his critical editions and German translations of the works of St. Ephrem the Syrian, scholarly interest in the fourth-century theologian increased considerably. Topical and literary studies of Ephrem's prose and poetry have steadily increased in number in the wake of the publication of those critical editions. The majority of the literature on Ephrem's works has been concerned with his methods of scriptural exegesis, his symbolic theory, his Trinitarian theology, and his polemics against groups within the Church—the Arians first and foremost—and those without, primarily Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan. In the area of Ephrem's anthropology, scholars have studied such topics as the place of language in human experience, the nature and limits of human

knowledge, and the role of the human body and of sensory experience in human development.

One major issue that has not received the attention that its importance in Ephrem's thought warrants is his understanding of human freedom. While portions of some monographs and a relatively small number of articles have dealt with the topic, a more comprehensive, book-length study of human freedom in Ephrem's thought has been wanting. Nabil el-Khoury has written two brief article and devoted parts of his *Die Interpretation der Welt bei Ephraem dem Syrer* to our subject; the works of Sten Hidal and Jouko Martikainen contain relevant sections, as does Tanios Bou Mansour's *La pensée symbolique de saint Ephrem le Syrien*; Beck, too, has made contributions here, though they are scattered across different publications and do not appear to ever have been consolidated in an extended presentation; there are other small-scale offerings, as the bibliography shows.

The most notable exception to that trend is the trilogy of articles written by Bou Mansour under the collective title "La liberté chez saint Ephrem le Syrien." In that series the author examines, by way of a close reading of the primary texts, Ephrem's conception of freedom in relation to those of Mani,

Marcion, and Bardaisan; he then discusses the notion of God's freedom as Ephrem articulated it, noting the polemical dimensions involved; in the last part of the series, the one most relevant to the present study, Bou Mansour presents numerous dimensions of Ephrem's understanding of human freedom: the notion of its definition and nature; the various types of proofs that Ephrem adduces for its reality and efficacy; its relation to law, to fate, and to evil; its limits and its grandeur; and, finally, the thorny issue of how it relates to divine grace.

It is true that Ephrem nowhere offers what much modern scholarship would consider a sufficiently systematic presentation of his own understanding of the nature and function of human freedom. It is nevertheless true, as the work of Bou Mansour shows in an eminent way, that by collating and comparing various texts across Ephrem's literary corpus, one is able to accomplish more than merely to sketch a general outline of his thought on the issue or to conclude that it was a matter of great apologetic and polemical importance for him; one can also discern a vast array of the specific details and contours of his teaching regarding it. Granted, that endeavor involves, at times, explicating connections that are only implicit and latent in his works. Yet insofar as the present study

does that, it hopes to do so in a way that respects the integrity and the idiom of the works themselves.

The structure of this dissertation takes its cue from two sources. The first source, the order of salvation history as it appears in the Bible and in Ephrem's works, begins with the Creation, the Fall, and the expulsion from Paradise; it finds its center in the incarnate Word; and it looks forward to pilgrim humanity's return to the renewed Paradise. The second source is Ephrem's two-fold conception of the way in which we are conformed ever more clearly and fully to the divine image in which we were created: by coming to know the truth and by living in accordance with it.

Chapter 2 takes up Ephrem's exegesis of Gen 1:26, focusing on the way in which Ephrem incorporates human freedom and authority in humanity's possession of the divine image, and on the relationship between those two aspects of the image.

Chapter 3 examines Ephrem's treatment of the Fall. It highlights Ephrem's strenuous attempts to vindicate God from any responsibility for the irruption of evil in creation, focusing all the blame on the free human agents. Relevant typological elements and themes are discussed, specifically youth and ignorance,

the abuse of freedom and its ramifications throughout the created order, and, in anticipation of some matters raised in the final chapter, a discussion of the layout of Paradise and a sketch of what Adam's victory would have been like, had he not fallen.

Chapter 4 is the first of a two-part examination of the human search for knowledge of the truth in relation to freedom — something Ephrem considered to be constitutive of our path to perfection in the image of God, or, to put it differently, our way forward after the Fall. This chapter is itself divided into two sections: the first examines Ephrem's positive doctrine of divine revelation as it relates to the nature of what we can know and how we can know it (through what media it is conveyed). The Christological ramifications of that aspect of Ephrem's thought are discussed, as well as the role of faith in coming to know the truth in freedom. Building on the positive doctrine examined in this first part, the second part turns to Ephrem's polemics against the destructive and ultimately futile attempt at true knowledge characterized as "investigation" — this is a matter of polemics aimed at a group operating within the Church, the Arians.

Chapter 5, completing what was begun in Chapter 4, takes up the issue of coming to know the truth about freedom itself. Here Ephrem's polemics take aim at groups outside the Church, particularly Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan. The chapter treats of an ontological notion of evil and astral determinism, key components of Ephrem's polemics.

Chapter 6 deals with what Ephrem considers the second constituent of our being perfected in the divine image: acting according to the truth. The chapter begins with an assessment of Ephrem's understanding of the relationship between divine grace and human freedom, noting that Ephrem maintains an "asymmetrical equilibrium" (for lack of a better phrase) between the two, and that suggestions of Pelagian or semi-Pelagian tendencies in Ephrem are unwarranted. The chapter closes with the pole of salvation history opposite humanity's creation in Paradise, the return to Paradise.

A few comments on methodology are due. Where polemics are concerned, this dissertation does not take as its aim the historical task of accurately ascribing particular doctrines to particular figures. Nor does it seek to assess whether Ephrem has accurately represented those doctrines whose originators may seem obvious. For example, this study is not so much concerned with whether Ephrem

was right about the Arians but with how he understood and responded to what is taken to be their method of theological inquiry as it appears in his works. Also, this dissertation does not intend to investigate the sources of Ephrem's thought or methods.

CHAPTER 2

THE IMAGE OF GOD

The first three chapters of Genesis, relating the story of humanity's creation and its tragic fall into sin and corruption, have held the attention of countless Jewish and Christian exegetes from diverse eras and traditions. Those two pivotal events related at the very beginning of the Bible have given rise to a vast range of interpretations. In both prose and verse Ephrem offers his own interpretation of what constitutes the human person's possession of God's image and likeness and of what the biblical account of the Fall tells us about human agency and freedom. This chapter takes up the first of those events.

person plural in Gen 1:26 (“Let *us* . . . *our* image”). Mention of man being made in the image and likeness of God may call to mind the New Testament passages in which Christ is presented as the image and likeness of the Father.³ But Ephrem does not quote Gen 1:26 in full (only ܠܡܥܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢܐ). He merely asks to whom God is speaking in the subsequent part of the verse, which he does not quote (i.e., ܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢܐ). Since speech implies an audience of some kind, the mere mention of God speaking would be enough to prompt the question. Ephrem answers his own question, and he frames his answer in a way that makes certain, *pace* el-Khoury, that it was the mention of the act of creating (the first use of the first-person plural, ܡܝܢܐ) more than any possible allusion to the image (the second use, ܡܝܢܐ) that spurred him to ask the question. Again, Ephrem’s answer: “Here and *in every place where He creates* it is clear that He is speaking to His Son.” The portion in italics indicates the focus of Ephrem’s attention, which is not the notion of the divine image. Ephrem immediately goes on to quote Jn 1:3 and Col 1:16, both of which speak of the Son as the one in whom and through whom all things were created. Col 1:15 does speak of the Son as the image of the invisible

³ E.g., Jn 14:8-9; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3.

God, but the fact that Ephrem does not include that verse in the passage is telling.

It is clear, then, that Ephrem is not here highlighting the Son's status as the perfect image of the Father so much as his role in the six-day work of creation.⁴ If Ephrem were concerned to present the Son as the perfect image of the Father here, one might expect him to follow through with that line of thinking by, perhaps, quoting Gen 1:26 in its entirety and referring to man as possessing the image of the perfect image of the invisible Father. In his review of Ephrem's exegesis of Genesis Kronholm refers to Adam as the *imago imaginis Dei*, calling that notion "an important consequence of [Ephrem's] fundamental view concerning the particular relation between the pre-existent Christ as God's First-born, and the creation of Adam/man."⁵ While Kronholm notes that this

⁴ Ephrem makes the same point when quoting Gen 1:26 in *HdF* 6.7.

⁵ Tryggve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Tradition*, CBOTS 11 (Lund: Gleerup, 1978), 48.

to hear us"). His translation envisions Ephrem as assuming God's voice in order to restate Gen 1:26 in a way that explains the content of the notion of God's image: being made in God's image means having the freedom to heed or to ignore him. In a similar vein, P. Mobarak construed the line as follows: "ea scilicet potestate praeditum usque modo, ut nihil impediatur, quo minus, si ipsi placeat, nobis parere possit, sui arbitrii jurisque."¹⁰ Tonneau renders it thus: "qui, scilicet, usque ad hoc potestatem habeat ut, si libet, audiat nos."¹¹ Murray's translation also treats the text as a gloss on man's being made in the image of God: "that is to say, endowed with authority (*shallit*) to the point that if it seems good to him (*en neshpar leh*) he will obey us."¹² Likewise Féghali: "cela signifie qu'il domine dans la mesure où il lui plaira de nous obéir."¹³ Finally, Beck renders the passage this way: "Gemäß dem, daß er bis zu dem Punkt (willens)mächtig (*šallit*) ist, daß er, wenn es ihm gefällt, auf uns hören kann."¹⁴

¹⁰ ESO, vol. 1, 18. His addition of "sui arbitrii jurisque," which has no correlative in the Syriac of the passage, makes his reading of the text abundantly clear.

¹¹ CSCO 153, 17.16.

¹² Robert Murray, "The Ephremic Tradition and the Theology of the Environment," *Hug* 2.1 (1999): par. 6.

¹³ Paul Féghali, "Les premiers jours de la création: Commentaire de Gn 1,1-2,4 par saint Éphrem," *PdO* 13 (1986): 28.

¹⁴ Edmund Beck, "Ephraems Brief an Hypatios," *OC* 58 (1974): 81 n 8.

Departing from that consensus, Mathews takes a very different tack:

“According to [ܐܠܗܐ] what has been the rule [ܥܠܝܕ] until now, namely, if it pleases God He will make it known to us [ܡܥܬܝܢ].”¹⁵ The three Syriac words in brackets indicate the key points where his translation differs from those of el-Khoury and the others cited above. Mathews renders ܐܠܗܐ as a preposition, not as an adverbial “namely” or “that is”; he reads ܥܠܝܕ as constituting an impersonal use of the passive participle introducing the conditional clause that follows, not as a passive participle modifying ܡܥܬܝܢ; and he construes ܡܥܬܝܢ as an Aphel imperfect whose subject is “God,” not as a Peal imperfect whose subject is “man,” as do the other translators mentioned. Given those differences, Mathews does not understand Ephrem to be referring to freewill, or, more specifically, to the human capacity for either attending to God or ignoring him. Rather, he sees in the passage a reiteration of a principle that appears earlier in the commentary, though less explicitly. That principle treats the account given in Genesis as the intentional revelation of things previously unknown, a revelation delivered by one who is ever conscious of his audience and whose will determines the method

¹⁵ Edward G. Mathews and Joseph P. Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, FOC 91 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 94. The preface (ix) names Mathews as the translator of *CGen*.

and content of that revelation. If God (or Moses) wants to reveal something to us, he will do so as he chooses. Anything written in the account, then, is put there with a revelatory and didactic purpose and not merely in order to record all the available details for the sake of thoroughness. Moses might not include something in his creation account either because it simply did not happen¹⁶ or because he did not choose to include something that did.¹⁷ Ephrem says of the wind (ܠܡܝܐ) that “Moses wished to make known to us its creation,”¹⁸ and it was God’s “will to show us that there was nothing created on the earth that was not created for the purpose of mankind or for his service.”¹⁹ That way of speaking does seem to constitute a precedent for such a statement as “According to what has been the rule until now, namely, if it pleases God He will make it known to

¹⁶ *CGen* 9.1-2: “If [the natures] had been created along with them, he would have said so.”

¹⁷ *CGen* 9.11-13: “He wrote this for us, though he did not write about everything for us, for he did not write for us about which day the spiritual beings were created.” Cf. 9.25-30: “Even though it was created on this day and at this time, he did not write it for us in this passage nor how it was created. For the present, then, let us accept the creation of the abyss as it is written for us, while we wait to learn from Moses as well how it was created.”

¹⁸ *CGen* 11.30.

¹⁹ *CGen* 14.1-3.

us.”²⁰ It is more reasonable, though, to read the passage, with el-Khoury and the others, as a brief, partial explanation of what it means to be created in God’s image.

There are linguistic reasons why the latter reading is preferable. First, according to R. Payne Smith, the passive participle ܠܡܝܕܐ may be used in an impersonal way, but it is not attested as meaning “it is a/the rule” but rather “it is permitted/lawful” and, when used with the preposition ܕ and a suffixed personal pronoun, “he/she/it may.”²¹ Second, although it is true that the Aphel of ܠܡܝܕܐ may take a personal pronoun suffix that serves as the object or recipient of the causative force of the Aphel,²² one might expect to find the Aphel of ܠܡܝܕܐ rather than that of ܠܡܝܕܐ. The latter more commonly refers to heeding, obeying, or

²⁰ See note 15 above. Kofsky and Ruzer read the passage the way Mathews does. Discussing Ephrem’s claim that dominion over the earth is what constitutes human possession of the divine image, they write: “Ephrem claims that the solution that he offers is based on the explicit will of God to make it clearly understood this way” (318). It is likely that here they simply follow Mathews’ translation, since they quote verbatim a different passage from that translation on p. 319 (p. 109 of Mathews’ translation).

²¹ *TS*, s.v.

²² *TS* cites Sir 45:3 as an example: ܡܠܐ ܡܫܝܚܐ (“He made him hear his voice”). In that regard, the first person plural pronominal suffix in *CGen* 23.25 may be used to support either of the proposed translations: it could refer either to “us, the readers” or to God, mirroring the use of the first person plural in Gen 1:26.

announcing, while the former plainly refers to making something known.

Coincidentally, Ephrem does use a form derived from the Aphel of ܐܬܐ in one of the passages already quoted. The Syriac underlying “Moses wished to make known to us” is ܐܬܐ ܕܡܘܨܝ ܕܝܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܐ.²³ A final note, the line immediately following the passage in question reads, “Moses again (ܐܬܐ) explains what it is by means of which we are the image of God in that [passage where] he says . . .”²⁴ The appearance of ܐܬܐ, which commonly implies a repetition or serial progression, may indicate that Ephrem has already explained — rather, that Ephrem thinks Moses has already explained — one way in which human persons are made in the image of God.

There has been good reason to pause for a time on this brief passage. If Mathews’ rendering is the more accurate one, then Ephrem is merely restating his conviction that God and Moses have the instruction of their audience very much in mind while the Genesis account unfolds: the text of Scripture was composed as it was intentionally, according to God’s will, and for the enlightenment of its recipients. But if the other translators are, in fact, more

²³ *CGen* 11.30.

²⁴ *CGen* 23.25-27.

faithful to the Syriac, then we find in the passage a definite correlation between human freedom and the human person's possession of the divine image.

Now, while Ephrem certainly holds that human freedom is integral to our being created in God's image, he does not make as profound and explicit a connection between the two as el-Khoury assumes, at least not in his exegesis of Genesis here. El-Khoury writes, "*C'est dans cette volonté libre de l'homme que saint Ephrem voit surtout l'image de Dieu. Par sa capacité de libre décision, l'homme est semblable à Dieu.*"²⁵ He comes to this conclusion while discussing Ephrem's view of the human person as *logikos*, as a creature endowed with

²⁵ El-Khoury, "Gen. 1,26," 204 (italics mine). Cf. id., *Die Interpretation der Welt bei Ephraem dem Syrer*, Tübinger theologische Studien 6 (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1976), 111: "Bei Ephraem beruht die Ebenbildlichkeit vor allem auf der Willenfreiheit." See also *ibid.*, 111-12:

Ephraem sieht in der Möglichkeit zur freien Entscheidung die größte Angleichung an Gott; denn in ihr ist dem Menschen ein Weg eröffnet, der ihn unendlich über sich hinausführen kann und *ihn die Schranken, welche ihm gesetzt sind, durchbrechen läßt.* (italics mine)

The italicized portion of this last quotation is especially problematic. As Chapter 4 will show, Ephrem has harsh words for those who disregard and try to overstep the measures and limits proper to human persons. Unless I am misreading el-Khoury's remarks, they appear to conflict with Ephrem's dire warning.

speech and reason.²⁶ Citing *HdF* 25.1, he notes the strong link in Ephrem's thought between the human capacity for speech and the possession of freedom:

Since you are a harp thus endowed with life and speech,
your strings and your words possess freedom.
O harp, which of itself,
according to its will, sings to its God!²⁷

It is not clear why el-Khoury moves from those comments to his claim that it is freewill that, above all else, constitutes the image of God in the human person according to Ephrem. Perhaps he is combining *HdF* 23.7 with Ephrem's insistence that Christ, as the Word, is the perfect image of the Father²⁸ and, at the same time, the perfect figure of man:²⁹ if the perfect figure of man is the Logos and man is *logikos*, and if speech is closely tied to human freedom, then freewill might enjoy pride of place with regard to human possession of the divine image.

²⁶ El-Khoury, "Gen. 1,26," 203.

²⁷ *HdF* 23.7 (cited as 25.1 by el-Khoury):

ܐܚܝܢܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ
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²⁸ El-Khoury, "Gen. 1,26," 200, where he cites Ephrem's *CDiss*, 1.3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

El-Khoury's immediate concern, though, in the context of his stressing freewill, is the possibility of inter-personal relations between God and man.³⁰

Whatever el-Khoury's reasoning may be, Ephrem's remarks in *CGen* does not share el-Khoury's exact emphasis on freewill. The connection between human freedom and the divine image is surely operative in *CGen* 23.24-25, but Ephrem does not there use the term ܠܚܝܬܐ (or some other term sharing its root), as one would expect, if Ephrem saw it as the touchstone of the human likeness to God.³¹ There are passages in other works by Ephrem that do emphasize freedom as that which constitutes man's being made in God's image. In one of his *Sermons on Faith*, Ephrem writes, "For God, when He made [Adam], made Him a created god / in that He gave him freedom (ܠܚܝܬܐ), so that he might conduct himself according to his own will."³² Freedom's role in constituting the image of God is

³⁰ Ibid., 204: "A travers son image, Dieu entre en relation avec les personnes humaines. Et l'homme, semblable à Dieu, entre, par sa capacité de libre décision, dans cette relation."

³¹ In *CGen* ܠܚܝܬܐ appears only twice, in the context of the account of Joseph's ruse involving his brother Benjamin and the cup hidden in the latter's sack (106.23-24). There the term refers to the state of freedom from slavery or servitude to an overlord, not the faculty of freewill.

³² *SdF* 3.31-38:

ܠܚܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ
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There is no question that the third level on which Gen 1:26 operates, according to el-Khoury's thesis, is the one most clearly and expressly connected to the image of God in *CGen*. Immediately following *CGen* 23.24-25, the text reads:

Moses again explains what it is by means of which we are the image of God in that [passage where] he says, “Let them have authority over the fishes of the sea and over the birds and over the cattle and over all the earth.” It is, then, by virtue of the authority (سلطان) that Adam received over the earth and over all that is in it that he possesses the image of God, the one who rules over things above and things below.³³

[illegible]

Cf. *Hyp* 1, 40.1-3. Cf. also *Hyp* 4, 114.31-41: "God therefore said, 'Let us make man in our image', that is, in the image of His authority. For just as the authority of God reigns over all, thus also the yoke of Adam's dominion was set over all."

אנחנו מחבלי ארמיה נכבד כי אנחנו חיליך. מוט ונח חיליך מלחמה. ונאמר ונעלה
ונלחם כל חל מלחמה. מה אפ נא ונחמה ונאמר כל חל מלחמה.

Ephrem just explained that we are made in God's image by virtue of our freedom to obey him or not. He now turns explicitly to the notion of our dominion over the earth and the things of the earth as likewise constitutive of our possession of the divine image. While we find here an explicit correlation between the image of God and the possession of authority, the character of the relation between that authority and human freedom is as yet unclear.

The Relationship between Freedom and Authority

Notionally, there is no conflict between the possession of authority and the possession of freedom. The former, in fact, depends on the latter, insofar as authority cannot be exercised by one who does not have the power of choice and self-determination and the ability to bring one's intentions to fruition. The exercise of authority presupposes the ability to deliberate, decide, and act on one's decision, which, in turn, presupposes the possession of freedom of thought and will. Neither element—freedom or authority—has any real meaning apart from the other. Neither takes on a life of its own, insofar as both are incorporated in the notion of the image of God given to man at his creation. Human freewill cannot but be described as authoritative (ܐܘܬܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ), as Ephrem does

describe it elsewhere.³⁴ He may speak of human freedom and authority in separate breaths, but their fundamental and intimate connection is at the heart of Ephrem's depiction of the human person as created in God's image.

That connection between freedom and authority is reflected, in part, in the overlap in translations of the two relevant Syriac terms, ܐܕܝܪܐ and ܐܕܝܪܐ, and of other terms that share their roots. In the case of Mitchell's translation of *Hyp* 1, the overlap is simply a conflation the two. As den Biesen points out, while Ephrem uses specific terms for "free" and "freewill" (ܐܝܪܐ and ܐܕܝܪܐ) as distinct from "authoritative" and "authority" (ܐܕܝܪܐ and ܐܕܝܪܐ), Mitchell translates ܐܕܝܪܐ as "free" and "independent," and he translates ܐܕܝܪܐ as "freewill" and "independence."³⁵ He even goes so far as to render ܐܕܝܪܐ ܐܕܝܪܐ as "our independent Freewill."³⁶ Bou Mansour follows suit and translates ܐܕܝܪܐ ܐܕܝܪܐ as "la parole libre" and ܐܕܝܪܐ ܐܕܝܪܐ as "l'esprit libre."³⁷ While the two

³⁴ *Hyp* 1, 21.20.

³⁵ Kees den Biesen, *Simple and Bold: Ephrem's Art of Symbolic Thought*, Gorgias Dissertations 26/Early Christian Studies 6 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2006), 251.

³⁶ C. W. Mitchell, *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan*, vol. 1 (London: Williams & Norgate, 1912), i.

³⁷ Tanios Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique de saint Ephrem le Syrien*, Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint-Esprit 16 (Kaslik, Lebanon: Université Saint-Esprit, 1988), 38.

terms, ܠܗܘܝܬܐ and ܠܥܠܐ, share an intimate connection, they cannot be simply collapsed into one another. Granted, the phrase ܠܥܠܐ ܠܗܘܝܬܐ is commonly taken to refer to freewill, and in that regard one can easily see the Syriac conception of freewill as a power or kind of authority. That point is even more evident in the way Ephrem alludes to freewill in reference to Gen 1:26: it is the *power or authority* to hear and obey God, according to the human person's good pleasure.³⁸ But the phrase ܠܗܘܝܬܐ ܠܥܠܐ implies that freedom and authority are not identical or completely interchangeable.³⁹ One adds a new dimension to the other.

So what does the one concept add to the other, and how does that combination relate to Ephrem's comments on Gen 1:26? To reiterate, it is better to read *CGen* 23.24-30 as a two-fold gloss on what it means to be created in the image of God, in line with el-Khoury's and similar translations, than to render it as Mathews does, whose translation omits any connection to freewill. The key to drawing the two concepts together lies in the way Ephrem alludes to freewill, as

³⁸ Since Ephrem obviously would say that it is far better to obey God than not to, we may infer that he views human freedom as a teleologically oriented reality, not as sheer liberty devoid of directionality, or as the mere absence of constraint or necessity in the face of competing options of equal worth. This notion, that freedom is only truly and completely what it is meant to be when it is exercised for the good, resurfaces in the discussion of the Fall in the next chapter.

³⁹ See *Eccl* 3.6.

mentioned above: “‘Let us make man in our image,’ that is, endowed with authority to the extent that if it seems good to him, he may obey us.” Freewill, then, is a kind of authority with which God invests man at his creation. That authority reflects the image of the Creator, and it pertains directly to each person’s relation to him. It unites every human person in the one divine image possessed in common and, at the same time, distinguishes each person in that it is the means by which each person is able to do what no one else can do for him or her: freely obey or freely disobey the Creator. Without the gift of freedom the human person would be not only devoid of the image but incapable of responding to God in a way proper to persons, that is, in the context of a relation built upon love, willing obedience, and accountability. Inter-personal relations, then, are built upon the ground of freedom.

Yet the freedom given to human persons pertains not only to their relation to the Creator. Human persons reflect their Creator, Ephrem says, by possessing and exercising authority over the rest of the created world. To combine both parts of Ephrem’s two-fold gloss on Gen 1:26: being created in the image of God means being endowed with authoritative freedom, that is, to have authority within and over oneself, as well as over the rest of creation. We might say that

Ephrem viewed human freedom as the ground upon which human authority is exercised. It is man's innate ability to decide, of his own accord, whether or not to hear and obey his Creator and to act accordingly and, by extension, to exercise his external authority rightly. In effect, Ephrem reads the first half of Gen 1:26 ("Let us ... image") in light of anthropological convictions substantiated elsewhere—there is no mention of freedom in the biblical text there—before he reads the second half of the verse ("Let them ... earth") in its own immediate context, linking it directly to the first half.

In order to look more deeply into the relation between freedom and authority one may turn to *Hyp* 1. There human authority appears as that which underlies and unifies the various aspects of the human person that reflect the Creator:

The written document is the likeness of the composite body, just as the authoritative tongue is the likeness of the authoritative mind. For the body is not able to add to or subtract from the measure of its height, nor is the document able to add to or subtract from the measure of its composition. The mouth's word, however, can be either within measure or beyond measure. For the Godhead has given us the authoritative word, which is like It, so that the authoritative word might serve our authoritative freewill. And by means of the word we are the likeness of the one who gave it, because by means of it we have an inclination toward and care for good things—and not only concerning good things, but we also learn about God, the source of good things, by means of the word, which is a gift from Him. By means of this [word], which is like God, we are clothed

difference of usage or meaning.⁴¹ As a result, the fact that he connects authority with the *image* but the authoritative word with the *likeness* is of no discernible consequence here. Those two elements constituting the image and the likeness are interconnected according to the following logic: the *authoritative word* is the power and capacity of the human person (alone of earthly creatures) to come to know the truth; it is by coming to know the truth and conducting oneself in the truth (כִּי יֵדַע וְכִי יַעֲשֶׂה וְכִי יִשְׁמַע וְכִי יִשְׁמַח) that one becomes the image of God; and those two ways of relating to the truth comprise the *authority* given to man—the same authority that Ephrem says both here and in *CGen* expresses man's being made in God's image to begin with. The former relation to the truth, knowledge, finds its correlate in the authoritative mind; the latter, truthful conduct, finds its correlate in authoritative freewill. Knowing the truth and acting according to it form the basis on which Adam would rightly exercise his authority over himself (in his relation to God) and over the things of this world.

⁴¹ Cf. Beck, "Brief," 80 n 6, where he notes, in regard to Ephrem's use of Gen 1:26, "Ephr. zitiert in *HdF* 6,7 die biblische Ausgangsstelle in der Form der Peš: *b-salman a(y)k dmūtan*, also ohne das *kai (et)* der LXX u. Vulg. Eine die beiden Ausdrücke trennende Interpretation fehlt dementsprechend bei ihm. Er geht im Brief von dem schon oben gebrauchten *dmūtâ* aus u. setzt dafür anschließend gleichbedeutend *salmâ* (Bild)."

There is yet another set of relations at work in Ephrem's excursus on the human person as created in God's image. The first lines of the passage quoted above lay out a polarity involving two comparisons: the written letter is like the physical body, as the tongue is like the mind. Neither element in the first pair can increase or decrease itself at will.⁴² But in regard to the second pair, Ephrem does not follow precisely the structure of the analogy he set up. He does not say that "the tongue and the mind" can, in contradistinction to the letter and the body, increase or decrease themselves at will, can remain within measure or go beyond it. Rather he says the "mouth's word" (ܡܠܟܬܐ ܕܦܝܐ) can do so. The audible word, the fruit of both the mind and the tongue, is grounded in the authoritative word, which is like God himself, who gave the word to human persons in order that it might serve their authoritative freewill. That this authoritative word is not coterminous with the mouth's word is clear from the fact that it is by means of the former that we have an inclination toward good things and learn about God, their source—neither of which is merely a matter of verbal discourse but of an inner working of the person not necessarily manifested verbally. The mind can

⁴² Cf. *Nat* 1.98.

know the truth by means of the authoritative word, and that knowledge may issue forth in speech, but not necessarily.

It is, moreover, through the authoritative word that we acquire divine teaching, the seal of our minds. Ephrem's choice of the image of the "seal" (سَلْ) to designate divine teaching as that by which we become the image of the all-knowing God is telling. To be imprinted, sealed, signed, or stamped, from the verbal root سَلَّ, is to bear the mark and resemblance of that which did the imprinting, sealing, and the like. Accordingly, the human person is not only marked out as belonging to God as his possession, through the acquisition of the seal of divine teaching, but is also made to bear the likeness of the source and subject of that teaching—all through the power of the authoritative word, which the Creator graciously bestows on his human creatures, and which, in a creaturely fashion, corresponds to and images the Creator himself. Although Ephrem does not make much of it in *Hyp* 1, the terminology based on سَلَّ calls to mind other passages in his works that portray the Creator as the Divine Artist endowing his handiwork with certain signature marks that bespeak their originator. In *Hyp* 1 Ephrem depicts that relation between the Creator and the human person, his handiwork, as a dynamic one, a process that allows the

human person to progress toward a fuller possession of the divine image through the mediation of the authoritative word.⁴³

In a number of passages across his literary corpus Ephrem points to the manifold ways in which human persons reflect their Creator.⁴⁴ The focus of the present chapter has been the relation between the divine image and freedom and authority. While he introduces other elements in the extended passage from *Hyp* 1 quoted above, authority there stands out as the fundamental quality common to them all. And it is for that reason, and for the fact that *CGen* is more explicit about authority than anything else in terms of what constitutes human possession of the divine image, that we can name authority (ܐܘܬܘܪܝܬܐ) as the element most crucial to Ephrem's understanding of human possession of that image. While freedom is the element most closely integrated with authority — more so than the tongue, the word, or the mind — it remains true that authority,

⁴³ This is evident, for example, in Ephrem's view that Adam was created neither mortal nor immortal but such that he was to choose between the way of life and the way of death. In other words, Adam was not created in a predetermined final state, a fixed relation to his Creator from which he could only Fall. Rather, a decision was required of him from the very beginning of his existence: he would either exercise his authority and freedom rightly, in loving obedience to God, or willfully alienate himself from him. His relation to his Creator was dynamic and changeable from the start.

⁴⁴ See Kronholm, *Motifs*, 62-67.

as a power and as a quality characterizing all those other interior aspects of the human person is, for Ephrem, the keystone of the human likeness to the Creator.⁴⁵ That said, it is imperative to bear in mind that authority cannot operate apart from freedom, that the former in fact presupposes the latter. If man's authority over himself and over the rest of creation reflects the Creator's authority over all things including human persons, then that authority must be characterized as being exercised in freedom. God's authority over human persons not only is exercised in freedom but also accommodates human freedom. His authority is no sheer force or power over against his creatures, compelling them to act as they do, as Ephrem takes pains to emphasize in his overtly polemical works. There is, then, no contradiction in God's exercising authority over all things while we yet exercise freedom by our own power, a

⁴⁵ Bou Mansour says as much in *Pensée*, 428:

De cette discussion, il résulte que le *šûltânâ*, du fait qu'il est commun aux trois concepts d'esprit, de parole et de liberté, est le mieux qualifié pour représenter ce qu'est l'image de Dieu dans l'homme. De plus, c'est à lui qu'Ephrem revient souvent pour définir cette image, en parlant du don qui en a été fait à Adam lors de sa création, de sa perte après la chute . . . et de sa reprise . . . grâce à la parole de révélation.

Cf. his comments earlier in the same work: "Outre le rôle, second mais important, qu'elle joue dans l'avènement de l'homme comme image de Dieu, la liberté humaine semble proprement réaliser ce qui, dans l'homme, constitue précisément cette image" (418).

power graciously given to us at our creation. Moreover, God's own authority, the same authority that he manifests in his free act of creation, is the divine, non-contingent, and constitutive ground of the creaturely authority that each human person possesses as gift.

Concluding Remarks

In view of the preceding discussion, it might be difficult not to view Ephrem as being somewhat inconsistent from one text to the other. *CGen* names authority as the chief way in which we image our Creator, but it glosses that authority in the strict compass of Gen 1:26, explicitly as authority over the things of the earth. In order to fill in the gap between freedom, to which *CGen* alludes but does not name, and the explicit mention of authority, this study suggests that freedom relates to that authority as the basis upon which the latter is exercised. Since it makes the exercise of authority possible, freedom would seem to be the more fundamental of the two, in spite of the fact that Ephrem names authority but only alludes to freedom. *Hyp 1*, in contrast to *CGen*, singles out the authoritative word as that through which we image our Creator. Authority underlies and colors the other elements of the human person Ephrem mentions there, giving

the impression, first, that the type of authority under discussion pertains not so much to externals—exercising dominion over the things of the earth—as it does to the interior activity of the person, and second, that authority, not freedom, is the more fundamental element.

Not to acquit Ephrem of being inconsistent entirely, it serves well to note that he understood the human possession of God's image to be a manifold reality irreducible to any one aspect of its fullness. The scope of what constitutes human likeness to God would, of course, be limited to what distinguishes human persons from the animals and the rest of creation. Nevertheless, there is ample material for contemplation of the divine image within that scope, and Ephrem avails himself of that variety in his numerous works. What he stresses above all else in one context he may relegate to a lesser role in another. Taking into account that way of reading Ephrem's variegated remarks, one should not fault him for speaking one way in *CGen* and another way in *Hyp* 1. In neither text, after all, does he single out one aspect and explicitly (or even implicitly) exclude others. Those accustomed to a different way of thinking on the subject may find him unforgivably unsystematic and inconsistent in his presentation across his

many works;⁴⁶ others may be content to investigate the context of a specific work in the hope of discovering the reasons behind his choosing to emphasize there one or more aspects over others. For Ephrem, human freedom takes its place among those aspects, but it is not the chief among them in his exegesis of Gen 1:26 in *CGen*. While it certainly constitutes a fundamental part of what it means to be created in God's image, freedom takes on a more explicit and prominent role in Ephrem's vision of how human persons progress toward being perfected in that image or, conversely, how they fall short of the measure for which they were created.

Much of the foregoing discussion has focused on human freedom as a seemingly static element of the human person in relation to the image of God. A crucial point that must be kept in mind, though, is that Ephrem's doctrine of human freedom is at core a dynamic one, oriented toward the rectification and reintegration of the whole person into the fullness of the divine image.⁴⁷ The task

⁴⁶ Cf. Beck, "Brief," 80 n 6: "Ephr. bringt zu dem Imago-charakter des Menschen in seinem Werken fast alle Einzelheiten, die sich dazu in der griech.-lat. Patristik finden, aber ohne jeden Versuch einer systematischen Ordnung."

⁴⁷ This point was raised above, in the context of the role of the authoritative word in *Hyp* 1.

that falls to each and every person is to exercise his or her freedom in the way it is intended, though not compelled, to be exercised.

In terms of our possession of the divine image one can say, then, that Ephrem's vision is two-fold. On the one hand, we possess the image by virtue of our creation at the hands of God. It is a gift given freely and equally to all human persons at their creation. On the other hand, the full acquisition of the divine image—albeit in creaturely fashion—is that to which human persons aspire and toward which they exert their efforts, never without God's help.⁴⁸ The divine image refers, then, to both that which we already are and that which we are to become. The path that human persons traverse toward perfection and full assimilation to the divine image is marked by their use of the gift of freedom. And the process by which human persons reach that goal—a life-long moral, ascetic endeavor—cannot be understood without first looking to the beginning of the story of free human action in the garden. Ephrem sees in that beginning an image of what the human race had and lost—or at the very least profoundly disfigured and impaired—through our first parents' tragic misuse of freedom.

⁴⁸ Chapter 6 discusses the complex relationship between human effort and God's active assistance.

CHAPTER 3

THE FALL

The Fall, the second pivotal event in Genesis relating to human freedom, occupies much of Ephrem's exegetical attention—much more so than the creation of the human person. In the account of the Fall he finds testimony to both the reality of human freedom and its terrible power. While the first human couple's childish ignorance was the opening through which the serpent's deception might gain entrance, they nevertheless retained full responsibility for their fatal choice, a choice that brought death in its wake, perverted the natural order of things, and frustrated humanity's hope for attaining to the priestly ministry in Paradise.

God's Goodness and Humanity's Freedom

Reading *CGen*, one can easily identify Ephrem's two chief concerns in explaining the account of the Fall in Genesis. He is eager, first, to highlight God's foreknowledge, goodness, and mercy in how he arranged the conditions under which Adam's and Eve's temptation would occur and, second, to point up the character of their decision as both free and foolishly arrogant. The reader is struck by the consistent stress Ephrem places on the gratuitous help that God provided for man's progress toward perfection, beginning with the context of the temptation to transgress the first commandment. Knowing beforehand what would be the first human couple's choice in the face of temptation, God gave Adam and Eve, so Ephrem writes, every opportunity both to overcome the serpent's attempts to lure them into disobedience and, failing that, to be reconciled to their Lord once they allowed themselves to be vanquished in the trial. Ephrem interweaves his two chief exegetical aims in that the more kind and generous he shows God to be—in the gifts he gave his creatures and in the way he arranged the circumstances of the temptation in the garden—the more he casts blame on Adam and Eve, highlighting both the free character of their decision and their willful contempt for their Benefactor.

he also built into it another incentive for obeying it beside the nobler incentive of love for him. God set death around the tree of knowledge so that if love did not move Adam to obedience, then at least the fear of death might deter him from disobedience.⁵³ Ephrem asks rhetorically, summing up his preceding comments, “If God indeed gave authority to [Adam], made him a participant in creation,⁵⁴ robed him in glory, and gave him the garden, what should He have done for him in addition, so that Adam would keep the commandment, yet did not do?”⁵⁵

It was not only in the way Adam and Eve were created and in how light the commandment was that God provided them with the means for overcoming

so no one should falsely allege that there is compulsion or another alien power.

ܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܕܠܐ ܕܡܝܬ
ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ
ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ
ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ

⁵³*CGen* 30.14-17. Cf. *Parad* 3.3, where Ephrem writes that God “set its boundary with dread (ܐܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬ).” Kofsky and Ruzer see this as Ephrem’s readiness “to waive the prevailing New Testament emphasis on the pre-requisition of love and adopt a rabbinic-like stand, namely, that both love and fear are legitimate motivations for religious praxis” (“Justice,” 322).

⁵⁴ God made Adam a participant in creation by giving him the capability and opportunity to name the animals. Ephrem writes about this process, related in *Gen* 2:19, just prior to the present quotation (see *CGen* 30.27-31.19).

⁵⁵ *CGen* 31.20-22:

ܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܕܠܐ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ
ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ ܕܡܝܬ

temptation. Even the conditions under which the serpent was allowed to confront Eve and ply her with half-truths and false promises betray her Creator's deep concern for her and Adam's welfare. The mere fact that it was a *serpent* that was allowed to approach her, and not some grand and terrifying creature or some angelic being, shows that God did not want to see them overwhelmed in the trial. The serpent, while cunning, was nevertheless far inferior to the first human couple, endowed as they were with the image and likeness of the Creator himself. The absurdity of this pairing of ill-matched contestants makes plain both that Eve could have easily overcome the base wiles of the serpent and that her failure to do so was entirely her own fault. By allowing only such a "totally despicable and vile"⁵⁶ creature to approach the one clothed in glory—his eyes downcast, unable to behold her splendor—God manifested his own kindness and showed his human creatures to be free, as only they could be responsible for the ensuing tragedy.

⁵⁶ CGen 35.22: *לֹא יָצָא מִן הַחַיָּים*

Kofsky and Ruzer argue, at least tentatively, that the serpent's despicable appearance "was in fact supposed to confront them with the revolting outward image of their mental temptation, and by that to actually deter them from transgressing the divine commandment" ("Justice," 324)—an interesting interpretation, but it is not clear from the text that Ephrem had this in mind.

From the foregoing it is clear that Ephrem is at pains to show God's great benevolence towards the crown jewel of his creation by arranging circumstances such that their contest might be a quick and easy one. It was nevertheless a contest, and it is precisely that fact that sets in sharp relief the free character of the first couple's decision. A contest whose outcome is pre-determined is no contest at all. The very fact that it was a contest, albeit one with an easily won crown, also shows, once again, that Adam's Lawgiver was a benevolent one with his creatures' best interests in mind. To Ephrem's way of thinking, God did not want to simply reward Adam for something God himself had done with no effort or cooperation on Adam's part. Rather, God elicited Adam's participation in the process whereby he would have gained both unerring wisdom and immortality:

The Just One did not want to give Adam the crown for nothing,
 though He gave him [Paradise] to enjoy without toil.
 He knew that if [Adam] wanted, he could be victorious.
 The Just One ardently wished to raise him to honor,
 for while the rank of the heavenly beings is great through [God's]
 goodness,
 the crown of freedom is surely no trifle.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ *Parad* 12.18:

לֹא יָרָא כְּחַס נִשְׁתַּלַּח חֵלֶלֶת חַיִּים לְאִוֶּמֶת
 בְּיָדָא וְלֹא חֵלֶלֶת מִסְכָּה לֹא נִשְׁתַּכְּחַר

In another hymn Ephrem elaborates on the idea that our efforts, and not God's alone, are necessary for our own progress toward perfection:

This is the Good One, who, though He was able, by force,
to adorn us without toil, took pains in every way
that we might grow fair by means of our will, that we might depict our
beauty
by means of the pigments that our freedom has gathered.
But if He adorns us, then we are like an image
that another painted and adorned with his own pigments.⁶⁰

Highlighting the fact that while God may dispose both persons and circumstances such that a good outcome can be readily achieved, Ephrem is equally adamant that human freedom is a factor determining the character of the outcome. One is tempted to read Ephrem's comments as his attempt to articulate a robust theodicy in the face of human tragedy, specifically its origin: not only is God not to blame for humanity's failings and the genesis of evil in the world, but

ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ

⁶⁰ HdF 31.5:

ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
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he was also, from the very start, very active in directing humanity's course in the right direction, while nonetheless clearing the space in which human freedom might exercise itself. Equally valid, though, is the view that his exegetical comments are his way of emphasizing the sovereignty, albeit relative and derivative, of the human person. The blame for the Fall rests squarely on the shoulders of the human actors, and that blame is made all the more damning considering all the blessings and help humanity was offered from the outset.

In order to make it clear that Adam and Eve were not simply passive participants or innocent victims in their own downfall, and in that of all who came after them, Ephrem rejects two opinions: first, the idea that they were under any compulsion or constraint to disobey the commandment and, second, the idea that Adam and Eve were not yet capable of exercising their freedom with understanding and vigor.

As was mentioned above briefly, the first couple was bound by no constraint to do what they did. The kind of constraint Ephrem has in mind here (ܡܠܚܒܐ) should not to be confused with necessity (ܡܠܚܒܐ), understood in terms of a deterministic theory of causality, with which concept he deals in other, more explicitly polemical works. Here the term "constraint" refers to the distress

It is easy to understand why Ephrem would point out that Eve had not yet seen the tree of knowledge before her tempter arrived. Had she already seen it, there may have been a chance for her to be drawn in by its beauty and weigh her desire for its fruit against the gravity of the commandment she and Adam had just received. With respect to the tree of life, on the other hand, it is not immediately clear why Ephrem would make the following observation: "God created the tree of life and hid it from the house of Adam, first, so that it might not besiege them with its beauty and double their struggle."⁶² The

⁶² *CGen* 35.1-2:

מִיָּד הַיָּמִים הַלְלוּ אֶת ה' וְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִיָּד הַיָּמִים הַלְלוּ אֶת ה' וְיִשְׂרָאֵל

commandment did not pertain to that tree, and so one might wonder how it could constitute an additional burden in obeying the commandment. We will return to this issue in the course of discussing the topography of Paradise below. For our present purpose it is enough to note that by claiming that both trees were out of sight—the one indefinitely, and the other until the moment the tempter arrived—Ephrem again points both to God’s kindness in arranging circumstances such that the contest would be easily won and to the fact that Adam and Eve acted freely in making their choice to disobey.

Ephrem also rebuffs the notion that Adam and Eve were not yet old enough to shoulder full responsibility for their own choices or to stand firm in the face of even mild temptation. Whereas Ephrem insists that they were “young adults (ܥܠܡܝܢ),” others are of the opinion that they were only “children (ܬܝܢܝܢ).” Ephrem attributes the latter opinion to the “outsiders (ܬܝܢܝܢ),” those who are not of the true church.⁶³ Now, it is true that elsewhere Ephrem himself uses precisely

⁶³ See *CGen* 33.1-4. It is not clear from the context that he had one particular group in mind. Mathews and Brock both translate ܬܝܢܝܢ as “pagans” but qualify that choice in their comments on the passage (see Mathews and Amar, *Prose Works*, 106 n 148; Sebastian Brock, *Hymns on Paradise* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998], 226 n II.14). Brock notes there that certain early

the term that he rejects in *CGen* to refer to Adam's and Eve's age. In *Parad* 7.6 Ephrem refers to Eve's "foolish childhood" (ܐܬܝܠܬܐ ܐܕܡܐ), and in the last hymn of the same cycle he twice uses the same term (ܐܬܝܠܬܐ) in reference to the young couple.⁶⁴ He uses that term in other hymn cycles as well.⁶⁵ So why does Ephrem reject that term in *CGen* and feel free to use it in other works? In the course of answering that question, an important distinction—some might say tension or inconsistency—emerges regarding the way Ephrem discusses the Fall in certain passages as opposed to others.

Christian exegetes, such as Theophilus of Antioch, maintain the interpretation that Ephrem here rejects.

Despite Ephrem's use of ܐܬܝܠܬܐ in the *Hymns on Paradise*, those hymns consistently depict Adam and Eve as mature enough to bear the brunt of the responsibility for the Fall, even though Ephrem is less emphatic there than in *CGen* about the inferiority of the serpent as compared to Adam and Eve. Recall that the serpent's manifestly low estate, according to Ephrem, was intended to be an indication that its counsel was not to be heeded, as Adam and Eve were aglow with the glory they received from their Maker and were endowed with authority over all the animals.

⁶⁴ *Parad* 15.12, 14.

⁶⁵ E.g., *Nat* 7.7, 26.8; *Virg* 12.12; *Eccl* 46.7.

Youth and Ignorance as Typological Elements

On the one hand, one might simply say that Ephrem uses the term ܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ in the hymns cited just above in much the same way that Aphrahat uses it in *Dem* 6.3, that is, in order to indicate the inexperience or childlike foolishness of the first couple.⁶⁶ In those hymns Ephrem is less concerned to confront any thorny theological or exegetical issue head-on, whereas in *CGen* he is clearly responding to what he deems an erroneous opinion about Adam and Eve. In *CGen* he makes a claim specifically about their age, using terms in a stricter fashion, as distinct from his more general comments in the hymns about their youthful simplicity of mind.

On the other hand, there is a noticeable difference of approach in his various works that should not be brushed over, and his use of terms derived from ܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ brings that difference to light. *Nat* 26.8 says that “the serpent deceived, led astray our mother, / a child lacking understanding.”⁶⁷ Elsewhere Ephrem

⁶⁶ *PO* 1.1:256.26: ܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

⁶⁷ *Nat* 26.8:

ܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

See Kronholm, *Motifs*, 98 for citations of Ephrem’s use of ܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ and related terms.

depicts the evil one recalling that “the first couple had listened to him. / His counsels were a trick for [their] childishness.”⁶⁸ The net effect of linking the notion of Adam and Eve’s ܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ with the wiles of serpent is that the burden of guilt for the Fall is shifted somewhat away from the first couple’s abuse of freedom and placed more directly on the deceitful influence of the evil one. That is not to say that Ephrem seeks to justify the couple’s disobedience but that he focuses his attention, in certain contexts, more on the evil one and his deceit (in contrast to the True One, Christ) than on the specific roles Adam and Eve played in the Fall. In those contexts Adam and Eve recede into the background somewhat, whereas in *CGen* they are placed front and center and are subjected to Ephrem’s unwavering scrutiny.

One of Ephrem’s principal motives for referring, in his hymns, to Adam and Eve as young and foolhardy is to enable him to elaborate two key typologies: first, Adam in relation to Christ and, second, Eve in relation to Mary. In some instances he uses terms related to the one he uses approvingly for Adam and Eve in *CGen* (ܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ). In other places he exploits the dual meaning of the term ܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ

⁶⁸ *Virg* 12.12:

ܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ ܕܐܕܡ ,ܡܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ ܕܐܕܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ,ܡܠܚܝܬܝܬܐ ܕܐܕܡ

to elucidate those typological relationships, or at least certain aspects of them.

Take the following stanza for example:

The old cried out, “Blessed be the babe
who rejuvenated Adam! He was saddened to see
that he grew old and decrepit, but the serpent who killed him
sloughed off [his skin] and was restored to youth. Blessed be the babe
by whom Eve and Adam were rejuvenated!”⁶⁹

Here Ephrem uses terms based on the root **חל** to meet the demands of the typological aspect he wants to illustrate. Not only is Christ the babe young in years—just born, in fact, in the context of the hymn; he also embodies the innocence associated with youth *par excellence*. Conversely, Adam is the one grown old, not only in years but even more so in terms of the corruption that he brought upon himself and allowed to insinuate itself into the very fabric of his existence. For Ephrem, as for Paul,⁷⁰ the old man signifies everything in us that is grown old and wizened, corrupted and degraded, while we are dead in sin. The new man, the young man, is what we are to become in Christ: renewed and

⁶⁹ *Nat* 7.11:

ܡܨܚܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܫܬܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܫܬܬܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܫܬܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܫܬܬܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܫܬܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܫܬܬܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܫܬܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܫܬܬܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܫܬܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܫܬܬܐ

⁷⁰ Cf. Rom 6:6; Eph 2:15, 4:22-24; Col 3:9-11.

washed clean, dead to sin and alive to God. Christ himself is the source and pattern of that new-found youth, and for Adam that means a restoration to a state of youthful innocence. So while the young-old polarity serves the purpose of juxtaposing the newborn Christ and the aged Adam, 930 years old at his death, the deeper meaning of the polarity touches upon sin and innocence, corruption and regeneration, not merely a quantitative difference in age. The root **חל** serves well in this context because the restored youth Adam received from the babe is youthfulness of mind and heart, or newness of life in Christ, without any connotation of ignorance or foolishness — a connotation that may have been difficult to avoid had Ephrem relied on a form of **ע**. Ephrem uses the term to suit his symbolic needs in this context and to complete the chain of reference (old Adam, young Christ, Adam made young again in Christ).

Ephrem's use of terms based on **ע**, however, allows him to fill out the typologies by way of its connotation of ignorance and foolishness. By referring to Adam and Eve as **ע** Ephrem draws attention to their ineptitude and the ease with which they could be duped by the serpent. He can then contrast those qualities with the wisdom of Christ and the discernment of Mary, thereby tightening the connection between the two pairs and illustrating the typological

character of salvation history as he reads it in Scripture and poetically expands upon it in his hymns. It comes as no surprise, then, that in the contexts of *Nat* 26.8 and *Virg* 12.12, in which words derived from ܐܝܬ appear, Ephrem refers to Christ as the foil for the foolish Adam and Eve. After Ephrem writes that the serpent deceived Eve, “our mother, / a child lacking understanding,” he continues:

Whereas the deceitful one mocked the young girl,
the false one was exposed by the dove:
from [her] innocent womb shone forth and came
the Wise One, who crushed the cunning one.⁷¹

With great economy of language Ephrem weaves together a group of correlations and contrasts involving Christ, Satan, Eve, and Mary. The key correlation in this passage is that between Christ, the wise one who conquered the deceitful one, and Eve, who was led astray in her childish ignorance. It is worth noting that there is an indication in the passage, albeit implicit, that

⁷¹ *Nat* 26.8:

ܐܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܐܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܐܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܐܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

In contrast to the translation above Beck translates the first line as “während die Listige ihren Spott trieb mit der Unerfahrenen,” construing the ܐܝܬ prefix as indicating the means by which the serpent deceived Eve. *CSD*, however, notes that ܐܝܬ generally takes its objects with the ܐܝܬ prefix.

Ephrem does not vindicate Eve completely by saying that she was deceived. While Ephrem does not name Mary or make much of the Eve-Mary typology here, his choice of the phrase “innocent womb” to refer to her is nevertheless telling, since “our mother” Eve is the guilty one. If an implicit contrast with a guilty womb is intended, then the guilt might be either that of Eve herself, by virtue of her disobedience, or that of the first-fruits of her womb, the murderous Cain. In any case, one should not read in the passage (or elsewhere in Ephrem, for that matter) any identification of being deceived with being beyond reproach.

Virg 12, which treats of Christ’s temptation in the desert,⁷² also makes use of the foolishness-wisdom polarity in the service of a Christ-centered typology. Recall that in stanza 12 the evil one muses on the fact that he had duped the young couple in the garden with his deceptive counsels. The stanza goes on:

But then came Sagacity, who hemmed him in.
[The evil one’s] temptations became a crowning for Him,
for that Wisdom, who came and laid him low.⁷³

⁷² See Mt 4:1-11.

⁷³ *Virg* 12.12:

ܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ
ܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ
ܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ

Taken together, the three passages reviewed over the previous several pages—*Nat* 7.11, *Nat* 26.8, and *Virg* 12.12—not only lay out key correspondences and contrasts between Adam, Eve, Christ, and Mary; they sketch out, in poetic fashion, some of the lineaments of Ephrem’s doctrine of recapitulation. If Adam and Eve’s youth points ahead to the fact that Christ entered human history as baby,⁷⁴ it does so with the crucial difference that while the first human couple’s youth (ܠܝܬܝܢܝܬܐ) connotes childish ignorance or foolishness, the terms used to refer to the Christ child (ܠܚܒܐ) and to his restoring Adam’s youth (ܠܚܐ) carry no such connotation. So while Christ passes through, takes to himself, and recapitulates all the stages of human development, he does so in a way free from the error and abuses of freedom perpetrated by our first parents and all their descendants. He undoes the tragic error committed in the garden and wins, through his proper use of human freedom, the crown that Adam and Eve spurned through their disobedience. In doing so, he manifests the victory of

⁷⁴ In other places Ephrem tightens the typological link between Adam’s coming forth into the world and that of Christ. Reminiscent of Irenaeus (*Adv haer* 3.18.7), *Nat* 1.16 reads, “The virgin earth had born that Adam, head of the earth; / today the Virgin bore [the new] Adam, the head of heaven.” Similarly, *Nat* 2.12 refers to Christ as a type of the Adam who came forth from the virgin earth, the untilled soil.

wisdom and truth over error and deceit, as *Virg* 12.12 and the other passages cited so pointedly illustrate. The child who is wisdom incarnate restores youth to the foolish youths who, through their own arrogance and gullibility, brought corruption and decrepitude upon themselves and those who came forth from them.

Mary figures into the typological network Ephrem develops in that she serves as a corrective for Eve's childish lack of understanding and discernment. Ephrem begins one of his *Hymns on the Church* by setting the two young women side by side, taking divine wisdom as the criterion for judging their virtues and merits:

Two simple ones, two simple-minded ones,
Mary and Eve are placed in comparison—
the one, the cause of our death; the other, of our life.

Refrain: Glory to Your wisdom!

Eve, her cunning made a stranger of her simplicity,
and she became undiscerning; Mary, with discernment,
made her cunning the salt of her simplicity.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ *Eccl* 35.1-2:

ܠܡܪܝܡ ܐܘܪܚܐ ܠܡܪܝܡ ܐܘܪܚܐ
ܠܡܪܝܡ ܐܘܪܚܐ ܠܡܪܝܡ ܐܘܪܚܐ
ܠܡܪܝܡ ܐܘܪܚܐ ܠܡܪܝܡ ܐܘܪܚܐ
ܠܡܪܝܡ ܐܘܪܚܐ ܠܡܪܝܡ ܐܘܪܚܐ

The basis for the comparison between Eve and Mary, though Ephrem does not make it explicit here, is Christ, the personification of cunning and sagacity.⁷⁶ He is ܠܚܡܝܬܐ itself, and the way that the two young women reflect his power as such depends on the specific way in which they freely choose to exercise their cunning—the one to the detriment of her own simplicity (“simplicity” understood as integrity), and the other in the service of it. The power of Mary’s cunning, rightly oriented by her proper exercise of freedom, manifests itself in her boldness toward Gabriel:

Let us marvel at Mary, who of the great angel
required [an explanation] and did not quake, asked and was not afraid.
Eve did not even want to ask
the despicable, footless serpent;
the handmaid overthrew Gabriel.⁷⁷

ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܡܝܬܐ
ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܡܝܬܐ
ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܡܝܬܐ

Cf. *Eccl* 46.11: “The mother lacking discernment [i.e., Eve] is the source of our grief, / and the sister of understanding [i.e., Mary] is the treasury of our joy.”

⁷⁶ Cf. *Virg* 12.12.

⁷⁷ *Eccl* 46.11:

ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܠܚܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ

As we have seen, Ephrem's use of the term ܠܕܝܢܐ in reference to Adam and Eve before the Fall allows him to broaden the perspective he takes in the hymns. Rather than focusing primarily on the guilt that the first couple incurred by abusing their freedom, Ephrem takes a more Christocentric view in some of his hymns, where Christ and Satan are the protagonists more so than Adam and Eve, and where typological exegesis plays a greater role. The latter pair are by no means innocent, but the deceiver, using the serpent as his vehicle, plays a more active and effective role in bringing about the Fall in certain poetic passages as distinct from *CGen*, in which the effectiveness and importance of the deceiver are downplayed and the responsibility for the Fall is attributed almost exclusively to the human agents.

And yet there are places in Ephrem's hymns where both the evil one and the human agents are likewise judged to be at fault. *Eccl* 46 is a good example. In that hymn Ephrem incorporates both the effectiveness of the serpent's wiles and the culpability of Adam and Eve. The question that occupies stanzas 5 through 9 is whether Adam sinned knowingly or unknowingly. An unnamed interlocutor claims that if Adam had known that it was sinful to eat from the tree, he would

not have done so.⁷⁸ Ephrem responds by putting the question to the claimant whether *he* knows when *he himself* sins. Ephrem then frames the following argument:

And if in reality a man never sinned
because he did not know that it is sinful to provoke [God's] anger,
just so in reality it is manifest
that Adam, a child (ܐܝܬܐ), did not know
that he was definitely sinning when he ate.⁷⁹

As a sign that Ephrem is not actually entertaining that argument as worthy, the conditional statement is introduced by ܐܠܐ, which, when followed by a perfect tense verb, indicates that the statement expresses an impossibility.⁸⁰ Since it is a contrary-to-fact statement, it is not entirely clear whether Ephrem uses ܐܝܬܐ as a term that applies to Adam appropriately, or whether he is implying that his opponent would say so, as a way of excusing Adam from responsibility. In any

⁷⁸ Eccl 46.5.

⁷⁹ Eccl 46.7:

ܐܠܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܕܡ ܕܠܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

⁸⁰ Theodor Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, trans. James A. Chrichton (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), § 375. In fact the whole introductory phrase ܐܠܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ indicates that what follows is contrary to fact.

event, Ephrem is convinced that Adam knew what he was doing when he sinned, whether or not he was a mere child:

And just as he knew when he was naked,
and he fled and hid, thus he hid
when he ate the stolen fruit.⁸¹

Adam and Eve are not the only ones to blame, however. The serpent succeeds in bringing them to the brink of sinning:

For the evil one blinded the understanding of the house of Adam,
that they might not investigate the deceit that he offered by means of the
serpent.

For if the deceit were investigated in the crucible,
it would there slough off [its] sham beauty;
it would there show its own blemishes.⁸²

The evil one is to blame for blinding our first parents' minds, and yet later in the hymn Ephrem intimates that they were willing partners in their own blinding

⁸¹ *Eccl* 46.8:

ܐܕܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܐܕܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܐܕܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

⁸² *Eccl* 46.2:

ܐܕܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܐܕܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܐܕܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܐܕܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܐܕܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

when he says that Eve “did not want to object to his words / even though his words were to be disputed / and reproved in the crucible.”⁸³

Adam and Eve’s descendants exhibit the same willingness to accept a sham beauty in the place of the true, since we sin just as wittingly as did they.⁸⁴ If someone says that Adam ate the fruit without knowing it was sinful,

Then he finds fault with that just Judge,
[claiming] that he unjustly passed His judgment
which scourged them⁸⁵ and punished that one.⁸⁶

For Ephrem, God is certainly not to blame at all for what happened to Adam and Eve, and, at least in this hymn, the evil one’s responsibility is limited. While the latter blinded their understanding, they allowed that to happen. They should have tested the serpent’s words, and they did not act without knowledge when they disobeyed the commandment.

⁸³ *Eccl* 46.10:

ܠܐ ܕܝܥܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

⁸⁴ Cf. *Eccl* 46.9.

⁸⁵ I.e., Adam and Eve.

⁸⁶ I.e., the serpent. *Eccl* 46.5:

ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

In the foregoing passages from Ephrem's hymns we have seen him blame the evil one for deceiving the first couple, implying that their youthful ignorance was a factor mitigating their culpability. *Eccl* 46 gave them far less leeway than the other hymns in terms of their responsibility for the Fall. Ephrem's view there is mixed to some degree, though. On the one hand Adam and Eve are ultimately responsible for their own failure to obey the commandment, and they failed knowingly; on the other hand, the evil one maliciously darkened their minds. Turning back to *CGen*, we find that Ephrem downplays the role of the serpent even further, focusing almost exclusively on the couple and ascribing all the blame to them. The serpent was an instrument of temptation, to be sure, but recall that God timed its entrance on the scene such that Eve would have easily recognized its ulterior aims and seen through its lies. That Adam and Eve were fully capable of being victorious and were given every possible help in the contest is clear to Ephrem on the basis of both their vast superiority vis-à-vis the serpent and their relative maturity. While Ephrem finds no difficulty in calling them *ܐܝܬܐ* in the hymns we reviewed,⁸⁷ he is adamant that they are in fact *ܬܠܡܝܕܝܢ*

⁸⁷ Again, possible excepting *Eccl* 46, where the ascription might be Ephrem's opponent's choice of words, not Ephrem's own.

in *CGen*. He gives a few reasons for his insistence: the multiplicity of names that Adam gave the animals is evidence of his wisdom (ܡܕܢܚܐܐܝܐ), which could not have been that of a child; Adam's charge to till and keep the garden shows his strength (ܡܕܢܚܐܐܝܐ); and it was the glory (ܠܚܐܝܐ) with which Adam and Eve were clothed that accounts for their being naked yet unashamed, not their alleged childhood.⁸⁸

The thrust of Ephrem's insistence that they were young adults is that they were fully capable of exercising their freedom in obedience to the law, and their failure to do so is their own fault, and theirs alone. Unlike what we found in the hymns we reviewed, Ephrem does not pursue any typological exegesis but rather focuses his attention on vindicating God from all allegations of injustice and on highlighting the central role of human freedom in the Fall. Since Ephrem assumes that God does not expect more from his creatures than they can bear, he sees the giving of the commandment to Adam and Eve as proof of their ability to obey it. Along with Adam's bestowal of the animals' names and the other reasons mentioned, Ephrem took as evidence of their young adulthood "the law that was established for them, which should witness to their full maturity, and

⁸⁸ See *CGen* 32.31-33.10.

Ephrem could not speak more plainly about who is at fault and why. Not only has he enlisted the serpent in the service of God's aim to lighten the severity of the contest by the way he depicted the manner and timing of the serpent's entrance,⁹¹ as well as his lowly status in relation to the two vested in glory; Ephrem has even rendered him almost superfluous to the tragedy about to unfold: the serpent's influence is minimal at best. In short, they would have fallen anyway, not by any constraint or necessity, but by their own greed and covetousness. The serpent's counsel was merely a pretext or catalyst. Whereas Ephrem elsewhere refers to the serpent's words with the more potent image of poison, here its words are only advice, which may be accepted or rejected at the will of the hearer.⁹²

⁹¹ Kofsky and Ruzer note Ephrem's use of an "inverted symmetry between the serpent's arrival without delay...and God's delayed appearance after the Fall in order to give Adam and Eve an occasion to repent" ("Justice," 324), showing once again the extent of God's mercy in his arranging circumstances as favorably as possible for the first human couple. Kofsky and Ruzer attribute that inverted symmetry to the influence of Jewish exegetical tradition, as does Sten Hidal (*Interpretatio Syriaca: Die Kommentare des heiligen Ephräm des Syrers zu Genesis und Exodus mit besondere Berücksichtigung ihrer Auslegungsgeschichtlichen Stellung*, CBOTS 6, [Lund: Gleerup, 1974], 85).

⁹² Ephrem explains that the influence of the other actors did not acquit either Adam or Eve of their personal guilt. When God approached the couple in the

While the passage as a whole makes Ephrem's view abundantly clear, there are a couple of details that are worth drawing out. First, the last two lines, stating that it was not what entered Eve's ear but what came forth from within her that overcame her, evoke Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees in Mt 15. There he instructs the crowd that it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles the person but what comes out of the mouth (Mt 15:11), since what comes out of the mouth issues from the heart (Mt 15:18). Eve's greed, and that of Adam following her, was seated within; it was not the result of the serpent's influence. Her wayward desire, which first welled up within her when she gazed at the tree, was the impetus behind her decision to eat from the tree.

A second detail, the mention of eyes and ears further reinforces Eve's personal guilt in the affair. Taking as his cue the mention of the tree's desirable appearance in Gen 3:6, Ephrem contrasts the two organs involved in the temptation. The serpent's counsel enters her ear, which fact accounts for the passive dimension of Eve's role in the affair and, conversely, the serpent's active

hopes they would confess their sin, they refused to confess what they themselves had done; rather, they complained to God of that which had been done to them by others—to Adam by Eve, and to Eve by the serpent (*CGen* 40.26-28). Their complaints did not constitute repentance, and so the chastisements followed in due course.

role. By hearing the serpent's words, she acted as a mere vessel for his deceptive counsel. As Sebastian Brock notes, Ephrem poetically images the contrast between Eve's disobedience and Mary's obedience as Satan pouring poison in the former's ear (as Claudius did to Hamlet's father) and as Mary conceiving through her own ear:⁹³

The evil one's poison, he poured it out into Eve's ear by means of the
serpent;
and the Good One brought low his mercy and entered through Mary's
ear.

Through that gate by which death entered, life entered, slaying death.⁹⁴

Elsewhere Ephrem expands on the image of conceiving through the ear to include those who hear the Lord's words and take them to heart, using the Samaritan woman at the well as his example⁹⁵:

Mary, the thirsty land—in Nazareth she
conceived our Lord through her hearing.
And you, woman thirsting for water, you also
conceived the Son through your hearing.

⁹³ Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian*, Cistercian Studies 124 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 32-33.

⁹⁴ *Sermo* 2.159-164 [Nach]:

ܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬ
ܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬ
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Cf. Eccl. 49.7.

⁹⁵ Cf. Jn 4.

Blessed are your ears, which drank [from] the Source,
that one who gave drink to the world.
Mary begot him in a manger,
you, in the ears of His hearers.⁹⁶

In contrast to both Mary and the Samaritan woman, who both begot the
life-giving Word, Eve begot death by imbibing the serpent's lies:

Eve became a cave and tomb
for the accursed serpent. Since his evil counsel
entered and dwelt in her, she became bread for him,
for she became dust.⁹⁷

The contrast between Eve and Mary, in relation to the stanza just above, hinges
on the notion of childbearing. Ephrem begins the hymn with Mary saying that
the baby she carried in her womb carried her aloft and revealed to her his
majesty. Eve, by contrast, allows the evil one to enter and dwell within her: the

⁹⁶ *Virg* 23.5:

ܠܗܡܢ ܠܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܥܬܐ ܕܡܝܠܚܐ
ܡܢ ܕܡܢܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ
ܠܗܡܢ ܠܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ
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⁹⁷ *Nat* 17.6:

ܠܗܡܢ ܠܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ
ܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ
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In Ephrem's account of what transpired after Eve had eaten, we find her becoming for Adam what the serpent had been for her. Vanquished in her own contest, she then brings the contest to him. Again departing from the biblical text, Ephrem compounds her guilt by imagining that she plied him forcefully: "And with many pleas she made him eat, even if it is not written that she entreated him."¹⁰⁶ The causative ܡܕܠܚܐ ("she made him eat"), in the Aphel, ascribes to Eve no small share of the responsibility for the outcome, even though Adam's consent was needed. As the serpent offered Eve his counsel, so did she offer Adam hers, although compared to the serpent's questions, her many entreaties¹⁰⁷ entailed more aggressive behavior. Like the serpent, she approached her husband in a form that would not overwhelm him: after she had eaten, she did not die, nor did she acquire divinity, nor was she immediately stripped naked of her glory, exposing her shame and darkness.¹⁰⁸ And just as the serpent was

¹⁰⁶ CGen 38.13-14: ܕܝܡܢ ܚܡܝܢܐܢܐ ܬܚܒܐ ܠܐ ܢܐܢ ܡܕܠܚܐ ܚܡܝܢܐܢܐ ܚܡܝܢܐܢܐ

¹⁰⁷ The Syriac ܚܡܝܢܐܢܐ and ܚܡܝܢܐܢܐ also have the somewhat less forceful connotations of persuading and convincing.

¹⁰⁸ CGen 38.10-20.

authority over her was, in fact, a new dimension in their now strained and unnatural relationship—unnatural, that is, in comparison with their Creator’s original intention for them. Whereas they were meant to share dominion over the rest of creation, and she was to be his helpmate, the situation is now radically different in the wake of her disobedience. By abusing the freedom upon which their shared authority was founded, she set their relationship in disarray, introducing an antagonistic rift between them.

We have already reviewed two elements of the order of nature that the abuse of freedom disrupted: the relation between human persons and the animals, instantiated by Eve and the serpent, and the relation between man and woman. Another instance of disorder that Ephrem points to entails Adam and Eve’s status vis-à-vis the tree of knowledge. They both exercised authority over all of creation, but, as part of his deceit, the evil one brought them to subvert that hierarchy. Even though the serpent never approached Adam, Ephrem gives his readers a glimpse into Satan’s mind as he recalls his opportunity to tempt the man:

“I remembered that the first Adam as well,
if I had made him proud as a lord,

in his pride he would have scoffed at the honor,¹¹⁹
 so that it might not seem that the tree was greater than he.
 His pride would have been his keeper.

“Because of this, I exalted the tree,
 so that with it I might diminish the man.”¹²⁰

The irony in the first two lines is that Adam was, in fact, created as a lord of creation, albeit by gift and for stewardship, and the tragedy is that he forgot his standing in relation to the rest of creation, including the grand tree of knowledge.¹²¹ To stay true to the narrative in Genesis, it was Eve who was

¹¹⁹ I.e., the honor of acquiring divinity, which the serpent offered by means of the tree.

¹²⁰ *Virg* 12.23-24:

[ܐܕܡ] ܕܐܪܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ
 ܡܕܝܗܐ [ܐܕܡ] ܕܐܪܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ
 ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ
 ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ
 ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ

ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ
 ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ

¹²¹ Ephrem points to this tragic irony in *CGen* 41.12-14, where he addresses Adam directly:

You have been unfaithful to your Benefactor, who put you in authority
 over all things, and you have firmly believed that deceiver, who has
 contrived to take your authority away entirely.

ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ
 ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ

See Kronholm, *Motifs*, 99, where he notes the connection between the false estimation of the tree and the false estimation of the serpent:

confronted by the serpent and who wrongly measured herself against the tree,
and it was she who failed to ask the serpent the following question:

If only that one [Eve] had asked, “Is that tree
a made thing or the Maker, is it a creature or the Divine Being?”
For the locked up treasures of all creatures
cannot give out anything without
the hidden symbol, the key to all.¹²²

Failing to ask that question, she incorrectly gauged her own glory and authority relative to the tree and allowed it to hold sway over her—again, through her own greed. Yet the most grievous crime involved in her (and Adam’s) estimation of the tree had less to do with how they compared themselves to it and more to do with their arrogance and blasphemy toward their Creator. With respect to every

In Ephrem’s view this reference to the possibility of attaining divine status by way of the tree of knowledge implies that the evil one through his reptilian instrument “elevated the tree,” from a created and natural tree under the dominion of man to a creative power and an independent being actually able to grant divinity. This is a parallel to the supposed elevation of the Serpent himself into a human or even heavenly state, whilst in reality a created animal in every respect inferior to man.

¹²² *Eccl* 48.3:

מִן הָאֵל וְהַכֹּהֵן וְהָאֵל וְהַכֹּהֵן
בְּחַיָּה מִן הָאֵל וְהַכֹּהֵן בְּחַיָּה מִן הָאֵל וְהַכֹּהֵן
וְהָאֵל וְהַכֹּהֵן וְהָאֵל וְהַכֹּהֵן
לֹא חָיָה לְחַיָּה לֹא חָיָה לְחַיָּה
וְהָאֵל וְהַכֹּהֵן וְהָאֵל וְהַכֹּהֵן

example of their perverting the order of nature, their fundamental and most heinous error was their failure to perceive and honor the infinite majesty and dominion of the Creator. They did not honor the Creator-creature distinction, which distinction is the cornerstone of Ephrem's ontology. Eve put more trust in the serpent than in God, Adam gave more weight to his wife's pleading than to God's commandment, and both greedily and foolishly thought they could seize divinity by way of that which was only a creature. It comes as no surprise, then, that Ephrem traces the genealogy of all idolaters back to Eve and the blindness she incurred:

And through the eye that grew dark the whole world was darkened,
and while people groped around, every stone they stumbled upon
they took for a god—they called falsehood truth.¹²³

One could go further than saying that they erred in viewing the tree itself as a source of divinity. In effect they sought to become gods without God, and in so doing they utterly forgot who they were and what their place was in the order

¹²³ *Eccl* 37.6:

ܡܠܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
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of things. In Ephrem's estimation, that forgetfulness explains God's words to

Adam in Gen 3:19:

And because "you are from dust" and you have forgotten yourself, "you will return to your dust," and you will know your true being through your humiliation.¹²⁴

God's chastisement in the form of a medicinal humiliation leading to true self-knowledge intends to remedy the two-fold disorder that Adam and Eve brought about: the paradoxical coupling of their wrong-minded humility toward the tree and the serpent, on the one hand, and their wanton self-aggrandizement before their Maker, on the other. Their abuse of freedom struck at the root of the order God established for them and the rest of creation, and, ironically, that same abuse led to the crippling of freedom itself. Christ came to provide the remedy himself:

Let the seventh day cry "Holy, holy, holy" to the Holy One,
who hallowed the Sabbath that it might give rest to living things.
The Good One, who does not tire, cared for humanity
and cared for the animals.
Since freedom fell under the yoke,
He came to birth and was brought into bondage that He might set
[freedom] free.

¹²⁴ CGen 44.16-18:

ܘܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ .ܝܝܬܐ ܝܥܡܕܝ .ܝܥܪܐ ܫܡܝܐ ܕܡܪ ܚܝܐ ܥܡ ܕܡܢ
ܕܝܠܕܐܡܝܐ

The Servant's cheek was slapped in the law court;
as Lord, He shattered the yoke that was [laid] upon the free.¹²⁵

Ephrem here considers the effects of the abuse of freedom in order to expand on the typological relation between the first Adam and the second, giving further evidence that Ephrem's work contains the outlines of a notion of recapitulation. The crippling of freedom attendant upon the Fall manifests itself not only as bondage—to sin, to the evil one, to one's own wayward desires—but also as a subjugation, in the etymological sense of toiling under the yoke. Freedom is not altogether lost because of the Fall but toils without rest under the burden of what it has wrought for itself. Christ subjects himself to our limitations and to the abuse of his own people. In so doing, he unburdens us, obtaining for us the Sabbath rest we were unable to obtain on our own. By subjugating himself, he sets human freedom free. It is important to stress, however, that while Ephrem speaks poetically about freedom coming under the yoke, he in no way advocates

¹²⁵ *Nat* 26.10:

[illegible]

a position of determinism or fatalism, either before the Fall or after. He vigorously rejects such a view in his overtly polemical works.

The Adam-Christ typology and the theme of Christ's recapitulation figure prominently in *Virg* 12. There we read of Satan tempting the God-man in the desert,¹²⁶ hoping the latter would be as vulnerable and susceptible to his wiles as was the "house of Adam (ܕܡܝܬ ܐܕܡ)." ¹²⁷ Christ does not reveal his divine identity so as to allow Satan to try him:

This was the work of our Athlete,
that He did not there let him know that He was God.
For if he had known that He was God,
he would have fled from Him at the outset
and would have ruined the completion [of the contest].¹²⁸

Christ came, according to Ephrem, to engage in the contest in which Adam and Eve were bested. From the hymn's first stanza it is clear that Christ was to contend as a man, not acting manifestly as God, and that this was so that he

¹²⁶ Cf. Mt 4.

¹²⁷ *Virg* 12.5.

¹²⁸ *Virg* 12.9:

ܠܡܥܢ ܕܡܝܬ ܐܕܡ ܡܠܟܐ
ܐܡ ܠܡܠܟܐ [ܕܡܝܬ ܐܕܡ] ܠܐ
ܐܡ ܠܡܠܟܐ [ܠܡܠܟܐ] ܕܐܝܢ ܐܠܐ
ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܐܝܢ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ
ܠܡܠܟܐ [ܕܡܝܬ] ܠܡܠܟܐ [ܕܡܠܟܐ]

might keep Satan from fleeing and might gain the victory from within the human condition, which he chose to take to himself:

Our Lord labored and went forth to the contest.
It was not that He might use force,
but that He might be victorious through striving.
For He hungered and, through fasting, led to victory
him who was vanquished on account of eating.¹²⁹

By his struggle with hunger and his victory over Satan through his fasting, Christ won the victory for his people, whose grief originated in Adam and Eve's deadly act of eating. The fact that Christ chose to struggle as a man and not overwhelm his enemy by sheer divine force is telling in a couple of respects. First, it shows him undoing the errors of our first parents, all the while being a man according to the line of Adam.¹³⁰ Second, it gives an indication of what Adam's victory would have looked like, had he stood fast in the contest.

¹²⁹ *Virg* 12.1:

ܐܬܝܬ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
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ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

¹³⁰ Cf. *Virg* 12.10, where Ephrem writes, "For neither did He exalt Himself as God, / nor did He lose His footing as man." The second verse implicitly contrasts the first Adam, who lost his footing, with the second Adam, who kept his own firm and steady. The first verse can be understood in a couple of ways. It clearly

The Shape of Victory and the Topography of Paradise

In the stanza quoted just above Ephrem depicts Christ as entering the fray as a man like Adam and winning the victory through his own striving and obedience to the Father's will. As the anti-type shining light back on the type, the character of Christ's victory illuminates what would have been the character of Adam's, namely, that it would have been won through exertion, fixity of purpose, and unconditional obedience to God. That view emerges from a couple of key passages in *CGen*.

There is an interesting difference between the conditions of the contest as originally explained in *CGen* 30.14-17 and as they appear in 38.10-22, where Eve brings the fruit to Adam for him to eat. In that prior passage, where Ephrem describes God's generosity in giving Adam all the trees except the one, the text says that God set death around the one tree in order to scare Adam away from disobedience in the event that his love for God was too weak to elicit his obedience. One would then deduce that obedience exercised out of fear would

means that Christ kept his divine identity hidden from Satan, but it might also contrast him, again by implication, with Adam, who sought to exalt himself and seize divinity though he was a mere man.

might say, either toward God or toward his own delusion about who he himself is and what he could be apart from his Maker. Ephrem's point is that Adam could not have simply stumbled upon victory as he was backing away from something fearful. It was necessary for him to direct his will in freedom toward the goal of his choosing. That necessity is the thrust behind Ephrem's emphasis on God's benevolence in arranging the contest the way he did. It was not only to offer every possible help to Adam so that the right choice might be easier to make, but also to clear the ground for Adam to act in freedom and with full knowledge. Every passage in *CGen* dealing with the temptation and the Fall resonates with Ephrem's insistence on the reality and efficacy, for better or for worse, of human freedom.

Ephrem elaborates on Adam's need to choose freely between obedience and disobedience:

In justice [God] withheld one tree from him to whom in goodness, He had given all that was in Paradise, on the earth, in the air, and in the seas. For when He created him, He neither made him mortal, nor did He fashion him immortal, so that Adam, by keeping the commandment or by transgressing the commandment, might obtain from one of the trees that which he wanted.

...

compulsion, they would not, then, reflect the image of their Maker, who himself is in no way compelled. Further, without human freedom, obedience and disobedience, love and contempt, are emptied of all meaning, and God's commandment is rendered superfluous, even irrational.

If Ephrem's conception of divine justice and goodness and human freedom makes it impossible to view the commandment as superfluous, so does it keep the commandment from being seen as arbitrary or calculated merely to test Adam's obedience. Ephrem's conception of divine law and justice cannot be read in terms of an extrinsic legalism. Rather, his view rests upon his convictions about the freedom of persons and an intrinsic, ontological understanding of law and moral action as shaping persons and relations between persons. A strictly legalistic notion would depict God's commandment as extrinsic to the good of the persons to whom the commandment was given. On that view, obedience and disobedience are merely matters of how one is to be reckoned, not of how one's person is shaped as a result of one's choices. Obedience would simply mean that one was accounted to be in good standing with the Lawgiver, and disobedience would mean just the opposite. Ephrem's view is quite different. According to Ephrem, God wanted to grant immortal life to his human creatures, meaning

that it was in fact what they were created to acquire and was part of what would constitute their perfection. Since God worked all things to the good of his creatures, why would his giving the commandment not be an expression of that same loving care? To deny that the commandment also worked to the good of its recipients, as a guide to their perfection, is to introduce a division in God, a conflict between his justice and his goodness, which notion is anathema to Ephrem. In effect, it is to say that, on the one hand, God graciously wanted to grant immortal life to Adam and Eve, but, on the other, he wanted to exact an unconditional and unthinking compliance from them regardless of the content and aim of his commandment—that his justice compelled him to forsake his goodness toward his creatures and demanded their death as their just deserts for breaking the law, thus thwarting the aim of his goodness.

Ephrem clearly holds that both God's justice and his goodness act in all respects for the good of his creatures, and that both are oriented toward nurturing their relationship. So while Adam and Eve were given the freedom to choose what they preferred to become, the commandment manifested the proper

orientation of their freedom.¹³⁴ Their obedience would have meant their choosing life, a life-giving relationship with their Creator and Benefactor, and their disobedience signaled their preference for severing that relation and turning toward other creatures—the tree, the serpent—and ultimately toward themselves, which choice of necessity entails death. Cutting themselves off from the source of life, they estranged themselves from their loving Maker and became what they preferred.

As evidence that Ephrem does not espouse an extrinsic, legalistic view of divine justice and obedience to God's will, we note again that he cites the "love or fear" (ܐܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܐܘ ܚܝܬܐ) ¹³⁵ of God as the proper motivation for obedience, not the fear of shame and corruption that would have been apparent to Adam had Eve been stripped of her glory immediately. For Ephrem, obedience must be born of love in order for it to constitute victory and play a role in the perfection of the one who obeys. As was already noted, Adam's obedience was to be a

¹³⁴ Nowhere does Ephrem appear to espouse a notion of human freedom that might be characterized as sheer, unmitigated liberty, devoid of all teleological orientation.

¹³⁵ *CGen* 38.20. The Syriac ܐܠܡܠܝܬܐ can refer either to fear and dread or to awe and pious reverence. It is apparent that the latter more fittingly applies to this context, as opposed to the fear of death mentioned in *CGen* 30.16.

Death, the fear of which was meant to be a helpful deterrent against disobedience, is a mercy in that it sets a limit to human grief and misery. That fact, coupled with Ephrem's conviction that obedience was to be the fruit of love, makes it clear that he viewed divine justice and law as perfective of those subject to the law and under God's justice. Out of justice God would have granted Adam and Eve immortal life and unerring knowledge, which gifts God wanted to grant them anyway out of his goodness; the decree of death, which a legalistic view would claim was simply their just recompense for disobedience, was in fact a merciful remedy for what would have been their eternal (self-inflicted) suffering. Acting in complete harmony and jointly expressing his undivided will, God's goodness and justice provide Adam and Eve with, on the one hand, every possible help to exercise their freedom in the way that would foster their own perfection and, on the other, the very opportunity to exercise that freedom at all.

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Cf. Eccl 2.3.

Up to this point we have sketched out some of the contours of what would have been Adam and Eve's victory. The crown won by their freely chosen obedience would not have been the mere conformity of their wills to a law that was extrinsic to their own good and promulgated by a disinterested and exacting legislator. Rather, it would have been their first act of love for their gracious Creator and would have nurtured a life-giving relationship with him—precisely what he wanted for them from the beginning yet did not coerce them into choosing. Further details about the shape of their victory emerge from Ephrem's depiction of what Brock calls the "topography of Paradise."¹³⁸

In his *Hymns on Paradise* Ephrem envisions Paradise as a mountain set apart, towering over the land of those who descended from Adam and who have continued his legacy of sin.¹³⁹ That Adam's descendants live far below the

¹³⁸ Brock, *Hymns*, note to *Parad* 1.10 on 189. See his comments on this topic on 49-57. On the same topic also see Anderson, *Genesis*, 55-58, 79-80, and Nicolas Séd, "Les hymnes sur le Paradis de saint Ephrem et les traditions juives," *Mus* 81 (1968): 457-67.

¹³⁹ *Parad* 1.4:

With the mind's eye I saw paradise,
and the height of every mountain is set below its height.
The summit of the flood reached only its lowest parts.
It kissed its feet and revered and turned back
to swell and trample the summit of the mountains and hills.

mountain of Paradise signals his expulsion after the Fall. He was not only cast out but cast down, settling in the valley below the mountain's base.¹⁴⁰ In addition to the vertical component of Ephrem's poetic vision of Paradise, there is a horizontal one as well—more specifically, as Brock notes, a concentric horizontal one, giving the mountain a conical shape.¹⁴¹ He conceives the horizontal layout of the mountain along the basic lines of the Temple, with its nested spaces. Since animals were not allowed to enter Paradise, Adam and Eve had to go to the outer boundary of the outer region of Paradise, where they dwelled, in order to meet the animals.¹⁴² It was at the edge of Paradise that the serpent met Eve and learned about the location of the trees, the tree of life being in an inner sanctum:

When the accursed one heard that, just like that of the sanctuary,

It kisses the foothills [of Paradise], and it subdues the summit of every [other place].

ܠܚܝܬܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܠܚܝܬܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܠܚܝܬܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܠܚܝܬܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܠܚܝܬܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

¹⁴⁰ *Parad* 1.10: After Adam sinned, God, "in [His] goodness, gave him the lowlands far off from it. / He settled him in the valley below the foothills of Paradise."

ܠܚܝܬܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܠܚܝܬܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

¹⁴¹ Brock, *Hymns*, 52, 54.

¹⁴² *Parad* 3.4.

the glory of that inner tabernacle was hidden from them,
 and that the tree of knowledge, which was shrouded with the
 commandment,
 was the veil of the sanctuary,
 he knew that that fruit was the key of justice,
 and that it would open the eyes of the presumptuous so that they might
 feel remorse.¹⁴³

Ephrem does not explore the Paradise-Tabernacle theme in *CGen*,¹⁴⁴ but he does write that the tree of knowledge was visible while the tree of life was hidden from view.¹⁴⁵ His comments there give rise to a few questions. Just prior to saying that the tree of life was hidden from view, he states that Adam was created neither mortal nor immortal so that he “might obtain from one of the trees that which he wanted.”¹⁴⁶ That statement gives the impression that Adam

¹⁴³ *Parad* 3.4:

ܡܢ ܕܢܥܡܪ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ
 ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
 ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
 ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
 ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
 ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

¹⁴⁴ In *CGen* 29.6-7, he mentions that Paradise is situated “on a great height” (ܡܢ ܡܪܝܬܐ). He also explains Cain and Abel’s trip out “to the valley” (ܕܡܪܝܬܐ) as implying either that they lived on a mountain on the outskirts of Paradise or that Abel tended his flocks on a mountain (*CGen* 49.8-11). Apart from those passing comments and his discussion of the four rivers of Paradise (28.14-29.10) Ephrem does not discuss the layout of Paradise in *CGen*.

¹⁴⁵ *CGen* 35.1.

¹⁴⁶ *CGen* 34.30-31.

had to choose between the two trees, but how could that be the case if one of them was hidden from his view? One might also ask *why* the tree of life was hidden. Ephrem says it was hidden, first, so that its beauty might not make Adam's contest harder, and second, so that Adam might not obey the commandment given by the invisible Lord merely for the sake of a visible reward.¹⁴⁷ The latter reason poses no difficulty, but one might still wonder how the tree's beauty would have made Adam's contest more difficult. Ephrem's discussion there is not completely satisfying. We must return to his hymns in order to answer those questions more fully.

If Adam's choice was between the two trees, and yet one was hidden from him, the whole contest needs to be understood in a different way, namely, with regard to Ephrem's depiction of the layout of Paradise. To anticipate the answer: Adam was meant for priestly service in Paradise, but at the time of his creation he was as yet unprepared for that service. The way in which he exercised his freedom and the specific intentions driving his choice would either effect or hinder his preparation. Ephrem's image of the Temple as an analogue for Paradise makes that clear:

¹⁴⁷ CGen 35.1-4.

[God] did not, then, allow Adam to enter
 that inner tabernacle. This one was guarded
 so that he [first] might be well pleasing in his service of that outer
 tabernacle,
 and, like a priest with sweet-smelling incense,
 his keeping the commandment might be for Adam a censer,
 that he might enter that hidden tabernacle [and stand] before the Hidden
 One.¹⁴⁸

Collating the passage above with *CGen* 34.26-31, we see Adam created in
 an intermediate state, between mortality and immortality, and between the
 world outside Paradise and the glory of its inner sanctum.¹⁴⁹ In that respect his
 choice was, in fact, between the two trees. If he served well in the outer
 tabernacle—Ephrem opines that all he had to till and keep there was the

¹⁴⁸ *Parad* 3.16:

ܐܕܡ ܕܠܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

¹⁴⁹ This vision of life before the Fall precludes any notion of a primordial perfection to which we need only be restored in Christ. From the very beginning, according to Ephrem, there was the opportunity for, and the hope and means of, progressing toward perfection. In the language of *Parad* 3, Adam was born a king but not yet a priest; his priesthood would be the crown of his victory in the contest.

Adam plucked the fruit and stripped away¹⁵¹ the commandment.
 And when he beheld that glory within,
 which shone forth with its dazzling rays, he fled outside.
 He ran and took refuge among the modest fig trees.¹⁵²

In his rash attempt to seize the priesthood, just like Uzziah, Adam is stricken and brought low by his own choice; like Uzziah, Adam flees and hides in shame.¹⁵³ Yet before he and Eve are cast out of Paradise, God offers them another opportunity to exercise their freedom aright, this time in repentance for their misdeeds. Again highlighting both God's benevolence and their capacity to choose according to their will, Ephrem depicts Adam and Eve as stubborn in the extreme, unwilling to admit their own wrongdoing and to ask for mercy. In his account of that episode in *CGen*, Ephrem raises an interesting point about the effects of the exercise of freedom but lets it stand without any explanation.

¹⁵¹ In keeping with Ephrem's image of the commandment as a sanctuary veil, he uses the verb *פלל*, which connotes rolling back or stripping away a veil (see *CSD*, s.v.).

¹⁵² *Parad* 3.13:

ܐܕܡ ܐܡܠܟ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ
 ܐܕܡ ܐܡܠܟ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ
 ܐܕܡ ܐܡܠܟ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ
 ܐܕܡ ܐܡܠܟ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ

¹⁵³ *Parad* 3.14. Adam's flight from the brilliance of the tree of life may be seen as a precursor or intimation of his eventual exile from Paradise, though Ephrem does not make that connection.

In the passage quoted just above, though, it is not so easy to surmise what Ephrem had in mind. The notion that Eve could have won pardon for both herself and Adam *after* he had already refused to confess is striking. Unfortunately Ephrem does not explain that idea of Eve's repentance making up for Adam's lack thereof. He merely leaves his readers with the impression that Eve's free choices were pivotal to the way events would unfold for both her and her husband. She was the first to be tested, and her choice in the contest would somehow impact how Adam fared as well; likewise, she was the last to be questioned after they had fallen, and her choice to confess or not could have had bearing on Adam's standing with God, even though he had already made his choice not to repent. If this reading does justice to Ephrem, then perhaps the crucial point here is that even though we choose and act in personal freedom, we do not do so in isolation from other free persons and without effect on them. One should not press the matter to the point that it undermines Ephrem's persistent emphasis on ultimate accountability for one's own deeds and motives—if for no other reason than that Ephrem does not expand upon those passing references to a notion of shared accountability.

CHAPTER 4

FREEDOM AND KNOWLEDGE

The previous chapters traced Ephrem's thought on human freedom from the creation of human persons in God's image and likeness through their fall into disobedience and alienation from self, from each other, and from God. The remainder of this study takes up the issue of how Ephrem understood humanity's way forward, in knowledge and in action, within its fallen and darkened condition. The present chapter broaches the first question to arise, which is two-fold: how can the human person come to know God, and how does freedom enter into that process? The shape of Ephrem's theological epistemology precludes certain other epistemologies, one of which is exemplified by the Arians, as Ephrem understands it.

Some may object to the use of term “epistemology” in an exposition of Ephrem’s works, claiming that it betrays a confusion of idioms and foists on Ephrem’s thinking what is really a post-Enlightenment preoccupation or simply a way of speaking that is utterly foreign to Ephrem’s milieu. Its use for interpreting Ephrem’s works is justified, however, if a discernible way of conceiving and articulating what we know and how we know it comes into view when reading his works. In Ephrem one does find a particular theological epistemology at work, in line with that basic definition of the term. He writes of the human ability—one could even say “responsibility”—to acquire knowledge, first and foremost the knowledge of God, and what he has to say on the topic involves his understanding of human freedom in a fundamental way.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Paul Russell avers in “A First Look at the Christology of Ephraem the Syrian,” *OCA* 256 (1998): 108:

While it is important to avoid systematizing Ephraem in a way that does not accord with the nature of his works, it is also necessary to attempt to discern the over-all character of what he is trying to say. It is just as destructive to reduce his thought to incoherence through a perverse unwillingness to compare and collate various statements as it is to make him a neo-Thomist.

Judgments will vary about what presentations accord with the nature of Ephrem’s works. But there remains the simple fact that we read Ephrem outside his own context, and any attempt to interpret him involves, in part, recasting his thought into an idiom not his own. The mere act of translating his works into

The present chapter, therefore, sketches out the contours of Ephrem's theological epistemology, in relation to his doctrine of God's self-revelation and of human freedom, and sets it in contrast to the epistemological method and presuppositions of "investigation" (ḥakmā) ¹⁵⁷ exemplified by the Arians, the frequent target of Ephrem's polemics against the "insider" adversaries.

PART I: EPHREM'S THEOLOGICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Vehicles of God's Self-Revelation

If you look anywhere, His symbol is there,
and wherever you read, you will discover His types.
For all creatures were created by Him,
and He inscribed his symbols upon His possessions.
Behold, when He created the world,
He looked upon it and adorned it with His images.

another language is a case in point. Accordingly, we may bring to bear on our exegesis of Ephrem's works certain conceptual tools or terms that Ephrem did not employ in writing them—that phenomenon is practically unavoidable anyway. One of the interpreter's responsibilities, then, is to exercise discernment in choosing and applying such tools.

¹⁵⁷ HdF 29.5 is just one of the numerous appearances of this term and terms built on the same root.

Fountains of His symbols were opened; they flowed and poured forth
His symbols upon its members.¹⁵⁸

So ends one of Ephrem's *Hymns on Virginity*. In stanzas like that one,¹⁵⁹ we find evidence of Ephrem's notion of the role played by images, types, and symbols. The Syriac term that is most frequently and intimately connected with this foundational aspect of Ephrem's thought is *raze*, mystery-bearing symbols that are laden with divine meaning grounded in the objective truth of God.¹⁶⁰ In the verses quoted above we read of a two-fold act of creation: God does not merely constitute created things in being as such, but stamps upon them the distinctive marks of their divine Craftsman. The fountains of symbols (ܡܢ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢ ܡܢܬܬܐ, ܡܢܬܬܐ) that gushed forth upon the creation recall the fountain of waters in Gen

¹⁵⁸ *Virg* 20.12:

ܡܢ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢ ܡܢܬܬܐ
ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ
ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ
ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ
ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ
ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ
ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ ܡܢܬܬܐ

Following Beck's note, ܡܢ in v. 4 should read ܡܢ. McVey translates ܡܢܬܬܐ as "His members," but the antecedent of the possessive suffix seems to be rather ܡܢܬܬܐ in v. 5.

¹⁵⁹ Beck refers the reader to *HdF* 76.12 and *Virg* 21.10 for parallels.

¹⁶⁰ For a discussion of *raze* and other terms involved in Ephrem's symbolic theory, see Bou Mansour, *Pensée*, 23-71.

inseparable, betokens God's establishment of a relation with that which is other than himself. That holds true above all with respect to human persons. It is the living God who creates, and his act of creating human persons flows from his personal subjectivity, which cannot be made impersonal or anonymous.¹⁶²

So the fact that God impresses his seal upon all that he brings into being in no way implies a bifurcation in the nature or meaning of creatures, as though the divine imprint were something added to them over and above some independently coherent and complete meaning they might otherwise enjoy or

¹⁶² Although it may be hidden, as is discussed below.

One of the implications of these reflections on personal subjectivity and divine revelation is that the preeminent *raza* in creation is the divine image and likeness graciously bestowed upon his beloved human creatures, with whom he establishes a life-giving relationship grounded in mutual personal subjectivity. More exactly, it is the created humanity of Christ that is the supreme *raza*. The incarnate Word is the most eloquent *raza* and the one to whom all others point and in whom they all cohere. When he who is the perfect image of the Father clothes himself with humanity, he brings about the convergence and reconciliation in himself of the symbol and the symbolized. The incarnate Word is the ultimate and unrepeatable self-revelation of God because, as the Son of God, he is the perfect image of the Father from all eternity, and as the Son of man, he is the perfect human person bearing in himself, in a pre-eminent way, the divine image that humanity possesses by gift. And since according to Ephrem the divine image consists first and foremost in that authority that is inseparable from freedom, Jesus Christ is the perfectly free human person. On account of that fact, and in view of Ephrem's latent doctrine of recapitulation (discussed in chapter 3), Christ frees our enslaved freedom by means of his own perfect and rightly exercised freedom.

had previously enjoyed. In bringing them into being, God constitutes his creatures as objectively meaningful with ultimate reference to himself, and this is so for a specific reason. All creation is endowed by God with symbolic significance precisely in order to reveal something of himself to mankind. The loving relationship he establishes with his human creatures is one in which he invites them to discover him through the whole panoply of created realities. And those created media of divine revelation do not impose their symbolic meaning on their observers. Human persons are urged to discover their meaning in freedom, by an effort of the will and mind on the ground of faith.

Of immense importance among those created realities, the two biblical testaments together occupy a unique place in Ephrem's understanding of the way God reveals himself to humanity. The Bible is unique among the *loci* of God's self-revelation in that there divine truth is conveyed by means of the word, whereas nature, of itself, is silent and can only come to word by way of human interaction with it, reflection upon it, and articulation of it.¹⁶³ One must decide to

¹⁶³ Perhaps Ephrem would have considered this task part of the priestly function of human persons. He certainly saw it as part of his own work as a theologian and poet.

engage mute nature so that, as the whole of Ephrem's literary corpus exemplifies, one can grasp its divine meaning and be able to give it a material voice by way of the written or spoken word to the glory of God and for the benefit of others.

While they are distinct in that regard, the Bible and the natural world are nevertheless coordinated such that they confirm and shed light upon one another. Recall the opening of *Virg* 20.12, quoted above: "If you look anywhere, His symbol is there, / and wherever you read , you will discover His types." As den Biesen rightly points out, the "anywhere" refers to the whole creation, and

T. F. Torrance viewed the task of the scientist along those same lines. For him, "the pursuit of science is one of the ways in which man exercises the dominion in the earth which he was given at his creation" (T. F. Torrance, "Newton, Einstein and Scientific Theology," *Religious Studies* 8 [1972]: 233). Explaining Bacon's understanding of the work of natural science and the natural scientist, Torrance continues:

Science is a religious duty, while man as scientist can be spoken of as *the priest of creation*, whose task it is to interpret the books of nature, to understand the universe in its wonderful structures and harmonies, and to bring it all into orderly articulation, so that it fulfils its proper end as the vast theatre of glory in which the creator is worshipped and praised. Nature itself is dumb, but it is man's part to bring it to word, to be its mouth through which the whole universe gives voice to the glory and majesty of the living God. (ibid.)

the “wherever” refers to the whole Bible.¹⁶⁴ It is telling that Ephrem places the two side by side in his presentation of the way God manifests himself, since, as Robert Murray notes, biblical types do not constitute a completely independent mode of God’s self-revelation.¹⁶⁵ Murray writes:

[Ephrem] never treats the biblical text as a world on its own: rather, the Bible, as a work of God in human imagery and language, is a part, was [*sic*] well as a special interpreter, of the whole world and its history. The Bible contains *raze*, revelatory symbols of Christ, because the whole world does. The reason why so many trees or pieces of wood in the Old Testament can be seen as types of the cross is that the eye of faith sees *every* tree as pregnant with the mystery of the cross.¹⁶⁶

Murray identifies in Ephrem’s thought the mutual influence and consonance of the Bible and the natural world. They help to interpret and confirm each other, all under the watchful eye enlightened by faith. And as we will see in the course

¹⁶⁴ Den Biesen, *Simple and Bold*, 25. I am unaware of whether Ephrem ever refers to the natural world as a “book” to be read. If that metaphor actually did have any meaning for him, these two verses might then refer only to the natural world—there is no mention of Scripture in the rest of the stanza—or they still might refer, as it seems they do, to the natural world and to Scripture in turn.

¹⁶⁵ Robert Murray, “The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem’s Theology,” *PdO* 6/7 (1975-76): 5.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* The italics are Murray’s. If nature and Scripture help to interpret each other more fully, that function is secondary to their primary role of witnessing to the Lord of both of them. According to Bou Mansour, Ephrem was not of the opinion that the witness of nature has the Bible or its truth as its proper object: “Bien au contraire, nature et Ecriture sont orientées toutes les deux vers l’attestation de la vérité du Créateur” (*Pensée*, 125).

of this chapter, the fact that both nature and the Bible are *created* means of God's self-revelation is crucial to Ephrem's polemic against those who are guilty of the sin of investigation. Working in tandem, nature and Scripture are unified in their purpose: to bear witness to God in order to facilitate our knowledge of him who is the truth, should we choose to engage them:

In his book Moses wrote of the creation that is in nature,
so that nature as well as the book might witness to the Creator—
nature, by the use of it; the book, by the reading of it.
They are witnesses that reach everywhere,
are found at all times, are present at every hour,
rebuking the unbeliever who rejects the Creator.¹⁶⁷

Though we engage them differently—*using* nature, but *reading* Scripture—the two witnesses are harmonized with one another. A beloved image of Ephrem's for that harmony is that of the harp, which serves two basic purposes.¹⁶⁸ On the

¹⁶⁷ *Parad* 5.2:

ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ	ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ
ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ	ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ
ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ	ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ
ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ	ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ
ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ	ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ
ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ	ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ
ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ	ܕܡܫܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܫܝܬܐ

The unbeliever's rejection of God is no mere failure to apprehend the truth, but willfulness, an abuse of his freedom with respect to the power given him by God to come to a knowledge of the truth offered everywhere around him.

¹⁶⁸ In Ephrem's use of the image of the harp Bou Mansour sees a presentation of the varied yet harmonious nature of God's self-revelation, conveying "unité mais

one hand, the harp, as an image of the vehicles of divine revelation, is that which

God uses to communicate himself to us:

Who, then, has seen our Lord and marveled
that He plays on three harps?
He blends their harmonies wisely,
lest their listeners be estranged.
[He blends] signs, and symbols, and figures,
so that nature and Scripture may rebuke [the unbeliever].
With the one creation He bound the two testaments,
so that they might put the unbelievers to shame.¹⁶⁹

On the other hand, the three harps are the God-given instruments on which the
believers freely play in response:

Blessed are you, O Church,
[Whose assembly] sings with three glorious harps.
Your finger plays upon the harp of Moses,
and that of our Savior, and that of nature as well.

dans la diversité, richesse mais dans la différence" (*Pensée*, 123). Citing *Virg* 29.9, he states, "En effet, le même Seigneur est proclamé par le silence de la nature et par les dires de l'Écriture, par l'action de l'une et la parole de l'autre" (*ibid.*). The Bible reveals God through the word, and the silent harp of nature reveals God by the way it acts and by man's use of it. Upon discovery of that silent revelation, the human person can then bring to word what nature holds in silence.

¹⁶⁹ *Virg* 30.1:

וְגַם שָׁמַע, אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ
וְהִלֵּלְךָ וְשִׁבְחֶךָ
וְשִׁבְחֶךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְשִׁבְחֶךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְשִׁבְחֶךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְשִׁבְחֶךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְשִׁבְחֶךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְשִׁבְחֶךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Your faith plays the three,
 for it is three names that baptized you.
 You could not be baptized in [only] one name nor, again,
 sing with [only] one harp.¹⁷⁰

Ephrem's three harps are the created means for man's encounter with his
 Creator—an encounter initiated by God (in the act of creating in the first place)
 and taken up and reciprocated by human persons in their free response of faith
 and love.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Virg 27.4:

ܐܠܚܡܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ
 ܫܡܝܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ [ܡܢ] ܡܢ
 ܕܡܢ ܡܢ ܡܢ ܡܢ ܡܢ
 ܡܢ ܡܢ ܡܢ ܡܢ ܡܢ
 ܡܢ ܡܢ ܡܢ ܡܢ ܡܢ
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Beck notes that ܡܢ ܡܢ in v. 6 should be corrected to ܡܢ ܡܢ.

¹⁷¹ Bou Mansour raises the question whether Ephrem maintains a *taxis* between Scripture and nature as means of God's self-revelation. The common image of the harp for the two seems to place the witness that each provides "sur un même pied d'égalité, bien qu'à des niveaux différents: niveau de la vérité naturelle et niveau de la vérité de l'histoire du salut (Virg 29,4-5), niveau de l'action et niveau de la parole (Virg 29,9)" (*Pensée*, 125). Yet it is only by way of Scripture that we receive the revelation of the Trinity and of the historical life of Jesus. While nature can only suggest the reality of the Trinity, Scripture relates that which surpasses the ability of nature to convey: "la génération du Fils et sa naissance de Marie ... la vie intradivine et la relation de la divinité avec l'humanité" (ibid., 125-26). Bou Mansour here has in mind Beck, who, he says, places the witness of nature and that of Scripture on the same level (ibid., 126).

To this point the exposition of Ephrem's doctrine of divine revelation has focused on the manifest things of God, that which he has planted in the midst of creation voicelessly, and that which he has conveyed through the Bible by means of human language. It is necessary, though, also to appreciate the correlative to Ephrem's emphasis on God's self-manifestation: his stress on God's hiddenness.

In one of his *Hymns on Faith* Ephrem writes:

Indeed, who is able to comprehend the Lord of natures,
to inquire into His Being and to investigate His Fatherhood,
and to explore His Greatness and to say how It is?
For, behold, in all those respects He is hidden from all,
and unless He wants to make Himself plain to us
there is nothing in Creation that is able to interpret Him.¹⁷²

The core assumption at work here — indeed, everywhere in Ephrem's theology — is that between the Creator and the creation, between God and everything else, there yawns a gaping ontological chasm, a “great, boundless gulf”¹⁷³ over which

¹⁷² HdF 44.7:

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¹⁷³ HdF 15.5: ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ

According to Beck's note, ܡܢ should read ܡܢܢ.

no created thing may cross. So any and all knowledge of God is fundamentally dependent upon God's good pleasure in revealing himself as he sees fit and to the extent that he sees fit. Note the last two verses in the stanza above: God is altogether hidden, and no created thing can interpret him, *unless* he wills it do so. He has so willed, and his very act of creating the natural world and taking on human language is sufficient evidence of that claim's truth. Yet as near as God may draw, through the created means he chooses for his self-revelation, he nevertheless remains infinitely transcendent. He is at once very close and incomparably far.¹⁷⁴

Brock uses the category of perspective to explain this illustration of Ephrem's habit of thinking through polarities.¹⁷⁵ From our perspective, all created things are of revelatory significance, and we understand them as just that, God's self-revelations in and through his handiwork. But from the perspective of divine reality itself, God has *hidden* something of himself in created things:

It cannot be overemphasized how crucial Ephrem's conviction about the ontological divide is for his polemic against investigation, which is discussed below.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *HdF* 72.23-24.

¹⁷⁵ See his discussion in Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 27-29.

Here the starting point is not the human experience of God, but God's actual Being (*ituta*), which objectively exists, but which can only be experienced in a hidden and ... subjective way. Seen from this perspective types and symbols are not *galyata*, instances of divine self-manifestation through visible creation; rather they have a hiddenness which points to something that will one day be revealed: what is 'hidden' in the symbols of Nature and of Scripture is revealed in Christ at the Incarnation; what lies hidden in the Sacraments will be revealed at the eschaton, in Paradise.

... The tension which [Ephrem] maintains between the two poles, hidden and revealed, is none other than the tension between the transcendence and the immanence of God.¹⁷⁶

Even when we come to see the symbolic significance of all that God has imprinted of himself in created realities, he yet remains hidden. This is all the more apparent in view of the ontological divide between God and creation: nothing finite could ever completely manifest the infinite, inimitable majesty of God as he is in himself.

While Brock's brief summary of the polarity between the hidden and the revealed is helpful for understanding that central aspect of Ephrem's thought, there is one point on which his language is potentially misleading. He speaks of the human perspective as "subjective," while the divine perspective enjoys objectivity.¹⁷⁷ By "subjective" he means that "every individual will approach

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 28-29.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 27, 28.

God's hiddenness by way of a different set of *galyata*, or points of revelation."¹⁷⁸

That is so because all the instances of God's self-revelation are differentiated, and that to which they all point in their manifold ways, God himself, is infinitely greater than the sum of revelation's parts: "the revelation is always partial."¹⁷⁹

His explanation of what he deems the "subjective" character of the human perspective is certainly true to Ephrem, but his choice of the term "subjective," in contrast to "objective," is open to misinterpretation. It is unfortunate that to the modern ear those terms typically register in ways that are contrary to Ephrem's thinking and are commonly understood with reference to a dualist framework in which subjectivism is pit against objective reality—not with reference to *subjectivity*.

Brock surely does not intend to foist on Ephrem some radical disconnect between knower and known, or between the content of one's thought and the reality it appears to intend, such as a dualist epistemology would entail. His exposition of Ephrem shows no marks of that kind of crippling of meaning and of the human capacity for real knowledge. But it bears repeating that, for

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Ephrem, it is God who implanted in created things real indications and signs of himself, constituting them to function as the faithful mind of the believer understands them to function. In that respect, both the divine and the human perspective are objective: they are grounded in the objective reality that God is, albeit in radically incommensurate ways. God makes created symbols to correspond in a contingent, creaturely way to the truth that he himself is in a non-contingent, uncreated way.

The above remarks may seem tangential, but it is critical to avoid any misunderstanding about how much of a realist Ephrem actually is. In no way could Ephrem be read as allowing for a theory of meaning as subjectively constructed out of whole cloth and totally dependent on the idiosyncrasies and fantasies of the mind unmoored from objective reality. As Michael Polanyi, the physical chemist turned philosopher of science, wrote:

To hold knowledge is indeed always a commitment to indeterminate implications, for human knowledge is but an intimation of reality, and we can never quite tell in what new way reality may yet manifest itself. It is external to us; it is objective; and so its future manifestations can never be completely under our intellectual control.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Michael Polanyi, "Faith and Reason," *Journal of Religion*, 41 (1961): 244. The relation between objectivity and freedom plays a key role in understanding Ephrem's rejection of investigation.

The media through which God reveals himself to human persons, and the specific content of those manifestations, are objectively determined by God to be what they are and to function as they do. When human persons choose to engage those media and discern their function and their hidden, divinely bestowed content, that experience always and necessarily yields, as Brock rightly notes, results that are partial—partial in each individual instance and in the aggregate. What that fact implies is that the revelation of God is always and everywhere new and the particulars of its manifestations are unexpected. And while we are free to discover the meaning of divine revelation in created things, we are not free to construct it. In other words, the fundamental structure, manner, and content of divine revelation are in no way subject to human control and determination: the structure, because the Creator orders all things; the manner, because he reveals himself as he wills; and the content, because the real, ultimate content of his revelation is the person of the incarnate Word.

*Christ, “the Lord of Symbols”*¹⁸¹

Since God wishes to reveal himself to us, he has both endowed created things with revelatory significance and enabled us to discover those hidden meanings. He is unceasing in his efforts to win mankind over, and so from the beginning he has offered us, as an invitation, pathways to the knowledge of him in the created world. Extending the invitation further and making it more fully revelatory of himself, God communicates with his word-endowed creatures by means of that which is contained in Scripture:

... He drew near to us by means of what belongs to us.
He put on names that belong to us so that He might clothe us
with the manner of life that belongs to Him. He borrowed our form and
put it on,
and as a father with his infants, so He spoke with our childishness.¹⁸²

In condescending to the level of what human persons can receive and articulate, God sanctified the use of human language to refer to himself. The events related in the Old Testament, his dealings with his beloved Israel, as well as the written

¹⁸¹ HdF 9.11: *וְיָרָא יְהוָה*

¹⁸² HdF 31.2:

... כְּבִלְמָה מִיָּד יְהוָה
וְיָרָא יְהוָה לְבָרְכּוֹ וְיָרָא
וְיָרָא כְּבִלְמָה מִיָּד יְהוָה
וְיָרָא יְהוָה לְבָרְכּוֹ וְיָרָא

As Beck notes, *כְּבִלְמָה* in the first line quoted should read *כְּבִלְמָה*.

biblical testimonies themselves, manifest divine *kenosis* already before the Incarnation—the verses quoted just above make that plain. One could even say that God’s gracious condescension was begun with the act of creation itself, since he has woven tell-tale signs of his truth into the fabric of creation.¹⁸³

Yet the ultimate revelation of God at the center of all created realities comes in the Incarnation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ, when, no longer putting on names and metaphors only, the Lord “put on the body,” “put on Adam.”¹⁸⁴ In taking on the flesh, the Son makes himself the sole bridge over the chasm separating God and creation. If any creature is to have access to the Father, it is only in and through the incarnate Lord. Ephrem hymns the glorious name of Jesus, calling it “the hidden bridge that leads / from death to life.”¹⁸⁵ He prays:

Be the bridge for my speech;
may it cross over to Your truth.
Make Your love a bridge for Your servant;
let me cross over You to Your Father.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Cf. *Virg* 20.12.

¹⁸⁴ See *Nat* 9.2, 23.13.

¹⁸⁵ *HdF* 6.17:

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¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*:

As the perfect visible image of the invisible God, Christ is both the source and the fulfillment of all types, images, and symbols, the fountainhead of all the streams of created manifestations of God, and the vast sea where they all converge:

Christ conquered and surmounted the symbols by His interpretations, the parables by His explanations. Just like the sea, He receives within Himself all the rushing streams.

...

For Christ is the one who perfects [the Scriptures'] symbols by His cross, their types by His body, their adornments by His beauty, and all of them by all of Himself.¹⁸⁷

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¹⁸⁷ *Virg* 9.10, 15:

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Torrance's entirely Christocentric understanding of biblical revelation resembles Ephrem's vision of Christ as the fulfillment of all the Bible's language and as the one who is clothed both with the body and with the garment of names. In *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1983), Torrance goes further and states explicitly something that is perhaps only latent in Ephrem: condescending to the level of human language, Christ is the one in whom and through whom our words are addressed to the Father—in Ephrem's terms, he

Murray offers a visual metaphor for the network of symbolic relations in Ephrem's understanding of divine revelation. If we imagine a cruciform image, an X and a Y axis, the vertical represents the ontological plane spanning the distance between God and creation; the horizontal represents a timeline; and Christ is at the intersection of the axes. Coming from the left on the timeline: under the Old Covenant, figures and types point ahead to Christ, but await their fulfillment in him. On the right, past the intersection: the Church is chronologically posterior to Christ but takes its origin in him, while it points

becomes the bridge spanning the ontological chasm over which our words may pass. Torrance writes:

[T]he real text of the New Testament revelation is the humanity of Jesus. As we read the Old Testament and read the New Testament and listen to the Word of God, the real text is not the documents of the Pentateuch [sic], the Psalms or the Prophets or the documents of the Gospels and the Epistles, but in and through them all the Word of God struggling with rebellious human existence in Israel on the way to becoming incarnate, and then that Word translated into the flesh and blood and mind and life of a human being in Jesus, in whom we have both the Word of God become man and the perfect response of man to God offered on our behalf. As the real text of God's Word addressed to us, Jesus is also the real text of our address to God. We have no speech or language with which to address God but the speech and language called Jesus Christ. In him our humanity, our human understanding, our human word are taken up, purified and sanctified, and addressed to God the Father for us as our very own—and that is the word of man with which God is well pleased. (88-89; the italics are Torrance's)

ahead to its fulfillment in his second coming in the future. From the bottom up: creation, which God infinitely transcends, is nevertheless filled by him with his symbols so that they point to Christ and are fulfilled in him, the perfect image and revelation of the Father. From the top down: in his desire to make himself known to us, God descends and puts on the body, beyond a mere metaphor or only a name, in the person of the one who, again, is the perfect image and revelation of the Father.

Murray's visual metaphor breaks down insofar as an axis represents a continuum, and in terms of ontology, nothing could be further from Ephrem's notion of the chasm.¹⁸⁸ While Christ brings all things into himself, the created-

¹⁸⁸ It would be interesting to examine whether Ephrem's symbolic theology has any contribution to make to the debate involving the *analogia entis*, *analogia fidei*, and the mediation of Christ—a debate made famous in the twentieth century by Erich Przywara, SJ, and the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth, who famously called the *analogia entis* the “invention of Antichrist” (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/1: *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, ed. G. T. Thompson and T. F. Torrance [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975], xiii.).

In Ephrem there are perhaps elements of both conceptions of analogy. God's self-revelation in the person of Christ is the foundation for the meaning and rationality of all created symbols and images of God, and they all bear some created correspondence to him because they are his works. Created things are all dimensions of God's self-revelation, and they are so precisely because they are grounded and fulfilled in Christ. This is not natural theology carried on

uncreated distinction nevertheless remains. The metaphor, though, does drive home the point Murray was making when, quoting Ephrem, he writes that Christ, the perfect image of God, is also “the term of all symbols, towards whom they home in from every side.”¹⁸⁹

“Everything depends on faith”¹⁹⁰

The pervasive emphasis in Ephrem’s works on the concrete reality of God’s self-revelation in the midst of the world he created may incline some of his readers to consider him a natural theologian of sorts.¹⁹¹ The corrective to that mistaken interpretation is Ephrem’s equally persistent stress on the priority of faith as that which enables human persons to read nature and Scripture rightly, to find in them what God has veiled. The notion that natural knowledge serves as the

independently either of the Scriptures or of faith in the one to whom all the Scriptures bear witness.

¹⁸⁹ *CDiss* 1.1, quoted in Murray, “Theory of Symbolism,” 7. As Russell put it, “Ephraem’s understanding of the nature of reality and how all the parts of it cohere is entirely Christocentric” (“The Son as the Revealer of the Father in Ephraem the Syrian’s Sermon I *De Fide*,” *The Harp* 13 [2000]: 139).

¹⁹⁰ *HdF* 7.9: ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ.

¹⁹¹ That is, according to the common conception of natural theology as involving the bracketing of revealed truth and of faith.

necessary propaedeutic for the reception of divine revelation given in Christ and in the biblical testimonies to him is certainly alien to Ephrem's way of thinking.

Faith is the requisite lens through which the human person is able to perceive the truth of God to which all the natural world and all the Bible bear witness in symbolic fashion. It is that which transforms the believer's eye into the instrument by which the opacity of created realities is changed to a transparency opening out onto God. More accurately, it is faith in the incarnate Word and the life-giving relation into which he draws the believer that make proper vision and true knowledge possible: "With faith gaze upon Him, / upon the Lord of symbols, who gives you life."¹⁹²

Chapter 2 presented Ephrem's understanding of the authority given to human persons by God as consisting in true knowledge and a life lived according to the truth. Since truth, for Ephrem, is ultimately hypostatized in the person of the Word,¹⁹³ our relation to the truth consists in our relation to him. The source of all true knowledge and that of life are one and the same, the person

¹⁹² HdF 9.11:

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

Beck notes that ܡܠܟܐ should read ܡܠܟܐ.

¹⁹³ See, e.g., HcH 2.18.

For Ephrem, the process of coming to know the truth (coming to know God), and living in accordance with the truth (leading a godly life according to the pattern of Christ, who is the Truth) are the flowering of God's bestowal of his divine image in the creation of human persons. Being formed in the image of God is partly what we are already, and partly what we are to become; it is at once a gift and a calling. Both the epistemic and ascetical dimensions of the human vocation are radically dependent upon the free, loving, and obedient activity of a faithful mind whose limpid eye is able to discover God where and how he reveals himself—ultimately in the person of his incarnate Son.

PART II: EPHREM'S POLEMIC AGAINST INVESTIGATION

The Nature of Investigation and Ephrem's Polemical Idiom

Part I of this chapter laid the groundwork for a discussion of Ephrem's polemic against the Arians, his chief adversaries within the Church.¹⁹⁷ It is not so much

¹⁹⁷ Problems related to a proper taxonomy of the various groups and movements commonly collected under the label "Arian" is beyond the scope of this study. Neither does this study assess the accuracy of Ephrem's estimation of Arian

the specific content of their doctrine that is of interest here as much as their theological method and epistemology—that is, the way in which they believed, according to Ephrem, that they could arrive at the knowledge of God, and what theological knowledge they assumed was open to them and was subject to their inquiry. To a great extent, then, Ephrem’s polemic against them centers on the proper method and character of theological knowing. The weightiest and most frequently repeated charge that Ephrem brings against them is that of the sin of investigation.

It is in the context of analyzing Ephrem’s polemical attack on those who engage in investigation that the relation between freedom and knowledge in Ephrem’s theology comes into better view. While Ephrem does not write about that connection at any great length in explicit form, it is nevertheless possible to discern how that connection is at work in his polemic, lending force to his invective against his opponent’s intellectual distortions and presumption. The manner in which human freedom figures into his rejection of investigation and disputation helps to bring into focus, by way of sharp contrast, the positive way

doctrine and theological method. What is important here is the profile of what Ephrem deems a threat to orthodox faith and life, not whether he is properly understanding his opponents’ ways of thinking.

in which it relates to his understanding of God's self-revelation, discussed at length above, and the proper human response to it.

In his *Hymns on Faith*, a key source for his anti-Arian polemic, Ephrem examines and rejects, through the use of his favorite literary form, the epistemological method of investigation exemplified by his principal insider adversaries. Sidney Griffith explains why Ephrem's choice of genre for the task is by no means arbitrary:

For Ephraem then, the challenge of the Arians is met, not by conversation with them on their own terms, but by opposing the very idiom in which they raise their questions. For Ephraem it almost seems that the *madrāšâ* (or the metrical *mêmrâ*) is the only genre of human speech that is suitable to the issue of God-talk. One recalls that in the Syriac tradition the *madrāšâ* is hymnic poetry of an essentially exegetical character. It sings of the symbols, types, antitypes, and images which come from the scriptures, or from the natural world of creation. Its proper *Sitz im Leben* is the community at worship, the liturgy. In this idiom alone, utilizing scriptural language, is Ephrem willing to speak of the generation of the Son from the Father, and of how one might characterize the birth of God.¹⁹⁸

Ephrem's chosen idiom is the one that best suits his conception of theological knowing as arising out of the free human engagement with the media of God's self-revelation, all of which draw the faithful, obedient mind to the worship of

¹⁹⁸ Sidney H. Griffith, "Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire," in *Diakonia: Essays in Honor of Robert T. Meyer*, ed. T. Halton and J. P. Williams (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 45.

God in his Church. That idiom is, at the same time, inimical to the epistemological method that he ascribes to his opponents and to their rejection of the priority of God's *self*-revelation in all theological knowing. It is resistant to the rationalistic hubris that arrogates to itself the power to penetrate into the hidden things of God "behind the back of Jesus Christ"¹⁹⁹ and to speak plainly of that which is in fact immeasurably beyond the capacities of the creaturely mind and of the language used to express what it knows. In other words, Ephrem insists on thinking and speaking through God's chosen symbols and names, taking them as trustworthy signs of divine truth, but the investigators refuse to be content with that mode of thought and speech: symbolic and metaphoric expression gives way to univocal speech. As Ephrem sees it, they freely choose to try to circumvent God's chosen means of self-revelation in preference for an allegedly direct (i.e., unmediated) apprehension of God as he is in his essence.

¹⁹⁹ The phrase is Torrance's. See his study *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (London: T & T Clark, 1988), 135. The phrase is there set, aptly enough for the present discussion, in the context of arguing for the indispensability of the Nicene confession and its significance for a proper understanding of divine revelation:

The *homoousion* asserts that God is eternally in himself what he is in Jesus Christ, and, therefore, that there is no dark unknown God behind the back of Jesus Christ, but only he who is made known to us in Jesus Christ.

Ephrem characterizes the attempt at unmediated knowledge as the vain effort to “pry into” (ܥܝܢܐ)²⁰⁰ the things of God.

The way of investigation, though, is not only a lamentable error of the intellect. In the Arians it is a mutation of the same fatal disease that so plagued the Greeks at Athens that they rejected both Paul’s preaching and the medicine of life.²⁰¹ Ephrem’s case against the investigators marshals a vast array of arguments against their many ills and vices. Among its other faults, investigation constitutes a sure sign of bad faith; willful disregard for the limitations inherent in human nature, and the neglect of an appropriately measured search for the knowledge of God; a complete distortion of the character of appropriate speech and appropriate silence; profound ignorance of the nature of God’s self-revelation and of the proper response to it; and evidence of a divisive and contentious spirit that wreaks havoc in the churches. In all those respects, investigation and the cognate sin of “inquiry” (ܥܝܢܐ) stem directly from the free choices made by the guilty parties. In no way whatsoever are they compelled to seek after the knowledge of God in the way they do. God freely and lovingly

²⁰⁰ See, e.g., *HdF* 8.9.

²⁰¹ *HdF* 47.11.

reveals himself to his human creatures for their own good, and he bids them to use the freedom he gave them to apply themselves to the task of discovering his truth and of allowing themselves to be formed by it in turn. That task is, for Ephrem, an ascetic discipline to which both the mind and the will must commit themselves in faith and in freedom. Knowledge of God cannot be gained in any other way.

Investigation as a Sign of Bad Faith

One of the most damning accusations that Ephrem brings against the investigators is that in seeking knowledge of God in the way they do, they have chosen the way of unbelief. The following stanza is typical of Ephrem's manner of arguing against them:

Seal our mouth, O Lord! For, if even Your revelation
bewildered the cunning, since they were unable to comprehend
Your birth from Mary, the bookish called Your generation into doubt
by their contentions. And if men do not grasp even Your humanity,
who indeed can comprehend Your divine birth? Glory to Your Begetter!²⁰²

²⁰² HdF 51.4:

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ

Time and again Ephrem relies on the argument *a fortiori*, usually *a minore ad maius*, in order to demonstrate the futility of pursuing investigation and the insolence that gives rise to it.²⁰³ The “bookish” (ܫܦܬܝܬܝܢ) Arians, unable to wrap their minds around the generation of the Son, reject God’s self-revelation as untrustworthy and look for names other than “Son” by which to refer to Christ.²⁰⁴ Yet God himself revealed that name; the faithful, who believe in the name, find their way to the knowledge of God unobstructed:

Vouchsafe to me also, O Lord, that I may walk in that fear,²⁰⁵
and that I may dread lest I cross the boundary of my faith.
Your truth is level and straight. To the faithful it is even,
and to the perverse it is rough.
The simple go straight and proceed;
the bookish go astray and fall into the abyss of investigation.
May our Lord draw them out! Glory to Him who can do all things!²⁰⁶

ܠܐ ܕܝܠܕܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
ܠܐܝܠܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ

²⁰³ See, e.g., *HdF* 1.16, 3.14, 7.1, 70.4-5, 28.9-11, 28.13.

²⁰⁴ See *HdF* 51.7-8. Cf. *HdF* 44.1.

²⁰⁵ I.e., of death, mentioned in the preceding stanza.

²⁰⁶ *HdF* 51.11:

ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ

Beck translates ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ as “dem, der alles vermag” but offers an alternative translation as well: “dem, der alle findet.”

All that the investigator has to offer as the fruit of his labors is something alien to the true faith, an innovation, to which the believer must respond, “My faith is complete, my pearl is perfect; your embellishment is not accepted.”²⁰⁷ Ephrem can urge us to rebuke, not merely to correct, the presumptuous innovator (ܠܬܝܒ ܠܬܝܠܝܩ ...)²⁰⁸ because the latter’s own bad faith and his attempt to pervert the faith of others are the results of his preference for the path that leads to ruin. The possibility for praise or blame rests on the recognition that we are accountable for the ways in which we exercise our freedom.²⁰⁹ Ephrem’s reproach only makes sense in the context of that recognition. Likewise, his exhortation to his readers that they “abide with [the Lord] in faith”²¹⁰ only has meaning if he understands the choice to preserve faith or to engage in investigation to be just that—a free choice.

²⁰⁷ *HdF* 51.13:

ܠܬܝܠܝܩ ܠܬܝܒ ܠܬܝܠܝܩ ...
ܠܬܝܠܝܩ ܠܬܝܒ ܠܬܝܠܝܩ ܠܬܝܠܝܩ ܠܬܝܒ ܠܬܝܠܝܩ

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* Cf. *HdF* 1.1, where Ephrem writes that “this presumptuous age of ours” has fashioned “a new faith” ([ܠܬܝܒ] ܠܬܝܠܝܩ ܠܬܝܠܝܩ ܠܬܝܠܝܩ).

²⁰⁹ See *HcH* 5.8.

²¹⁰ *HdF* 72.4: ܠܬܝܒ ܠܬܝܠܝܩ ܠܬܝܠܝܩ.

Part I showed how crucial the medium of the natural world and that of the Bible are to Ephrem's doctrine of divine revelation. In his infinite freedom, God made the world as he did and condescended to the level of human language in order to invite his human creatures into a life-giving relationship with him. It is only possible for them to accept the invitation through the exercise of the freedom he gave them. They have every means and ability to respond and to engage him, but they cannot approach him by any means other than those he provides. They cannot disregard his "hidden manifestations" in created nature and spurn the Scriptures²¹¹ and still expect to come to know him. The emphasis is on God's *self-revelation*, actualized and made sufficient by him alone and through the instruments that he chooses: "Without Him you would not even be able to know / that He exists."²¹² So when Ephrem interprets one of the symbols in the natural world—in *HdF* 73, for example, Ephrem writes of the Father, Son,

²¹¹ It is important to note that for Ephrem, receiving God's self-revelation through the Scriptures is always an ecclesial act. When he talks about the Bible, it is the Bible as proclaimed and preached in the true Church that he has in mind. There is private reading of Scripture, but the results of any reading must be assayed in the crucible of Christ in his Church.

²¹² *HdF* 72.5:

ܡܕܢܐ ܕܐܠ ܐܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ
ܡܕܢܐ ܕܐܠ ܐܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ

and Holy Spirit as imaged, respectively, in the sun, its light, and its heat—his conviction is that the likeness is real and is intended by God to be an aid for coming to know him, but that that is his doing. We are not free to discover, let alone to create, any path to divine truth that God did not establish as such. At the end of Ephrem’s elaboration of the sun as a Trinitarian symbol, he warns:

Look at the likenesses in created things,
and do not doubt the Three,
lest you perish!²¹³

It takes concerted effort to learn what nature has to teach us, and everyone learns in proportion to their ability and to the measure of their labors. But if one does not so apply himself and does not submit himself to the One who teaches all things, he is duly called “one who is led astray by his freedom” (ܡܬܚܝܬܝܢ ܠܚܝܬܝܢ), as Ephrem says.²¹⁴ Submission to the divine Teacher necessitates submission to the ways and means he has chosen to teach, nature being the most evident and ubiquitous means of instruction.

²¹³ HdF 73.20:

ܡܬܚܝܬܝܢ ܠܚܝܬܝܢ ܡܬܚܝܬܝܢ ܠܚܝܬܝܢ
ܡܬܚܝܬܝܢ ܠܚܝܬܝܢ ܡܬܚܝܬܝܢ ܠܚܝܬܝܢ

²¹⁴ HdF 48.5.

Ephrem also urges his readers not to neglect the other harp (or *harps*) of revelation beside that of nature. He urges them to stay close by the Scriptures and not to wander where they do not lead — unlike the Arian investigators, who by choice “have gone forth outside the Scriptures, / to wander around in a pathless desert waste, and have deserted the [New] Testament, the path to the Kingdom.”²¹⁵ The faithful and obedient mind seeking the knowledge of God must hold fast to the Scriptures as both complete and trustworthy. If we readily place our confidence in our physicians, Ephrem wonders, and submit to their remedies without any questioning or reluctance, however painful they may be, why is it that “the books of God are not so sufficient to convince / about His Son that He is His Begotten”?²¹⁶ Who are we to judge the “words of Him who judges all”²¹⁷ or to “reproach the voice of Him who reproaches all”?²¹⁸

²¹⁵ HdF 65.1:

... ܐܡܪ ܝܗܘܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

²¹⁶ HdF 56.12:

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

Beck corrects ܡܠܟܐ to ܡܠܟܐ. See also the preceding stanza.

²¹⁷ HdF 56.11: ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ.

²¹⁸ Ibid.: ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ.

For Ephrem, the Bible, along with the symbolic meaning inherent in nature (properly interpreted), is the criterion by which all our language referring to God is judged. He calls Scripture a “furnace” (ܦܝܪܐ) for testing the “names and distinctions” (ܡܬܠܐܝܬܐ ܡܕܡܬܐ) that we would ascribe to God.²¹⁹ Ephrem’s reverence for Scripture both binds him to what it contains and preserves him from straying outside its scope. The following stanzas, worth quoting in full, give expression to some of the issues at the heart of Ephrem’s polemic and bring much of the foregoing exposition into sharper focus:

Is anyone able to tell me whence you know
the nature of the Lord of all? God forbid that I should ever profess
to know! His books proclaim Him,
and because it is fitting that we should firmly believe in God,
I listened and firmly believed Him, and by my faith I restrained
the inquiry of my audacity.

For I have never drifted along after [other] people
that I might speak as they speak, for I have seen that
by other names that are not written do they call our Savior.
I have forsaken what is not written, and I have instructed [others] in that
which is written,
lest on account of these things that are not written
I should bring to naught the things that are written.

He created water and gave [it] to the fish for [their] benefit;
He set down the books and gave [them] to men for [their] benefit.

²¹⁹ HdF 44.1.

beyond or behind the God-given biblical medium. He sees himself as a steward of biblical revelation charged with keeping the books intact and with defending their sufficiency.

It is worth noting, too, that the passage ends with an illustration of nature's cooperation with Scripture. Here it is not the various books of the Bible that bear witness to one another, although Ephrem would surely affirm that. Rather, it is the natural fact that the life-sustaining environment for a fish has its boundaries that bears witness to the presence of boundaries no seeker of knowledge may cross and live. For Ephrem, faith rooted in biblical revelation is what keeps us from killing the spirit by trying to know what is not given us to know. In other words, Ephrem insists that we must choose scriptural faith over the ruinous attempt at intellectual mastery over the truth of God. Whether one chooses to trust in the veracity of Scripture is central to Ephrem's anti-Arian polemic, since it is Scripture that, over and above the testimony of nature, offers knowledge of both Christ's humanity and his divinity:

... For not from nature
did we learn Christ. It is right that from the place where
we learned His humanity, it is just that from there

we should seek His divinity.²²¹

Notwithstanding the preeminence of Scripture over nature, Ephrem urges his audience to trust not in themselves, as the investigators do, but in the testimony given by both harps of revelation, or more precisely, in the one to whom they testify. Part prayer, part polemic, Ephrem writes:

Protect my simplicity, O Lord,
 from the cunning, who are very foolish,
 for if they knew Your greatness
 they would not have presumptuously attempted an investigation of You.
 For if they had joined nature to Scripture,
 then from the two they would have learned the Lord of both:
 nature giving life²²² through manifest things,
 and Scripture, too, through simple things.
 Blessed be He who gives life to the body by the one,
 and gives life to souls by the other!
 Give me drink, through a pure pastor,
 from the clear well of the Scriptures!²²³

²²¹ HdF 65.2:

...
 ܠܗ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
 ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
 ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ

Beck notes the variant ܠܗ for ܠܡܢ.

This passage lends weight to Bou Mansour's argument, mentioned in footnote 15 above, that Ephrem maintains a *taxis* between nature and Scripture.

²²² Or, in line with a variant, "revealing" (ܡܪܝܢܐ).

²²³ HdF 35.10:

ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
 ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
 ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
 ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ

The material presented in the preceding several pages has shown that the Arians' epistemological method is, in Ephrem's view, absolutely inimical to the way of faith in God's self-revelation delivered through nature and Scripture and safeguarded in the Church that adheres to the Nicene confession. Only by the faith that Ephrem commends to his audience does God draw near to the one who seeks to know him; if we scrutinize him, we stray far from him.²²⁴ Because the sin of investigation does not merely weaken or injure the faithful mind but kills it, accusing the investigators of "bad faith" turns out to be too imprecise to be very helpful. If we follow Ephrem's train of thought, we recognize that inasmuch as his opponents engage in investigation, to that same extent they reject the faith—not only the true faith, but the very category of faith. Investigation is the conscious, willful attempt to ground belief on something other than that which

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

Note the emphasis in the last verses on the ecclesial aspect of scriptural revelation.

²²⁴ HdF 72.2.

we are given to believe, which amounts to the rejection of the possibility of faith altogether.

Torrance wrote that faith, at least in part, “is the orientation of the reason towards God’s self-revelation, the rational response of man to the Word of God.”²²⁵ While Torrance’s manner of expression is not Ephremian, the substance of his statement is surely of a piece with Ephrem’s theological epistemology. As the coming pages of this chapter argue, Ephrem’s vision of how we come to know God, and how investigators are unable to do so, is built on what has been presented up to this point. Ephrem pits faith against audacious investigation; but faith, as he understands it, is anything but irrational or antirational. Right theological knowing and thinking, using our God-given reason for what it was created for, is of the very substance of faith, and the way in which we exercise

²²⁵ T. F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 33. The fuller context is as follows:

Faith is the orientation of the reason towards God’s self-revelation, the rational response of man to the Word of God. It is not only that, but more than that, ... but it is no less than that, i.e. than a fully rational acknowledgement of a real Word given to us by God from beyond us. In Alan Richardson’s fine phrase, faith is a “condition of rationality.”

In a footnote to this passage Torrance remarks, “This means that an antithesis between reason and faith must be ruled out, for faith is the behaviour of the reason in accordance with the nature of its divine Object.”

our freedom determines whether our reason is brought to life and enlightened by faith—that is, becomes what it is supposed to be—or remains darkened and cut off from the Truth in which it would find its fulfillment.

Measure and Limits

Part and parcel of the investigator's rejection of faith as the only way to knowledge of God is his willful disregard for the proper measures, limits, and order inherent in the natures of things. At the heart of Ephrem's polemic against investigation, as well as his positive doctrine of divine revelation through created realities, is his conviction that God, and he alone, is the author of all order, measure, and limit:

Behold, He extends His limits over all things,
and He spreads out His orderings over all things.
Necessity governs nature,
the mind and will [govern] freedom.
Natures are bound, the free are guarded.
The Law is a bulwark that guards freedom.
Who could find fault with Him
who ordered the Law and freedom for us?²²⁶

²²⁶ HdF 28.4:

ܡܠ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ
ܡܠ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ
ܡܠ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܬܐ

The Lord and Maker of all things, God sets the boundaries and measures of created realities, and he orders them to the good. Freedom in will and in thought operates within this created order; only when it works in harmony with the structures of created reality does it act to the benefit of the human person and in a godly manner.

Yet the order that God establishes is not only that which obtains within creation but also the order of its relation, as a whole, to him. Freedom is oriented not only toward the order evident in creation; its proper exercise is predicated on the proper relation between it, a created reality, and its Maker. In terms of human knowledge, that means that we are free to inquire only into that which God gives us to know; we must freely recognize and abide by the limits inherent in our nature and in the natures of all created things. The investigator acts otherwise. He foolishly yet freely commits himself to a hopeless quest for that which lies infinitely beyond his measure as a creature. Underlying this aspect of

מַלְאָכָא דְּמַלְאָכָא דְּמַלְאָכָא
 מַלְאָכָא דְּמַלְאָכָא דְּמַלְאָכָא
 מַלְאָכָא דְּמַלְאָכָא דְּמַלְאָכָא
 מַלְאָכָא דְּמַלְאָכָא דְּמַלְאָכָא
 מַלְאָכָא דְּמַלְאָכָא דְּמַלְאָכָא

Following Beck's notes, מַלְאָכָא and מַלְאָכָא should be read without the possessive suffixes.

slips and falls away from it.
 And if there is no one who is able to strike
 a target that is close,
 who is able to hit
 a hidden target that is far away?
 We cannot comprehend His humanity;
 who is able to comprehend
 His hidden divinity?²³⁰

Ephrem's talk of arrows and targets is meant to impress upon his audience the need to carefully observe the measure proper to created natures. When he strictly charges us to be mindful of humanity's limitations, he is simply working out the implications of his conviction about the ontological chasm. All created things have a limit or measure that determines what is possible for them and what is right for them in accordance with their nature. Even the good things of this world—medicine, wine and spices, eating and sleeping, for example—are only

²³⁰ HdF 7.2:

ܦܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܡܪܝܚܐ
 ܐܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܡܪܝܚܐ
 ܡܪܝܚܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܡܪܝܚܐ
 ܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܡܪܝܚܐ
 ܡܪܝܚܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܡܪܝܚܐ
 ܡܪܝܚܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܡܪܝܚܐ
 ܡܪܝܚܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܡܪܝܚܐ
 ܡܪܝܚܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܡܪܝܚܐ
 ܡܪܝܚܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܡܪܝܚܐ
 ܡܪܝܚܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܡܪܝܚܐ

Beck notes a variant containing the *punctum participii* for each of the verbs that appear as perfects in vv. 3-4.

good for us if taken in the appropriate measure.²³¹ If we approach creaturely realities within measure and in an orderly way, we receive the benefit they have to offer. However, it is not according to measure to approach God by way of investigation into his hiddenness. The scope within which we can inquire into the natures of things terminates at the edge of the chasm. Because of that fact we must be ever mindful of the limitations of our humanity and must measure our search for knowledge of God, directing it only toward those means God has chosen for revealing himself. Otherwise we risk being counted among the insolent:

The presumptuous one indeed forgot his nature, that he is [only] a man,
and he forsook what humanity is and investigated what Being is.
And if he forgot his nature, into whose nature should he inquire?
For he forgot his measure and was frenzied with excess.²³²

Ephrem rebukes the insolent one who does not limit his questions:

²³¹ *HdF* 28.2. In this example, the propriety of measure is in function of the limitations of human nature checked against the specific natures of the things of which we partake. The limit is not inherent in those things but in us with respect to those things.

²³² *HdF* 47.9:

ܠܟܝ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ
ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ
ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ
ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ

Beck notes ܡܕܝܢܬܐ as a variant for ܡܕܝܢܬܐ in v. 3.

Behold, let us reprove his confusion all the more,
 since his will is disturbed through its freedom.
 For his nature was ordered by [God's] goodness,
 so that from freedom the nature might be known.²³³

Since his choice for unmeasured inquiry was freely made, it stands to reason that things could have been different for him and, perhaps, still could:

If he had shaken off his wine and recognized that he is mortal,
 he would have kept silence and observed the measure of mortals.²³⁴

The specifically Nicene dimension of Ephrem's polemic against investigation emerges by way of his contrast between what we can know of God—that is, the measure of theological knowing proper to human nature—and what the Son knows. The chasm provides the framework for the contrast:

Behold, all eyes and all minds
 are far too weak in comparison with that strength
 of the Godhead.

That Ray that shines forth from It
 comprehends It; the Light that It begets
 knows It.²³⁵

²³³ HdF 28.7:

ܡܬܠܝܠܐ ܡܥܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܐܡܢ
 ܡܬܠܝܠܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܡܥܢܐ
 ܡܬܠܝܠܝܢ ܡܥܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܡܥܢܐ
 ܡܬܠܝܠܝܢ ܡܥܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܡܥܢܐ

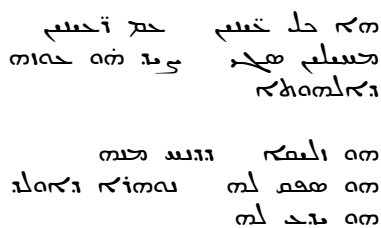
²³⁴ Ibid.:

ܐܡܢ ܡܬܠܝܠܝܢ ܡܥܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܡܥܢܐ
 ܡܬܠܝܠܝܢ ܡܥܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܡܥܢܐ

Only the uncreated Word of God, whose revealed name “Son” betokens his divine generation, can fully know the uncreated Father,²³⁶ for it is in the hiddenness of God that the Son’s generation is grounded. All creaturely knowing falls infinitely short of that mark and must freely, humbly, and obediently keep to its own measure.

An essential part of keeping to our own measure is the recognition that the criterion for the truth or falsity of our thoughts lies not within us but in God. We are not the crucible for trying the metal of our own or others’ teachings, says Ephrem; God alone is.²³⁷ He is also the balance in which we must weigh our thoughts and our wills; he employs just the right weight for each thing according

²³⁵ *HdF* 71.19-20:



The translation above agrees with Beck, who takes ܐܠܗܐ as the antecedent of the pronominal object suffixes of the prepositions in stanza 20: he translates them using feminine pronouns agreeing with “Gottheit.”

²³⁶ See, e.g., *HdF* 26.12, 27.3.

²³⁷ *HdF* 12.2, 48.2-3.

to its nature.²³⁸ The inquirers are found wanting, and yet God may have mercy on them for their being too light in the balance.²³⁹

Ephrem's invocation of God's mercy in connection with the sin of investigation is not, however, as forceful as his dire warnings about the consequences of investigation. Returning to the image of the archer, Ephrem likens the investigator to a proud yet blind archer who unwittingly shoots his arrows into a fire:

The arrows that he shot in his pride
have turned to ash, have become dust in the wind.
And if it should so happen that he himself should go into it,²⁴⁰
therein would be the destruction of both him and his arrows.²⁴¹

Elsewhere Ephrem turns to scriptural examples of limits not to be crossed — the cherub with the flaming sword guarding the boundary of Paradise, and God's command that no one but Moses ascend Sinai — as points of comparison for the

²³⁸ *HdF* 12.3.

²³⁹ Cf. *HdF* 12.5.

²⁴⁰ I.e., the fire.

²⁴¹ *HdF* 27.8:

ܡܝܕܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ
ܕܝܥܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܕܝܥܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܝܥܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܕܝܥܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܝܥܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܕܝܥܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

limits of theological inquiry.²⁴² God set a boundary around the mountain for a day, but the height of his hiddenness is bounded off forever; death by stoning was the sentence for the one who crosses the limit imposed around Sinai, Gehenna for the one who tries to cross the limit of God's hiddenness.²⁴³

Ephrem's convictions about the injurious effects and punishment that come in the wake of unmeasured inquiry are all predicated on his belief that the investigator freely chooses his path. The same holds true for Ephrem's exhortations to know our proper measure and observe its limits,²⁴⁴ to not lead ourselves astray and scrutinize our God:

Let us temper²⁴⁵ our minds and measure our thoughts as well,
and let us recognize [about] our knowing that
it is far too small and wretched to inquire into the One who knows all.²⁴⁶

Ephrem's plea for self-restraint and sober reflection on the natural limit of human knowing is charged, through and through, with moral urgency. One who

²⁴² *HdF* 28.8.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ Cf., e.g., *HdF* 72.1.

²⁴⁵ The Syriac ܡܠܬܐ can also be translated "let us anoint."

²⁴⁶ *HdF* 25.3:

ܡܠܬܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܡܢ ܐܬܪ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
ܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܐܬܪ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
ܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܐܬܪ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

chooses to step over the limit and exceed his God-given measure does so at his own peril. His choice does not lead him to the deep truth of God but traps him within the circuit of his own feeble mind and the absurd fictions it takes for theological knowledge. He hems himself in by his own ignorance and perversion and cuts himself off from the gift of God's self-revelation, refracting all that he is given to know of God through the prism of his own investigation, the structure of which he alone determines:

O blind congregation of inquirers,
they stand in the midst of the light and seek it.

...

Each one, as he imagined,
took and depicted the light in his mind.

The investigator is an epistemological constructivist of sorts, but in practice only, not in theory. The extreme theoretical constructivist has the relative advantage of consciously admitting that he generates meaning, whereas the investigator so deludes himself that he thinks he actually strikes his external, objective target while his vain inquiry, in point of fact, has only turned his mind back upon

itself.²⁴⁷ He generates a mental image and takes it for the Light itself. Indeed, the link between investigation and idolatry is a strong one, as Ephrem sternly warns:

Rebuke your thought, lest it commit adultery and beget for us
a Messiah that does not exist and deny the one that does exist!
Beware not to make an idol by your investigation.
Beware not to fashion with your intellect
an omen of your mind and an offspring of your thought.
Let the Offspring of the True One be depicted in your thought!²⁴⁸

Binding himself, by his abuse of freedom, to the idols fashioned by his own intellect, the investigator cuts himself off from the revealed truth of God and sows controversy and division among others. The alternative to investigation that Ephrem offers is one that works toward the reintegration of the person, both as a whole person and as a member of the true Church.

²⁴⁷ Cf. *HdF* 42.6, where Ephrem makes the related point that natures are not what they are because of the working of our will. They exist as they do independent of our knowing or acting, and we must accept reality as it is.

²⁴⁸ *HdF* 44.10:

ܠܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܝܥܠܝܬ ܠܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܝܥܠܝܬ ܠܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܝܥܠܝܬ ܠܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܝܥܠܝܬ
ܠܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܝܥܠܝܬ ܠܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܝܥܠܝܬ ܠܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܝܥܠܝܬ ܠܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܝܥܠܝܬ
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Beck notes the variant ܠܐ for ܠܐ in v. 1.

Ecclesial Dimensions of Investigation

One of the most pernicious effects of unmeasured investigation is the disturbance and confusion it engenders in the churches. For Ephrem, this is not only a matter of right doctrinal profession over against error; it has direct bearing on the very life of the body of believers and troubles its peace.²⁴⁹ Investigation and contentious disputation go hand in hand, and together they wreak havoc on the life of faith lived in ecclesial unity which Ephrem so ardently commends to his audience. Several passages in the *Hymns on Faith* speak about the scourge of controversy, offer prayers for peace and unity among believers, or tout the advantage that Ephrem's own undivided congregation enjoys.²⁵⁰ Since one *chooses* investigation, the ills that it brings in tow are attributable to freedom as well:

The Scriptures are at one; men are divided.
For, controversies about the one Truth have come about
because of freedom.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ This is not to imply that Ephrem would separate those two concerns at any great distance. Quite the opposite, Ephrem's thought evinces a strong and intimate connection between what one thinks and professes, on the one hand, and the character of one's moral, ecclesial life as a whole, on the other hand.

²⁵⁰ See, e.g., *HdF* 47.12, 48 refrain, 52.15, 53.2-3.

²⁵¹ *HdF* 68.1:

And yet it is important to recognize that Ephrem, while he castigates the insolent investigators and their divisiveness, nevertheless concedes a proper method of inquiry that is open to believers. More than a concession, in fact, the right way of questioning reality is the path to the knowledge of God that Ephrem speaks of so eloquently, and which was outlined in the first part of this chapter. Essential to this healthy type of inquiry is the humble recognition of natural limits and the strict observance of measure. The faithful inquirer is careful to discern the right balance between questioning and silence, between pressing on to a deeper knowledge of God through his chosen media of self-revelation and restraining himself through faith, obedience, and trust in God. Numerous passages talk of right speech and right silence, the proper use of the mind and tongue, and even an appropriate form of disputation for the sake of edification (Ephrem surely would hold up his own polemic as an example of the lattermost).²⁵² The necessary condition for such healthy inquiry and debate is

ܐܡܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
ܐܡܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
ܐܡܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

²⁵² See, e.g., *HdF* 2 passim, 4.1, 4.13-14, 23 passim, 24.6-7, 38.8-10, 50.2-4, 58.7, 67.25.

faith firmly rooted in the life of the true Church, which presupposes a trusting obedience to the specific means God has chosen to reveal himself. The limits of those means provide the framework within which Ephrem encourages believers to exert their efforts in coming to know God more deeply. Only by the right use of freedom in accepting as the foundation of one's inquiry and debate what the true faith presents can one rightly exercise one's freedom in forging ahead with any theological investigation. It would be better, in fact, to say that the life of faith is not only the foundation of proper theological investigation but also its abiding guide and standard. Healthy inquiry can only be carried on by one whose entire disposition is oriented by the orthodox faith, which comes to expression in the worship of the true Church. As faith and love are intimately bound up with each other,²⁵³ so love and truth are yokefellows who jointly prepare the way for concord and peace.²⁵⁴ The orthodox believer engages in theological inquiry within the strict compass of the faith-love-truth nexus preserved whole and entire in the Church, and only there. So when Ephrem

²⁵³ Cf. *HdF* 80.3.

²⁵⁴ Cf. *HdF* 20.12.

writes that “the faithful never debate or investigate / for, they have faith in God,”²⁵⁵ the reader must balance that sentiment with the following:

In the Church there is
inquiry such that you may investigate things revealed —
not such that you may pry into things hidden.²⁵⁶

A group of polarities are now brought into correlation with each other, all in relation to theological inquiry: the revealed and the hidden, faith and unbelief, humility and presumption, measure and excess.

And to those we should add the polarity between rationality and rationalism, since that pairing takes account of much of what Ephrem puts his finger on in his contrast between proper and improper investigation, even though the terms themselves are obviously not Ephrem’s. Clearly Ephrem does not repudiate the exercise of reason—the God-given word (ܐܠܗܐ)—but exhorts his audience to recognize and observe the limits of human reason dictated by human nature and ultimately by God himself. The difference between

²⁵⁵ HdF 56.8:

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ

²⁵⁶ HdF 8.9:

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ

rationalism (exemplified by excessive, presumptuous investigation) and rationality (exemplified by measured, humble inquiry) is not merely one of degree; they are entirely different in their foundation, orientation, and end. The former is an abuse of freedom and, in effect, the frustration of the human desire to know, since it does not terminate upon any objective reality at all but generates fictions of the mind that supplant the truth of God: it ends in irrationality and idolatry. The latter, however, is exercised in accord with the *telos* of freedom, exercising the authoritative mind according to its given nature, and in accord with the nature and means of God's self-revelation. That correspondence between rationality and revelation accounts for the real progress that the faithful inquirer achieves on the path to the knowledge of God: they are attuned to one another, since God structures both of them. It is evident, then, how Ephrem can condemn one type of investigation and, at the same time, make allowance for another.

Yet more than merely being allowed to do so, the faithful one *will* engage in inquiry, under the influence of love's attraction to the truth (or Truth). And the whole dynamism just described is only actualized through the power of freedom rightly exercised. Just as there is no compulsion to investigate in insolence —

“inquiry is not imposed, by force, / upon the presumptuous,” says Ephrem²⁵⁷—so also there is no compulsion to receive and foster faith and to engage in the humble search for the truth of God as he reveals himself. Insolent investigation entails a free choice of personal orientation, not some epistemological method born of necessity, and it constitutes, to Ephrem’s mind, an abuse of freedom that cripples faith, cuts oneself off from God and his truth, and breeds division. Faithful, humble inquiry is also a choice of orientation, but it accords with the teleological orientation of human freedom and, accordingly, fosters personal and ecclesial unity.

The way of theological knowing that Ephrem describes—sometimes positively and explicitly, other times implicitly and negatively, by way of his polemic against unhealthy investigation—has a three-fold nature. First, it takes on the character of ascetic discipline. The humble, obedient mind and tongue learn to control themselves as they should, restraining the insolence of their

²⁵⁷ HdF 70.9:

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ
ܕܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢ

inquiry by faith.²⁵⁸ They curb the wayward tendencies of their thoughts and words and achieve a disciplined balance of action and rest.

Second, it is inherently dialogical. It seeks converse with God, not theft of his hidden mysteries. Unlike presumptuous investigation, faithful inquiry does not try to bypass the given content and structure of God's self-revelation in order to discover what in fact cannot be discovered. Rather, it responds to God's invitation according to the terms in which it was delivered, taking up the harps that God has ordained for that purpose, and meeting him where he approaches us.

Finally, and closely related to the second point, it is doxological by nature. Inquiry is no end in itself but only a means to a more profound knowledge of God. One who inquires rightly will take up Ephrem's prayer that the Lord make his tongue a pen for God's glory and that he should sing what is right with his harp.²⁵⁹

That last point about the character of proper inquiry recalls Griffith's remarks on Ephrem's choice of idiom for his polemic against presumptuous

²⁵⁸ Cf. *HdF* 64.10.

²⁵⁹ *HdF* 51.5-6.

investigation. Speech about the mysteries of God finds its proper place in the liturgical life of the Church because that is the context in which the truth of God, knowledge of which is grounded on the *terra firma* of orthodox faith in the eternal Word of God become man in Jesus, is most fully appropriated and celebrated. Right belief, freely appropriated and nurtured, issues forth in right worship freely offered; the other way around, right worship is the fullest exercise of rational faith and freedom, the only fitting human response to God's self-revelation in nature, in Scripture, and, above all, in Jesus Christ. All knowing is oriented toward the worship of God, and when human persons discover the truth of God as he makes it accessible to faithful and discerning minds, their response of worship gathers up and presents to him the best that human persons can offer in the best way they can offer it: in right, rational faith and obedience; according to the measure appropriate to human beings and recognizing their creaturely limits; using fitting speech sanctified by God, while observing proper silence; from within the context of a life lived according to the truth of God revealed in Christ; avoiding all divisiveness; and as the most profound expression of human freedom. For Ephrem, human freedom is ultimately the freedom given by God to worship him rightly and, in so doing, to become fully a

CHAPTER 5

FREEDOM AND OUTSIDER POLEMICS

Does one's integrity ever lie in what he is not able to do? I think that usually it does, for free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man. Freedom cannot be conceived simply.

Flannery O'Connor²⁶²

Chapter 4 began an exposition of how Ephrem understood humanity's way forward after the Fall in relation to freedom and knowledge. The greater part of that chapter was taken up with Ephrem's polemic against presumptuous investigation, a charge he lays primarily against the Arians. The present chapter continues the exposition of Ephrem's polemics, only this time with respect to what Ephrem considers to be threats originating outside the Church. Here the

²⁶² From the author's note to the 2nd ed. of *Wise Blood* (1962).

point of contention is not one of theological method or creedal statement as such. Rather, it has to do directly with the reality of human freedom itself. The two main sources for Ephrem's polemic on this issue are his *First Discourse to Hypatius* and *Hymns against Heresies*; this chapter relies chiefly on them. In those texts Ephrem engages two different lines of thought bearing on human freedom: astral determinism and the notion that evil enjoys real, ontological status as a distinct being or principle. While he approaches the two differently, Ephrem nevertheless heavily relies, in much of his polemics against both, on the distinction between bound natures and unbound freedom. The applications differ, but the distinction is essential to both debates.

A comment on methodology is necessary before looking into the debates themselves. While Ephrem provides valuable assistance to the researcher looking for source material on the Manichaeans, Marcionites, and Bardaisanites, the present chapter does not look to him for that kind of information.²⁶³ In keeping

²⁶³ For an oft-cited example of the use of Ephrem as a source for Manichaean material, see John C. Reeves, "Manichaean Citations from the *Prose Refutations* of Ephrem," in Paul Mirecki and Jason BeDuhn, *Emerging from Darkness: Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 43 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 217-88. On Bardaisanite material in Ephrem, see most recently Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment of the Evidence and*

with the approach of the previous chapters, the present exposition does not attempt to assess either the accuracy of Ephrem's depiction of his opponents' doctrines or the fairness of his response to them. Of concern here is Ephrem's perception of the problems involved and the profile of his own conception of human freedom as it can be gleaned from his polemical literature, regardless of the latter's suitability to its intended targets.²⁶⁴

a New Interpretation, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 22 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009), esp. 156-238. Han J. W. Drijvers also made frequent use of Ephrem's writings for his work on Bardaisan, for which see the bibliography in Ramelli, *Bardaisan*; for an example of Drijvers's use of Ephrem for Marcionite material, see his "Marcionism in Syria: Principles, Problems, Polemics," *Second Century* 6 (1987-1988): 153-72, reprinted in idem, *History and Religion in Late Antique Syria* (London: Ashgate Variorum, 1994), XI. In this last article Drijvers comments on Ephrem's value for the historian of Marcionism: "Notwithstanding his vehement and often over-sophisticated polemics with Marcion, Ephraem provides us with a coherent picture of his opponent's views which are not misrepresented on purpose. In particular the basic ideas of Marcion's system are clear and not liable to any misunderstanding" (158).

²⁶⁴ To the issue of how accurately Ephrem portrays his opponents' doctrines is added the problem of proper ascription, by which I mean what may rightly be ascribed to the magisterial figure whose name came to be identified with a movement or school of thought, and what to that movement or school itself after him.

The Self-Evidential Character of Human Freedom

Before looking at Ephrem's response to the two main issues mentioned above, it would be good to begin with Ephrem's most basic argument for the reality of human freedom, an argument that applies to any and all lines of thought to the contrary. Ephrem claims that the very debate about human freedom demonstrates the reality of freedom because the whole category of debate, likewise the category of teaching and that of persuasion, is predicated on human freedom. Much of *Eccl* 6 is taken up with this argument:

If He did not give [it]²⁶⁵ to us, then we should inquire into why He did not give it.

But if there is no freedom, then He did not give us [the possibility]²⁶⁶ to say these things.

For questions and disputes are brought forth by freedom.

Debate and its sister, inquiry — they are the daughters of freedom.

Even before we demonstrate [anything] we find that that debate stems from freedom.

Indeed, it is not appropriate for you to ask whether there is freedom or not.

²⁶⁵ I.e., freedom.

²⁶⁶ Following Beck: "... dann hätte er uns nicht [die Möglichkeit] gegeben, das zu sagen."

ignorance or a desire to evade personal accountability, the fact that we are constantly presented with the workings of freedom, which we would clearly recognize if we only gave it a moment's reflection. Freedom's power is evident from the fact that we consider possibilities and negotiate conflicting options all the time. It takes an act of the will—literally—to deny that we do so.

Ephrem argues insistently along those lines in *Hyp* 1 when he imagines an interlocutor asking what the will is. Since names, for Ephrem, indicate the natures or qualities of their referents,²⁶⁹ and since freedom cannot be demonstrated on prior grounds, he can simply reply, "This is its precise truth: [it

consider our experience of the will as material for rational demonstration. In other words, Ephrem argues for human freedom in accord with reason, or rationality—that is, in accord with the ܠܡܢܐ that we possess. The Syriac term may stand for "reason" in Ephrem's works as long as one does not impose on it either a *rationalistic* interpretation or a perversely agnostic interpretation that eschews all contact between the rational mind and things as they really are.

²⁶⁹ See, e.g., *Hyp* 1, 46.17ff, where Ephrem writes, "You say, 'Freedom': from its name learn its authoritative power! ... For these are names that are not at variance with their reality [lit., their truth (ܠܡܢܐ)]."

Bou Mansour, citing Beck, points to Ephrem's adoption of the Stoic conception of *ὁνομα* here and elsewhere. See his comments in "Liberté," 5-6. He points to this intimate connection, in Ephrem, between names and the realities they name as an aspect of what I have called the self-evidential character of freedom: "Ainsi, une assimilation de la liberté à son nom paraît-elle être pour Ephrem l'une des vérités qui se passent de toute vérification et s'imposent par elles-mêmes" (ibid.).

yet foolishly that we are all deprived of the word. Just as the utterance of the latter's claim proves its content false, so the former's condition of denial undermines the denial itself. Ephrem continues:

Freedom, too, when it has gone to hide itself in a debate and to show by argumentation that it does not exist, is then caught all the more, and it is shown to exist. For, were there no freedom, there would be no debate or argument. But if it is seen all the more when it hides, and is proven wrong all the more when it denies [itself], then when it shows itself it is made manifest as the sun.²⁷³

²⁷³ Hyp 1, 39.1-8:

אֲנִי אֶחָד מֵהַנְּשִׁימִים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים וְהַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים
 הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים
 הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים
 הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים

Cf. HcH 11.4:

What could obscure freedom,
 which is like the sun shining in the sky?
 Who could deny its authority,
 whose strength, like God, is mighty?
 How evident it is, for, behold, its oppressors are its heralds!
 How manifest it is, for, behold, its false accusers are its trumpets!
 The argument for it is easy, and it is pleasing [to stand by] its side.

אֲנִי אֶחָד מֵהַנְּשִׁימִים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים
 הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים
 הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים
 הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים
 הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים הַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים

Ephrem is confident that he can summarily dispel all doubts about our freedom, regardless of their specific details, by way of his one axiomatic claim: “If you have the authority to ask, then you have no need to ask. / But if you are deprived of the question,²⁷⁴ then you are deprived of freedom.”²⁷⁵ His is essentially a meta-argument that absorbs any and all threats to human freedom, enlisting them for its own purpose. In a sense it even depends on those threats in order to convey its point—but only in a limited sense, for, the underlying notion could just as easily be applied to any instance in which a person is presented with, or presents himself with, more than one object for consideration, be it in thought alone or in terms of possible courses of action.

So there are basically two applications of Ephrem’s self-referential argument for freedom. The first is his response to the claim that we are not free, which he considers absurd and self-defeating. The second applies to all other

²⁷⁴ I.e., the possibility of asking the question. Cf. Beck: “Bist du aber (der Möglichkeit) zu fragen beraubt.”

²⁷⁵ *Eccl* 6.15:

 ܐܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܡܪ ܡܪܝܢ ܐܢ ܐܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܡܪ ܕܡܪܝܢ
ܡܪܝܢ [ܐܢ] ܐܡ ܕܡܪ ܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܪ ܡܪܝܢ ܡܪܝܢ ܡܪܝܢ

Cf. *Eccl* 6.3 for the same idea in a more condensed form: “Inquiry follows freedom” (ܡܪܝܢ ܡܪܝܢ ܡܪܝܢ); or, in the form of a rhetorical question, *Eccl* 6.2: “If we do not possess freedom, why is our will examined?” (ܡܪܝܢ ܐܢ ܡܪܝܢ ܡܪܝܢ ܡܪܝܢ ܡܪܝܢ).

Bou Mansour stressed that last point, noting that the polemical context of Ephrem's remarks forced his argument to focus on the sheer reality of human freedom more than on any attempt at a definition of its essence.²⁷⁹ He continues:

Il nous semble toutefois que l'approche d'Ephrem du mystère de la liberté s'apparente en bien des points à la méthode phénoménologique, qui cherche moins à expliquer et à valoriser qu'à saisir l'être dans ses apparitions et opère une réduction, une *epochè*, eu égard à une essence posée a priori de la chose qu'elle étudie.... En effet, comme il assigne à celle-ci [i.e., liberté] une nature irréductible à une saisie conceptuelle claire et distincte, il nous la présente comme impuissante à se connaître elle-même.²⁸⁰

While Bou Mansour's remarks are persuasive, there is reason to be cautious about casting Ephrem's method as phenomenological. Now, Bou Mansour does not state precisely whose phenomenological method he has in mind here. He cites Ricoeur in a footnote to this passage, but not in such a way as to make it clear that the parallel he is drawing pertains primarily or exclusively to him and

²⁷⁹ See Bou Mansour, "Liberté," 3-4: "S'il est vrai qu'Ephrem ne s'est pas soucié de procéder à une définition de la liberté, la raison pourrait être — vu le contexte polémique qui a déterminé tout le débat — la priorité de l'affirmation de son existence et la nécessité et l'urgence de défendre celle-ci avant d'entamer ou d'élaborer une quelconque déclaration sur son essence." Bou Mansour's comments here connect with the those in note 6 above: he cites that same page in de Halleux's article in connection with Ephrem's lack of concern for defining freedom.

²⁸⁰ Bou Mansour, "Liberté," 4.

Ephrem. But if we consider what may be regarded as a typical component of the phenomenological method, generally speaking—the bracketing off of the object of experience and of any judgment about its existence, or perhaps any judgment about it all, in order to focus on the structure of one’s consciousness and perception of it²⁸¹—then the reason for caution becomes clear.²⁸² It is the function of the will that Ephrem intends to describe, not merely his consciousness of it, and the will cannot be identified with consciousness or self-consciousness. And while Ephrem begins by formulating his description of the functioning will in the first person, which is the perspective proper to the phenomenological reduction, the fact that he does not restrict himself to the first person throughout is telling: he is not only profiling his own experience of the will in act but that which he thinks holds true for everyone.²⁸³ In the end, Ephrem does not really follow

²⁸¹ It should be born in mind that the suspension of judgment does not imply a denial of anything, since denial is itself a judgment. It is rather the abstention from affirmation and rejection altogether, at least for a time.

²⁸² My critical remarks in what follows do not stem from the fact the Bou Mansour sees a parallel between Ephrem’s method and one that is situated in a cultural and intellectual context foreign to him. Drawing out such parallels can be of value indeed. My intention in what follows is to question whether the parallel Bou Mansour has drawn is accurate or not.

²⁸³ Cf. *Eccl* 6.12, where Ephrem implies that arguments about human freedom, whether they are true or false, must apply to everyone.

through with a phenomenological reduction, or *epochē*.²⁸⁴ Rather, he treats the human will as his proper object—not *his* will alone, let alone his consciousness of his own will. In fact, his argument would suffer were he not making a claim that held true, so he believed, for all human persons regardless of their self-consciousness. Ephrem indeed starts with self-reflection, but he quickly widens out his argument to encompass what he believes is everyone's experience, whether they reflect upon it and are conscious of it or not.

Whether or not the label “phenomenological” is best suited to Ephrem's method in *Hyp* 1,²⁸⁵ Bou Mansour is certainly right in noting the lack there of any

²⁸⁴ Ricoeur adopted the notion of the *epochē*, whose modern manifestation is attributed, above all, to Husserl, though it is rooted in Greek skepticism. Karl Simms (*Paul Ricoeur* [New York: Routledge, 2003], 53) illustrates Ricoeur's use of the concept as applied to Freud's transformation of the term “unconscious” from a descriptor to a substantive (“*the unconscious*”): “The shift in meaning constitutes what Ricoeur calls ‘an *epochē* in reverse’. The phenomenological *epochē*, or ‘reduction’, we recall, consists in a bracketing-off of all judgements concerning what we cannot know with certainty—the status of the external world as presented to us through our senses, for example—in order to contemplate what can be known with absolute certainty, namely self-consciousness. The establishment of *the unconscious* is an *epochē* in reverse because ‘what is initially best known, the conscious, is suspended and becomes the least known’.”

²⁸⁵ It should be noted that Bou Mansour does not totally identify Ephrem's method with that of phenomenology but states that it is in several respects similar to it (“Liberté,” 4).

definitive exposition of the essence of the will in abstraction. As the passage from *Hyp* 1 quoted above shows, Ephrem focuses chiefly on the “that” of the reality of freewill, not the “why.”²⁸⁶ Bou Mansour points to that fact, but in place of the “why” he has “how” (“comment”),²⁸⁷ referring to essence. Ephrem’s polemic against presumptuous investigation, as we saw in the previous chapter, hinges on the inability of the human person to plumb the depths of anything at all, even oneself. It comes as no surprise, then, that he could be fully confident of the reality of human freedom yet restrain himself from attempting a definitive exposition of the essence of the will.

Without presuming to delineate a static essence of the will, Ephrem nevertheless offers a profile of some of the qualities it exhibits when it acts, one of which he explains in terms of victory. In this context victory consists in the resolution of duality or multiplicity to singularity, the condition of having opted for one perceived desirable over all others. Thus, even in defying the Law, one’s will is victorious insofar as it has exercised its authoritative freedom and brought its own determination to the brink of action. Defeat is not really possible for

²⁸⁶ See *Hyp* 1, 34.19-21.

²⁸⁷ “Liberté,” 4-5. He cites other texts in this connection.

freewill. Even in the case of inaction, one's will has freely decided, rightly or wrongly, against action, if refraining from a particular course (or a number of courses) of action was one of the thoughts it had considered. Ephrem uses the example of the farmer going out to sow seeds: if he stopped himself from doing so because of a thought that conflicted with his intention to sow (e.g., a lack of foresight or trust that the sown seed would eventually yield a harvest), he would have opted for inaction, which was precisely the content of that opposing thought he considered. In other words, he freely willed to refrain from sowing the seeds; omission is as much a free choice of the will as any commission.²⁸⁸ And so, freewill is not only inherently divisible and susceptible to conflict but also ineluctably victorious simply because it is free and cannot cease to exercise

²⁸⁸ See *Hyp* 1, 31.12ff. It must be noted that the kind of multiplicity about which Ephrem is speaking in his example of the sower is not a healthy one, even though it is proof of the sower's freedom. The kind of multiplicity that stifles swift, proper action is detrimental and indicates the lack of an appropriate simplicity, unencumbered by conflicting thoughts threatening to hinder proper action. Here multiplicity is harmful distraction—not the intelligent discernment of the best among many options but the dangerous complication of an otherwise clear, straightforward matter. Multiplicity of the will's thoughts may show we are free, but it is not therefore desirable.

itself—even in the case of what we consider inaction.²⁸⁹ The only true defeat that pertains to the sphere of the will is the defeat suffered by the thoughts of the will that are passed over in favor of others—these latter are the final determinations of the will, its actual choices.

It is hard to imagine that those two dimensions of freewill, its divisibility and its inevitable victory, do not refer to its essence; yet there is no reason to assume that they alone exhaust the will's essence. Whether he would admit it or not, Ephrem does make assertions about at least part of its essence, the "how" of its reality. While he surely exhibits no pretence of having thoroughly explained anything he investigates, he nevertheless does go beyond the mere "that" of things, in spite of the fact that he may overstate his case at times and lean heavily in the direction of the apophatic or agnostic. Nevertheless, we should hesitate to accuse him of being blatantly inconsistent with his epistemological principles, since he does explicitly admit the propriety of measured investigation into created natures, which, as Ephrem himself shows, leads the mind beyond the

²⁸⁹ This is not to say that Ephrem enfolded all human activity under the aegis of freedom and the exercise of the will. His focus appears to be restricted to the conscious deliberation and decisions of the will; his assessment does not have any direct bearing on, e.g., autonomic functions or unreflective, impulsive behavior.

mere fact of existence into the realm of essence, the “how” or “as what” of a thing’s existence. His claim that the names of things manifest their inherent characteristics hinges on at least partial apprehension of essences.

An Ontology of Evil

At the heart of Ephrem’s debate with his opponents over the reality and efficacy of human freedom is the question of who (or what) is accountable for the choices that seem to be our own. The application of that question to right action — obedience to the Law and the excellence of the martyrs, for example — carries much weight for Ephrem, but the question becomes more controversial when applied directly to evil. Considered as a question about praise and blame, it is the latter that figures into the debate more pointedly.²⁹⁰

A good part of Ephrem’s polemic in *Hyp* 1 is aimed at a particularly problematic way of dealing with that question: the supposition of an evil substance, principle, or element that accounts for our evil thoughts and actions. Ephrem presents that teaching in the words used by the “heresies” (ܐܝܬܐ)

²⁹⁰ This issue is discussed in more detail toward the end of this chapter.

Mitchell's translation of this passage—to my knowledge, the only published English translation of it—misses the point and introduces a confusion of Ephrem's argument. It is worth quoting it in order to clarify, by way of contrast with the translation just above, what Ephrem's argument is getting at:

For the Giver of Freewill is not so confused (in mind) as this man who is divided (against himself) part against part, that He should become involved in a struggle with His nature. *For* He gave us Freewill which, *by His permission*, receives good and evil impulses, and He furthermore ordained a Law for it that it should not do overtly those Evils which *by His permission* stir invisibly in it.³⁰⁰

The crux of the problem lies in the fact that Mitchell misses the connection between what he thinks is the second full sentence and the first: they should, in fact, be one long sentence. The *dalat* (ا) proclitic that begins what Mitchell renders as a second sentence—the italicized “For”—is actually a subordinate clause marker. It begins not a new independent clause but a dependent clause expressing the conflicting actions that God would be exhibiting, were he to be divided in himself on the issue at hand. Ephrem is not claiming that God gives us freewill and engenders good and evil impulses in it; he is saying that if God were to do so and, at the same time, legislate against acting on those evil

³⁰⁰ Mitchell, *Prose Refutations*, xviii (italics mine).

impulses, he would be at variance with himself. The most egregious problem here is the notion that God would instill specifically *evil* impulses in us; that is why Mitchell, misunderstanding the Syriac the way he does, renders ܡܢ ܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ and ܡܢ ܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ as “by His permission” — he feels compelled to soften the blow of the claim that God stirs up evil in us.³⁰¹

Recall that it was Ephrem’s opponents who raised the problem about our impulses having to originate with God, if he is the one who gives us freewill. Ephrem surely does not subscribe to that idea, and Mitchell’s translation misleads on that score. The central claim of Ephrem’s argument about freedom is that evil only comes about through the exercise of freedom and in the context of its deliberations. He would agree, no doubt, that the emergence of those impulses, and any actions that follow from them, occurs by God’s permission, but Ephrem would say that about anything that comes to be. If there is one claim

³⁰¹ My translation agrees, essentially, with Beck’s on this point regarding the structure of Ephrem’s argument:

Gott nun, der Geber der Freiheit, ist nicht wie dieser (Mensch), bei dem ein Teil gegen den andern steht, verwirrt, sodaß er mit sich selber im Streit läge, indem er uns die Freiheit gab, die von ihm Antriebe zum Guten und Bösen empfängt, und andererseits für die Freiheit das Gesetz erließ, daß sie nicht außen das Böse tun solle, das insgeheim von ihm (kommend) in ihr sich regt! (Beck, *Brief*, 106-107)

about God that Ephrem feels no need to qualify, it is that he is and has ever been the Lord of all things: nothing could ever surprise God or resist him and force its way into reality against his will. But that is not the point of the present debate. Ephrem's energy is focused on showing that it is freedom, and it alone, that accounts for the conflicting thoughts and desires that we perceive within ourselves, especially evil thoughts and desires. We need, Ephrem might say, to be honest and recognize our own accountability for the evil in which we are caught up, not to foist it on either God or some alien, extrinsic evil principle that takes up residence in our will like some invader or parasite.

There is at least one passage in Ephrem's works, however, that at first glance appears to speak against the reading of *Hyp* 1 presented here. In *HcH* 11, Ephrem argues against both an evil principle and fate as destructive of human freedom. There he writes:

Let us show [however] that its³⁰² authority reigns over all.
For, its Lord stirs up both good things and bad,
 and there is no evil principle over against it,
 nor is there any compulsion of fate to attack it.³⁰³

³⁰² I.e., human freedom's.

³⁰³ *HcH* 11.3:

ܠܡܥܢ ܕܢܚܝܬ ܕܡܠܚܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܬܐ
 ܕܡܠܚܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܬܐ

It is important that Ephrem does not write, in that second verse, that freedom's Lord stirs up impulses in the will. Beck's reference to Is 45:7 in his footnote to this verse—"I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe, I am the LORD, who do all these things"—is more in line with the meaning of the passage than any ascription of the will's good and evil impulses to God as their source. The good and bad things—literally, "evil things"—that Ephrem has in mind here are those things that actually come to pass, not those about which we freely deliberate within ourselves according to our impulses and desires. And even in that case, Ephrem probably has in mind the chastisements that God brings to pass on those he disciplines and instructs, the "evils" and woes that work for the good of his creatures. He may also have in mind the idea that we find in Mitchell's mistranslation of the passage from *Hyp* 1 discussed above: the recognition that nothing whatsoever, whether good or evil, comes about except by God's permission. Whatever the best reading of *HcH* 11.3 may be, the stanza surely does not allow for the notion that God forcibly injects into our freewill

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ

In his translation of the second verse quoted here, Beck adds "(durch sie)," referring to freedom.

impulses toward good or evil not attributable to us as their author. Recall that Ephrem's opponents in *Hyp* 1 view the conflict internal to the will as one that is resolved not by the will itself but by the opposing elements in the conflict.

Ephrem, on the other hand, consistently affirms that it is the will that decides the outcome of the conflict. In other words, Ephrem's opponents would appear to offer the victor's crown to one or the other of the conflicting elements at work in the will, whereas Ephrem hands it to the will itself in every instance. *HcH* 28 offers a good example of how Ephrem rejects the alleged influence of an evil principle over freewill and holds the latter exclusively accountable for our choices and proclivities:

Through the body's food the will
acquires a taste for, and introduces, gluttony,
and through its drink, drunkenness.
Through the good things that it has in nature
it acquires for itself evil things that are not in nature,
for, evil does not possess being.
Those good things
are transformed into evil by our will.
The will has mangled the orders [of things];
freedom has confused the measures [of things].
Blessed is He who orders creatures
so that through them we might learn of every order!³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ *HcH* 28. 2:

acquiring a taste for the evil to which it gives rise when confronted with the goods of nature. It is clear, then, that what drives Ephrem's rejection of the ontological reality of evil is his doctrine of creation. Nothing can come into being apart from God's willing it so, and that which he does call into being can only be good; what we call "evil" is what results when fallen human freedom perverts being.

In his argument against his opponents' understanding of the impulses at work in our will, Ephrem relies heavily on the distinction between bound and unbound realities. In brief, a bound nature is one whose manner of acting is established by God; it is unable to determine courses of action or behaviors for itself. Fire cannot decide to not put off heat. Neither does it choose to burn us if we touch it, nor can it decide not to burn us. An unbound nature, by contrast, is one that freely determines its own courses of action and behaviors. Accordingly, a given human person—the notion of unbound natures can only apply to persons, since only they are truly free³⁰⁵—may choose to act in a way radically different from, even diametrically opposed to, that of another person. They share

³⁰⁵ Cf. *HdF* 79.5, where Ephrem speaks about a relative degree of freedom in animals.

By juxtaposing the “simple one,” who is about to surrender his own freedom to the governance of the stars, with Joshua, who exercised what amounts to prelapsarian authority over creation,³¹⁹ Ephrem links, albeit implicitly, the error of astral determinism with the perversion of the creaturely order of which Adam and Eve were guilty. In the garden the first human couple aggrandized the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, mistakenly considering it the source of the divinity that was theirs for the taking, contrary to God’s commandment. They treated it as though it were above them, whereas they were, in fact, to exercise dominion over it and all creation, in accordance with the divine image and likeness with which they were endowed. Moreover, they fell into their error of judgment and their sin by heeding the deceits of the evil one, whereas Joshua exercised his God-given authority by means of his prayer to the Lord of all, who created human persons to be lords and stewards of all creation. In Joshua we

ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ

³¹⁹ See Josh 10:12-14.

glimpse a partial restoration of persons and things to their divinely established order of relations.

Ascribing the governance of all things to the Creator of all things, Ephrem focuses specifically on the stars and the order that they exhibit, since they are at the center of this debate:

For they are not placed as lords over our freedom,
but were set up as servants for our lordship,
as lamps on dry land and milestones on the sea.
When the eye directs itself to their place,
Pleiades and the Big Dipper, Aldebaran and Orion,
they instruct [us] without error that He who governs all is one.³²⁰

In contrast to the Chaldeans' claim that the stars are the governors of all things, Ephrem restores both to God and to human persons their proper authority, which they exercise in freedom—the one being absolute, the other derivative.

In the midst of Ephrem's discussion of divinely established order, he raises the issue of sameness and difference, akin to the categories of the variable and the invariable, which we saw him apply to the teaching about substantial

³²⁰ HcH 5.7:

ܐܠ ܕܝܗܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܐܠ ܕܝܗܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܐܠ ܕܝܗܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܐܠ ܕܝܗܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܐܠ ܕܝܗܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܐܠ ܕܝܗܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

Ephrem considers it a marvel that generations go by, and yet no two children are born alike in all respects. Fate does not bring into being different people in one and the same image, “as it has brought into being and produced blind men in every age.”³²⁴ Ephrem’s answer to the problem, as one would expect, is that it is God, not fate or the stars, that brings all things into being and governs them. He establishes their similarities and dissimilarities: he “has made things the same, inasmuch as it is advantageous for us, and has made things different, inasmuch as it helps us.”³²⁵ For Ephrem, the proof that God, not the stars, makes things to be what they are lies in their subjection to him as their Maker and Governor. He is the one who sets them in motion on their courses,³²⁶ “and that which is shown to be without authority regarding its movement / you should not make into a lord, for it is a footless slave.”³²⁷

فیز و لغت کفر و نوحه لحد قلن

Cf. *HcH* 5.4.

324 *HcH* 5.10: قحطه حط اقص

[illegible]

Cf. *HcH* 5.5.

326 *HcH* 6.9.

327 Ibid.:

אמנם דבר אחד חלוקה נלמד עליו
לפי חכמתו, וזה

With respect to the way Ephrem handles variability and invariability, there is a noteworthy change from his argument against substantial evil to that against fate. In the former, Ephrem cited the fact that one individual of a species possessing a bound nature could stand for all individuals of that species. Whatever natural characteristics the one exhibited, the rest must share—if one lamb is innocent, all are.³²⁸ That fact illuminated a fundamental difference between unbound natures and bond natures, between human persons in their freedom and all other creatures in the natural world, whose activities and qualities are determined for them by God. In debating fate, though, Ephrem points to the variability that obtains across species in order to exploit a weakness in the Chaldean error:

And if by fate fish devour one another,
 why, therefore, do lambs not kill their companions?
 And if horoscopes arrange for those with large eyes,
 then the lot falls to moles that they should be blind.
 And which is the horoscope of demons and devils,
 or the hour of Legion, the prince of the Chaldeans?³²⁹

Cf. *HcH* 9.3.

³²⁸ See *Hyp* 1, 46.12-13.

³²⁹ *HcH* 6.7:

ܡܢ ܠܝܬ ܕܠܝܬ ܕܠܝܬ	ܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ
ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ	ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ
ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ	ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ
ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ	ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ

Ephrem's point is that all things whatsoever that come into being under the same sign should share the same qualities, but this is manifestly not the case. Were it so, the consequences would be dire for those who had the misfortune to share the same horoscope as the demons—though here Ephrem is likely hinting at the absurdity that even spiritual beings would need to have a horoscope if astral determinism were the truth about created things.

There is another respect in which Ephrem uses variability and invariability in his argument against fate that more closely approximates his use of those categories against the doctrine of substantial evil. As we saw, Ephrem points out the differences between human persons as well as the variability within the life of each individual person in order to argue that we are all free and not under the compulsion of any mixture of substances, good and evil. He reiterates that fact about human variability in order to undermine the notion that our horoscope determines how our lives unfold. In the following stanza he takes up the example of a murderer to prove his point:

If the killer's hour is from the womb,

ܐܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܕܐ ܕܡܪܕܐ ܕܡܪܕܐ ܕܡܪܕܐ ܕܡܪܕܐ
ܐܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܕܐ ܕܡܪܕܐ ܕܡܪܕܐ ܕܡܪܕܐ ܕܡܪܕܐ

then nature has prevailed in children and brought in freedom,
 such that it might prevail in youth up until one is grown up.
 And if, then, to periods of life are apportioned
 the lots of the use [of limbs], then it is made clear that there is an order
 that has stayed youth [from crime] and has freed old age [from that
 restraint].³³⁰

It is not clear exactly what Ephrem's argument in this stanza is. He may mean that if one who kills as an adult has not done so since the moment he became physically capable of that crime, then fate does not hold complete sway over him; perhaps Ephrem is taking the fact that one is simply incapable of committing murder before a certain age as proof against the reality of fate. In either case, his appeal to the variations that distinguish our lives at different stages is intended to exploit this obvious weakness in the argument for fate, at least according to Ephrem's polemical depiction of it. In the following stanza he takes up this argument again, this time bringing in the possibility of repentance as another witness against fate:

If it has made someone mute, and he is mute forever,

³³⁰ HcH 6.12:

ܐܢ ܕܢܬܝܒ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
 ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
 ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
 ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
 ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ

changing for the worse, those virgins at unruly feasts who abandon their vow and commit fornication?³³²

In a manner less forced and more pragmatic in scope, Ephrem raises a problem about how one's horoscope is calculated. In *HcH* 6 he imagines a child conceived without sense organs: "Who fashioned the defect in the womb? / And how did the fetus's defect precede its horoscope?"³³³ Since his opponents do not acknowledge "the Power that destroys the horoscope, / that kills in the womb and gives life outside it,"³³⁴ they are left to consider whether or not there are two different fates. If there are, then the hour of conception and that of birth, and the stars that coincide with them, are at odds with one another. Ephrem rejects as absurd a hypothetical solution to their difficulty, namely, that "the same hour of its conception / circles back and comes again and emerges at its birth."³³⁵ He concludes:

³³² See *HcH* 9.8.

³³³ *HcH* 6.3:

... וְיֵשׁ מִיָּסֵד לְכָל חַיָּה
וְיֵשׁ מִיָּסֵד לְכָל חַיָּה

³³⁴ *HcH* 6.4:

... וְיֵשׁ מִיָּסֵד לְכָל חַיָּה
וְיֵשׁ מִיָּסֵד לְכָל חַיָּה

³³⁵ *Ibid.*:

... וְיֵשׁ מִיָּסֵד לְכָל חַיָּה
... וְיֵשׁ מִיָּסֵד לְכָל חַיָּה

How indeed does the erroneous one allot the horoscope?
 Do they reckon the hour of its³³⁶ conception by a calculation,
 or arrive at its birth by a division?
 Fate traps itself and is conquered.
 For, if it turns to the birth, the conception happens beforehand,
 and if it therefore seeks the conception, that hour is hidden.³³⁷

Ephrem's question is reasonable, albeit clearly rhetorical. Presenting it the way he does, he shows that he is confident he has backed his opponents into a corner and deprived them of any reasonable way of responding. Both ways of answering his question lead to an impasse.

Ephrem uses a similar tactic in *HcH* 9, where he presents his opponents with a dilemma both parts of which deprive the stars of any influence on our circumstances. His argument there is based on the principle that no physical body can give to another entity what it does not itself possess:

Hot fire and cold air,
 wet water and dry land—
 the thing that comes forth from their power is like them.

בִּיחֻד הַיָּלֶד וְהָאֵם הַמִּשְׁכָּח בְּחַלְמָא

³³⁶ I.e, the child born without sense organs.

³³⁷ *HcH* 6.5:

אֵיךְ יִפְתָּח בְּרִי לֵבָא לְבִדּוּ מֵלֵךְ
 לֵבָא, עֲדֵיךְ וְכִלְמֵךְ מִשְׁכָּח בְּחַלְמָא
 אֵם חַלְמָא, וְחַלְמָא מִשְׁכָּח בְּחַלְמָא
 מִלְכָּא מִכָּד נִפְשָׁא אִשְׁוּדָּא
 וְאֵל אִתְּרָא לֵבָא מֵלֵךְ אִשְׁוּדָּא מִכָּד מִלְכָּא
 אִשְׁוּדָּא וְאֵל כִּדָּא מִלְכָּא לֵבָא, עֲדֵיךְ בְּחַלְמָא

of fate through the prism of astral determinism itself, his own anti-determinist polemic being a case in point. If we attribute to the stars' influence all things that come to pass, we must, then, acknowledge that astral determinism is a self-defeating theory, that fate is a house divided:

Behold, all peoples obey [their] leaders,
 serve their rulers, reverence their kings.
 Who has thus incited us to rebel against the stars?
 They themselves have compelled us and forced us to deny [them].
 And who would believe in fate, which forces us to deny [it]?
 And who would serve a lord who compels [us] to be ashamed of him?

It is fate that subjugates slaves to their lords.
 Consider how contradictory it is, such that it has incited us to rebel
 against it.
 It brings shame upon itself in us. If there is no freedom,
 then its compulsion incites in us that we should despise it.
 It keeps us silent that we might not revile kings to their face.
 Through us it honors the king, and through us it dishonors itself.³⁴³

³⁴³ HcH 9.9-10:

מִן חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד
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חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד חֵסֶד
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The comparison Ephrem draws between how we typically regard our human rulers, and how we can (and how Ephrem himself does) treat our alleged celestial rulers is illustrative of the weakness of astral determinism. Only freedom can reasonably account for all the debates in which we engage and all the divisions that exist among us. For Ephrem, there is no contradiction in holding that God is the Lord of all things and, at the same time, recognizing that there are those who reject him or deny his authority, even his existence.³⁴⁴ The key is Ephrem's conviction that God creates human persons free, allowing those who reject him to do so—a far cry from the notion that he compels them to do so, as fate, for its part, would have to do, if it were accountable for all we did, said, and thought.³⁴⁵

The last major argument against fate to review here applies equally to the notion of substantial evil. In a number of passages Ephrem appeals to the reality of justice and injustice, praise and blame, as evidence of the reality of human

³⁴⁴ Cf. *HcH* 11.14: "Blessed is He who has taught two things at once: / that we have a Lord and [that we have] freedom as well."

ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ

³⁴⁵ In *HcH* 6.22 Ephrem considers the revelation that God exists as yet another example of fate compelling us to reject it, were fate to be the force governing us.

freedom. Both the teaching on fate and that on substantial evil are incompatible with any semblance of personal accountability and moral judgment. Ephrem takes up the argument in the following passage, tying in the notion of moral instruction:

Scepters and laws testify that there is freedom,
for they chastise the presumptuous and instruct the simple.
He who kills and slays, he who commits adultery and he who steals —
they [all] cry out that we possess freedom.
And if there were no freedom, [how] could there be blame?
Fate shuts its mouth at the voice of the accuser.³⁴⁶

The moral judgment that we apply to human action is rooted in both freedom and the fact that God judges us on the basis of our exercise of freedom:

Books instruct [us] about the Just One
that He does not accuse evil but rather freedom.
For, if there were an evil principle,
then He would have either accused it or opposed it.
And if there were a fate that makes murderers,
then everyone would blame it and not the murderers [themselves].
We do indeed blame them, the vicious ones,
since they are not bound in their natures.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ HcH 5.8:

ܩܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
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ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ

³⁴⁷ HcH 11.5:

Our moral intuition regarding justice, so deeply ingrained in us, witnesses to the freedom that we possess and which alone accounts for praiseworthy and blameworthy action. Ephrem relies on our immediate, visceral reaction to the injustices we suffer in order to show how deeply flawed the teaching on fate is. Over the course of three stanzas in *HcH* 5 he develops such an argument, constructing a scenario in which the wife of a Chaldean, an adherent to astral determinism, commits adultery. Ephrem exploits the cuckold's likely desire for vengeance in order to turn the latter's belief in fate against him: if he acts on his desire for justice, "he makes void the horoscope, since it teaches that from it / come unforeseen events, by chance, without any order."³⁴⁸ Since it was all prearranged for him, he must accept it all as his lot.³⁴⁹ His desire for justice is

ܚܬܝܬܐ ܡܚܡܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܚܝܬܐ
 ܕܠܐ ܝܬܐ ܠܚܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܡܚܝܬܐ
 ܕܠܐ ܝܬܐ ܠܚܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܡܚܝܬܐ
 ܠܐ ܝܬܐ ܠܚܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܡܚܝܬܐ
 ܠܐ ܝܬܐ ܠܚܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܡܚܝܬܐ
 ܠܐ ܝܬܐ ܠܚܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܡܚܝܬܐ
 ܠܐ ܝܬܐ ܠܚܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܡܚܝܬܐ

Beck's note suggests omitting the *seyame* in ܠܚܬܐ (v. 2) in accord with ms. A.

³⁴⁸ *HcH* 5.13:

ܚܬܝܬܐ ܡܚܡܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܚܝܬܐ
 ܕܠܐ ܝܬܐ ܠܚܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܡܚܝܬܐ

³⁴⁹ Cf. *HcH* 5.14.

essentially a desire to set things aright, to introduce order where there is disorder—actual disorder, with respect to the injustice, and the disorder that his theory about fate implies, whether he knows it or not. What he seeks presupposes the reality of human freedom:

Consider freedom: it avenges the wrong done to it,
when it both demands its money and when it demands [recognition of] its
status.

At the same time as [making these] demands, it brings the horoscope to
naught.

Its heralds themselves have refuted it,
for when they demand justice, they introduce order into
the troubled confusion of the Chaldeans, who muddle and sling words.³⁵⁰

Weights and measure, laws and penalties, and the order they imply, are all grounded in the reality of freedom and the mutual exclusivity of justice and injustice.³⁵¹ Yet, if both justice and injustice stem from fate, Ephrem wonders, why is the one esteemed and the other despised?³⁵² Freedom and “the crucible of

³⁵⁰ *HcH* 5.15:

ܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
ܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
ܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
ܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
ܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
ܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܚܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ

³⁵¹ Cf. *HcH* 6.18.

³⁵² Cf. *HcH* 6.22. This is a variation on Ephrem’s argument, discussed above, about fate compelling some to reject fate itself while others affirm it. The

discernment” are what make sense of that opposition and our expectations and judgments based on it.

Closely linked to the opposition between praise and blame, that between victory and defeat forms the basis of an astute psychological observation Ephrem makes in *Hyp* 1. He writes:

For there is no man who has gone down and brought up a crown from a difficult contest through great toil and [then] says that there is no freedom, lest the reward of his toil and the praise of his crown come to naught. He who has been conquered says that there is no freedom so that he may excuse the wicked guilt of his dissolute will. If you see a man who says that there is no freedom, know that his freedom has not conducted itself well.³⁵³

With these comments Ephrem cuts across all the various arguments against freedom. There is always the possibility that one’s adherence to a doctrine denying human freedom, whatever doctrine it may be, veils a personal, moral problem. Employed in this way, such arguments against freedom are disingenuous and their motives self-serving. The precedent for the distortion of

underlying principle is that the idea of such stark contrarities originating from the same source is absurd and sets all things in disarray.

³⁵³ *Hyp* 1, 40.3-9:

לֹא יֵשׁ אִישׁ שֶׁיָּרַד וַיָּבִיחַ כִּסֵּה מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ וַיֵּרָא לְפָנֶיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵין חֵירוּת
 וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת
 וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת
 וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת וְלֹא חֵירוּת

conscience and personal accountability that they entail is as old as human history. By externalizing the responsibility for one's faults and foisting it on fate, on an evil substance, or even on God, one repeats the error of our first parents, who cut themselves off from mercy because they refused to confess their faults as their own.³⁵⁴ Ephrem's observation in *Hyp* 1 is a perfect example of the confluence of thought and action as the two-fold way by which human persons either come to perfection in the image of their Creator, if they exercise their authoritative freedom rightly, or despoil the divine image in themselves and degenerate to the sub-human through error and sin.

Building on the previous discussion of Ephrem's doctrine of creation and the Fall and of his defense of a right conception of human freedom, the next chapter takes up the issue of right action in greater detail.

³⁵⁴ Cf. *Hyp* 1, 40.9-15.

CHAPTER 6

FREEDOM AND HUMAN ACTION

The previous two chapters focused on the relation between freedom and thought with particular attention to Ephrem's polemics aimed at threats within and outside the Church. The development of right thinking on such key issues as what knowledge is accessible to human persons and how we should regard the power of freedom is one of the two elements in which the proper exercise of our authoritative freedom consists, according to Ephrem's conception of it. The other element pertains to right action—living in accordance with the truth. Those two elements jointly constitute our being conformed ever more clearly to the image of our Creator; the present chapter treats of the second, examining Ephrem's understanding of the relation between grace and human freedom, his presentation of moral exempla, and his depiction of the righteous in Paradise.

Grace and Human Freedom

Ephrem wrote no treatise or series of hymns devoted to the way he believed God's grace and human freedom interact with one another. One would search his works in vain for a highly systematic exposition of that relationship, especially if one hoped to find clearly argued distinctions akin to those between prevenient and subsequent grace or sufficient and efficacious grace, to which Western theological attention later turned. Instead of focusing on different moments or types of grace, the trajectory of Ephrem's thought aims at a balance between grace and freedom, difficult to characterize with precision but real nonetheless. That balance pertains to our experience of God's gifts to us, our accepting them as such, and our use of them for their intended purpose. Yet, undergirding the condition in which that synergy can be realized is the precedence of grace as the basis on which our response to God's gracious invitation is made possible to begin with. For Ephrem, God's gifts precede our reception of them; the balance is struck when we understand and use them rightly. Bou Mansour finds this dual aspect of the grace-freedom relationship in

Ephrem's works, citing the primacy of grace and, at the same time, arguing that Ephrem maintains an equilibrium between the two.³⁵⁵

The use of the term "gift" in connection with divine grace raises an important point. As the rest of this section intends to make clear, Ephrem's conception of grace does not envision it (or God) as standing over against human freedom, vying for the greater share of influence over what we think, say, or do. His emphasis, rather, is on the character of grace as an invitation and a means of help extended to human persons so that they may become fully human, that they may progress toward perfection in accord with the divine image given them at their creation. The example of the just in paradise, discussed below, provides the model for what that progress toward human perfection in the divine image looks like. It cannot be realized without either God's gracious gifts or our commitment and effort.

HdF 25 exemplifies Ephrem's thought on the grace-freedom relationship.

He opens the hymns with a plea for "a little breath of the Spirit" (*ܠܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ* *ܠܠܗܐ*) so that, he says, "I may be able to proclaim the glory of Him / who is

³⁵⁵ Bou Mansour, "Liberté," 72. Bou Mansour's discussion of grace in relation to human freedom in this article is repeated, apparently verbatim, in his "Aspects de la liberté humaine chez saint Éphrem le Syrien," *ETL* 60 (1984): 271-82.

greater than all with my poor tongue”;³⁵⁶ if God did not grant that gift, no one could speak truly of him.³⁵⁷ His grace has the power of enabling its recipients to transcend their own weaknesses and limitations: “May Your gift, my Lord, quickly raise me up to Your height. / Through You I am able to grow great that I may attain to You.”³⁵⁸

In granting his gift, however, God does not thereby overpower its recipients such that their freedom is compromised: “Glory to the gift that speaks in the mouths of speakers / while it does not take away their freedom by its eloquence.”³⁵⁹ Ephrem does not go into any detail about how that complementarity, which some may consider simply a contradiction, is possible.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁶ HdF 25.1:

...ܐܡܪܬܝ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

³⁵⁷ See HdF 25.2.

³⁵⁸ HdF 25.12:

ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

³⁵⁹ HdF 25.3:

ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

Perhaps Ephrem had Mt 10:19-20 in mind when writing these verses.

³⁶⁰ We should recall that Ephrem claims that we can grasp *that* something is so without being able to understand or articulate precisely *how* it is so.

Ephrem’s *Commentary on Exodus* offers another passage in which the mysterious encounter between grace and human freedom is presented and left

Elsewhere in the same hymn cycle Ephrem returns to the conception of divine grace as a gift enabling more insightful proclamation of divine truth:

Our Lord, let my tongue be a pen for Your praise.
 Let the finger of Your goodness inscribe and write with it
 a helpful discourse. A pen, my Lord, is unable
 to write of its own will, without him who holds it.
 Let my tongue not slip so that apart from You I should say
 something that is harmful. Glory to Your teaching!³⁶¹

unexplained. Ex 2:5 shows pharaoh's daughter going down to the river to bathe, occasioning her discovery of the child Moses. In his comments on what brought her to go out to bathe when she did, Ephrem writes: *ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ* (Tonneau, in *Genesim et in Exodum commentarii*, p. 107, l. 30). Jansma argues ("Ephraem on Exodus II, 5: Reflections on the Interplay of Human Freewill and Divine Providence," *OCP* 39 [1973]: 26) that the subject of the passive verb is not "she," referring to pharaoh's daughter, but "her freedom." He feels that his correction of the particle *man* with the preposition *men* and the translation that it allows, against those of Mobarak and Tonneau, helps to make better sense of the passage. It might make for a better reading of the passage, but it does not answer the question of how, for Ephrem, grace and freedom interrelate in human action. Jansma believes that that sentence in the commentary "was for Ephraem the most appropriate—in fact, the only possible—form to express the delicate situation in which human freewill and Divine providence so subtly interplayed" ("Reflections," 27). We are led back, then, to Ephrem's insistence on "knowing that" but not necessarily "knowing how."

³⁶¹ *HdF* 51.6:

ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ
 ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ
 ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ
 ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ
 ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ
 ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ ܕܡܝܪܝܢ

Cf. Ps 45:1.

Both passages just above make clear, *HdF* 25.3 more so than 51.6, that Ephrem conceived of the relation between grace and human freedom as one of cooperation. They both recall the issues dealt with in chapter 4 of this study, those having to do with what we can know of God by way of his created types and symbols, how we should frame our inquiry into their natures, and what is the character of our proper response to God's invitation to know him more profoundly. In passages like the two quoted above we find Ephrem delving further into the relationship between human persons and their Creator, stressing the synergy that the relationship entails when it is healthy.

And yet human persons, according to Ephrem's way of thinking, do not come to the task of discovering their Creator and proclaiming his truth as completely autonomous, self-sufficient agents. That process and every reality involved in it bear the marks of grace: we are endowed with God's gifts from our beginning; the self-manifestations that God inscribes in creation and creation itself are his gifts to us; and both our discovery of him and our response to that

discovery are likewise made possible by his gifts.³⁶² The relationship between human persons and God, for Ephrem, clearly is not the meeting of two equal parties, not only because of the created-uncreated divide, but also because the means that establish the relationship and allow for its flourishing come from God as a gift from the very start. In chapters 2 and 3 we saw that this was the case in Ephrem's doctrine of creation and his understanding of the context of the Fall. In the latter it was stressed that God offered every means of assistance and arranged the circumstances such that the burden of obedience for Adam and Eve was light and their victory was all but secured for them, were they only to earnestly desire it and act on that desire. Yet, soon after the granting of both the gift of authoritative freedom and the gracious help and incentive to commit to a life-giving relationship with the Creator, the terrible power of freedom in the face of God's grace became manifest. They used their gift to deny its giver and, in so doing, compromised the gift itself. They yoked their own freedom to sin, error, and death—though recall that even death, to Ephrem's mind, is a gift, as it cuts short what would have been an interminable life of suffering and sin upon sin.

³⁶² Bou Mansour's reading of Ephrem ("Liberté," 79) considers human response to God's invitation as fundamental to the grace-freedom relationship: "La coopération humaine se situe au niveau de l'acceptation et de la réponse."

The conclusion to draw from the foregoing is that while Ephrem at certain points stresses the cooperation that obtains between God and human persons when their relationship is healthy, the wider context of Ephrem's thought on grace clearly recognizes its priority. As Bou Mansour observes, Ephrem held that

la grâce ne constitue pas un élément à côté de la liberté mais un élément fondateur en dehors duquel nous risquons de mécomprendre non seulement le rapport liberté-grâce mais aussi la véritable valeur de la liberté elle-même.³⁶³

In chapter 2 it was said that if there is to be a distinction between human freedom and human authority, it seems that the former is the ground on which the latter can be exercised. Now we can add that, for Ephrem, grace, conceived specifically as *gift*, is the ground on which freedom and authority stand — not only at the start, in the giving of freedom and authority at the creation of human persons, but also throughout the whole of human life, since human freedom never acquires self-determination as to its own teleological character. It is not given to freedom to determine for itself what the character of its proper exercise is; the proper end of freedom is given to it by God, and the failure to exercise freedom according to that orientation amounts to the weakening and

³⁶³ Ibid., 84-85.

enslavement of freedom itself. Human history, from the very beginning, has shown that to be the case, and for that reason does Ephrem pray that God heal our freedom³⁶⁴ and assert that Christ came to set free our freedom.³⁶⁵

When we do exercise our freedom as it is meant to be exercised, we do so in cooperation with God's gracious guidance, bringing our own efforts to the task of thinking and acting in a godly way. And when we do so, we do not find that grace assists our freedom in attaining goals of the latter's making. Rather, grace comes to us, on Ephrem's view, as a help in our striving toward the attainment of further gifts that God offers to us, gifts whose acceptance demands and presupposes a certain way of living, but which are gifts nonetheless:

And while the seed comes from us, the fruits come from His will.
That gift of His does not teach us laziness.
His diligence beckons us diligently
to plunder the riches that His love has presented to us.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ *HcH* 11.1.

³⁶⁵ *Nat* 26.10; cf. *Nat* 22.5.

³⁶⁶ *HdF* 25.10:

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

For Ephrem, God's ultimate gift is that of his Son, in and through whom salvation is extended to all who truly desire it, and whom believers encounter in a unique way in the Eucharist celebrated in the Church:

Consider freedom, which is like a hand
that can reach out to all [kinds of] fruits.
And just as formerly it was able
to pluck and take the medicine of death,
so is it able to pluck the medicine of life.³⁶⁷

Here the pervading presence of grace in the whole of human life is brought to the fore. The gift of freedom can be exercised either unto death or unto eternal life, which is itself a gift offered by God, and of which the Eucharist stands as a pledge.

Nevertheless, while God makes salvation possible by his grace, he allows its actualization to hinge, at least in part, on the decisions of our freedom.³⁶⁸ Bou Mansour was correct, with respect to at least certain situations, when he noted that for Ephrem “le «Oui» de la volonté est la condition sans laquelle l'efficacité

³⁶⁷ *Eccl* 19.7:

[,m] ܠܗܘܐ ܕܠܗܘܐ ܕܠܗܘܐ ܕܠܗܘܐ [ܡܬ] ܕܠܗܘܐ
ܕܠܗܘܐ ܕܠܗܘܐ ܕܠܗܘܐ ܕܠܗܘܐ ܕܠܗܘܐ
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³⁶⁸ Cf. Bou Mansour, “Liberté,” 72: “Sans conteste, l’une des grandeurs de la liberté humaine est sa participation à la réalisation du salut.”

divine se trouve empêchée de s'actuer."³⁶⁹ God, Ephrem would say, does not force anyone to desire or choose eternal life and to live in accordance with that desire. He wants not merely our passive acceptance of his governance over us but our active engagement in a life lived according to his truth:

This is the Good One, who, while He was able by force
to adorn us without toil, toiled by every means
that we might adorn [ourselves] by means of our will, that we might
depict our beauty
with the colors that our freedom gathers.
But if *He* were to adorn us, then we would be like an image
that another depicts and adorns with his own colors.³⁷⁰

Passages such as that just above, in conjunction with, for example, virtually all of his discourse on freedom in *Hyp* 1, might lead one to conclude that Ephrem overemphasizes the efficacy of human freedom and overextends its sphere of operation. Such a conclusion does not do justice to the wider context of his thought on the issue and risks reducing his conception of freedom to the articulation he gives it in more or less polemical contexts—that would hold true

³⁶⁹ Bou Mansour, "Liberté," 79.

³⁷⁰ *HdF* 31.5:

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
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especially if one's scope were restricted to *Hyp* 1 and the *HcH* cycle. Bou Mansour argues for taking full account of the variety of ways in which Ephrem talks of grace and freedom. In presenting Ephrem's thought on that relationship we should be wary of oversimplifying or systematizing in a facile way "une pensée assoiffée de paradoxes et d'antinomies."³⁷¹ Bou Mansour's quick review of some of those paradoxes and antinomies, helpful for its citations, is worth quoting in full:

A une liberté qui semble dépasser tout don reçu de la bonté divine (Virg 34,10-11), succède l'insistance sur la prépondérance de la grâce (Virg 26,10); à une liberté qui choisit les moyens de salut (CH 51,10) s'oppose l'image du Dieu-médecin qui guérit par tous les moyens (CH 30,9; 36,14; 33,3-4); à un salut dit procuré par le pouvoir de la prière (CH 33,1) s'oppose un salut accordé par une initiative divine avant et sans notre prière (Eccl 22,3.5; Virg 26,10...); l'affirmation d'un salut défini comme oeuvre de la grâce et de la croix du Christ (Eccl 20,11) se trouve ébranlée par une insistance sur le rôle de la liberté (Eccl 18,7); la nature humaine est tantôt présentée comme revêtue d'une faiblesse quasi constitutive (CH 31,5; Eccl 14,7-8; 15,3; HdF 4,14), tantôt supposée d'une bonté essentielle et d'une puissance sans mesure (CH 20,8).³⁷²

As is clear from Bou Mansour's collation of passages, Ephrem's thought on grace and human freedom resists any quick and easy interpretation. Bou Mansour has argued admirably for a fundamental unity amid the seemingly conflicting

³⁷¹ Bou Mansour, "Liberté," 82.

³⁷² Ibid., 82-83.

presentations that Ephrem offers. The theme of cooperation is one of the keys to that unity:

En effet, le thème des bonnes oeuvres est lié étroitement à celui du chemin, de la voie du salut. Sur ce chemin, l'acquisition des oeuvres bonnes est un acte personnel, par lequel l'homme exprime sa coopération à l'acte salutaire de Dieu.³⁷³

Yet, again, Ephrem does not understand cooperation as the meeting of two equal parties; grace always enjoys pride of place. It is God's movement toward us that makes our movement toward him possible, not the other way around, and, as was noted above, the history of God's grace communicated as his saving action in the world is as long as history itself:

Ephrem affirme que c'est Dieu qui donne les moyens de salut à l'intérieur desquels la liberté humaine peut se développer et auxquels elle peut accorder son consentement ou son refus. Ces moyens correspondent à la totalité de l'histoire du salut qui commence dans l'A.T. et s'achève par la croix, la descente aux enfers, la résurrection et l'instauration de l'Eglise (CH 32,9; 33,6.9).³⁷⁴

While it is concentrated and manifested in spectacular ways at specific times in specific events, grace is God's ever-present gift to humanity, bearing freedom up and allowing it to operate. Grace, then, is like the sea, which envelops and bears

³⁷³ Ibid., 73.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 77.

up the swimmer, allowing him to exercise his skill and waiting for him to do so.³⁷⁵ One is here reminded of the dying hero's final words in Bernanos's *Diary of a Country Priest*: "Tout est grâce!"³⁷⁶—that is, if we understand the image of the sea as indicating not merely an "everywhere" of grace but, more, an "everything." While Ephrem argues forcefully for the recognition of freedom's power, it is nevertheless clear that he understands all things to be, at root, gifts

³⁷⁵ HdF 25.8-9; cf. Bou Mansour, "Liberté," 81.

³⁷⁶ Georges Bernanos, *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (Paris: Plon, 1936), 324.

In his masterwork on Bernanos (*Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996]), Hans Urs von Balthasar comments on the country priest's last words ("What does it matter? Everything is grace!"):

This truth is so absolute that there cannot exist any problematic tension or dialectic between "merit" and "grace" because, even though grace does indeed "strike" man from the outside, it also makes a claim upon him from within. The word "merit" has no other meaning for Bernanos than the manner whereby the whole man makes himself radically present and available to the action of grace. For Bernanos, "merit" as such should nowhere be given separate consideration. (52)

The substance of von Balthasar's reading of Bernanos may apply to Ephrem as well—specifically the notion of grace as the objective and pervasive reality that elicits our freely given "yes" to God, and the conviction that good works, or the "merit" they may entail, must always be understood in tandem with God's prior gracious action in the world and in our lives.

Interestingly, on the same page of his book von Balthasar quotes a candid self-reflection penned by Bernanos that could just as easily come from Ephrem's pen: "No one is as shamelessly greedy for grace, and as foolishly wasteful with it, as I. In every respect, a thankless beggar."

from God and means for our coming to know him and to live according to his truth. Human freedom itself is a gift, and grace acts not as its rival, seeking to best it or undermine its integrity, but as a help to bring it to its perfection.

Ephrem's thought does not point to a quantitative balance between grace and freedom, treating their relationship as some contract or reducing it to a calculus, but to their interdependence in the realization of sanctity and salvation. Both grace and the right exercise of human freedom are necessary for human persons to become what they were created to become.

Some of the literature on Ephrem's thought raises the issue of Pelagianism. Hidal, for example, finding no concept of original sin in Ephrem's works,³⁷⁷ comments that "Ephräms Betonung des freien Willens und die damit zusammenhängende semipelagianistische Tendenz" might be explained by his being an ascetic and preacher.³⁷⁸ He takes his cue on that point from Beck,³⁷⁹ who, noting the obvious fact that one cannot expect Ephrem to have commented on the Pelagian controversy, admits that certain passages in isolation can admit of a

³⁷⁷ Hidal, *Interpretatio*, 83.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 82.

³⁷⁹ Edmund Beck, *Die Theologie des heiligen Ephraem in seinen Hymnen über den Glauben*, SA 21 (Rome: Libreria Vaticana, 1949), 105.

Pelagian interpretation; such passages, says Beck, must be read in conjunction with those that stress the necessity of grace and in connection with the polemical exigencies of his defense of freedom.³⁸⁰

El-Khoury rejects the notion that Ephrem's thinking is Pelagian. He notes that while Ephrem's works bear the marks of an Antiochene emphasis on the humanity of Christ,

doch führt diese anthropozentrische Tendenz bei Ephraem nicht zu einem Pelagianismus – sie ist als begrenzte Antwort auf die gnostische Haltung gemeint –, sondern betont nur ausdrücklich die dem Menschen in Freiheit gestellte Aufgabe seiner Selbstverwirklichung in und zu Gott.³⁸¹

Cutting across the whole debate about Pelagiansim or semi-Pelagianism in Ephrem, Bou Mansour poses a salient question: "Mais le souci constant d'innocenter Ephrem d'un pélagianisme avant la lettre ne traduit-il pas un asservissement à l'horizon augustinien, même si celui-ci est corrigé?"³⁸² One may respond that what is at stake here is not the ascription of anachronistic labels and

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Nabil el-Khoury, "Willensfreiheit bei Ephraem dem Syrer." *OS* 25 (1976): 66.

³⁸² Bou Mansour, "Liberté," 84. On this issue of applying to Ephrem's works a conceptual structure foreign to him, cf. Bou Mansour's assessment and, ultimately, critique of Beck's assessment of Ephrem's conception of freewill according to "le schéma classique de l'acte volontaire avec ses différentes phases qui vont de la conception du projet jusqu'à son exécution" (ibid., 7-12; quotation from p. 12).

their alien contexts but the conceptual, doctrinal substance to which they point. Nevertheless, it seems Bou Mansour's analysis of Ephrem's way of thinking on this issue states the truth of the matter with the greatest simplicity and accuracy: "Nous croyons fermement qu'Ephrem n'a pas pensé la liberté sans la grâce ni la grâce au détriment de la liberté."³⁸³

The Victories of the Just

In the foregoing exposition of Ephrem's understanding of human freedom, in this and previous chapters, two obvious questions have gone largely unexamined: what does the right exercise of freedom look like, and where does it lead one? The second chapter examined the bestowal of the gift of freedom at the creation of human persons; the third spoke at length of the harm that humanity incurred immediately thereafter through the misuse of that gift; the fourth and fifth chapters presented Ephrem's reply to threats to what he considers the right way of understanding freedom and its relation to knowledge. The fourth chapter did, in a sense, inquire into freedom's proper use, but there the discussion was

³⁸³ Ibid.

limited to how freedom bears upon the way we view the world, God's self-manifestation within it, and freedom itself. Both of the previous chapters, in fact, had something to say about the present questions, but in them the right use of human freedom was made visible only by way of contrast with particular distortions of the understanding. The rest of the profile of the one who exercises his freedom rightly, beyond the qualities of right thinking, remains to be seen.

In presenting his moral ideals Ephrem often enlists the help of biblical figures. Abraham, Moses, and Daniel, for instance, serve as exempla of self-restraint with regard to disputation and investigation,³⁸⁴ simplicity as opposed to hubris,³⁸⁵ and reliance on prayer and discretion.³⁸⁶ Adam and Uzziah, by way of their sins and failures, provide us with models of how not to think or act.³⁸⁷ On occasion Ephrem turns to Noah as well for purposes of typology and moral

³⁸⁴ *HdF* 56.3-6.

³⁸⁵ *HdF* 47.6.

³⁸⁶ *HdF* 47.7-8.

³⁸⁷ *HdF* 38.17; *Parad* 3.14, 12.4, 15.9-10.

exemplarity.³⁸⁸ With prayer and incense Noah was pleasing to God,³⁸⁹ and he

“overcame the waves of desire”³⁹⁰ in a generation given over to its lusts:

Oh, how resplendent was Noah, who was victorious in comparison
to all those of his generation! They were found wanting in the balance,
since they were weighed in terms of righteousness. Yet one soul weighed
heavy [in the scales]
by virtue of the armor of chastity. They sank in the flood
who were light in the scales, but lifted up in the ark
was the chaste and honorable³⁹¹ one. Glory to Him who took pleasure in
him!³⁹²

Noah (along with his family) was all that would remain of the former generation,

the only one with whom God was pleased, and would serve as the beginning of

the new: God chose him as the one through whom to make a fresh start for the

³⁸⁸ See, e.g., *CNis* 1 *passim*; *HdF* 49 *passim*, 56.2; *Nat* 1.56-58; *Virg* 8.14.

³⁸⁹ *CNis* 1.1.

³⁹⁰ *CNis* 1.4: ܐܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܢܘܚ

The Syriac text is taken from Sebastian P. Brock and George A. Kiraz, *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2006), 230.

³⁹¹ The Syriac ܐܝܬܝܢ can also be translated as “weighty,” here playing off the image of the scales.

³⁹² *HdF* 49.1:

ܐܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܢܘܚ ܐܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܢܘܚ
ܐܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܢܘܚ ܐܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܢܘܚ
ܐܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܢܘܚ ܐܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܢܘܚ
ܐܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܢܘܚ ܐܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܢܘܚ
ܐܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܢܘܚ ܐܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܢܘܚ

human race.³⁹³ The concluding hemistich of *HdF* 49.2 (“Praises to Him who chose him!”)³⁹⁴ might give the impression that that was purely an act of grace, implying that Noah’s high calling stemmed from his being privileged by God. But in the previous stanza and elsewhere Ephrem makes clear that Noah’s standing was the crown of the victory that he gained by his moral efforts—efforts that his contemporaries also could have made, if they had chosen to do so:

Take Noah [for example]: he could rebuke
all those of his generation, [saying] that if they had so willed, they [too
could have] fared well,
since the power of freedom was equal in them and in Noah.³⁹⁵

Here we find a variation of Ephrem’s argument from the one to the many: if one man is free to set his moral bearings aright and so flourish, everyone else is as well. The very category of exemplarity hinges on the truth of that claim. The stanza above shows that Noah enjoyed no superhuman power, nor was he picked out by God and compelled to live a life pleasing to God. The fact that

³⁹³ Cf. *HdF* 49.2.

³⁹⁴ *HdF* 49.2: ܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܘܚ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ

³⁹⁵ *Eccl* 3.9:

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܘܚ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܘܚ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܘܚ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ

everyone around Noah could have lived according to the truth just as he did makes it possible for him to serve as an exemplum for Ephrem's readers.

Righteous exempla serve two purposes. First, they provide both concrete models of how to live a life pleasing to God and the encouragement to do so. Second, they offer us a glimpse into the true nature and power of human freedom. While it may seem that the relation between the exempla and those who read about them is purely external, as though the feats of the righteous infinitely surpass and remain beyond the reach of those who would learn from them, Ephrem understands the relation differently. Exempla teach us something about ourselves, about what our lives might look like were we to become our true selves.³⁹⁶ In this regard the particular details of any given exemplum's life are arbitrary from our perspective. Ephrem's point in choosing to profile Noah's moral excellence and faith is not to make his readers want to become Noah, but to exhort and encourage them to become the persons God created them to be. Noah reveals to us part of who we are, by virtue of our creation, and that which we are able to become, at least in general terms. Exempla depict for us the proper exercise of freedom and reveal its power:

³⁹⁶ In anticipation of the discussion below, cf. *Parad* 13.15, 14.12.

Righteous exempla show not only how we ought to live but, as the stanzas above argue, who we are as free persons, whether we like what they reveal to us or not. The one who is sick with foul deeds may underestimate the efficacy of human freedom in order to excuse his own misuse of freedom, a point raised in chapter 5. He so distorts the truth as to call the bitter sweet and the sweet bitter. And yet, while he suffers the injurious effects of his own misdeeds, his freedom remains the seat of his power to repent and turn to the truth. Ephrem's discourse on human freedom touches on our tendency to claim the victories as our own but to distance ourselves from our own failures. What the exempla show us, according to Ephrem's presentation, is that we must claim *both* as issuing from our exercise of freedom. One can, then, consider an exemplum as a model, a source of encouragement, and a warning.

In Ephrem's handling of them, exempla not only instruct his readers about how to conduct their lives but also point ahead to the paradisiacal life of the just in the coming age, which Ephrem poetically imagines in his *Hymns on Paradise*. His depiction of the landscape and wonders of the renewed Paradise to come highlights the lavish rewards given to the just as the crown of their achievements and perseverance during their earthly lives. Their rewards are presented not only

as their just deserts for a life well lived, but also as the manifestation of the truth that they lived. Since they recognized and lived according to the truth that God has revealed, their rewards serve as fitting testimonies to that fact, as the flowering of the truth that they accepted and embodied.

The cluster of terms and images to which Ephrem turns most frequently in describing the righteous in Paradise centers on the contest, with its concomitant motifs of toil, warfare, crowning, and rest. The just in Paradise are those whom God, in his justice, crowns as victors.³⁹⁸ Their pain and suffering, their toil and burdens are now over,³⁹⁹ and in return for their vigils and fasts, they are granted the rest and comfort that their crowns afford them:⁴⁰⁰

They have no anxiety, for they have no suffering.
 They have no fear, for there is no snare [laid] for them.
 They have no enemy, for they have passed through the contest.
 They declare themselves
 forever blessed, for their battles are over,
 and they have received their crowns and have found rest in their
 dwellings [in Paradise].⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁸ *Parad* 3.refrain.

³⁹⁹ *Parad* 2.5.

⁴⁰⁰ *Parad* 6.3, 7.3.

⁴⁰¹ *Parad* 7.23:

ܠܗ ܐܡܠ ܕܡܪ ܠܝ ܠܗ ܐܡܠ ܕܡܪ ܠܝ
 ܠܗ ܐܡܠ ܕܡܪ ܠܝ ܠܗ ܐܡܠ ܕܡܪ ܠܝ
 ܠܗ ܐܡܠ ܕܡܪ ܠܝ ܠܗ ܐܡܠ ܕܡܪ ܠܝ
 ܠܗ ܐܡܠ ܕܡܪ ܠܝ

The reward that the righteous receive for their labors serves a dual purpose. It is at once a source of encouragement for those still in this life to endure to the end—hence Ephrem’s exhortation to persevere in penitential mourning in order to be welcomed into Paradise⁴⁰²—and also a powerful warning against failing to shoulder the burdens entailed in living a godly life. The victors’ crowns stand as a rebuke to sinners, which rebuke Ephrem does not hesitate to aim at himself,⁴⁰³ and the beatitude of the just carries with it a dire warning to the careless and slothful: “Blessed is he who labored to be among the first; / woe to him who took no pains to be even the last!”⁴⁰⁴

Ephrem presents the just in Paradise as figures of great authority and influence. Their intercession on behalf of others is powerful with God, just as powerful as their disapprobation of evildoers.⁴⁰⁵ Ephrem even goes so far as to depict them as participants in God’s mighty acts recorded in the Bible:

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

⁴⁰² *Parad* 7.3.

⁴⁰³ *Parad* 7.28.

⁴⁰⁴ *Parad* 6.18:

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

⁴⁰⁵ *Parad* 6.19.

They went down into Egypt and filled it when it suffered famine.
 They came to the unknowing sea and imparted wisdom to it by means of
 a rod.
 They set out into the hateful desert and adorned it with the pillar.
 They entered the furnace made blazing hot
 and sprinkled it with their dew...⁴⁰⁶

For all their commonalities, those remarkable figures exhibit a great variety of virtues and accomplishments. To those passages in which Ephrem praises them as a group are added those in which he marks out the different paths that led them to Paradise. In *Parad* 7, for example, Ephrem devotes six stanzas to praising the sundry virtues of the inhabitants of Paradise: those who exercised custody of their mind, tongue, and eyes; virgins; fasters; those who ministered to the sick; those who abstained from wine; those who made the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom.⁴⁰⁷ That variety fits into a broader framework of accommodation and gradation in Ephrem's depiction of Paradise. The organizing principle of that framework is that one's crown, reward, and specific abode in Paradise are apportioned according to the specific ways in which one

⁴⁰⁶ *Parad* 6.20:

ܬܬܝܠܟܢ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
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 ... ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

⁴⁰⁷ *Parad* 7.14-19.

has exercised one's freedom. This allows for both a great variety of splendors in Paradise as well as a hierarchical ordering among its inhabitants based on how well they fared in their contest and to what extent they lived according to the truth. For Ephrem, the question of admission into Paradise is not merely one of being saved or not being saved, of entry or rejection. Rather, he envisions the entry of the saved into Paradise as a highly personal and specific matter.

Precisely where one will dwell, what beauties that place will offer, what reward one will receive—those matters are all dependent, to a great extent, on how one has exercised one's freedom. A number of passages touch on that point.⁴⁰⁸ While Ephrem gives no indication that all his talk of rewards, crowns, and special dwellings is to be taken simply as a metaphor, we may understand it as emblematic or illustrative of a deeper, more fundamental dimension of the life of the saved: how they relate to God. Ephrem sees Paradise not as an end in itself but as the environment in which a renewed and more intimate relationship between God and human persons may flourish, unhindered by the temptation, corruption, and warfare of life in this world. Our freedom is the means by which we can prepare for that relationship in that new environment:

⁴⁰⁸ See, e.g., *Parad* 2.2, 2.11, 5.6, 7.14-19, 9.2, 9.26-27.

According to the way each has purified his eye for Him in this life,
 so is he able to behold the glory of Him who is greater than all.
 According to the way each has opened his ear to Him in this life,
 so is he able to comprehend His wisdom.
 According to the way each has prepared a vessel for Him in this life,
 so is he able to bear a portion of His treasures.⁴⁰⁹

God passes judgment on the way we have prepared ourselves and reveals to us
 the truth about our lives. According to Ephrem, Paradise itself makes clear to
 those who enter the extent to which they have exercised their freedom in the
 proper way during their earthly life:

Forge, in this life, and take the key to Paradise.
 The gate that eagerly awaits you shines gladly and beams at you;
 the discerning gate adjusts its measure to those who enter,
 for in [its] wisdom it grows smaller and grows bigger.
 For, according to the stature and rank of [each] person it is lifted up;
 it makes known by its dimensions whether he is perfect or lacking.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁹ *Parad* 9.26:

כל אדם אפי' חסד ורחמים
 חסד חסד חסד חסד חסד
 חסד חסד חסד חסד חסד
 חסד חסד חסד חסד חסד
 חסד חסד חסד חסד חסד
 חסד חסד חסד חסד חסד

⁴¹⁰ *Parad* 2.2:

חסד חסד חסד חסד חסד
 חסד חסד חסד חסד חסד
 חסד חסד חסד חסד חסד
 חסד חסד חסד חסד חסד
 חסד חסד חסד חסד חסד
 חסד חסד חסד חסד חסד

Cf. *Eccl* 13.5.

Ephrem returns to the image of keys in relation to entering Paradise later in the hymn cycle, where he develops the image along a different line of thought:

Blessed is He who, with His keys, opened the garden of life!⁴¹¹

I saw a dwelling and a tabernacle of light,
and a voice that said, "Blessed is the thief
who freely received the keys to Paradise!"⁴¹²

The significance of Ephrem's use of the image of keys in these passages is that it leads us back to the issue of freedom's interaction with grace. In both passages it is evident that entrance to Paradise is a gift of grace. While it must be noted that the thief freely received the keys only *after* his confession to Christ on the cross, the refrain of *Parad 7* clearly points to Christ as the one who himself wields the keys in throwing open the gates of Paradise. Just prior to the text of the refrain we read:

He gave up His Son for us that we might believe in Him.
For, His body is with us, His truth is with us.
He came and gave us His keys, for His treasures are laid up for us.⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ *Parad 7*. refrain: ܠܡܢ ܕܗܘ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܗܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

⁴¹² *Parad 8.2*:

ܠܡܢ ܕܗܘ ܡܠܟܐ	ܕܗܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
ܠܡܢ ܕܗܘ ܡܠܟܐ	ܕܗܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
ܠܡܢ ܕܗܘ ܡܠܟܐ	ܕܗܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

⁴¹³ *Parad 7.1*:

ܠܡܢ ܕܗܘ ܡܠܟܐ	ܕܗܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
ܠܡܢ ܕܗܘ ܡܠܟܐ	ܕܗܝܬ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

It would probably be quibbling to take the first hemistich of this last verse (“He came and gave us His keys”) to mean that the refrain should read, “Blessed is *he* who, with *His* keys...,” with the change of capitalization indicating that the human recipient of the keys is the one opening the gate, not Christ. The point of the quoted passages from *Parad* 7 (and 8.2) is that God himself is the real source, the gracious source, of our salvation—a counterpoint to *Parad* 2.2, in which the stress is laid on our exercise of freedom. It is immaterial, in Ephrem’s development of the image of the keys here, who actually turns the key in the lock; the power of God’s gift in bringing about salvation is the crucial point.

That said, it cannot go unnoticed that Ephrem’s treatment of the way salvation is realized does issue in a back-and-forth movement between the role of human freedom and that of grace. At times Ephrem forcefully directs his readers’ attention to Christ as the way of entrance into Paradise: he praises Christ as the one “who was pierced through and removed the [flaming] sword of Paradise”⁴¹⁴

ܩܠܝܠܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ

⁴¹⁴ *Parad* 2.refrain: ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ

The Syriac ܡܪܝܢܐ refers to a lance or spear, but I follow Beck in understanding it as the “flaming sword” (das [Flammen]schwert) that barred access to Paradise.

though the latter were sufficient in themselves to win salvation. The indispensability of grace here is all the more evident given Ephrem's view of good works, discussed above, as the fruits of a human freedom rightly attuned to the action of grace, as the manifestations of a dynamic, cooperative relationship between God's gifts of grace and the exercise of human freedom.

For Ephrem, as we have seen, grace is operative in a critical way throughout the whole of human life and salvation, from our creation in the divine image as authoritatively free, through our progress in coming to know and live according to the truth revealed by God, and through our incorporation in the salvific economy of the crucified Lord. Considering the totality of Ephrem's works examined in this study, and following the trajectory of his thought as closely as possible, it is clear that human freedom does not, of itself, lead one to salvation. Rather, its most direct and powerful impact bears upon either the character of one's particular experience of Paradise, according to character of one's earthly life, or, for those who would not enter Paradise, their rejection of the truth embodied by him who opened the way to Paradise. Ephrem would say that these latter cut off their hope and prefer the servitude and captivity of this world to the glory of their true city and the attainment of their

full stature.⁴²³ Having reduced their freedom to slavery, they are more pleased with their bonds than with the prospect of returning to the Father's house, to their proper dwelling in Eden, where the fruits of the just outshine the beauties of that Paradise.⁴²⁴

⁴²³ Cf. *Parad* 13 passim.

⁴²⁴ Cf. *Parad* 7.31, 14.7, 6.11-15.

CONCLUSION

It has been said that “for Ephrem, all theology is ultimately *theologia polemica*.”⁴²⁵ It has not been the principal aim of this dissertation to prove that claim false. Yet, having traced Ephrem’s understanding of human freedom from creation, through the Fall, through being perfected in the divine image by way of knowledge of the truth and a life lived according to it, and finally to re-entry into Paradise, this dissertation has shown that Ephrem’s theological vision—here, primarily as it pertains to human freedom—is not driven by polemical motives alone. The philosophical, theological, and cultic milieu of fourth-century Mesopotamia was no doubt fertile ground for polemics between the orthodox and those they deemed heterodox. But it would be more than a gross

⁴²⁵ Hidal, *Interpretatio*, 86. He qualifies that claim, however: “Obschon für Ephräm alle Theologie letztlich *theologia polemica* ist, bedeutet das nicht, dass er damit jegliches Interesse an einer stärker sachlichen Exegese verlöre. Auch in der Auslegung von Gen 3 gibt er einige interessante Hinweise.”

oversimplification to claim that Ephrem developed and articulated his theological and anthropological vision solely for the purpose of contending with his enemies. He surely felt the burden of the threat posed by conceptions of freedom that could find no place in an orthodox framework. As was the case, for example, with early conciliar expressions of dogma and canon—when threats to orthodox belief and praxis occasioned evaluation of the adequacy of then current articulations and, at times, the search for new articulations—so in Ephrem’s case, what he considered perilous to the thought, confession, and life of the Church surely spurred him on to more intense focus on those problems with an eye to precluding unorthodox ways of thinking. A fuller picture of what Ephrem accomplished in his works, however, will recognize those polemical articulations—and they are indeed numerous—as parts of a greater whole. If the preceding chapters have not fundamentally misread Ephrem, there is substantial positive teaching to be found flowing either from or into his conception of freedom, even if his most pointed words on the topic typically issue with some threat in view.

While authority, in an explicit way, is *the* foundational element of Ephrem’s understanding of how human persons are created in the image of God,

freedom is nevertheless integral to the divine image as well. Even admitting authority's more fundamental status, it cannot be exercised but in freedom and has no meaning apart from freedom. It is by way of authoritative freedom that the human person acts as a created god in the midst of creation, and it is by way of that same authoritative freedom that the human person enters into or, to his own destruction, refuses to enter into a relationship of loving, life-giving, and *liberating* obedience to his Lord. Only in freedom can the human person come to a full and proper knowledge of the truth about himself, his world, and God — “full and proper,” that is, with respect to the limits of human nature — and a life lived according to the truth demands the natural exercise of freedom as intended by God but not compelled by him. For Ephrem, authoritative freedom entails the absence of both external and internal constraint, and it gives the lie to alleged astral forces and the notion that substantial evil is mixed into the composition of human beings. Freedom, itself a gift of grace, is also that which elevates human persons such that they may act with God in working out their salvation, making sense of and lending weight to their moral efforts without cutting them off from God's gracious assistance. For Ephrem that means that no one enters Paradise by

force of moral effort alone, but, once within Paradise, one's reward and crown are real, whatever they may be.

APPENDIX

SELECTED TEXTS

Hymns on the Church 2

Concerning longsuffering, freedom, goodness, and justice

1. Who is so longsuffering that he might discourse
about Your longsuffering, which endures our debts?
[When] we sin, we are filled with iniquity; [when] we do good, we are
filled with pride.

Refrain: Glory to Your goodness!

2. We are merciless savages to one another:
him who becomes great we envy, [and] over him who falls we rejoice.
Though our lives are very short, our debts are long.
3. You have decreased our measure—seventy years when strong—
But over seventy times seven have we sinned against You.
By [Your] mercy our lives are short, that we might not lengthen our debts.
4. I am dumbstruck at Your mercy, for it has covered Your justice.
Man, though he is impure, hates the impure one, whom he resembles.
But You, who are holy, have not shrunk away from our debts.
5. Again, I am dumbstruck by Your justice, for it has not gone to court
with Your goodness, though it is the accuser.

How can Your sun rise on him who has provoked You to anger?

6. You have brought us to perfection without limit; we have failed without measure.
You have taught right actions; we have acted perversely.
We are clothed with the names [only], we have stripped off the deeds.
7. We have compelled Your justice such that it might accuse us.
For even if we are indebted to it, we pray that it might not exact [payment],
but if someone owes us, we cry out lest You disregard [their debt].
8. If a man hastened, then, to Your justice
that he might accuse his debtor, it would take his pledge
first against his own debts, that he would repay [them]; and then he might exact [payment].
9. And if a man hastened to it that he might seek release from debt,
it would hasten and bind him along with his own debtor.
For if he released that one from it, then he will be released by it.⁴²⁶
10. Our cleverness conquers and is conquered by [Your justice]:
it conquers, since it seeks release concerning its debts;
it is conquered, since as soon as it comes that it might exact [payment], it
is compelled [to pay] by [Your justice].
11. Our freedom approaches Your justice with its stratagems.
For if it offends,⁴²⁷ it shows its weakness,

⁴²⁶ מִן הַצֶּדֶק : “justice” (צֶדֶק) may be the antecedent of the feminine object of פָּדָה. But if the superdot is a scribal error, then the object, as masculine, may have the implied “debt” (חֵטְא) as its antecedent. The latter possibility would urge the following translation: “then he would be released *from* it [i.e., his own debt].”

⁴²⁷ וְאִם חָטְאָהּ אֶת הַצֶּדֶק. Cf. *TS*, vol. 2, 2628: “וְאִם חָטְאָהּ אֶת הַצֶּדֶק, *si peccaveris*, Ephr. ed. Lamy, i. 457.11.”

and if it is offended,⁴²⁸ it shows its injustice.

12. It has forgotten the fact that the two of them⁴²⁹ confirm one another.
For if a man is weak and asks that he might find mercy,
then his debtor is also weak and asks that *he* might find mercy.
13. We have forgotten, and have wanted to make Him forget who does not
forget,⁴³⁰
that if our nature is weak, then whoever offends us is blameless;
but if our nature is strong, it is a great thing that He should forgive us.
14. Justice knows that from us and through us it will conquer us.
For if there is weakness, then it speaks for us all,
and if there is strength, then it speaks against us all.
15. You knew that it was possible for your enemy not to hate you.
Your freedom asserted that it was possible that you might not sin.
For if he has strength, you also have strength.
16. Now when we make petition on behalf of our weakness,
which has offended God, at the same time we make petition
on behalf of the weakness of him who injures us.
17. Now when a man asks that he might find mercy, as [he is] weak,
then whoever has offended him is thereby acquitted. And, again, when we
accuse
one who had offended us, our own accusation condemns us.
18. The nature of our freedom is one [and the same] in every person.

⁴²⁸ Cf. TS, vol. 2, 2628: وَلَا يَذْكُرُ، وَهُوَ الْإِثْمُ وَلَا يَذْكُرُ، وَهُوَ الْإِثْمُ.

⁴²⁹ Justice and mercy.

⁴³⁰ وَلَا يَذْكُرُ، وَهُوَ الْإِثْمُ : literally, "have forgotten and have made to forget." Cf. Beck: "wir haben vergessen und haben vergessen lassen (wollen) jenen, der nicht vergisst."

If its strength is weak in one, it is weak for everyone.
But if our strength is in one, it is likewise in every person.

19. The nature of sweetness is sweet for him who is healthy,
bitter for him who is ill. Just so with freedom as well:
it is infirm for sinners, healthy for the righteous.
20. Indeed, when one examines the nature of sweetness,
it is not in the mouth of the sick that he tests and examines it.
For, the healthy mouth is the crucible of tastes.
21. Again, when one examines the power of freedom,
it is not tested in the impure; they are sick with foul deeds.
The pure one, who is healthy, will be the crucible for its testing.
22. When, therefore, a sick one says to you that bitter is
the taste of sweetness, see how his sickness increases,
since he falsifies sweetness, the fountain of delights.
23. Again, when an impure one says to you that feeble is
the power of freedom, see how he cuts off his hope,
since he impoverishes freedom, the treasure of humanity.

Hymns on the Church 3

To the same tune

1. Everyone is set in [the midst of] a contest:
he who is far from anger is troubled by avarice,
and he who restrains himself from pride is enslaved to mammon.

Refrain: Glory to the Conqueror of all!

2. Indeed, if someone would conquer, a pure one who finished [the contest],
this same one is able to reproach him who slackened,
for if he had wished, he [could have] put the reins on his limbs.
3. Deceit was confirmed in the crucible of the sinner.
For while he is defiled in his own will, he finds fault with his⁴³¹ Maker.
Yet, the remorse hidden within it is sufficient for his⁴³² indictment.
4. Now if its nature is hateful, how is there hidden in it
repentance, which is good, and through which the hateful become good?
The virtue that is hidden within it refutes its hatefulness.
5. When someone approaches fire [even only] a little,
its teaches about its nature: in it is its strength perceived.
Thus also with freedom: through it is its power proclaimed.
6. But the nature of fire is bound at all times;
the authority of freedom is unbound at all times.
If it envies, it grows cold, and if it loves, it grows warm.

⁴³¹ Or "its," referring to the will.

⁴³² Or "its," again referring to the will.

7. Indeed, if one would taste the sea with the tip of his little finger
he would know that all of it is bitter, as vast as it is.
So in one man is every man able to be perceived.
8. Do not trouble yourself to examine everyone,
whether they can overcome the Evil One in the contest.
For if one is able to be victorious, all are able to be victorious.
9. Take Noah [for example]: he could rebuke
all those of his generation, [saying] that if they had so willed, they [too
could have] fared well,
since the power of freedom was equal in them and in Noah.
10. Your neighbor who offended you—now if you rebuke him
for the fact that he offended you, by him will you be accused,
since it was possible for you not to offend your neighbor and your God.
11. Our tongue changes its expressions, just as our will.
Now if it slips and offends, it brings on weakness,
and if its companion slips, it says dreadful things.
12. If you approach its⁴³³ prayer, there are two perceptions⁴³⁴ in it:
it will show that its power is weak; it will show that its companion is
strong.
It prays concerning its debts; it accuses its debtor.
13. Which of the two does one prefer to approach?
If he has affirmed weakness, then he has prayed for his companion;
if he has affirmed excellence, then he has incensed his Judge.
14. Now if one should approach either of the two,
then it will be the common portion between him and his debtor,

⁴³³ I.e., the tongue's.

⁴³⁴ Literally, "tastes" (تذوّق).

for the weakness is common, as the strength is common.

15. Our perversity is compelled to come to correction.
One prays for forgiveness; it comes about for his neighbor.
And if he calls upon the Avenger, then He becomes his adversary at law.
16. A man makes himself a pledge through what he chooses.
If, then, he is clement towards himself,
he cannot be jealous towards his neighbor.
17. In cleverness [both] sides are set up in opposition.
Someone cried out to the Pardoner; he set his debtor free.
And [another] cried out to the Avenger; he covered over his own
forgiveness.⁴³⁵
18. One's neighbor is placed with him on every side.
Wherever there is goodness his debtors are placed,
and wherever there is justice his crimes are placed.
19. He comes in that he might make supplication, and again he comes in that
he might accuse.
If he approaches goodness, he frees his debtors,
and if he approaches justice, he proclaims his own faults.

⁴³⁵ ܡܡܥܠܐ ܡܚ: literally, "he doubled his forgiveness," which contradicts the argument Ephrem made in the previous stanzas. See Beck's note *ad loc.*, where he suggests emending ms. D with ܡܚܐ ('*appyeh*) from ESO, which reads ܡܚܐ ܡܡܥܠܐ, while keeping ܡܡܥܠܐ from D.

Hymns on the Church 6

To the tune of "This day"

1. Now if our created [nature] is hateful, the blame lies with the Creator.
But if our free will is evil, then the blame accrues to us.

Refrain: — — — — —

2. If we do not possess freedom, why is our will examined?
If it does not exist, then He judged⁴³⁶ unjustly, and if it does exist, then He
rightly exacted punishment.
3. Inquiry accompanies freedom. The Law is bound by both.
For freedom is asked whether it transgressed the precept of the Judge.
4. What, then, would the Creator[, the True One,]⁴³⁷ gain by deceiving us
in that without giving us freedom, He [came and]⁴³⁸ gave us the Law?
5. — — truth — — — that we should question and be questioned
whether our Maker gave us freedom or did not give [it] to us.
6. If He did not give [it] to us, then we should inquire into why He did not
give it.
But if there is no freedom, then He did not give us [the ability]⁴³⁹ to say
these things.
7. For questions and disputes are brought forth by freedom.

⁴³⁶ *ὅτι* : Beck notes *ad loc.* that the perfect tense may refer to the Fall.

⁴³⁷ *Lectio incerta.*

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ Cf. Beck: "dann hätte er uns nicht [die Möglichkeit] gegeben, das zu sagen."

Debate and its sister, inquiry — they are the daughters of freedom.

8. Even before we demonstrate [anything] we find that that debate stems from freedom.
Indeed, it is not appropriate for you to ask whether there is freedom or not.
9. For if you have a question, you [thereby] confirm for yourself concerning freedom.
Who is the one that questions for you, your will or another power?
10. If the question is from another power, you — — you are in the middle.
[If]⁴⁴⁰ you were without [perceptions],⁴⁴¹ you would [also not]⁴⁴² perceive that you exist.
11. — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
— — an instrument of another, and the other asks by means of it.
12. Whether there is one or many, the argument [that they have made]⁴⁴³ is one.
The argument that is made with regard to you extends, indeed, to everyone.
13. If, again, one perceives and asks about freedom whether it exists, then that is what was said about you as well: it is argued against the one who possesses it.
14. From his question we might learn that his nature is endowed with authority.

⁴⁴⁰ *Lectio incerta.*

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

Both [possibilities] that were debated in the middle, on them hang all speech.

15. If you have the authority to ask, then you have no need to ask.
But if you are deprived of the question,⁴⁴⁴ then you are deprived of freedom.
16. [A bound nature does not ask,]⁴⁴⁵ because the question belongs to that which has authority.
An unbound nature asks; its will, then, is endowed with authority.
17. Take for yourself, then, an example from both sides for both, so that by means of things that are easy for you [to understand] you might understand difficult things.⁴⁴⁶
18. A dumb man is unable to ask, for his tongue is bound.
A man endowed with speech is able to ask, for his tongue is endowed with authority.
19. In the dumb man, whose tongue is bound, know what a bound nature is.
In the man endowed with speech, whose mouth is unbound, learn what freedom is.
20. Just as the word of [this one's] mouth is unbound, so is freedom unbound.
And just as the tongue of the dumb man is bound, so is nature bound.
21. For the former⁴⁴⁷ does not possess the word of the mouth, and the latter⁴⁴⁸ does not possess freedom.

⁴⁴⁴ I.e., the ability to ask the question.

⁴⁴⁵ *Lectio incerta*.

⁴⁴⁶ Literally, "difficult things might be made known to you."

⁴⁴⁷ I.e., the dumb man's tongue, listed first in v. 2 of st. 20.

⁴⁴⁸ I.e., the bound nature, listed second in v. 2 of st. 20.

From these things that I have said to you perceive the freedom in your person.

22. Weigh in yourself your freewill; see if you possess it or not.
From yourself and through yourself you are able to learn about freedom.

Hymns on the Church 13

To the tune of "To Jerusalem our Lord"

1. Deem me worthy that I may sing to You, if my sins permit!
And You know as well, my Lord, that boldness⁴⁴⁹ is our advocate.

Refrain: Save me, who seek/take refuge in you!

2. By means of threefold boldness is the door opened.⁴⁵⁰
While it is conquered, it conquers, for it is persistent, it asks, and it receives.
3. In the furnace of freedom was the key to Your door forged,
and it is not shut before us if it⁴⁵¹ is with us.
4. In wisdom have You made it, my Lord; with skill have You healed it for us.
On both sides, then, do I marvel at Your wisdom.
5. Regarding the door, my Lord, indeed it is thought to be closed,
and our freewill⁴⁵² is the key to Your treasure.
6. Only in this world do we all possess it.
Let us open and enter through it while it does not flee from us.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁹ ܠܒܢܐܬܐ, which term surfaces in a key gospel passage to which Ephrem alludes in v. 2.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. Lk 11:5-13. The phrase ܠܒܢܐܬܐ ܬܠܬܐ (ܬܠܬܐ) ("three-fold boldness") refers to the three-fold asking, seeking, and knocking, which opens the door.

⁴⁵¹ I.e., the key (ms. E here includes ܠܒܢܐܬܐ).

⁴⁵² Literally, "the will of our freedom."

7. In the likeness of darkness do my sins live in me.
The windows of the house⁴⁵⁴ have grown dark; may its senses be
enlightened by You!
8. With [merely] one of its rays does the sun, with its coming, carry away
the darkness, which the seas are unable to wash away.
9. Your wonderful [work], my Lord, is that You illuminated for the blind
man⁴⁵⁵
the two windows that conquered the sun, which conquered the darkness.
10. So weak is it⁴⁵⁶ that even if one shuts the gate of the eye
it is unable to open it and enter on account of its weakness.
11. And it does not possess the key that opens blindness,
so that it should convince its worshippers how blind they are.
12. Your brightness opened the eyes that were closed.⁴⁵⁷
With clay⁴⁵⁸ You daubed them; the two closed⁴⁵⁹ ones You opened.
13. Your light drove into and rent the two veils
where those Grains of Paradise⁴⁶⁰ dwelt in the darkness.

⁴⁵³ The text in *ESO*, vol. 3, breaks off here and inserts *Eccl* 19 starting with ܠܝܢܐ
ܕܡܝܢ.

⁴⁵⁴ I.e., the body, following Beck's note *ad loc*.

⁴⁵⁵ Following Beck's suggestion to omit the *seyame* in ܠܡܝܢܐ.

⁴⁵⁶ Beck supplies "die Sonne" parenthetically.

⁴⁵⁷ Or "dulled" (ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ).

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. Jn 9:16.

⁴⁵⁹ See n. 41 above.

⁴⁶⁰ ܠܡܝܢܐ: Beck renders this as "Paradieseskorn" and identifies it with
cardamom in his note *ad loc*.

14. The clay that opened eyes floated in [the pool at] Shiloh.
It poured forth and filled them with abundant springs of light.
15. Jesus, enlighten the veiled eye that is blind in me!
Though Shiloh is far off, Your cup is full of light.
16. The Priest who, acting as priest, has offered Himself as a sacrifice
has washed away all that evil by His blood.
17. To Your Father, therefore, we give thanks through You, my Lord.
Glory be to Him through You, and praise be to You as well!
18. Who would not pluck from Your tree
the living Fruit that freely gives life to one's mortality?
19. Let us wonder at and, indeed, eat the brightness that is within His bread!
Let us marvel at and, again, drink in the light in⁴⁶¹ His wine!
20. For a hoard of treasures is laid up and hidden in His bread.
Gather [it] up in your hands, take the Treasury of Life!
21. He who is exalted over all, because He humbled Himself,
behold, our companions have made Him a slave⁴⁶² and a creature.
22. Your generation is very clear: [You are] the Living Fruit of the Father.
Our body made You our likeness because You have put it on.
23. God, then, kept the fast of men.
He who hears prayers prayed the prayer of servants.
24. Your fast has interpreted for us what Your prayer is.
Since Your fast was of the body, Your prayer was of the body.

⁴⁶¹ **ܚܒܐ**: literally, "by means of, through."

⁴⁶² Following Beck's suggestion to read **ܚܒܐ** as **ܚܒܐ**, as it appears in ms. U.

25. Your fast wiped clean the impurity of the serpent of old;
Your prayer was the crucible, for it purified our soul's filth.
26. The graves have given forth, my Lord, a loud and wondrous noise;
in that cry of death the voice of life springs forth.
27. Its⁴⁶³ first-fruits stirred, warmed, and rose up.
The Exalted One rejoiced in it; He brooded over it and lifted it up.
28. The trumpet of the dead, my Lord, glorifies, and the whole of it resounds.
The great silence of Sheol gives glory to you.
29. Again, the great stillness of the dead, generation to generation,⁴⁶⁴ my Lord,
has given You all praise, waves upon waves [of praise].⁴⁶⁵
30. May my mind sprout forth eloquent tender grass for you, my Lord.
Sprinkle upon it the dew of mercy, reap hymns from it!
31. May the world give You thanks! May it spout out and give to You
praise clear and pure, and, through You, to Him who sent You!

⁴⁶³ I.e., life's.

⁴⁶⁴ يَتَدَوَّرُ

⁴⁶⁵ يَتَدَوَّرُ (taking account of Beck's suggested correction per ms. U).

Hymns on the Church 19

1. Freedom⁴⁶⁶ — — — — —
— — — — — is lordly.
The course of goodness presses hard
upon the gate of justice, which is mighty.
They come to one another in aid.
2. His mercy⁴⁶⁷ is able to justify through compulsion,⁴⁶⁸
but He does not do away with [man's] understanding,
for He knows that man can justify himself.
Even men⁴⁶⁹ are not at all pleased
with one who shuts his [own] eyes to the light.
3. One of two things holds for him
who leads anyone who has closed his [own] eyes:
either his discernment is very young and childlike,
or his derision⁴⁷⁰ is very grievous and bitter
since he has disregarded the eyes that could see.
4. The guide bore the reproach of that one,⁴⁷¹
since he did not see the fact that the one who was being guided was one
who could see.
God, indeed, is not to be mocked [by the idea]
that He would lead one whose vision is healthy,

⁴⁶⁶ *Lectio incerta.*

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁸ Beck's note here refers to *HdF* 31.5.

⁴⁶⁹ *Lectio incerta.*

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

so that He would reject the eye that He [Himself] gave us.

5. See, further, that this is also madness,
that if a man possesses healthy hands
and does not wish to use them,
then he is a fool who lends him
his hand that he might eat or drink with it.
6. How much more, then, [would] God,
who gave man freedom
— —⁴⁷²
7. Consider freedom, which is like a hand
that can reach out to all [kinds of] fruits.
And just as formerly it was able
to pluck and take the medicine of death,
so is it able to pluck the Medicine of Life.

⁴⁷² The rest of the stanza is too fragmentary to be deciphered.

Hymns on the Church 46

To the tune of "New men"

1. The Evil One incites us with something that cannot
ever be investigated; it may, however, be believed.
For if its beauty is investigated,
it is not comprehended, and we imagine to ourselves,
in our sickness, that it is like creatures.

Refrain: Blessed is He who has enlightened the eyes of our heart!

2. For the Evil One blinded the understanding of the house of Adam,
that they might not investigate the deceit that he offered by means of the
serpent.
For if the deceit were investigated in the crucible,
It would slough off there [its] sham beauty;
it would shine light there on its own blemishes.
3. Would that Eve had inquired of that serpent,
"You do not perceive even your apparent name, how it is.
How much more, therefore, are you a stranger
to those hidden things of that tree.
It is hidden from the angels, revealed to the simple."
4. When the heart is filled with the love of something
there is no place in it for counsel and understanding.
For the whole of it is led by the one will,
and in everything this is its effort:
how it might fulfill the desire of its heart.
5. And if someone should say, "If Adam knew
that it was odious to have eaten, he would not even have approached,"
then he finds fault with that Just Judge,

[claiming] that He unjustly carried out His judgment,
which scourged them⁴⁷³ and punished that one.⁴⁷⁴

6. Let me ask this one who said on Adam's behalf,
"When someone sins, it happens [only] because he knows it,"
[—let me ask] if, while knowing, he, too, sins.
From him and with him let us learn [about] Adam,
that he also knew when he sinned.
7. And if as in truth man never sinned
because he did not know that it is odious to provoke [God's] anger,
just so it is truly manifest
that Adam, a child, did not know
that he was definitely sinning when he ate.
8. The serpent was the one who blamed Adam when he went astray,
and the Just One judged him after he had gone astray.
And just as he knew when he was naked,
and he fled and hid, thus he hid
when he ate the stolen fruit.
9. We are like Adam, just as he is like us.
For just as that one hid, so we too hide.
Cain hid; Achan hid;
Gehazi hid; Judah hid.
Blessed is the Judge who found us guilty!
10. Eve against that weak and contemptible serpent—
the glorious one did not want to object to his words,
even though his words were to be disputed
and reprov'd in the crucible,
while to her [belonged] brightness, and to him, scorn.

⁴⁷³ I.e., Adam and Eve.

⁴⁷⁴ I.e., the serpent

11. Let us marvel at Mary, who of the great angel
required [an explanation] and did not quake, asked and was not afraid.
Eve did not even want to ask
the despicable, footless serpent;
the handmaid overthrew Gabriel.
12. Mary did not ask that she might investigate the Son of Life.
She asked about a mortal who had not known her.
About easy things did Mary ask
the truthful one. Eve accepted
entirely difficult things from the deceitful one.
13. The mother without discernment is the fount of our grief,
and the sister of understanding is the treasury of our joy.
The serpent, who should be questioned,
is not investigated; the Messiah, who should
be believed, is investigated!

Hymns against Heresies 5

To the same tune

1. Stay and let me speak to you, simple one, who runs
to the gate of the Chaldean and goes that he might enslave
his freedom to the luminaries bound by the command.⁴⁷⁵
You are lord of them all, if you will.
Instead of that one who leads you astray, be like that one that who held
back
the sun so that he might teach you how splendidly victorious prayer is.

Refrain: Blessed is he who puts the false ones to shame by Your truth!

2. It is only right for the Chaldean that if he reveals to me
the works and deeds that I have done and will do,
and if freedom is imprisoned under fate,
it is only right, moreover, that he should reveal by means of his wisdom
the expressions and words that I have said and will say.
For my words have eluded fate, which [supposedly] governs all things.
3. Now if freedom has authority over its thoughts,
then its words do not fall under fate at all,
and its discourse and its working are not comprehensible there.
[One] part of it instructs us about [the other] part:
for if its word is lofty, how lofty [must] its deed be.
For compulsion has never bent its⁴⁷⁶ will.
4. And if it is by fate that the blind increase upon the earth,
why, then, do kings not thus increase with their diadems?

⁴⁷⁵ Beck cites Joshua's command that the sun and moon stand still (Jos 10:12-14).

⁴⁷⁶ I.e., freedom's.

And, moreover, if it is by fate that deaf-mutes resemble one another,
why, then, do forms and faces not thus resemble
one another? That instructs [us] that One
has made things the same, inasmuch as it is advantageous for us, and has
made things different, inasmuch as it helps us.

5. He makes faces different and orders sight;
He has made sicknesses the same [for all] and has confounded inquirers.
He makes [some things] different so that we should understand, and has
made [other things] the same so that we should wonder.
He makes different and, again, makes the same so that He might make us
marvel.
He makes His distinctions the same, since one is the image of man;
He differentiates His minglings, since one is He who knows all.
6. To us the appearance of His ways of acting are very confusing,
and as if without order He impoverishes and, again, enriches.
And yet all of this [apparent] confusion stands under order,
as the planets, which are seemingly confused,
and yet each is ordered and is established by [His] decree.
It is not so that they should compel us, but that they should instruct us.
7. For they are not placed as lords over our freedom,
but were set up as servants for our lordship,
as lamps on dry land and milestones on the sea.
When the eye directs itself to their place,
Pleiades and the Big Dipper, Aldebaran and Orion,
they instruct [us] without error that He who governs all is one.
8. Scepters and laws testify that there is freedom,
for they chastise the presumptuous and instruct the simple.
He who kills and slays, he who commits adultery and he who steals—
they [all] cry out that we possess freedom.
And if there were no freedom, [how] could there be blame?
Fate shuts its mouth at the voice of the accuser.

9. How many deaf people there are, [all of them] stamped with [that] one defect,
and yet there are not ten stamped with one form.
Now, does fate stamp not even five with one face?
Truth saw that error likened
births to the horoscope and defects to one another.
It [therefore] differentiates faces in order to refute the horoscope.
10. In our age people live a hundred and ten years,
and there are no children found that resemble one another in all things,
in heart and face, visage and features.
And fate, which is handed down a hundred years,
has indeed not chanced to bring into being and produce [different people]
in one image,
as it has brought into being and produced blind men in every age.
11. Adam begot Seth in his likeness, according to his image.
The Creator saw His image, that it was corrupted.
To him He gave back His seal, and the seal sealed itself.
This One is the Craftsman for whom everything is possible.
For, He pours out upon him the seal that was corrupted and raises him
up,
and seals his former glory upon his wretchedness.
12. Seth was like a mirror for his begetter:
Adam saw himself as he was imprinted in his child,
and Seth, too, saw his image in the image of his begetter.
Whoever sees an offspring also [sees] his begetter,
for, they are imprinted, the one with the other; they are clothed, the one
with the other—
they are clothed with symbols of our Lord and His Begetter.
13. Indeed, if a man commits adultery with the wife of a Chaldean,

he empties his⁴⁷⁷ purse and plunders his house;
 he overturns his table and pours out his wine vessel.
 Now if [the Chaldean] avenges himself and his wife,
 he makes void the horoscope, since it teaches that from it
 come unforeseen events, by chance, without any order.

14. If he opens [a book] in order to recite to you lots and horoscopes,
 grab that book of his, rip it to shreds and tear it apart.
 Deride and mock him, recite to him his teaching:
 "This was prearranged, that it should befall you."
 And if he demands [compensation] from you, ask him why
 he demands that he should not suffer loss and [yet] leads [others] astray
 so as to gain profits.
15. Consider freedom: it avenges the wrong done to it,
 when it both demands its money and when it demands [recognition of] its
 status.
 At the same time as [making these] demands it brings the horoscope to
 naught.
 Its⁴⁷⁸ heralds themselves have refuted it,
 for when they demand justice,⁴⁷⁹ they introduce order into
 the troubled confusion of the Chaldeans, who muddle and sling words.
16. The confused sons of Babel have confused our hearing.
 In the beginning the tongues were confused within its bosom.
 The sorcerers and augurs within it are confused again.
 Babel, which confusions confound—
 he who gives to it his soul and his hearing,
 Legion dances in him and prances and leaps for joy in him.
17. Blessed be the Catholic [Church], whose eyes do not regard

⁴⁷⁷ I.e., the Chaldean's.

⁴⁷⁸ I.e., the horoscope's.

⁴⁷⁹ Or, truth (ܐܬܝܬܐܝܬܐܝܬ).

the motion⁴⁸⁰ that Babel regards, which⁴⁸¹ the prophet,
the son of Amos derided and often ridiculed.
He mocks the deceivers that led her astray.
The star of the True One summoned them to Bethlehem,
so that those who had deceived by means of the stars might be saved by
means of a star.

18. For that error of fate and the horoscope
had not seen the journey of that unbound star.
It⁴⁸² saw that nature and freedom had been troubled,
and [so] it moved forth, which was not of its nature, that it might instruct
us.
It proclaimed that Truth had come and shone forth in the world;
it announced⁴⁸³ that, behold, the deliverance of creatures had arrived.
19. May your truth, my Lord, be for us a stronghold in which we may take
refuge.
For, behold, error swarms [and] wounds with all manner of goads.
Divination makes pagans out of us, and a dream⁴⁸⁴ ensnares us.
Purify Your Church in Your font!
For, the footstep, and the encounter, and the summons, and the voice
are [all] the filth of paganism that is smeared on many.
20. No one has ever seen a ship at sea
wandering on its own, without a pilot,
being its own pilot and setting itself in order.

⁴⁸⁰ Of the stars.

⁴⁸¹ I.e., Babel.

⁴⁸² Reading ܐܠܗܐ for ܐܠܗܐ in accord with Beck's notes for the Syriac text and for his translation ("Er sah"). The antecedent is the "unbound star" in the previous verse.

⁴⁸³ Beck fills out the meaning of ܐܠܗܐ in his translation: "Er brachte die Frohbotschaft."

⁴⁸⁴ I.e., the interpretation of dreams. Cf. Beck's "Traum(deuterei)."

And they are like ships in need, all of them:
the soul regarding freedom, the creature regarding the Creator,
the Church regarding the Savior, the altar regarding the Holy Spirit.

Hymns against Heresies 6

To the same tune

1. How should we understand fate? Let it instruct us.
If it is a stranger, nature has prevailed over it,
and if it is a governor, compulsion has enslaved it.
Nature accuses it through them all.
For it surely is not of justice, since its injustice is without measure.
Neither is it of goodness, for its bitterness is without measure.

Refrain: Blessed is He who put error to shame and laid bare its heralds!

2. "It aids the despised one, the star that extols him."
Why does it not aid the blind one, the star that shines brightly on him?
Fate, which enslaves all, is enslaved by deformities.
It is proven false by its contradictions.
For, it has not chanced to heal a defective eye,
just as it happens to give a defective finger.
3. [Say] it happened that a child was conceived without sense organs.
One asks: "Who fashioned the defect within the womb?
And how did the fetus's defect precede its horoscope?"
And if there are two fates,
then the hours strive against themselves, the hour of its birth
with the other hour of its conception and beginning.
4. And if they should say that the same hour of its conception
circles back and comes again and emerges at its birth,
then they err greatly and are led astray, for, it cannot come [again].
It is a lie that is concocted and refuted.
For, behold, there appeared the Power that destroys the horoscope,
that kills in the womb and gives life outside it.

5. How indeed does the erroneous one allot the horoscope?
Do they reckon the hour of its conception by a calculation,
or arrive at its birth by a division?
Fate traps itself and is conquered.
For, if it turns to the birth, the conception happens beforehand,
and if it therefore seeks the conception, that hour is hidden.
6. Now, if that star that blinds is mighty,
why is its companion weak, being unable to open [his eyes]?
And if nature, then, conquers the horoscope,
it shows that the Lord of all sustains all.
And how has it arranged lots: to slaves, sons of slaves,
and free men in every generation beget free sons?
7. And if by fate fish devour one another,
why, therefore, do lambs not kill their companions?
And if horoscopes arrange for those with large eyes,
then the lot falls to moles that they should be blind.
And which is the horoscope of demons and devils,
or the hour of Legion, the prince of the Chaldeans?
8. Consider the fabrications, how they refute one another.
Ask the diviners, augurs, and Chaldeans.
Examine them in one thing, and, behold, they are refuted and wander
about.
For, their root, the whole of it, is divided.
The augurs have refuted the diviners; the magicians have conquered one
another.
Dreams have refuted one another, and stars [have conquered] the
necromancers.
9. And if, then, the course of the stars and luminaries
does not stem from that freedom that belongs to the luminaries,
let us ask about it this [question], which is the most difficult [question] of
all:
who set in motion all their movements?

And that which is shown to be without authority regarding its movement
you should not make into a lord, for it is a footless slave.

10. Bardaisan is subtle: he binds that fate
with a superior fate that proceeds on its way in freedom.
The compulsion of the lower ones speaks against it by means of the higher
ones.
Their shadow speaks against their body.
For, that calculation that restrains the lower ones
cripples the unfettered freedom of the higher ones.
11. Cast off the mighty blasphemy of the Chaldeans,
which has enraged the Creator and bound His authority,
so that He is governed without discernment, as if by compulsion.
They have shut up His thinking⁴⁸⁵ in the stars.
Who would [still] love the Good One, and who would [still] serve the Just
One,
if there were no judgment and no crucible of recompense?
12. If the killer's hour is from the womb,
then nature has prevailed in children and brought in freedom,
such that it might prevail in youth up until one is grown up.
And if, then, to periods of life are apportioned
the lots of the use [of limbs], then it is made clear that there is an order
that has stayed youth [from crime] and has freed old age [from that
restraint].
13. The stars do not abide [by] the order [of nature]
because fate is not able to order its confusion.
Its courses and its distributions do not stem from its will:
compulsion always comes along with chance.
If, then, it grants youth and old age,
it shows that the crown of freedom lies in the middle.

⁴⁸⁵ Or "care, intention, purpose."

14. Truth is unitary, and its power is not divided.
But if its hearers are divided and contentious,
may the impurity of the presumptuous ones not touch its beauty.
And if it is not divided with respect to itself,
then debate is a sickness that belongs to the inquirers,
who have not healthily observed the limits of teaching.
15. For, three limits are established for believers
beyond which it is not permitted and lawful to go.
Let us restrain the wandering of our thought within them.
They are mingled with one another without envy.
If one crosses over one [of them], he oversteps them all,
and he falls into the myriads of myriads of their secret depths.⁴⁸⁶
16. The Begotten, whose bulwark is the crown of the flood —
the fire of disputation cannot reach Him.
His enemy reaches [His] bulwark and is defeated.
His silence cools down our speech,
and it is not able to reach and to inquire into His springs,
for the waves of His springs cast it out and repel it.
17. Let us forsake the insiders, and let us speak to the Chaldeans.
Now, if fate prevails over a child
about whom it is determined that he should despised in his youth,
and if fate, then, passed by and removed
that hateful hour and did not cause any [permanent] harm,
then nature, which constrains it, is a witness to its defeats.
18. How can He who orders all things through fate be the one who sets all
things in disarray?
Why are there weights and measures, and for what?
-

⁴⁸⁶ **مَعْلَمٌ** from **مَعْلَمٌ**: “inmost recess, inner chamber, secret corner, secret.” Cf. Beck’s “Abgründe.”

What cause has called forth laws?
Fate refutes itself in all these things.
And behold, all of creation, with every mouth, cries out
that it is man that is the neighbor of justice.

19. For, not from fate come circumcision and uncircumcision,
the former of which observes customs, and the latter, discernments.⁴⁸⁷
The one discriminates about dishes; the other, about manners of living.
From which [of the two] do the modest increase in the world?
Their⁴⁸⁸ covenants⁴⁸⁹ have despised fate and nature,
for, the stars have not mingled truth in the holy ones.
20. It⁴⁹⁰ has despised the rich, who have provided for [others] with their
treasures.
It has despised the poor, who have endured their sufferings.
It has despised the fasters, who have persevered in their fasts.
Virginity has borne witness that it does not exist.
For, behold, its⁴⁹¹ enemies have increased in the contest,
and they have stayed back and have been left behind by it in the race of
freedom.
21. If it⁴⁹² has made someone mute, and he is mute forever,
then fate has made a hand such that it would kill anywhere.
Indeed, why is the killer's arm still [when he is] in a crowd?
Who stilled the movement of his star?
And an adulterer on trial is ashamed and penitent.
Who made the countenance of that defiled star blush?

⁴⁸⁷ Cf. Beck: "dass letzteres (seine) Sitten einhält, ersteres die Unterscheidungen."

⁴⁸⁸ I.e., the modest ones'.

⁴⁸⁹ Or "statutes" (قوانين).

⁴⁹⁰ I.e., fate.

⁴⁹¹ I.e., virginity's.

⁴⁹² I.e., fate.

22. If, then, both uprightness and lawlessness stem from fate,
why is uprightness loved, and why is lawlessness hated,
if there is no freedom or crucible of discernment?
And if, then, there is only fate,
who has revealed to man that God exists,
and how has Christ conquered fate and its laws?
23. Now, if fate is true in all that is said,
and if one cannot think without it,
then it is necessary that in all our impulses and speech and thoughts
the truth is spoken.
But if there is lying, then it must be silenced,
and we should cry out that freedom is the fount of thoughts.
24. The yoke is ashamed of its yoke, the tyrant of the Chaldeans,
which compels the human race like wild beasts
and has usurped the will, the governor of thoughts.
The sea and dry land as well convince [us]
that another controls the ship and chariot.
Learn that the Lord of all governs all things!

Hymns against Heresies 9

To the same tune

1. Is the mouth of that eloquent star able to speak?
Compulsion governs its word and its course.
That which has authority over all movements is convicted by way of
weakness.
And if the star is dead, then it has come to naught and has ceased.
For, the dead cannot bring the dead back to life,
neither [can] the mute sow the word in our mind.
2. How does the blind one come to be such without a blind star,
and how the deaf-mute without a deaf-mute star?
It is the cripple that teaches us about the star that is crippled;
it is fate that [teaches us that] all deformities⁴⁹³ are in it.
For, it is mute, blind, crippled, and demon-ridden.
A foul beast has fallen upon the Chaldeans.
3. And if, then, the stars and the signs of the Zodiac are rational,
they therefore know that great ignominy of theirs,
since they see that by compulsion they run [their course] without ceasing,
and it grieves them all in all these respects:
that they [can]not lay enemies low and [can]not be of benefit to friends,
for, [even] the judge's servant has authority in both [those] respects.
4. Hot fire and cold air,
wet water and dry land —
the thing that comes forth from their power is like them.
[Such] is not [the work of] the authoritative will.

⁴⁹³ While the Syriac reads ܡܬܥܬܝܢ (forms), Beck's "(Miss)bildungen" brings out the sense of the argument better.

Let them instruct [us] how the stars, which have no sight,
made the foolish and the wise bring forth their sight.

5. If indeed they bring forth things hot and things cold,
then it is because they have within themselves the cold and the hot,
and, therefore, from that which they possess do their bodies
give, [though] without sight, through their contact.
If, then, they saw and gave the intellect, which they do not possess,
then there is [only] One whose will is the treasury of all things.
6. The height of all that north wind carries the snow,
and it never fails to refute the signs of the Zodiac,
for, fate was not able to stop the snow
that enriched the sources of the north wind.
And the cold star has not beheld that place
which is the storehouse of snow, the store of its sources.
7. Ships that are sunk, ports that are ruined,
tumors and plagues, tremors and earthquakes,
wars and floods, the overthrow of cities—
they have refuted the horoscope, since they treat [everyone] the same.
The tents of the Hebrews and the tents of the house of Hagar
cry out that custom and law pertain to the will.
8. Whence come unruly feasts and their bells,
and dice and the ordered books of the Chaldeans?
Who proclaimed the feast of the raving idol,
in which women keeping the feast fornicate?
And indeed does one star stand for those virgins
who before [their] fornication had vowed their virginity?
9. Behold, all peoples obey [their] leaders,
serve their rulers, reverence their kings.
Who has thus incited us to rebel against the stars?
They themselves have compelled us and forced us to deny [them].
And who would believe in fate, which forces us to deny [it]?

And who would serve a lord who compels [us] to be ashamed of him?

10. It is fate that subjugates slaves to their lords.
Consider how contradictory it is, such that it has incited us to rebel
against it.
It brings shame upon itself in us. If there is no freedom,
then its compulsion incites in us that we should despise it.
It keeps us silent that we might not revile kings to their face.
Through us it honors the king, and through us it dishonors itself.

Hymns against Heresies 11

To the tune of "If my disciple"

1. O our Physician, heal our freedom.
May it be healed by You, may it be set free by You.
Do not neglect its healing!
For, in You indeed does its health stand.
It is the great gift through which You make us greater
than the seas, which are bound by their own limits,
[greater] than the earth, heaven, and the mountains.
Without it, they are much smaller [than we are].

Refrain: Through freedom, my Lord, You have made the little body greater than
all [other] creatures!

2. May our Lord heal our mind,
for, its will⁴⁹⁴ is sick by reason of riches,
and its thoughts by reason of possessions,
and its authority is sick by reason of its lusts.
Evil⁴⁹⁵ does not exist, if [our mind so] wills,
just like darkness, which does not exist, if the light shines.
And [evil] is like brambles, for, if [the mind] lets it lie untended, without
upkeep,
it lets it spring up again.
Be, my Lord, its light and its husbandman,
for, by You is it pruned,⁴⁹⁶ and by You is it enlightened!

⁴⁹⁴ Lit. "wills, desires" (ܐܝܬܝܬܝܬܝܬ).

⁴⁹⁵ Beck notes that "evil" (ܐܝܬܝܬܝܬ) here refers to the evil substance or principle that Ephrem's opponents claim exists as an independent entity.

⁴⁹⁶ Or "purified" (ܐܝܬܝܬܝܬ).

3. The infidels along with the Chaldeans —
 by means of their own freedom do they bring freedom to naught,
 since [according to them] the evil principle is stronger than it,
 and fate is a compulsion that enslaves it.
 Let us show [however] that its authority reigns over all.
 For its Lord stirs up both good things and bad,⁴⁹⁷
 and there is no evil principle over against it,
 nor is there any compulsion of fate to attack it.
 Blessed be the Creator of freedom,
 [His] handmaid to whom He has given free will!

4. What could obscure freedom,
 which is like the sun shining in the sky?
 Who could deny its authority,
 whose strength, like God, is mighty?
 How evident it is, for, behold, its oppressors are its heralds!
 How manifest it is, for, behold, its false accusers are its trumpets!
 The argument for it is easy, and it is pleasing [to stand by] its side,
 and its name is more precious than [those of] all [other] creatures.
 Blessed is He who plaited the commandments,
 so that freedom might be crowned with them!
 Blessed is He who increased the righteous,
 the witnesses that cry out about freedom!

5. Books instruct [us] about the Just One
 that He does not accuse evil⁴⁹⁸ but rather freedom.
 For, if there were an evil principle,
 then He would have either accused it or opposed⁴⁹⁹ it.
 And if there were a fate that makes murderers,
 then everyone would blame it and not the murderers [themselves].
 We do indeed blame them, the vicious ones,

⁴⁹⁷ Beck here adds “(durch sie),” referring, apparently, to freedom.

⁴⁹⁸ Beck’s note suggests omitting the seyame in سَيَامَ in accord with ms. A.

⁴⁹⁹ لَوْ كَانَتْ: this can also be rendered “would have compelled, constrained”

since they are not bound in their natures.
Blessed is He who through Moses and Daniel
rebuked kings within their fortified cities!

6. As freedom, then,
conceals the power that lies hidden in it—
it⁵⁰⁰ veils it⁵⁰¹ in pleasures,
but the just one reveals it in sufferings,
and whenever it repents,⁵⁰² it gives the deposits back to its Lord—
thus⁵⁰³ again does it cover the truth with falsehood.
Sorcerers and Chaldeans,
by compulsion they have affirmed the truth.
Blessed is He who rends the veil of error,
and the hidden truth shines forth from it!
7. Blessed is He who did not test Adam
with a great or difficult thing,
so no one should falsely allege that there is compulsion
or another alien power.
[He tested him] through a contemptible vessel, the companion of beasts;
He called it a name: enslaved beast.
Moreover He crippled it, and it was brought low,
so that Adam might be ashamed, [realizing] who mocked him.
Adam resembles the sea,
which is tossed to and fro from the wafting of the wind.
8. The Babylonian had decreed a death sentence
upon the Chaldeans, upon his [own] teaching.
And they fled and sought refuge
in the name that is more exalted than the name of fate.

⁵⁰⁰ I.e., freedom.

⁵⁰¹ I.e., power.

⁵⁰² Or “suffers” (ܕܝܫܝܐ).

⁵⁰³ This verse resumes the comparison begun in vv. 1-2 of the stanza.

For if they had called those [stars] of theirs “gods,”
then they ought to have learned the revelations from them.
And if they proclaimed another power,
then they brought reproach upon their own teachings.
Blessed is He who even from before Daniel
has refuted them from them and through them!

9. The Chaldeans never before acknowledged
God, who is above all things.
The compulsion of [their] arts held them back.
But they proclaimed the truth that they had denied.
Their will darkened and concealed truth.
And while they spoke the name of God in the plural,
Daniel came in [and] proclaimed
the one God, who has dominion over all.
Blessed is He who manifests his revelation,
that through prayer one is able to receive it!
10. For not through prayer does fate,
as they say, give revelation.
This is the reckoning according to their word.
For he who has learned it inquires into everything by means of it.
They stood between deceit and a drawn sword;
they made haste, they bound the interpretation of the dream through
another power;
he who is not subject to the [Chaldeans'] craftiness
commits [his] will to prayer.
And because they proclaimed the manifest truth
God also saved their lives.
11. And while the powerful ones were wearied out,
and the beastly ones were wearied and confounded,
and while they put to confusion their own doctrines,
as well as their divinations and their graven images,
and when their pains began to abate,
then the Good One summoned Hebrew physicians.

Their letters and their revelations
were the remedies for their lacerations.

Blessed is He who wearied Himself with [healing] their sufferings;
through their wills they covered their wounds!

12. Pharaoh, the kinsman of Babylon,
despised the craftiness of his diviners.
Fate, which he loved, he laid bare.
For it was not given thence [to the Hebrews' children] to die.
Their⁵⁰⁴ deeds refute their own books.
For, indeed how could birth under one [and the same] horoscope
give life to the children on dry land
and [at the same time] drown the infants in the river?
Blessed is He who twice meted out to them
with the great measure of a great sea!
13. Egypt was wounded and learned
that the power that strikes also heals.
It did not learn from the Chaldeans
when the evil time would pass.
It ran to Moses, who healed its wounds.
And soon, on account of him, its wounds increased and its torments
pressed hard,
so that it would not think that perhaps it was [all] by chance.
Ten times it learned the truth.
Moses taught Egypt;
the cows taught the Philistines.
14. Blessed is He who laid bare the bosoms
that were filled with divinations and diviners:
Egypt, the bosom of roots,⁵⁰⁵
and Babylon, the bosom of amulets.

⁵⁰⁴ I.e., the Egyptians'.

⁵⁰⁵ For magic.

And Assyria learned through Sennacherib, who fell,
as well as the Ethiopians, who fell through the prayer of Asa.
Time and time again the Exalted One has urged
all the nations to look upon Him.

Blessed is He who has taught two things at once:
that we have a Lord and [that we have] freedom as well!

Hymns against Heresies 18

To the same tune

1. The body and darkness—if their nature is detestable,
who can be justified by night,
where flesh and darkness and Satan, their kinsman, [reign],
the three that prevail over everyone?
And if wine and desire are added,
who would conquer the nature of [an evil] Being?
[What] a marvel is the will, which has conquered them all by itself!
The breath of freedom has prevailed over Satan,
whom they have made into a [divine] Being.
2. They are wholly rebuked: how weak
is the voice of the infirm ones' petition! And yet it strikes him and scatters
him.
And the ones lying prostrate who pray, they overthrow him with their
voice.
Behold, the prostrate ones lay him low!
The lame run before him by their fasting.
The blind chant and praise, and they blind him.
The maimed hurl arrows of prayer, and he is put to shame.⁵⁰⁶
The sick conquer him; the lame weary him out;
the prostrate ones lay him low.
3. The serpent's poison kills by necessity;
and the color of night, its coming is of necessity;
and the nature of fever and sleep pertain to necessity.
Sin [however] pertains to the will.
If, therefore, their nature were one,

⁵⁰⁶ The Syriac (ܝܥܕܝܪ) can also be translated "is angered." Beck notes ܝܥܕܝܪ as a variant for this reading: "is blinded."

it would refute itself, for, it is not equal:
the body rebukes the demon and breathes upon him, its kin;
[yet] it loves the soul. And how does it love a stranger
and hate its kinsman?

4. They have laid the blame on the Maker:
"In His wisdom He was able to make evil pleasant,
just like the night, its kinsman, which is pleasant and peaceful,
in which the vigilant ones shine out."
But if, again, their root is one,
then the Maker [must have] changed their nature, [making it so that]
night is our rest and Satan is the one who wearies us.
And if this is not [because] of the Maker,
then night is alien to Satan.
5. Earth and the body, evil and night—
who would mix, would weigh, would make equal their nature,
despite their differences?
Behold, they cry out in their silence:
earth, in all [its] fruits;
the body, in all its glorious senses;
evil, in all its various deceits;
and night, in all its ordered moments and minutes.
But [only] the fourth is detestable,
accursed in its will and hateful in its freedom.
6. Darkness depicts Cain: let us consider him.
Darkness covers the beauty of creatures,
and Cain conceals the murder of the just.
See how they are depicted, the one by the other.
The womb of night is buried and hidden,
and snares and ambushes are [hidden] in the heart of the murderer:
Cain, through his will, and darkness, through its nature.
Night, by means of its color,
deceives those who look on it; and Cain [deceives] by means of his tongue.

7. Light depicts Abel for us: let us consider it.
For creatures, light makes radiant their adornment,
and for offerings, Abel adorns their beauty.
They are reflected, the one in the other.
There is nothing that is not manifest in the light,
and there is nothing in Abel that is not radiant.
The light also joyfully greets the hateful;
Abel, like light, was of bright cheer,
and the murderer was gloomy like the darkness.

8. Why was the darkness created first,
and [why] did it receive the first place and the right of the first-born? So
that
Cain and his first-born right might be depicted.
And then the light was created, like Abel.
And the light, which was created after [the darkness], was fair,
[just like] Abel, who was born after him.⁵⁰⁷
Cain and the darkness were the first-born and were declared the elder;
and later came Abel and the light, who resemble
the world and our Savior.

9. Diviners and conjurers and snake-charmers, who are accursed,
subdue the spirits and the vipers by their enchantments.
The Evil One forged weaponry against himself [whereby] he was
vanquished.
Indeed, he laid himself bare,
for, his stratagems were against himself, and he did not discern
that he put his [own] hands in bonds and was reproved.
And when he sought to capture us he did not understand
that we inquired into him [and discovered] that he is no [divine] Being.
For, behold, even his followers bring him low with their incantations.

10. Teaching instructed the lion and taught [him], and he did no harm.

⁵⁰⁷ I.e., Cain.

Skill bound the serpent, and he did not kill.
Eagles, too, and hawks were instructed, and they did not rebel.
That Good One, whom they say
is not even like mortals,
since He has not instructed and taught the Evil One —
O Good One, who sees the Evil One when he does harm,
has He not with all [His] wisdom,
and not with all [His] skill taught him not to harm?

11. The lion, the hawk, and the serpent, which are despised,
are a crucible for the unbelievers' deceit and have refuted it.
For they say that their sort stems from that nature of evil.
The lion, the hawk, and the serpent —
how could they be instructed not to harm?
The root from which they have arisen is bitter,
for, Satan will never learn not to harm.
Sons of truth, pray for the preachers of falsehood,
for they have erred and have led [others] into error [long] enough!

Hymns against Heresies 28

To the same tune

1. My friends, a shadow
does not exist of itself or for itself.
It is produced by virtue of the body —
just like evil, which does not possess being,
since it is produced by virtue of the good.
For, while the marriage is the same among both of them,
it is pure and becoming with the Law
but defiled and despicable without the Law.
Blessed is He who gave us one example
so that by it we might perceive many!
2. Through the body's food the will
acquires a taste for, and introduces, gluttony,
and through its drink, drunkenness.
Through the good things that it has in nature
it acquires for itself evil things that are not in nature,
for, evil does not possess being.
Those good things
are transformed into evil by our will.
The will has mangled the orders [of things];
freedom has confused the measures [of things].
Blessed is He who orders creatures
so that through them we might learn about every order!
3. If you look upon nature,
all of it is pure thanks to its Creator.
But if you observe [human] behavior,
all of it is corrupt thanks to our will.

It⁵⁰⁸ has spread the defects of [human] behavior over nature,
and pure nature has been disfigured by the despicable.
And if someone strips himself of [this] behavior,
he clothes himself rightly with [the things] of nature.
Let our mouth strip off blasphemy
and our tongue put on praise!

4. And if someone wants to add
a second embellishment to the first,
then he abstains from nature,
lest he be defiled or corrupted.
For, nature is an occasion for good things and for bad things.
If someone keeps to its order, he also profits by it;
but if someone confuses it,
he incurs every loss through it.
O Lord of nature, grant us
that we might use it with discernment!
5. Let physicians with their scales
be witnesses to nature.
For, with measures and scales
they have mixed helpful things with poisons.
But if the poison outweighs its companion, then it is a loss.⁵⁰⁹
He who heals all, who undertook to order creatures,
orders nature in [His] mercy
and confuses [human] ways in [His] wrath.
Blessed is He who by means of creatures
teaches order to our freedom!
6. And even the body's hair and fingernails
are foul, if they increase and grow long.
And yet, without them it⁵¹⁰ is detestable,

⁵⁰⁸ I.e., the will.

⁵⁰⁹ I.e., it is harmful.

for, by them the body is adorned.
How hateful to nature, then, are sins!
And wine, if it is clear, is pleasant.
Sinners sin by [their own] will;
they disturb nature by [their] behavior.
Blessed is He who has given [us] a pure garment,
pure nature, which is [yet] sullied by us!

7. If you seek nature,
do not seek it where we have disturbed it.
Let us ascend to the fountainhead,
which was clear before there was man.
“And the Lord saw everything, and all of it pleased Him.”⁵¹¹
And if there were an evil Being that strove [against Him],
then at that time it strove
with the Creator and not with the creature.
Blessed is He who manifested Himself to us,
that He is mighty, wise, and kind!
8. He manifested His power when He created,
for, from nothing He created everything.
Again, He manifested His rich wisdom,
for, He adorned, ordered, beautified, and crowned.
Still more, He manifested His goodness,
for, He freely made pure creatures, which He gave to Adam.
Up to [the time when He gave them to] Adam they were pure,
but from that time forward, they were disturbed.
O Lord, gather our will,
which wanders and disturbs and is disturbed as well!
9. The growth of thorns witnesses
to the new growth of sins.

⁵¹⁰ I.e., the body.

⁵¹¹ Cf. Gen 1:31.

For, thorns had not sprung up
until sins had arisen.
And when the hidden sins of freedom appeared,
then the visible thorns appeared from the earth.
He depicted sins by means of thorns
lest one should accuse the Godhead.
Love the Lord of nature,
which we have distorted through sins and thorns!

10. And if straw, wheat's kinsman,
is despised as long as it is [found] in the wheat pile,
how much [more] despised [must] hateful behavior be,
which is alien to the whole of nature.
Let us cast forth from it the despicable things that [stem] from our
freedom,
the sins and debts that our will has begotten.
May the pure wheat pile be picked clean
of the briars and chaff of our behavior.
Blessed is the Creator of our nature,
which He created clear in the beginning!
11. See that nature and Scripture
are joined with one yoke by the Ploughman.
Nature hates adulterers
and diviners and murderers.
The Law, too, hates the same ones.
And when nature and the Law purified the earth,
they sowed new commandments
in the earth of the heart so that it might bear fruit.
Glory to the Lord of nature,
and praise to the Lord of Scripture!
12. The impure have despised nature,
the fornicators and the erroneous with them.
For, they were permitted by nature
both to err and to fornicate.

Nature cried out, and the bull, its yolk-fellow, heard it,
that dreadful Law that [came] from Mount Sinai.
And since the Law of Moses was wearied,
the Perfect One descended that He might perfect them.
O Perfecter, glory to You,
for through You those who are lacking have been made full!

13. Deliver me from the dispute of [our] time,
which is harsh and pleasant, bitter and hidden.
The whole of the controversy is hateful.
Death breathes out through the disputers' mouth;
it goads the ear with intractable questions
and deceives the mind with enticing, cajoling arguments.
It presses ever harder in order to subdue
and comes off as humble in order to seize.
Wrest, my Lord, and lead forth the innocent
from the cunning plots that close in!
Have mercy on those who have rejected nature,
from which they came, and which they nevertheless have reviled!

ABBREVIATIONS

I. Works by Ephrem

Unless otherwise indicated, the Syriac texts of Ephrem's works are taken from Beck's CSCO editions.

<i>CDiss</i>	<i>Commentary on the Diatessaron</i>
<i>CGen</i>	<i>Commentary on Genesis</i> (Cited according to page and line numbers in Tonneau's edition.)
<i>CNis</i>	<i>Nisibene Hymns</i>
<i>Eccl</i>	<i>Hymns on the Church</i>
<i>HdF</i>	<i>Hymns on Faith</i>
<i>Hyp</i>	<i>Discourses for Hypatius</i> (The Syriac text of <i>Hyp</i> 1 is cited according to the page and line numbers in Overbeck's edition; that of <i>Hyp</i> 4 is cited according to the page and line numbers in Mitchell's edition.)
<i>Nach</i>	<i>Nachträge zu Ephraem Syrus</i> [=CSCO 363]
<i>Nat</i>	<i>Hymns on the Nativity</i>
<i>Parad</i>	<i>Hymns on Paradise</i>
<i>SdF</i>	<i>Sermons on Faith</i>
<i>Virg</i>	<i>Hymns on Virginité</i>

II. Other Sources

<i>CBOTS</i>	<i>Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series</i>
<i>CS</i>	<i>Cistercian Studies</i>
<i>CSD</i>	Payne Smith, J. <i>A Compendious Syriac Dictionary: Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus by R. Payne Smith.</i>
<i>CSCO</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
<i>ESO</i>	Assemani, Josephus Simonius. <i>Sancti patris nostri Ephraem Syri opera omnia quae exstant Graece, Syriace, Latine, in sex tomos distributa.</i> 6 vols. (Only the Syriac vols. are cited in this dissertation.)
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses</i>

FOC	The Fathers of the Church
<i>Hug</i>	<i>Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies</i>
<i>Mus</i>	<i>Le Muséon</i>
<i>PdO</i>	<i>Parole de l'Orient</i>
<i>PO</i>	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
<i>OC</i>	<i>Oriens Christianus</i>
<i>OCA</i>	<i>Orientalia Christiana Analecta</i>
<i>OCP</i>	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
<i>OrS</i>	<i>L'Orient Syrien</i>
<i>OsS</i>	<i>Ostkirchliche Studien</i>
<i>SA</i>	<i>Studia Anselmiana</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
<i>TS</i>	Payne Smith, R., ed. <i>Thesaurus Syriacus</i> . 2 vols.

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