FIRE IN THE BREAD, LIFE IN THE BODY: THE PNEUMATOLOGY OF EPHREM THE SYRIAN

by

David Wesley Kiger, B.C.M, B.Th., M.Div.

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ABSTRACT
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The fourth century debates about the status and personhood of the Son later expanded to reflections on the status and person of the Holy Spirit. In this dissertation I examine the pneumatology of Ephrem the Syrian, who is often over-looked in discussions about fourth century pneumatology. I argue that Ephrem displays a high pneumatology that fits within the broad contours of the pro-Nicene movement. I begin with a discussion of Ephrem's Syriac heritage and focus on the themes and language surrounding the Holy Spirit in pre-Nicene Syriac texts. Pre-Nicene Syriac authors speak about the Spirit's role in liturgical practices, often using feminine or maternal language to describe the Spirit's work. I proceed then to a discussion of the grounding principle of Ephrem's theology, the concept of true and borrowed names. Ephrem's focus on divine names shows a clear concern for and response to the theology of Eunomius and Aetius. The logic that Ephrem uses to combat Eunomius's understanding of divine names bears a marked similarity to Basil's logic in *Contra Eunomium.* Next, I assert that Ephrem affirms the unity of divine operations in the Trinity because of his assertion that the Holy Spirit participates in the act of creation. Ephrem does not believe that the Holy Spirit is the "wind/spirit" that hovers of the primordial waters in Gen. 1:2b, because creation does not proceed from those waters. In addition, he does affirm the Spirit's creative action in the waters of baptism. Because Jesus left the Spirit to his followers after his ascension, Ephrem believes that the locus of the Holy Spirit's activity is the life of the church. In the sacraments the Holy Spirit forgives sin and creates new believers, thus performing the same actions as the Father and Son. Lastly, in his most vivid image of the Trinity, Ephrem affirms that God is the undiminished giver, who is present to all without suffering loss in God's self. God's presence is evident in the life of Christians by the presence of the Holy Spirit who is present everywhere without diminishing. Ephrem's pneumatology affirms several key pro-Nicene commitments without recourse to the same exegetical traditions. Such an affirmation highlights that the transmission of orthodox theological ideas, based upon the common sources of the Bible and sacraments, integrated into the contexts beyond the traditional Latin and Greek divide.

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Arriving at the end of this process feels more surreal than I had imagined. The writing process is lonely and difficult. Even though the end has felt beyond my capacity for understanding, my thanks for those who have helped and encouraged me along the way is ever present. How can words do justice to the depth of gratitude I have for the many, many people who have made this project possible? My thankfulness to those who have helped me on my journey through the dissertation process and throughout my academic career reaches beyond what I can articulate in words.

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

CNis	Carmina Nisibena
CSCO	*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*
Eccl.	Hymns on the Church
FOTC	*Fathers of the Church* series by The Catholic University of America Press
HCH	Hymns Against Heresies
HdF	Hymns on Faith
H.Pard.	Hymns on Paradise
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OCP	*Orientalia Christiana Periodica*
PdO	*Parole de l'Orient*
PR I–II	Ephrem's Prose Refutations volumes 1–2
SdF	Sermons on Faith
SP	Studia Patristica
VC	*Vigiliae Christianae*
Virg	Hymns on Virginity

INTRODUCTION

Accounts of the development of fourth century theology, let alone accounts of fourth century pneumatology, seldom include a discussion of Syriac theology.[1] This omission in pneumatological narratives is striking for several reasons. First, in their account of the development of pneumatology up to Augustine, Michel Barnes and Lewis Ayres have noted that fourth century pro-Nicene pneumatologies make a distinct exegetical departure from Jewish pneumatologies, evidenced in the adoption of the Septuagint as the source for pneumatological reflection.[2] While it is, perhaps, an over-used trope which has recently come under scrutiny, Syriac theology has been referred to as 'Semitic' Christianity.[3] Without confirming or denying the claim to its 'Semitic'

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[1] R.C.P. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), lacks any sustained discussion of Syriac theology in general. John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*: *The Formation of Christian Theology* vol. 1 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2001) and *The Nicene Faith: Formation of Christian Theology* vol. 2 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2004), lacks any engagement with Syriac. Henry Barclay Sweete, *On the Early History of the Holy Spirit, with Especial Reference to the Controversies of the Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1873), has no reference to the Syriac tradition. Sergei Bulgakov, *The Comforter* trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 1–52, neglects to mention any Syriac sources in his overview of the Patristic Doctrine of the Spirit. Even anthologies of patristic texts on the Holy Spirit neglect Syriac sources, eds. J. Patout Burns and Gerald M. Fagin, *The Holy Spirit* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984). Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: an Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 229–235, attempts to integrate some of Ephrem into his discussion of the fourth century and notes that such integration is "in its infancy." Kathleen McVey, "Syriac Christian Tradition and Gender in Trinitarian Theology," in *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church,* ed. Khaled Anatolios (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 209, says that Ayres's inclusion of Ephrem into the history of the fourth century theological debates was the first such inclusion.

[2] Lewis Ayres and Michel René Barnes, "Pneumatology: Historical and Methodological Considerations," *Augustinian Studies* 39 (2008): 163–236. For an attempt at integrating Syriac pneumatology, specifically Aphrahat, into the broader conversations of Latin and Greek theology see, Bogdan Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses* (Boston: Brill, 2009).

[3] Ute Possekel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium; Subsidia, v. 580. t. 102. (Lovanii: Peeters, 1999) has offered a persuasive account of Ephrem's familiarity with the diffused philosophical culture. Matthew Crawford, "The Fourfold Gospel in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian," *Hugoye Journal of Syriac Studies* 18 (2015): 3–45, argues that, in addition to the Diatessaron in Syriac, Ephrem may have even had

character, developments of Syriac pneumatology could provide further evidence supporting the narrative provided by Barnes and Ayres. Second, Ephrem, the paragon of early Syriac theology, lived during the heart of the development of creedal pneumatologies.[4] Not including Ephrem and his predecessor Aphrahat in discussions of fourth century pneumatology is a lacuna for accounts of early Christian theology in general and fourth century accounts in particular.

In order to have an account of the development of pneumatology in the fourth century, one which does not prejudice the significance of available witnesses, then Syriac pneumatology needs to be integrated into conversations about the development of fourth century theology. My dissertation proposes that early Syriac pneumatology up to Ephrem shows a pattern of development that parallels the contemporary Greek traditions. This is so in its transition from binitarian to trinitarian thought and can be evidenced in Ephrem's

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familiarity with certain Greek Gospels. Crawford bases this on the fact that Ephrem, himself identifies different Greek translations.

[4] According to Matthews, "General Introduction" in *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works* FOTC (Washington, D.C.: CUA, 1994), 3, Ephrem is, "unquestionably the greatest writer in the history of the Syriac-speaking church, Ephrem stands as the pillar of Syriac Christian literature and culture." Kathleen McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 3, calls Ephrem, "the foremost writer in the Syriac tradition." Mingana, "Remarks on the Text of the Prose Refutations S. Ephrem," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 4 (1922): 523, remarked that Ephrem was, "to Syriac more than what Cicero is to Latin and Homer to Greek." André de Halleux, "La Transmission des Hymnes d'Éphrem d'après le ms. Sinaï Syr. 10, F. 165^{v}–178^{r}" in *Symposium Syriacum, 1972: célebré dans les jours 26–31 octobre 1972 à l'Institut Pontifical Oriental de Rome*, ed. by Ortiz de Urbina, Ignatius (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1974), 21, calls Ephrem's writings "un sommet des lettres syriaques." Ephrem's status as paragon of early Syriac theology is evident in the hagiographical tradition that follows his wake and is due, in part, to the brilliance of his writing as well as the fact that he has more surviving texts than any previous Syriac author. Not only is Ephrem remembered in the Syriac Christian tradition, he is mentioned in Sozomen *History of the Church* III.16, Jerome *De virus illustribus* 115, Palladius, *The Lausaic History* 40, Theodoret HE 4.26, and there is a Vita for Ephrem written by Jacob of Serugh within a century of Ephrem's death, see, Joseph P. Amar, ed. *The Syriac Vita Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian*. CSCO, vols. 629–630, scriptores syri, 242–243 (Louvain: Peeters, 2011). I call Ephrem's pneumatology and theology "early" because of the paucity of sources for Syriac theology prior to Ephrem. Outside of Ephrem and Aphrahat, early Syriac theology would include both the Odes of Solomon and the Acts of Thomas. Both the *Odes* and the *ATh* survive in both Syriac and Greek. Whereas in the Latin and Greek tradition the fourth century had numerous predecessors, Syriac writing emerges in the fourth century.

own theology of the Holy Spirit. I propose that Ephrem had a 'high' pneumatology that identified the Holy Spirit as divine, in unity with and distinct from the Father and the Son.[5] I also suggest that while Ephrem's pneumatological conclusions are the same, he does not come to those conclusions through the same exegetical debates as his Latin and Greek counterparts. I explore Ephrem's pneumatology as it reveals itself in both polemical interactions and his own theological writings. To accomplish this, I construct Ephrem's argument for a high pneumatology and contrast his argument against what he says his opponents believed. Once we conceptualize Ephrem's argument and his perception of his opponents, we can compare it against the concurrent Latin and Greek arguments.

Several difficulties present themselves at the outset of such a pneumatological integration. Ephrem does not write many theological treatises in the same format or genre as his contemporaries. Instead, the majority of Ephrem's writings are theological poems and sermons. As Sidney Griffith has noted, Ephrem's theological language is more akin to the Psalms than other modes of inquiry. His method is one of, in Griffith's words, "faith adoring the mystery."[6] Ephrem's writings are also notoriously difficult to date,[7]

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[5] By "high pneumatology" I am saying that an author 1) does not understand the Holy Spirit as a creature or activity, and 2) the author articulates the belief that the Holy Spirit is fully divine. The more explicit the acknowledgement, or argument that the divinity of the Holy Spirit is the same as the Father's and the Son's divinity the "higher" the pneumatology.

[6] Sidney Harrison Griffith, *"Faith Adoring the Mystery": Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian*. The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology 1997, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1997). Griffith acknowledges his debt to Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1975), 89, where Murray says, "Not *fides quaerens intellectum* but *fides adorans mysterium*!" Griffith argues that Ephrem's method of reading the Bible can be divided into two forms: the literal reading, and the symbolic reading. The literal reading is evident in Ephrem's commentary on Genesis while the symbolic reading is found throughout his poetry.

[7] André de Halleux, "La Transmission Des Hymnes," 21–63. Cf. André de Halleux, "Une clé pour les Hymnes d'Éphrem dans le MS. Sinaï Syr. 10," *Le Muséon* 85 (1972): 171–199.

because there is no way of knowing if the collections of hymns that have been passed down under Ephrem's name were composed as units, or if they were compiled after his death. Nevertheless, what we know of Ephrem's life is useful for attempting approximate datings. Ephrem lived in Nisibis until 363, when he was forced to move to Edessa, where he stayed until he died in June of 373. In addition, Ephrem's lifetime parallels that of Athanasius (d. 373), one of the first fourth century authors with a high pneumatology, and thus lived during a time when there was active theological reflection on the Holy Spirit. I argue that Ephrem's pneumatology is high because he understands the role of the Spirit to be first equal with the Father and the Son, and second to be active in the sacraments.

Ephrem has been considered a pro-Nicene theologian, and as Ayres points out, Ephrem "must have played a major role in nurturing and strengthening pro-Nicene theology in his region."[8] Ephrem's pro-Nicene leaning is also evident in the way

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[8] Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 229. Ephrem references Arius in four of the *HCH* but does not provide substantial information regarding Arius's views. In *HCH* 22 Ephrem mentions Aetius by name in the midst of a list of Ephrem's heretical opponents. Sidney Griffith, "Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire," in *Diakonia: Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer* eds. Thomas Halton and Joseph Williman (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 37–47, stresses the anti-Arian vocabulary in the *HdF*. Paul Russell, *St. Ephraem the Syrian and St. Gregory the Theologian Confront the Arians*, (Kerala, India: Saint Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1994), 183, argues that Ephrem and Gregory of Nazianzus both confront the Arian crisis by means of poetry and exegesis, but that Ephrem, unlike Gregory, is reticent to provide explicit references to his Arian counterparts. Christine Shepardson, "Christian Division in Ancient Edessa Ephrem the Syrian's *Carmina Nisibena XXVII–XXVIII*," *Journal of The Assyrian Academic Society* 12 (January 1999): 29–31, suggests that Ephrem's anti-Arian positions were evident before his move to Edessa. Shepardson also notes that while Ephrem's position was against Arian theology, Ephrem's primary concern was church unity. Ephrem saw the Arian's as a threat to the unity of the church. Cornelia Horn, "Überlegungen zur Rolle der Pneumatologie Ephräm des Syrers im Umfeld des Ersten Konzils von Konstantinople," in *Syriaca II. Beiträge zum 3. Deutschen Syrologen-Symposium in Vierzehnheiligen 2002* ed. M. Tamcke (Münster 2004, 29–51), suggests that Ephrem's pneumatology prefigures that of Constantinople 381. Kees den Biesen, *Simple and Bold: Ephrem's Art of Symbolic Thought* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2006), 84, focuses on Ephrem's symbolic theology as Ephrem's answer to the Arian crisis. Ephrem's goal, according to Biesen, was to avoid the "intellectualistic hubris" of the era in order to work toward a unified church. T. Bou Mansour, 202, suggests that Ephrem's trinitarian position is at the heart profoundly paradoxical. Peter Bruns, "Arius hellenizans?—Ephräm der Syrer und die neoarianischen Kontroversen seiner Zeit: Ein Beitrage zur

scholarship has treated Ephrem's *Hymns on Faith*. This collection of hymns is thought by some to be a refutation of the Arian heresy, or more specifically the Homoians.[9] While the exact details of the person or movement with whom Ephrem is disputing in the *Hymns on Faith* remains unclear, his polemical work is not limited to Christological concerns. Ephrem's *Prose Refutations* show his polemical interaction with the thought of Bardaisan, Marcion, and Mani.[10] It may be noted that Ephrem, like his Latin and Greek contemporaries, inherits and uses an anti-Marcion and anti-Manichaean logic, and presumably literature, for pro-Nicene theology.[11] In his refutation of Bardaisan of Edessa, Ephrem shows that he is also concerned with pneumatology, where the Holy Spirit is understood as divine.[12] How Ephrem perceives his opponents and their arguments will help to show how Ephrem is arguing for the divinity of the Holy Spirit and whether this is done in the same way as his Latin and Greek counterparts.

Contrary to Ayres's and Griffith's assertion that Ephrem was a pro-Nicene or in favor of Nicene theological formulations, Jeffery Wickes suggests that Ephrem's allegiance is less clear.[13] Wickes argues that because Ephrem does not use *homoousios*

Rezeption des Nizänums im syrischen Sprachraum," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 101 (1990): 53, argues that Ephrem rejects Arianism because it adds Greek philosophy to theology.

[9] Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery*, 21, thinks that the *Hymns on Faith* betray a knowledge of the Homoians, while Jeffrey T. Wickes, *Hymns on Faith,* FOTC, vol. 130 (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University Of America Press, 2015), believes that such a specific attribution is not discernable and instead he opts for the category "subordinationist."

[10] *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan*: Transcribed from Palimpset B.M. ADD. 14623, trans. C.W. Mitchell, A.A. Bevan, and F.C. Burkitt (London: Williams and Northgate, 1921).

[11] Rebecca Lyman, "Arians and Manichees on Christ," *JTS* 40 (1989): 493–503 suggest that Arius' theology was in part a response to Manichee theology.

[12] *HCH* 55.

[13] Wickes, *Hymns on Faith,* 29–43.

language that Ephrem's position on the controversy of the fourth century is not in favor of Nicaea. In fact, Wickes suggests that Ephrem's theology is closer to a *homoian* or *homoiousian* position because Ephrem uses "like" language to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son.[14] At the same time that he used "like" language Ephrem displayed antipathy toward philosophical theology like that of Aetius and Eunomius. Ephrem then, according to Wickes, occupies a more liminal space because, in the end, he will deny subordinationist Christology without technical Nicene language, and at the same time Ephrem exhibits a strong aversion to technical theological expressions found in the likes of Eunomius.

Wickes bases some of the logic of his assertion on Brian Daley's interpretation of Meletius of Antioch.[15] For Daley, Meletius modeled a middle position during the fourth century conflicts. Meletius maintained, what Daley calls, "older theological language" and so remained resistant to pro-Nicene developments. Daley further suggests that Meletius was a theological heir to Eusebius of Caesarea. Wickes's work on Ephrem is invaluable. Nevertheless, I think that Ephrem's place in the fourth century controversies can be better defined. Wickes does not define a pro-Nicene position neither does he

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[14] Wickes, *Hymns on Faith,* 37–39, says that Ephrem eschews pro-Nicene vocabulary and prefers instead the language of "like." Wickes bases this on his analysis of *HdF* 53.12 where Ephrem says the Son is "entirely like" his begetter and on *HdF* 52.14 where Ephrem may or may not reference those promoting the term *homoousios*. Wickes suggests that this reticence to accept Nicene language is evident throughout the *HdF* but Wickes does note that Ephrem speaks of the Son and Father as one essence in *HdF* 73. The evidence from the *HdF* suggests to Wickes that Ephrem was hesitant to accept the Nicene language for *homousios* but later accepted that vocabulary however reluctantly. The earliest Syriac translation of the Nicene creed, dated to 410, translates *homoousios* with *bar kyānā,* a set phrase that appears only once in Ephrem's writings in speaking about the Son's work in creation. See Arthur Vööbus, "New Sources for the Symbol in Early Syrian Christianity," *VC* 26 (1972): 291–296, for the text and translation of the creed in Syriac.

[15] Brian Daley, "The Enigma of Meletius of Antioch," in *Tradition and the Rule of Faith in the Early Church* eds. Ronnie J. Rombs and Alexander Y. Hwang (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 128–150.

define a homoiousian or homoian position.[16] Ephrem's use of like language in select hymns does not seem to me to be enough evidence to place him in the homoian camp, especially when Ephrem appears pro-Nicene in many other passages.

There is evidence to suggest that Ephrem, at Edessa, would have encountered a theological context that contained a broad range of opinions. Emmanuel Fiano has constructed a sequence of events that shows a wide range of theological diversity in fourth century Edessa in regards to the differing positions concerning the controversies surrounding the Trinity.[17] Fiano outlines the careers of two Edessan bishops, Aithalla and Barses, to show that there was a diversity of opinion in the city regarding the language of the Son's generation. In addition, Fiano notes that Julian's 40th Epistle (*ad Hecebolium*) indicates that there was a large Arian faction in Edessa in the 360s.[18] Last, the life of Rabbula the Bishop of Edessa also shows that up until the early fifth century there remained in Edessa a strong Arian presence. Thus, one can be confident that when Ephrem arrives in Edessa in 363 he is met by Arian Christians in addition to his pro-Nicene allies.

In this dissertation I trace Ephrem's pneumatology and situate it first within his Syriac milieu and second, within the fourth century debates about the Holy Spirit. Ephrem's pneumatology was not necessarily static; I pay particular attention to the possible development of his thought, although such development is difficult to detect because of the lack of precision in our ability to date his writings. For example, there is

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[16] R.C.P. Hanson, *The Search*, does not offer a definition for pro-Nicene.

[17] Emmanuel Fiano, "The Trinitarian Controversies in Fourth Century Edessa," *Le Muséon* 128 (2015): 85–125.

[18] Julian. *Letter* 40, trans. Wilmer Cave France Wright in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*. The Loeb Classical Library vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 126–129.

potential for development in Ephrem's thought on the Holy Spirit when one considers his interpretation of the 'hovering' spirit in Gen 1:2b. In his commentary on Genesis, Ephrem remarks that this spirit hovering over the waters cannot be the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit does not create. However, in his *Hymns on Faith*, Ephrem says that the Holy Spirit 'hovers.' In both cases, Ephrem uses the verb from Gen. 1:2b *raḥep* (ܪܚܦ).[19] As Jeffrey Wickes has noted, this could be a sign of development in Ephrem's thought, or it could signify that Ephrem did not see any disparity between these interpretations. Still, because it remains unclear when these texts were written the development in Ephrem's thinking is untraceable.[20]

My thesis addresses two problems in the study of the fourth century. First, by giving a synthetic account of Ephrem's pneumatology I provide a needed addition to scholarship on Ephrem as it now stands by focusing on an aspect of Ephrem's theology, namely his pneumatology, which has up to now been understudied. Second, by locating when and how Ephrem articulates his high pneumatology, I integrate an instance of high pneumatology outside the Greek and Latin speaking Christian world into the development of fourth century theology. Such an integration serves as fodder for reflection on the nature of the formation of doctrine by noting the similar and distinct arguments which are used in different linguistic contexts. The comparison and abstraction of Ephrem's pneumatology vis-à-vis his fourth century contemporaries sheds light on how Christian theological argumentation spread and differed throughout the late antique

[19] Throughout the body of this dissertation I transliterate the Syriac text. In the footnotes I provide the Syriac script. I follow the transliteration scheme found in *The Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2011), x, with the exception that I indicate word inital ālap. In addition, all Syriac translations in this dissertation are my own, unless otherwise noted.

[20] Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 220 note 13.

world. In addition, by focusing on Ephrem's immediate social and polemical context, I showcase how pro-Nicene writers combatted a variety of heterodox theologies that focused on the Holy Spirit.

Present Status of the Problem

Scholarship on Ephrem has been focused with Ephrem as a distinct theologian whose theology is not connected to the philosophical thought of the Greek and Latin world.[21] This scholarship stresses the Jewish character of Syriac Christianity prior to 400CE, and assumes that because Ephrem and his Syriac forebears do not write philosophical treatises that Syriac theology is altogether different from Greek and Latin theology. Despite Sebastian Brock's appeal for comparative studies of Ephrem and the Cappadocians,[22] the idea that Syriac Christianity is a purely Semitic form of Christianity has been an impediment to studying Ephrem within the broader fourth century context. This understanding of Ephrem as ignorant of Greek philosophy has recently come under scrutiny in the landmark study by Ute Possekel.[23] Possekel shows how Ephrem was well aware of the philosophy prevalent in the fourth century, and in so doing builds upon Dom Edmumd Beck's work. Beck argued that Ephrem had minimal or superficial familiarity with Stoicism.[24]

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[21] Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 14. Murray, "The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology," *PdO* 6–7 (1975–76), 4.

[22] Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 148. Cf. Paul Russell, *St. Ephraem the Syrian and St. Gregory the Theologian Confront the Arians* (Kerala, India: Saint Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1994).

[23] Possekel, *Evidence*, 1–12.

[24] Beck, *Ephräms des Syrers Psychologie und Erkenntnislehre*, CSCO vol. 58 (Louvain: Peeters, 1980), 174.

Studies on Ephrem's theology have focused on his symbolism and method[25] to the neglect of direct engagement with Ephrem's pneumatology.[26] This may be due in part to the fact that Ephrem has no surviving work dedicated to the theology of the Holy Spirit, although Jerome notes that he read such a work.[27] Ephrem's pneumatology has been treated in one monograph: Joseph Hage's doctoral dissertation published posthumously in 2012.[28] Several articles engage Ephrem's pneumatology as it relates to the Christian sacraments.[29] Most attention has been focused on the *Hymns on Faith*,[30] specifically Hymn 10, in which the Holy Spirit is connected directly to baptism and the Eucharist. Hage presents many of the texts in which Ephrem mentions the Holy Spirit or the Holy Spirit's work. While Hage attempts to show connections between Ephrem's thought and Basil or Athanasius, Hage interacts minimally with non-Syriac sources. Hage's work is important because he ties together many of the texts in Ephrem that draw upon Holy Spirit language. However, Hage does not construct a full argument for how Ephrem

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[25] Kees Den Biesen, *Simple and Bold: Ephrem's Art of Symbolic Thought* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2006). P. Tanios bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique de saint Ephrem le syrien* (Kaslik : Université Saint-Esprit, 1988).

[26] Edmund Beck, *Die Theologie des Hl. Ephraem: In Seinen Hymnen Über den Glauben* (Pontificum Institutum S. Anselmi: Rome, 1949), 81–92 provides a chapter devoted to the Holy Spirit in the *Hymns on Faith*.

[27] Jerome, *De virus illustribus* 115.

[28] Joseph Hage, *L'Esprit Saint chez saint Éphrem de Nisibe et dans la tradition syriaque antérieure* (Kaslik: Presses de l'Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik, 2012), offers the most complete study of Ephrem's pneumatology, but his methodology does not chart how Ephrem fits within the fourth century.

[29] Sidney Griffith, "Spirit in the Bread; Fire in the Wine: The Eucharist as 'Living Medicine' in the Thought of Ephraem the Syrian," *Modern Theology* 15 (1999): 225–246. Robert Murray, "A Hymn of St Ephrem to Christ on the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit, and the Sacraments," *Eastern Churches Review* 3(1970): 142–150. Pierre Yousif, "L'Eucharistie chez saint Éphrem de Nisibe" (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 244; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientale, 1984), 145-156.

[30] Beck, *Die Theologie*, 81–92. Provides his most concentrated discussion of Ephrem's understanding of the Holy Spirit as evidenced in the *Hymns on Faith*.

understood the Holy Spirit in contradistinction to his opponents, or how Ephrem's pneumatology relates to the broader fourth century.

Hage is not alone in offering impressionistic accounts of Ephrem's relation to the fourth century, as both Edmund Beck and Jeffrey Wickes also provide little connection of Ephrem's work to the Greek and Latin speaking world.[31] Beck and Wickes note that in Ephrem's *Hymns on Faith*, he affirms the divinity of the Holy Spirit in his theology of baptism and by his use doxological formulas of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[32] This observation is helpful, but does not work to integrate Ephrem's pneumatology into the broader context of the fourth century. Wickes points out that Ephrem's theology of the Spirit appears similar to that of Cyril of Jerusalem, but does not elaborate. Paul Russell attempts to show how Ephrem is related to other fourth century figures in his confrontation with the Arians.[33] However, as Ayres has said, Russell's treatment is "imprecise" in his understanding of the Arian position.[34] Joseph Amar notes that there is no clear reference in Ephrem to assert that he would have been a supporter of the

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[31] Wickes, 40–41. Beck, *Die Theologie*, 81.

[32] Wickes, 40–41. Beck, *Die Theologie*, 81. De Halleux, "Saint Éphrem le Syrien," *Revue théologique de Louvain* 14 (1983): 351, notes that Ephrem "n'affirme jamais expressément la divinité de la troisième Personne, mais il est indubitable qu'il n'en confondait pas la nature divine avec celle des esprits angéliques créés, qu'il considère comme éthérée, mais matérielle."

[33] Paul S. Russell, *St. Ephraem the Syrian and St. Gregory the Theologian Confront the Arians* (Kerala, India: Saint Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1994). Cf. Paul S. Russell, "An Anti-Neo-Arian Interpolation in Ephraem of Nisibis' Hymn 46 On Faith," *Studia Patristica*, (Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 568-572. Paul S Russell, "Ephraem and Athanasius on the Knowledge of Christ," *Gregorianum* 85 (2004): 445–74.

[34] Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 231 ft. 32. While the terms Arian and Neo-Arian are flawed terms to describe the many different experssions of Christianity in the fourth century, I still use them in this dissertation to describe anti-Nicene and non-Nicene expressions of Christianity. I label Eunomius and his teacher Aetius as Neo-Arian because they are from a different and later historical setting. It is true no "Arian" or "Neo-Arian" would self-idenitfy as such, I nevertheless use the terms to refer to the opponents of pro-Nicene theology. Cf. Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 247–267.

pneumatology expressed in the council of Constantinople of 381.[35] Christine Shepardson has connected Athanasius and Ephrem by arguing that they both described their subordinationist opponents as Jews, in order to insult their opponents and at the same time garner support from the empire.[36]

Studies on the Syriac theology of the Holy Spirit like that of Sebastian Brock and of E.P. Siman[37] also do not set Ephrem within his historical context; instead, they opt for viewing Ephrem as the source of later Syriac theology and liturgy. Consequently, Ephrem's pneumatology is not studied in his fourth century context but as a source for later Syriac liturgy. Brock's study on the Holy Spirit in Syriac baptismal traditions highlights Ephrem as the fountainhead of the Syrian baptismal tradition, but the work as a whole does not synthesize or contextualize Ephrem's writings about the Holy Spirit in the broader fourth century.[38] While Brock provides a brief survey of the Syriac tradition prior to Ephrem, he is not exhaustive. As is often noted in studies of early Syriac pneumatology, feminine gender verbs and pronouns are used to describe the Holy Spirit.[39] Brock notes that up until 400CE Syriac authors, including Ephrem, describe the Holy Spirit with feminine pronouns and verb forms, but that after 400 Syriac authors

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[35] Amar, *The Syriac Vita*, chapter 26, page 66 note 1.

[36] Christine C. Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria*. Patristic Monograph Series, v. 20, (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 106–156.

[37] Sebastian Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008). E.P. Siman, *L'Expérience de l'Esprit par l'Église d'après La Tradition Syrienne d'Antioche* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1971).

[38] Sebastian Brock, *Holy Spirit,* 35–37, pertains directly to Ephrem.

[39] Susan Harvey, "Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, the Odes of Solomon, and Early Syriac Tradition." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37:2–3 (1993), 111–39. Sebastian Brock, "The Holy Spirit as Feminine in Early Syriac Literature" in *After Eve* ed. J.Martin Soskice (Basingstoke: Marshal Pickering, 1990), 73–88.

begin to use masculine verbs with the feminine noun.[40] However, Susan Myers has argued that Ephrem rejected the concept of the motherhood language in relation to the Holy Spirit, on the basis of Ephrem's critique of what he perceived to be Bardaisan's theology of a Mother-Spirit.[41]

There are other studies that focus on early Syriac pneumatology prior to Ephrem. Winfrid Cramer and Emmanuel Kaniyamparampil trace early Syriac pneumatology from the *Odes of Solomon* and *Acts of Thomas* up to Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*, but do not engage Ephrem's writings.[42] Kaniyamparampil even notes, "Ephrem is a very prolific author and his works deserve a separate study on the question of the Spirit."[43] Thus, the current state of scholarship on Ephrem and early Syriac theology is ripe for a theological study that integrates Ephrem's ideas into the mainstream debates of the latter half of the fourth century.

Ephrem's Life and Works

Ephrem the Syrian is perhaps the most well-known Syriac author. Ephrem was born within the first decade of the fourth century, and his hagiographical legacy began within 10 years of his death in 373, when Epiphanius notes the importance of Ephrem's

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[40] Brock, *Holy Spirit*, 5.

[41] Susan E. Myers, "The Spirit as Mother in Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity" in *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions: Interdisciplinary Approaches* eds. S.P. Ahearne-Kroll, P.A. Holloway, and J.A. Kelhoffer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 427–462.

[42] Winfrid Cramer, *Der Geist Gottes und des Menschen in frühsyrischer Theologie,* Münsterische Beiträge Zur Theologie, Heft 46, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979). And Winfrid Cramer, *Die Engelvorstellungen Bei Ephräm Dem Syrer*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 173, (Roma: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1965). Emmanuel Kaniyamparampil, *The Spirit of Life: A Study of the Holy Spirit in the Early Syriac Tradition* (Kerala, India: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India Paurastya Vidyapeetham, 2003).

[43] Kaniyamparampil, *The Spirit of Life*, 5.

writings in relation to determining the birth of Jesus.[44] Within 150 years of his death Ephrem is remembered in historical and hagiographical accounts in Latin, Greek, and Syriac.[45] The specific details of Ephrem's life, however, are not found in these sources. From what little evidence exists within his own writing, Ephrem was born to Christian parents in the town of Nisibis situated on the borders of the Roman and Persian Empires.[46] In Jacob of Serugh's hagiography of Ephrem, Ephrem's father is portrayed as a Zoroastrian Priest, but this, seems contradicted in Ephrem's own writings.[47] He grew up in the church and it is likely that his own bishop, Jacob, was present for the council of Nicaea.[48] Again, the exaggerated account of his life details that Ephrem was present for the council, but this is not attested in Ephrem's writings and is highly unlikely.[49] In 363

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[44] Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 51.22.7. *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis Books II and III (Sects 47–80, De Fide*) trans. Frank Williams (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 50, Epiphanius quotes something attributed to Ephrem that is not found in Ephrem's existing body of work.

[45] For Latin, Jerome *De virus illustribus* 115, Greek, Sozomen *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.16, Palladius Lausaic History, 40, for Syriac see *The Syriac Vita Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian* trans. Joseph P. Amar (Louvain: Peeters, 2011).

[46] *Virg*. 37.10 notes that God's truth was in Ephrem "from his youth," and in his *HCH* 26.10 Ephrem says he was born in the way of truth. As Kathleen McVey has noted, "The most trustworthy data for Ephrem's life are incidental remarks in his writings; next are the Greek accounts of Palladius, Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret; among Syriac sources the most reliable are Jacob of Sarug and Barhadbshabba," *Ephrem the Syrian Hymns*, introduction (New York: Paulist, 1989), 5 note 8. While McVey is no doubt correct that the best source on Ephrem's life would be Ephrem himself, one must be careful when taking passing comments in *madrāšē* to be indicative of Ephrem's self-revelation. The general character of *madrāšē* as teaching songs makes self-disclosure from Ephrem appear less probable, see Wickes, "Between Liturgy and School: Reassessing the Performative Context of Ephrem's *Madrāšê*," *JECS* 26, no. 1 (2018): 25–51, argues for performative context that was part study group and part liturgy, such an emphasis helps move a solitary focus on the liturgy to a more informal setting, but nonetheless would indicate that the *madrāšē* were used to educate others about the faith, not about Ephrem's personal history. The nature of *madrāšē* as songs has also come under scrutiny see McVey, "Were the Earliest Madrāšē Songs or Recitations?" in *After Bardaisan*: *Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Hans J.W. Drijvers* ed. G.J. Reinink and A.C. Klugkist (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), 185–199; and Michael Lattke, "Sind Ephraems Madrāšê Hymnen?" *Oriens Christianus* 73 (1989): 38–43.

[47] *A Metrical Homily on Holy Mar Ephrem by Mar Jacob of Sarug* trans. Joseph P. Amar (Turnhout, Belqium: Brepols, 1995).

[48] E. Honigmann, "La Liste Originale des Pères de Nicée," *Byzantion* 14 (1939): 17–76. Jean M. Fiey, "Les évêques de Nisibe au temps de Saint Ephrem," *PdO* 4, no. 1–2 (1973): 126.

Ephrem was forced to migrate from Nisibis to Edessa because emperor Julian overextended his military campaign into the Persian Empire. Cut off from his own supply chain and fully surrounded within enemy territory, Julian died. The next emperor, Jovian, negotiated a trade with the Persians. In exchange for the Roman army's safe return, the Roman empire gave up Nisibis to the Persians. Ephrem lived out his final 10 years in Edessa, where he was a deacon.

Ephrem is known as a prolific author, composing over 400 *madrāšē* or teaching songs along with metrical sermons or *mimrē*, several prose works, and commentaries. While later Greek portrayals of Ephrem envision him, albeit through anachronism, as a Byzantine monk, Ephrem was more likely an *iḥidāyē* or "solitary one," part of the *bnay/bnāt qyāmā* "sons or daughters of the covenant," an early ascetical group who valued celibacy "singleness" as the path toward Christian virtue.[50] In his capacity as deacon he assisted the bishops with preaching and song writing. There is also some speculation that toward the end of his life Ephrem helped organize flood relief while in Edessa. Ephrem's song writing or poetical legacy is celebrated in Syriac, where Jacob of Serugh calls him the new Moses for women as Ephrem promoted and conducted female choirs in worship settings.[51] Ephrem is also remembered in the Greek theological

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[49] Amar, *The Syriac Vita*, chapter 5, page 16 note 1.

[50] Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20, no. 1 (1973): 1–19. Sidney H. Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in *Asceticism,* eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1997), 220–245. Idem., "Monks, 'Singles', and the 'Sons of the Covenant,' Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology," in *ΕΥΛΟΓΗΜΑ: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, SJ* eds. E Carr, Stefano Parenti, and Abraham Thiermeyer (Rome: Centro Studi S. Anselmo, 1993), 141–160. Cf. Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 8–11.

[51] Johannes Quasten, *Music & Worship in Pagan & Christian Antiquity* trans. Boniface Ramsey, O.P. (Washington DC: National Association of Pastoral Musicians, 1983), 75–87, notes the role of women in worship choirs. Susan Harvey, "On Mary's Voice: Gendered Words in Syriac Marian Tradition," in *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography* eds. Dale B. Martin and Patricia Cox Miller (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 63–86, highlights how in female choirs

tradition where Ephrem Graecus's pseudonymous corpus is surpassed in volume only by John Chrysostom within the *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*. Ephrem's poetry is celebrated for his use of symbolism, as opposed to dogmatic argumentation.

Because we know so little of the details in Ephrem's life it is difficult to date his writings. In the writings where Ephrem appears to mention himself, I am not convinced that one can assume that it is a biographical detail. For instance, in *Hymn on Virginity* 37:10 Ephrem says, "Your truth was in me in my youth, Your faithfulness is with my old age."[52] Because this is a *madrāšē*, a song for teaching Christians, I am not certain that this line is a biographical statement. Also, one could interpret this parallel construction as saying that God, who is always true, is faithful to God's people in all stages of their lives. If this *madrāšē* was to be read a song of instruction or worship, then assuming details like this one are biographical appears problematic. It is thus, difficult to date Ephrem's writings on the basis of the biographical details about his life.

The most important detail about Ephrem's life that is used for dating his writings is the fact that Ephrem migrated from Nisibis to Edessa after 363. Scholars have used this life changing event to peg certain of Ephrem's hymn cycles to his period in Nisibis or in Edessa. This approach is complicated by the fact that scholars, at times, assume that Ephrem's hymn cycles were composed as units.

Ephrem's hymns sang words that were to have come from the mouth of Mary. Such an action gave voice to women in the ancient church. Idem., "Liturgy and Ethics in Ancient Syriac Christianity: Two Paradigms," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26 (2013): 300–316, for how hymns on vigil were formative for ethical concerns and practices in Ephrem's and Jacob of Sarug's contexts.

[52] *Virg*. 37.10

ܥܡܟ ܗܘܬ ܫܪܪܝ [ܫܪܪ] ܒܨܒܝ ܒܬ ܫܪܪ ܗܝ ܕܥܡ

Blake Hartung has recently discussed the challenges in dating Ephrem's *madrāšē* noting that most scholars have assumed that the hymns traveled as collective units. Hartung argues instead that the hymn collections were not made by Ephrem, but by later editors. As Hartung says, "to hypothesize a date of composition for a particular hymn cycle is to assume that Ephrem composed the hymns in that cycle at a particular time and collected them as a unit."[53]

Throughout this dissertation I have limited myself to using what I perceive to be authentic Ephrem texts. I do not include the commentary on the Diatessaron attributed to Ephrem. While this text is valuable for the study of the fourth century and of the Ephremic tradition, I do not believe that the text as it now stands is authentic to Ephrem, and rather represents the results of layers of redaction and editing.[54] Even if the commentary posseses sections that are authentic to Ephrem, the layers of textual redaction obscure those authentic portions. For the same reasons, I do not use texts from

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[53] Blake Hartung, "The Authorship and Dating of the Syriac Corpus attributed to Ephrem of Nisibis: A Reassessment," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 22, no. 2 (2018): 296–321.

[54] Christian Lange, *The Portrayal of Christ in the Syriac Commentary on the Diatessaron.* (Louven: Peeters, 2005), 36–68, highlights the many textual inconsistincies between the Armenian and Syriac versions. Edmund Beck, "Ephräm und der Diatessaronkommentar im Abschnitt über die Wunder beim Tode Jesu am Kreuz," *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993), 119, and "Der syrische Diatessaronkommentar zu der unvergebbaren Sünde wider den Heiligen Geist übersetzt und erklärt," 37, did not think that the Commentary on the Diatessaron was genuine to Ephrem, but was instead the result of an Ephremic school. Brock, when he encountered a quotation of Aphrahat in the text also determined that this was not genuine to Ephrem, "*Notulae Syriacae*: Some Miscellaneous Identifications," *Le Muséon* 108 (1995): 77. Even if that is the case it still indicates that Ephrem would have been familiar with the Diatessaron to some extent. Matthew R. Crawford, "Resolving Genealogical Ambiguity: Eusebius and (ps-)Ephrem on Luke 1.36," *Aramaic Studies* 14 (2016): 83–97, argues that the interpretation of Luke 1:36 in the commentary on the Diatessaron relies on an exegetical tradition from Eusebius of Caesarea. This highlights the difficulties in determining the authorship of the Commentary on the Diatessaron. If Crawford's argument is correct, then the Syriac author of the Commentary on the Diastessaron implemented ideas from Eusebius of Caesarea, a Greek. More importantly, the use of Eusebius's writings in a Syriac text complicates the relationship between Syriac Christianity and Greek Christianity. It is probable that Ephrem was at least aware of Eusebius.

the *Hymns on Epiphany*, while these texts have a rich pneumatology, I am not convinced of their authenticity to Ephrem or that their original pericopes are discernable.[55]

Outline of the Dissertation

As Barnes and Ayres have noted, theology about the Spirit is often rooted in polemical exegesis.[56] In an attempt to identify any exegetical or symbolical traditions from the Syriac milieu present in Ephrem, I examine Syriac literature prior to and contemporaneous with Ephrem, paying attention to the biblical texts used.[57] This investigation will highlight the feminine attributes of the Holy Spirit in Syriac (a theme Barnes calls 'consort pneumatology'), as well as the liturgical implications of Holy Spirit language. I lay the ground work for a genealogical approach to Ephrem's pneumatology.[58]

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[55] Gerard Rouwhorst, "Le Noyau le Plus Ancien des Hymnes de la Collection 'Sur L'Epiphanie' et la Question de Leur Authenticité," *VC* 66 (2012): 139–159, argues that there is a core of authentic Ephrem material in the *Epiphany* cycle. Rouwhorst goes so far as to suggest a method for determining which strophes are authentic to Ephrem. While Rouwhorst presents a compelling case, I am nonetheless unconvinced that we can have the confidence he has about the authenticity of parts of the *Epiphany* hymns. In addition, while what I am arguing about Ephrem's theology would be enhanced by the authenticity of the *Epiphany* hymns, my argument is not dependent upon their content.

[56] Ayres and Barnes, "Pneumatology," 166. Cf. J. Warren Smith, "The Trinity in the Fourth-Century Fathers" *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* eds. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford, 2011), 109–123, where Smith notes that fourth century theology was concerned with exegesis.

[57] This method is outlined in Michel R. Barnes, "Rereading Augustine's Theology of the Trinity," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 150–4. Barnes's method focuses on reading texts within their immediate context. Such a reading does not allow for texts written at a later date to impact the meaning of an older text. Because Ephrem's texts are almost impossible to date with certainty, I use the parameters of Ephrem's life (300–373CE) as the limits to texts with which Ephrem could have been familiar.

[58] While looking to Macarius Symeon can provide wonderful theological reflection and connections with Ephrem, because the dating of the Macarian corpus (370s–390s) has such a small over lap with Ephrem who dies in 373, I have excluded Macarius from my research. The most obvious reason to investigate Ephrem's relationship to Macarius is Ephrem's reference, in *HCH* 22, to the Messalians. Columba Stewart, *Working the Earth of the Heart* (Oxford: Oxford, 1991), 188–233, explored this connection in relationship to theologies of mixture and divine indwelling in Macarius and the Syriac

Throughout my dissertation I use the term pro-Nicene to refer to the movement of fourth century theologians supportive of Nicaea. Lewis Ayres argues that the three traits of the pro-Nicene movement are: "a clear version of the person and nature distinction," meaning that what is true of the divine nature is true of each person of the Trinity; that the eternal generation of the Son happens within the unknowable and united Godhead; and a "clear expression of the doctrine that the persons work inseparably."[59] One difficulty associated with Ayres's defining markers of pro-Nicene is that he appears to leave Athanasius out of the pro-Nicene movement.[60] In this dissertation when I use the term "pro-Nicene" I do so with a reference to Ayres's traits as a grounding principle, but with an expansive sense that can include Athanasius.

In the end, my thesis shows how Ephrem's argument for the divinity of the Holy Spirit is situated with the arguments in the Latin and Greek traditions. In so doing, I believe Ephrem's pneumatology is high and consistent with a pro-Nicene formulation of the Trinity. I suggest that Ephrem was aware of the broader debates, like the one concerning Eunomius, in the fourth century and that Ephrem's conclusions while the

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tradition. Cf. Deirdre Dempsey, "The Phrase 'Purity of Heart' in Early Syriac Writings," in *Purity of Heart in Early Ascetic and Monastic Literature* eds. Harriet Luckman and Linda Kulzer, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 31–44, for an overview of how Ephrem and the early Syriac tradition discusses the concept of the pure in heart.

[59] Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 236. Michel Barnes, "Stages in Nicene Theology," Forthcoming, uses pro-Nicene differently from Ayres. Barnes suggests that between Nicaea and the Council of Sirmium 357 that the party in favor of Nicaea ought to be called "neo-Nicene." The emphasis of the neo-Nicenes is on showing the continuity of the Father's and the Son's nature, while the pro-Nicenes show how the Father and Son are distinct.

[60] Khaled Anatolios, "Yes and No: Reflections on Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*," *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007): 154–155. In response Ayres, "A Response to the Critics of *Nicaea and Its Legacy*," *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007): 165, suggests that his pro-Nicene traits are at least present in Athanasius's later works saying, "some of the basic principles of pro-Nicene theology only enter his [Athanasius's] thought rather late and do not become structural (such as a focus on the unity and diversity of persons)."

same as the pro-Nicene movement lack the same exegetical decisions because Ephrem's genre does not allow him the same space for exegesis. Ephrem uses his poetic genres and plain interpretations to show that the Holy Spirit's work is connected to the baptismal and the doxological formulas used during baptism. Ephrem's high pneumatology prior to the Council of Constantinople 381 was due to his pro-Nicene commitments as evidenced in his understanding of the sacraments and liturgy.

In chapter one I argue that pneumatology in pre-Nicene Syriac literature is part of the larger conversation about the role of the Spirit. Language describing the Spirit prior to Nicaea focused on the same concerns as Greek and Latin Christianity. I highlight several key themes regarding Spirit language that are also present in the writings of Ephrem. I focus on the Spirit's role in baptism and Eucharist and note the distinctive features of the epiclesis found in the *Acts of Thomas*. Within this literature the Spirit is discussed as hovering like a mother bird, this also lends credence to the fact that Holy Spirit is referred to with feminine verb forms. The sanctifying presence of the Spirit is often spoken of with the metaphor of fire. In addition, I argue that while there is no united pre-Nicene Syriac pneumatology that there is still present in this literature the seeds of a pro-Nicene position.

In the second chapter I argue that Ephrem wrote some of his material in response to the Eunomian controversy. Ephrem's theory of names, while not of the same philosophical mindset as Basil of Caesarea or Gregory of Nyssa (meaning that Ephrem does not employ philosophical arguments based in philosophical sources), nevertheless indicates a context in which Ephrem was aware of and writing against the theology of Eunomius. Ephrem's theory of names allows him to assert the divinity of the Holy Spirit

because the Holy Spirit is named along with the Father and the Son as God. In addition, the Holy Spirit's essence is the same essence as the Father and the Son. For Ephrem the same hidden essence of Father, Son, and Spirit indicates that the Three are indeed One. Ephrem's theory and theology of language uses logic that is similar to Basil's in that Ephrem thinks that God's true names provide a notional understanding of who God is. In the same way, Basil taught that Scriptural names for God evoked a notion of who God is. By showing that Ephrem's theology is, in part, written in response to the anti-Nicene position places Ephrem's context within the pro-Nicene trajectory.

Ephrem's interpretation of the *ruḥā* over the primordial waters of the creation narrative could be read so as to indicate that he denies that the Holy Spirit is able to create. If this were the case, Ephrem would appear divergent from the pro-Nicene movement because he would not affirm the unity of divine operations. In chapter three I argue that Ephrem's literal reading of the Genesis narrative, coupled with his polemical context against Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani, discourage Ephrem from identifying the *ruḥā* over the waters of creation as the Holy Spirit. Ephrem instead argues that the *ruḥā* cannot be the Spirit and must be wind because the wind in that verse does not create. Ephrem thus argues that the Spirit creates, the wind in Gen 1:2b does not, therefore the *ruḥā* is wind and not the Spirit. This insight coupled with Ephrem's affirmation of Ps. 33:6 as a reference to the Holy Spirit indicates that Ephrem held that the creative action was an operation of the Spirit. Ephrem establishes the baptismal font and the sacraments as the locus of the Spirit's creative activity.

Because Ephrem affirms the Holy Spirit's capacity to create, the work of Christian baptism is the transformation of the baptizand by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In chapter four I argue that Ephrem's theology of baptism and Eucharist fits within the pro-Nicene trajectory and finds a striking parallel in the thought of Cyril of Jerusalem, especially in their understanding of the dove from Genesis 8. The Spirit hovers over the baptismal waters like the wind that brooded over the waters of creation. Ephrem placed a high importance on the pre-baptismal anointing and the work of the Holy Spirit in the anointing and baptism. The Spirit works through the sacraments to purify and sanctify individuals. Only God is able to purify and sanctify sinners. If the Holy Spirit does what only God can do, then the Holy Spirit must be God. Ephrem's interpretation of Noah's ark takes on a typology of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan with the dove representing the Holy Spirit and is consistent with the thinking of other pro-Nicenes. In the sacrament of the Eucharist the Spirit is mixed and mingled in the bread and wine and through this gift individual people overcome the enemy.

Lewis Ayres argues that one mark of pro-Nicene pneumatology is the doctrine of the undiminished giver.[61] In the fifth chapter I argue that Ephrem through his trinitarian image of the sun or fire, its ray of light, and its warmth, affirms the doctrine of the undiminished giver in reference to the Holy Spirit. As such, Ephrem's trinitarian theology is consistent with the pro-Nicene movement in that he affirms that God is undiminished in giving. God gives the Holy Spirit as proof that God dwells with each of God's people, yet God is not lessened through this gift. Ephrem articulates that because the Holy Spirit does not diminish, this means that the status of the Holy Spirit is the same as God the Father. Ephrem uses mixture and mingling language, that bears similarity to the Stoic

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[61] Lewis Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver': Didymus the Blind's *De spiritu sancto* and the development of Nicene pneumatology," in *The Holy Spirit in the Fathers of the Church: Proceedings of the Seventh International Patristics Conference, Maynooth, 2008* edited by D. Vincent Twomey SVD and Janet E. Rutherford (London: Four Courts Press, 2010), 57–72.

uses of mixture, in order to show the unity and distinction of the persons of the Trinity. In so doing, Ephrem avoids Sabellian modalism. He highlights that the persons of the Trinity are at once unified and distinct, mixed but separated.

In the end, I show that Ephrem's theology of the Holy Spirit and of the Trinity follows the trends of the pro-Nicene movement and is contemporaneous with the developments in the Greek Church. Ephrem places the Holy Spirit at the same status as both the Father and the Son, while affirming the trinitarian order of Father, Son, Spirit. The name Holy Spirit within the taxis of divine names indicates that the Spirit is beyond human capacity to understand. The Spirit creates and thus is evident in the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. The distinction between creator and created runs throughout Ephrem's work and he places the Spirit on the side of creator. The creative act does not exhaust the Spirit, who is undiminished in giving. These affirmations of the Spirit's status and role demonstrate Ephrem's integration of the theological themes and arguments found in the pro-Nicene movement into Syriac idioms. While it is clear that Ephrem lacked facility with Greek, his trinitarian theology bears marked similarities to the theology of Basil and the pro-Nicene trajectory. Ephrem's theology is not divorced from the Greek and Latin traditions, rather it is distanced by language and furthered by its own context.

CHAPTER ONE: PRE-NICENE SYRIAC SPIRIT LANGUAGE

Introduction

Syriac scholars often encourage people to read Ephrem on his own terms.[1] The inherent challenge in such a reading is that the context out of which Ephrem's life and writings comes is obscure and the details are debated. If Ephrem's theology arises out of some degree of a Semitic form of Christianity, how much awareness can he have had of the fourth century theological debates, occurring in Latin and Greek? How much knowledge did Ephrem have of the rest of the late antique Christian world when he lived in Nisibis? Did he discover the diversity of the Christian tradition only after he arrived in Edessa? What distinguished his heterodox opponents from those found throughout the Roman Empire? All of these questions are complicated by the difficulties in interpreting the limited data of the earliest Syriac Christianity.

Despite the clear missionary effort expressed in the *Acts of the Apostles*, knowledge of how Christianity reached Syriac speakers at the eastern edge of the Roman Empire and into the Persian Empire is still a mystery.[2] This mystery is deepened by the

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[1] Kees den Biesen, *Simple and Bold*, XIX-XX, notes that Ephrem has been misunderstood because scholars have assumed a Western superiority over Ephrem's non-rational mode of discourse. Biesen follows T. Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique*, in asserting that Ephrem's theology is rooted in symbolism, a symbolism that has multiple meanings. Biesen and Mansour focus on symbolism as the defining quality of Ephrem's thought, for example Biesen, page 50, says, "it is not enough to analyze Ephrem's use of specific symbols or images or to interpret individual texts within the context of Ephrem's writings…Ephrem's symbolical theology can only be properly understood by a reflection that takes all of these elements into due account, but at the same time transcends them by its own creative thought." Jeffrey Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 43, suggests that reading Ephrem on his own terms means "he is virulently anti-subordinationist, but his writings also suggest a real ambivalence about Nicaea and its *homoousios.*"

[2] J.C.L. Gibson, "From Qumran to Edessa *or* The Aramaic Speaking Church Before and After 70 A.D." *Annual Leeds Oriental Society V* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), argues that Jews emigrated out of Palestine after 70CE and settled in places like Edessa. This settling created a Jewish-like Christianity that focused on asceticism, dualism of body and soul, and was not interested in Greek philosophy. Han Drijvers, *Cults and*

obscure origins of the Syriac language. As Jeffrey Wickes notes, "we can see Syriac Christianity's earliest development only in shadowy form: through scattered pieces of inscriptions, biblical translations, obscure religious poems, speculative treatises, and fantastical narratives."[3] It is not clear how and when the Syriac dialect of Aramaic formed, but Syriac inscriptions date from as early as the year 6CE.[4] The term Syriac does

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Beliefs at Edessa, 9–10, postulated that Christianity reached Edessa because of Christian missionary work starting in Antioch, with Christians traveling the Silk Road, bringing their evangelistic message. J.B. Segal, "When did Christianity come to Edessa?" in *Middle East Studies and Libraries: A Felicitation Volume for Professor J.D. Pearson* ed. B.C. Bloomfield (London: Mansell, 1980), proposes a hybrid of the two preceding theories with a twofold movement of Christianity to Edessa. He suggests that Christianity first came to Edessa from Nisibis, with a second movement coming out of Antioch. In addition to the advancement of Christianity to Syriac speakers, the issue of Syriac Christianity's relationship with Judaism is also of interest. Robert Murray, "The Characteristics of Earliest Syriac Christianity" in *East of Byzantium* 3–16; and Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* vol. 1 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1960), 4, romanticize the Semitic character of early Syriac Christianity to the point of denying Greek philosophical understanding and motivations. Cf. Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* 343–347. A.F.J. Klijn, "Christianity in Edessa and the Gospel of Thomas: On Barbara Ehlers *Kann das Thomasevangelium aus Edessa stammen?*" *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972): 70–77, argues that Christianity in Edessa came from a hybrid Jewish-Christian community that slowly lost its more Jewish characteristics. In contrast, Michael Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1999), argues for a Jewish origin to Christianity in the Syriac speaking world because the Peshitta was a translation from Hebrew that would have required non-rabbinic Jews to translate.

[3] Jefferey Wickes, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: The Hymns on Faith* (Washington DC: The Catholic Univserity of America Press, 2015), 3.

[4] Han J.W. Drijvers and John F. Healy, *The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osrhoene*: *Texts, Translations and Commentary* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 140–144. Because of Syriac's grammatical similarities to Aramaic, what determines whether an inscription is Syriac is the script and provenance. One complexity, however, of deciphering these early Syriac inscriptions is that "there can…be no narrow and clear-cut definition of the early Syriac script," 1. The Syriac language developed three principal scripts: *eṣtrangelo, serṭa*, and *East Syriac* (sometimes called Nestorian). Regarding the inscriptions and texts in Edessa and Osrhoene, Drijvers and Healy note that "the language of the corpus is, therefore, to be regarded as the first stage in the formation of classical Syriac, reflecting a revival in the fortunes of Aramaic as a prestige language in the Edessa region (with parallels to this revival at Palmyra and Hatra)," 34. John F. Healey, "The Early History of the Syriac Script: A Reassessment," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 45 (2000): 64, argues that the development of Syriac script began with two scripts, one cursive and one block, both resembling *eṣtrangelo*. Later, in the 8th century *serṭa* took over for *eṣtrangelo* but "was not essentially new" because there was already a cursive style script from the beginning. While this first stage of Syriac is evident in the inscriptions, it does not mean that these inscriptions are equivalent to classical Syriac. John F. Healey, "The Beginnings of Syriac in Context: Language and Script in Early Edessa and in Palmyra," *ARAM* 28 (2016): 463–470, argues that the barriers between Old Syriac inscriptions and contemporary forms of Aramaic in Palmyra were fluid and that the script of the inscriptions is not equivalent to language. These early inscriptions are sometimes called Old Syriac Documents. The documents have been helpful in providing chronological information concerning the Abgarid dynasty in Edessa. The information in these documents indicates that the end of the Abgarid dynasty was around 212, when Edessa become a Roman colony. For an overview of these documents see A.M. Butts, "Old Syriac Documents," in the *Gorgrias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 314–317.

not come from the Greek name for the province of Syria, but is instead how the speakers of Syriac identified themselves and their language (*suryāyā* ܣܘܪܝܝܐ). The language appears to have originated from and flourished in Edessa, modern day Saniurfa in South-east Turkey.[5] Syriac is a dialect of Aramaic akin to eastern Aramaic dialects like Mandaean and the Babylonian Talmud; this means that Syriac is not western, Palestinian Aramaic, which was the language of Jesus (although they are linked).[6] Literature in Syriac flourished from the third century CE onward and became a crucial part of how the Greek philosophical tradition entered into the Islamic world.[7]

This chapter discusses the trends and themes in pre-Nicene Syriac language regarding the Spirit in order to provide the context for Ephrem's emergent pneumatology. I show that language for the Spirit in pre-Nicene Syriac Christianity is characterized by its feminine and maternal imagery. It seems that the emphasis on feminine language is due, in part, to the fact that the Syriac word for Spirit (*ruḥā*) is feminine. The Spirit is also described with language evocative of birds, with the specific action of hovering. The concept of the Spirit hovering has long-lasting theological importance throughout the Christian tradition with special emphasis in later Syriac authors. Lastly, I note that Spirit language in pre-Nicene Syriac texts is often connected with liturgical actions. These three

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[5] J.F. Coakely, *Robinson's Paradigms and Exercises in Syriac Grammar* (Oxford: Oxford, 2013), 1. Wheeler Thackston, *Introduction to Syriac* (Bethesda, MD: Ibex, 1999), vii, notes that "Syriac belongs to the Levantine (northwest) group of the central branch of the West Semitic languages together with all other forms of Aramaic (Babylonian Aramaic, Imperial Aramaic, Palestinian Aramaic, Samaritan, Mandaean) and Canaanite (Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Phoenician)."

[6] Coakely, *Robinson's*, 1.

[7] Thackston, viii. Cf. Daniel King, *The Earliest Syriac Translation of Aristotle's Categories* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1–17. King notes that Aristotle is present in Syriac Christianity by the year 600. The importance of this early date is that some western philosophers had access to an Arabic version of Aristotle because of Syriac translators. King does caution that, "Western scholasticism often took its initial impetus from the tradition of the Arabic Aristotle, and yet quickly thereafter gained a direct access to the Greek original which superseded the 'Arabic' route," 2.

themes are not exhaustive, but they offer a broad understanding of Spirit vocabulary in Syriac texts prior to Ephrem.[8]

I proceed first with an overview of the available sources from which to develop such an early pneumatology. I note these sources' relationships to the origins of Syriac Christianity, touching upon the issues related to Edessa as the birthplace of Syriac Christianity. Finally, I introduce the spirit language in the themes of feminine and maternal language, bird-like imagery, and liturgy.[9] Overall, pre-Nicene Syriac authors speak of the Spirit as distinct from Christ, yet at times, fulfilling the same purposes and actions. The Spirit is referenced with feminine grammar and feminine imagery, but this imagery does not entail a gendered divinity. While Ephrem does not engage these texts in a direct manner, he does use feminine, bird-like, and liturgical language in his descriptions of the Holy Spirit's work. These texts then serve as a background to understanding the Syriac context out of which Ephrem's thought arose. In the end, what ties together the pre-Nicene authors' thoughts about the Holy Spirit is their shared belief that the Spirit of God is working in the world for its good.

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[8] The grouping of pre-Nicene Syriac texts is based on the common language of the texts under consideration and this is an artificial grouping. Nonetheless, this is grouping serves to how Syriac texts prior to Ephrem describe and discuss the concept of Spirit. It is important to note that none of the texts that come under consideration will evidence a trinitarian theology consistent with the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). Despite the lack of a clear trinitarian theology, these texts still show a nascent trinitarianism in their descriptions of the Spirit's actions. The lack of Nicene trinitarian thought is expected in texts that pre-date Nicaea.

[9] I do not include the theme of angelomorphic pneumatology because I believe that Ephrem tacitly rejects the idea. According to Barnes, 174, angelomorphic pneumatology is "a wholly Jewish phenomenon: it predates Christianity and, in the Common Era, sometimes parallels Christian theology of the Holy Spirit." Bogdan Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 159–188, and "Early Christian Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Aphrahat the Persian Sage," *Hugoye* 11 (2011): 161–205, argues that Aphrahat implements angelomorphic pneumatology. Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), drew attention to the divine-like powers of the angel of the Lord. Cf. Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998). John R. Levison, "The Angelic Spirit in Early Judaism," *SBL 1995 Seminar Papers* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1995), 464–493. Idem., *The Spirit in First Century Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

The Sources and Origins of Pre-Nicene Syriac Theology

The religious climate of Mesopotamia in the second to fourth centuries CE facilitated multiple religions ranging from pagan to Christian. The religious nature of Syriac writings is evidenced by the fact that the oldest Syriac manuscripts are copies of the Bible and religious texts.[10] The question of Christianity's origin in the Syriac milieu is complicated by the lack of available evidence. In this section, I discuss the origins of Christianity in Mesopotamia, with special reference to Edessa. I then transition into a discussion of the sources that form the background of pre-Nicene Syriac Christianity.

Christianity in the Syriac milieu is reported by Eusebius of Caesarea to have come to Edessa with the arrival of Thaddeus and his healing of, preaching to, and subsequent conversion of King Abgar Ukama the Black.[11] Eusebius relates that Abgar wrote to Jesus and invited him to come heal the king's ailment. In addition, Abgar wrote that after

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[10] William Henry Paine Hatch, *An Album of Dated Syriac Manuscripts* (Boston: The American Academy of Arts and Sciences), 1946. The earliest known Syriac manuscript (BM, Add. MS. 12150) dates to CE411 and is housed in the British Museum. BM, Add. MS. 12150 contains the Clementine *Recognitions*, Titus of Bostra's *Four Discourses Against the Manichees*, Eusebius of Caesarea's *On the Theophany*, and writings about the martyrs. Robert L. Bensly, J. Rendel Harris, and F. Crawford Burkitt *The Four Gospels in Syriac transcribed from the Sinaitic Palimpsest* with introduction by Agnes Smith Lewis, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894), Syriac Sinaiticus designated syr^{s} is a palimpsest of the Gospels from the late 4th century. It was discovered in 1892 by Agnes Lewis Smith at the monastery of St. Catherine's in Sinai. Because it is a palimpsest, syr^{s} is not always legible and thus incomplete. The Curetonian version of the Bible syr^{cur} dates to the 5th century. There are Syriac inscriptions which predate these manuscripts and these inscriptions are not Christian in origin, however, the earliest extant Syriac texts are religious and Christian.

[11] Eusebius is the first witness to this tradition, writing in the late third to early fourth century. He claimed that he found this document in the archives at Edessa. After Eusebius there is paucity of information about this story and text with no references to it for about 100 years. The Syriac version of the story, which dates to the early 400s, was first published in 1876 by George Phillips, *The Doctrine of Addai, The Apostle, Now First Edited in a Complete Form in the Original Syriac* (London: Trübner and Co., 1876). George Howard, *The Teaching of Addai* (Ann Arbor, MI: SBL, 1981), republished the text with a new English translation. Regarding the Abgarid dynasty, Ute Possekel, "Friendship with Rome: Edessan Politics and Culture in the Time of King Abgar VIII," *ARAM* 28 (2016): 453–461, argues that the Edessan kingdom maintained a modicum on independence from both the Roman and Persian empires through strategic friendships with Roman rulers.

healing him, Jesus could live in Edessa, because the city, although small, is sufficient for both great men.[12] According to Eusebius, Jesus wrote back to Abgar and declined the invitation because it would not fulfill his mission. Still, Jesus promised to send someone to Abgar after his mission was completed.[13] After the death and resurrection of Jesus, Eusebius notes that Thomas was compelled to send Thaddeus to Edessa. Upon his arrival, Thaddeus stays with Tobias and begins healing people in the power of God.[14] Word of the healings makes its way to King Abgar, who summons Thaddeus to court. Abgar is healed and converts to Christianity, thus establishing Edessa as a Christian city, shortly after the resurrection of Jesus.

While the details of this conversion account are fraught with historical inaccuracies—for instance, the names of bishops and kings do not align with other known timelines—nevertheless, the Thaddeus legend emphasizes the perceived antiquity of Christianity in Edessa.[15] This attestation is questioned by Walter Bauer, who suggests that the antecedent of Christianity in Edessa was heresy. The orthodox Christian position of the Church of Edessa came about, according to Bauer, as a reaction to the Ur-

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[12] *Eccl. Hist.* 1.13.8. πόλις δὲ μικροτάτη μοί ἐστι καὶ σεμνή, ἥτις ἐξαρκεῖ ἀμφοτέροις.

[13] *Eccl. Hist.* 1.13.10. περὶ δὲ οὗ ἔγραψάς μοι ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σέ, δέον ἐστὶ πάντα δι’ ἃ ἀπεστάλην ἐνταῦθα, πληρῶσαι καὶ μετὰ τὸ πληρῶσαι οὕτως ἀναληφθῆναι πρὸς τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με. καὶ ἐπειδὰν ἀναληφθῶ, ἀποστελῶ. σοί τινα τῶν μαθητῶν μου, ἵνα ἰάσηταί σου τὸ πάθος καὶ ζωήν σοι καὶ τοῖς σὺν σοὶ παράσχηται.

[14] *Eccl. Hist.* 1.13.11 ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ. Later in 1.13.19 Abgar notes that the healings that Thaddeus does in Edessa are performed by the power of God (σὺν δυνάμει τοῦ θεοῦ ταῦτα ποιεῖς). Twice, then Eusebius mentions that Thaddeus’ works of healing are done in the power of God. It appears that this power is separate from Christ.

[15] Sebastian Brock, “Eusebius and Syriac Christianity,” in *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, ed. H. W. Attridge and G. Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 212–34, argues that there is no historical basis for the legend and that the legend represents an orthodox faction in Edessa’s claim to antiquity and authority. In addition, Brock suggests that Eusebius did not use the city’s archives, but that the *DA* did.

movements of heresies.[16] Bauer's position has met with significant criticism regarding his methodology.[17] Nevertheless, Bauer's thesis calls attention to the complex theological nature of the development of doctrine in early Syriac sources. Bauer's thesis complicates the Thaddeus legend by suggesting that it is a total fabrication to lay a claim of prior antiquity to Christianity.

A Syriac version of the Thaddeus legend from the fifth century relates a longer, more detailed record of events. Sidney Griffith argues that the Syriac version, called the *Doctrina Addai* (*DA* hereafter), represents the theological interests of fifth century Syriac Christianity because of the Christological arguments present in the text.[18] Griffith notes that the sections of the *DA* that should be the focus for scholars are the speeches made by Addai. In making his argument, Griffith suggests the work was completed around 420CE. What is evident from the *DA* and Eusebius's account is that the idea that Christianity was present in Edessa from an early stage formed prior to Eusebius and then lay dormant until the early fifth century.[19] This means that while it remains improbable for the story to go

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[16] Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy In Earliest Christianity* translated by a team from the Philadelphia seminar on Christian origins, edited by Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (London: SCM Press, 1972), 1–43.

[17] Arland J. Hultgren, *The Rise of Normative Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994). Cf. Han J. Drijvers, "Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity," *The Second Century* 2 (1982): 157–176, where he argues that the apparent heterodox and heretical views found in early Syriac Christianity might owe their origin to the cult of Mani. Drijvers suggests that the Manichean religion took texts that were already Christian and orthodox in order to change them to match up with the Manichaean religion. H.E.W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1954), 39–94, offers an early English response to Bauer's thesis. Turner, 80, objects to Bauer's understanding of orthodoxy: "the nature of orthodoxy is richer and more varied than Bauer himself allows. Its underlying basis lies in the religious facts of Christianity itself. It can therefore find without the loss of its essential unity different expressions as its data pass through the crucible of varied Christian minds."

[18] Sidney H. Griffith, "The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm of Christian Thought in Edessa in the Fifth Century," *Hugoye* 6, no. 2 (2009): 269–292.

[19] This does not mean Christian origins in Mesopotamia were linked to Edessa. In fact, Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent, *Missionary Stories and the Formation of Syriac Churches* (Oakland:

back to a historical event, it is clear that the argument for Edessa's Christian past goes back to at least the third century.[20]

One of the reasons pre-Nicene Syriac theology's origins are ambiguous is that the literature itself is limited. The earliest Syriac texts are *Odes of Solomon*[21] and the *Acts of Judas Thomas,*[22] which were both composed in the second to third centuries CE. Han

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University of California, 2015), 36–55, argues that the missionary stories like that of the *DA*, were attempts to validate the orthodox population in Edessa. See also David Taylor, "The Coming of Christianity to Mesopotamia," in *The Syriac World* ed. Daniel King (London: Routledge, 2019), 68–87, who argues that these origin narratives like the *DA* and the *Acts of Mar Mari*, a text about Christianity's expansion into Iranian Mesopotamia, are not related to any historical data. Rather, than a fantastical narrative about Christianity's expansion eastward, Taylor suggests, 83, that the gospel migrated east "by countless anonymous Christians—lay people, deacons, priests, and ascetics—some by choice and some as captives of foreign power."

[20] Ilaria Ramelli, "Possible Historical Traces in the *Doctrina Addai*," *Hugoye* 9 (2006): 51–127, argues for historical kernels in the *DA* even though the *DA* is rife with historical inaccuracies. For instance, Ramelli suggests that the correspondence between Abgar and Tiberius bears marks of being a historical event.

[21] Michael Lattke, *Odes of Solomon: A Commentary*, trans. Marianne Ehrhardt (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 3–11, provides a detailed introduction to the early witnesses and manuscripts that make up the *Odes*. The earliest manuscript dating from the late second to early third century are in Greek while Syriac manuscripts are from the 9th century and later. Nonetheless, Lattke questions whether there is an allusion to the *Odes* in Ephrem's *H.Pard.* 7.21 and notes that if there is then by Ephrem's time there was a Syriac translation of the *Odes*. Lattke argues that the *Odes* were written in the first quarter of the second century based upon what he sees as the possible dependence of other texts (Tertullian, Miniscus Felix, et al) on the *Odes*. Lattke suggests that the original language of the *Odes* was Greek and that they were translated into Syriac. The *Odes*, Lattke argues, have a large overlap of communities, including Judaism, Gnosticism, and Christianity. In contrast to Lattke, James Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 14, suggests that the Syriac manuscripts are closer to the autograph. Charlesworth, "Odes of Solomon," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 2 ed. James Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 726–727, argues for around 100CE for the original composition of the *Odes.* According to Charlesworth, "The Odes of Solomon and the Gospel of John," *Catholic Bbiblical Quarterly* 35 (1973): 320, the *Odes* share a strong relationship with the Gospel of John and are from the same religious environment. Robert Grant, "Odes of Solomon and the Church of Antioch," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 63 (1944): 377, suggests that the *Odes*, coming from Edessa, were even known to Ignatius of Antioch. The rival narratives about the *Odes* originate with the manuscripts. Prior to J. Rendel Harris's discovery of the Syriac manuscript and subsequent publication in 1909, there were sparse references to the *Odes* in Lactantius and Gnostic writings. This led to the assumption that the *Odes* were Gnostic in character. Drijvers, "East of Antioch: Forces and Structures in the Development of Early Syriac Theology," in *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity* (London: Variorum, 1984), 7, argues that the *Odes* are from the third century and represent an early form of Syriac Marcionism.

[22] The question of which language the *ATh* was first written in is rooted in the fact that the Greek manuscript tradition is older than the Syriac. A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction-Text-Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 1–7, argues that the Syriac text was first and that soon after there was a Greek translation. The current Syriac text used this Greek translation to supplement the original. Harold W. Attridge, "The Original Language of the Acts of Thomas," in *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies on the*

Drijvers notes that while it is difficult to discern whether these texts were first written in Greek or Syriac, the Mesopotamian culture of the day was bilingual, and thus it was inconsequential which language was first. Because literate people of the time and region would have been bilingual, Drijvers argues that the *Odes* and the *ATh* could have been written in both Greek and Syriac contemporaneously and distributed in both languages.[23] In essence, Drijvers thought that if people were bilingual, and if the texts were translated into either Syriac or Greek soon after being penned, then the original language is not the most important aspect of the text.

The *Odes* are a collection of 42 poems, most of which are preserved in Syriac, and are of an indeterminate Christian character. The *Odes* are esoteric poems, some of which were found among Gnostic writings. This has led some scholars to highlight the Gnostic interpretations of particular odes and to see within the collection a Gnostic leaning.[24] The *Odes* provide a body of literature that is a similar poetic genre to that of Ephrem and highlight the key role that poetry played in Syriac theology.[25] In spite of

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Hebrew Bible, Intertestamental Judaism, and Christian Origins presented to John Strugnell on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, eds. Harold W. Attridge, John J. Collins, and Thomas H. Tobin, SJ (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 244, argues that Syriac was the original language of the *ATh*. F.C. Burkitt, "The Original Language of the Acts of Judas Thomas," *JTS* 1:2 (1900): 280–290, argues for the priority of the Syriac text based on the mistranslations of the Syriac in the Greek text.

[23] Han Drijvers, "East of Antioch," 3.

[24] Five Odes are found in the *Pistis Sophia* in full or incomplete forms (Ode 1, 5, 6, 22, and 25). As Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament:* Vol. 2*, History and Literature of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 218, says, "It is still an open question whether the *Odes of Solomon* should therefore be called a gnostic hymnbook. Although the gnostic character of many of these concepts cannot be doubted, it is quite likely that gnostic images and terms expressing the individual's hope for a future life and resurrection were not limited to communities committed to gnostic theology but had become much more widespread. If this were the case, this oldest Christian hymnal attests that Gnosticism affected the language of early Christian piety in Syria very deeply indeed."

[25] J. Rendel Harris, "Ephrem's Use of the *Odes of Solomon*," *The Expositor* series 8 volume 3 (1912): 113–119, argues that Ephrem was dependent upon the *Odes* in writing the *Hymns on Epiphany*. Harris notes that Ephrem appeared to be using a Greek version of the *Odes* and not the Syriac. Because Ephrem was limited in his ability to read Greek and because the *HE* were not authentic to Ephrem, Harris's

their undetermined Christian character, the *Odes* received a wide readership in both orthodox and heterodox communities.

The Holy Spirit is referenced numerous times throughout the *Odes.* These references signify that the Spirit is of a higher status than humanity and the angels, and at times even higher than the Son. Concerning Spirit language in the *Odes,* Michael Lattke says:

> The "Spirit of the Lord" teaches without falsehood (3:10a) and is able to "speak" indirectly (6:2a; 16:5a) but is also the object of "hymns" (13:2b) and is praised as the "holy Spirit" by "our spirits" (6:7b). The "cithara of your holy Spirit" (14:8a) also belongs to this hymnic context. It is by his "holy Spirit" (τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ in 𝔊) that the Most High performs the circumcision of the speaking "I" (11:2a). Two passages mention the "Father" and the "Son"; one (23:22b) also has the "holy Spirit," and the other speaks of that "Spirit of holiness" (19:2c; cf. 19:4a) that can perform the most extravagant feats. These passages are influenced by Matt 28:19, later the "point of departure for the doctrine of the Trinity," and similar "triadic formulations" in the New Testament (cf. 2 Cor. 13:13).[26]

Lattke is reticent to find the beginnings of trinitarian theology in the *Odes*, but there are several instances within the *Odes* where the Spirit is mentioned along with the Father and the Son.

In the *Acts of Thomas,* the early Syriac tradition is portrayed in its missional activity of spreading the gospel. The missionary activity of the apostle Thomas is communicated through a novella or hagiographical account whose fantastical details cast doubt upon the historical reliability of the material.[27] The *ATh* is a Christian novel about

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judgment that Ephrem knew the *Odes* is not correct. What can be said is that the Ephremic community may have been familiar with the *Odes*, but there is still doubt as to whether Ephrem himself knew the *Odes*.

[26] Michael Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*: Excursus 36: "Spirit" and "Wind" in the *Odes of Solomon*, 495. 𝔊 refers to the Greek version of the *Odes* from *Papyrus Bodmer XI.*

[27] A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction-Text-Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1962) is the standard English translation of the Syriac text. Cf. Han Drijvers, *Acts of Thomas,* in *New Testament Apocrypha,* vol. 2*, Writings Relating to the Apostles; Apocalypses and Related Subjects,* ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 2:322–411. In this chapter

Judas Thomas, who travels to and evangelizes India. Judas Thomas promotes an ascetic lifestyle in which celibacy is a chief value, and this theme is further contextualized in the reception of the text. Epiphanius claimed that the *ATh* was part of the canon of Scriptures for the Encratites who were a heretical sect concerned with sexual purity and celibacy.[28] The *ATh* appears to have been composed in or near Edessa. This is evidenced by the veneration of Thomas in Edessa which continued after the *ATh* was written. While the earliest manuscripts of the *ATh* are in Greek it now appears that the original text was written in Syriac.

Despite the fact that the Greek text of the *ATh* is often given priority[29] in the formation of the text, Harold Attridge argues that Syriac was the original language of composition for the *ATh*.[30] The many differences between the Greek and Syriac texts are best explained if Syriac is the original language. Attridge notes that the best explanation for several awkward Greek constructions is that the Greek represents a Semitic set phrase found in Syriac. He says, "These cases at least provide disjunctive errors indicating that the extant Greek is not the source of the Syriac. Their large number enhances the probability that the Greek was translated from the Syriac."[31] Attridge shows that the problems in the Greek text of the *ATh* are best explained as either semiticisms, a

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the translations are my own from the Syriac text of Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,* 1:171ff., 2:146ff. For a synopsis of the whole work see Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent, *Missionary Stories*, 17–21.

[28] Epiphanius, *Panarion,* 2.1.5

[29] G. Bornkamm, "The Acts of Thomas," in E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 2.428. Susan Myers, *Spirit Epiclesis in the Acts of Thomas* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 17–18.

[30] Harold W. Attridge, "The Original Language of the Acts of Thomas," 244. Cf. F.C. Burkitt, "The Original Language of the Acts of Judas Thomas," *JTS* 1:2 (1900): 280–290.

[31] Attridge, "Original Language," 244.

translation of a corrupt Syriac text, or a misunderstanding of the Syriac language. The breadth of evidence supporting a Syriac original leads Attridge to remark, "It is, however, clear that the range of witnesses now available to us ultimately depends on a Syriac original."[32] While the earliest manuscripts are Greek, the Greek text relies on an original Syriac text that is not extant.

While the *ATh* in both the Greek and Syriac recensions shows a strong pneumatology, perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Spirit language in the *ATh* are the epicleses calling down the Spirit over baptismal oil. The Spirit in these passages is referred to as mother, referenced as having wings and hovering, and comes to baptizands in order to purify them and make them children of God.

The *Odes* and the *ATh* both come out of bilingual contexts and exhibit in their textual tradition the bilingual nature of Mesopotamia during the Roman and Persian empires.[33] These texts highlight the challenges of establishing the origin of Christianity in the Syriac milieu. What seems clear though is that the early Syriac Christians were not hidden away from the rest of the world. As Ute Possekel notes, "early Syriac literature has a number of distinctive features, but this should not be understood to imply that Syriac authors were isolated within their linguistic milieu."[34] Syriac speakers lived in

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[32] Attridge, "Original Language," 250.

[33] I have chosen to omit references to Bardaisan's *Book of Laws and Countries* even though it dates to before Nicaea. The antiquity of the *BLC* is evidenced in Eusebius of Caesarea's references to the work. However, there is little to no language in the text that references the Spirit or the Spirit's activity. In addition, Ephrem's polemics against Bardaisan do not reflect knowledge of the *BLC* or its teachings. The *BLC* is best considered a work of Bardaisan's school because in the *BLC* Bardaisan is a character who functions in the same role as Socrates does in Platonic dialogues. It is not probable that the *BLC* is a product of Bardaisan's pen.

[34] Ute Possekel, "The Emergence of Syriac Literature to AD 400," in *The Syriac World* ed. Daniel King (London: Routledge, 2019), 310. This concept is further corroborated with the evidence from inscriptions. John F. Healey, "Pre-Christian Religions of Syriac Regions," *The Syriac World* ed. Daniel King (London: Routledge, 2019), 63, says, "All the indications are that Edessa was thoroughly Hellenised

towns through which passed inter-empiric trade with people and languages from all over the world.

Across the border of the Roman Empire we find the only other Syriac author from the fourth century prior to Ephrem, Aphrahat the Persian Sage. Aphrahat wrote *The Demonstrations,* a collection of 23 sermon-like exhortations or discourses. From internal evidence, these *Demonstrations* can be dated to 345CE at the latest.[35] The *Demonstrations* are a mixture of sermon and letter, with each discourse covering a specific topic. Aphrahat is regarded as a biblical theologian because his writing is replete with both quotations and allusions to the Bible. Aphrahat does not mention the council of Nicaea in his writings and seems to be writing as an ascetic or proto-monastic. It is for this reason that I consider Aphrahat part of pre-Nicene Syriac Christianity. Syriac Christianity was known for its emphasis on ascetic living and parallels have been made between Syriac Christian communities comprised of children of the covenant (*bnay qyāmā*) to the communities at Qumran.[36] Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* appears to have been written for such an ascetic community.

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long before it became part of a Roman province in 212/213 CE. Its elite was well prepared, therefore, for engagement with the debates in the Greek-speaking church as they emerged in the third and fourth centuries CE."

[35] In Demonstration 22, Aphrahat notes that the first ten demonstrations were written in the year 648 of Alexander's kingdom (336–337CE) with the next twelve composed in the year 655 of the same kingdom, which Aphrahat says is the 35th year for the king of Persia (343–344CE). Aphrahat informs us in Demonstration 23 that he composed it in the year 655 of Alexander's kingdom which is the 36th year of Shapur of Persia (345CE). For an introduction to the textual history of the Demonstrations see Edward J. Duncan, *Baptism in the Demonstrations of Aphraates the Persian Sage* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1945), 1–13.

[36] Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20, no. 1 (1973): 1–19. Sidney H. Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in *Asceticism,* eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1997), 220–245. Idem., "Monks, 'Singles', and the 'Sons of the Covenant,' Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology," in *ΕΥΛΟΓΗΜΑ: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, SJ* eds. E Carr, Stefano Parenti, and Abraham Thiermeyer (Rome: Centro Studi S. Anselmo, 1993), 141–160.

There is no distinct, unified Syriac theology prior to Ephrem, and connecting texts like the *Odes*, *ATh*, and *The Demonstrations* is an artificial grouping. The fact that there is so little available material for Syriac theology prior to 350CE necessitates reading what is available as a literary unit. This unit encompasses two empires and at least two languages. Syriac pneumatology prior to Ephrem is situated within a variety of contexts. As noted above, several motifs guide early Syriac thought on the Holy Spirit: feminine and maternal language, the concept of hovering, and the Spirit's activity in the sacraments. Each of these concepts is undergirded by the Christian belief in the experience of God's presence. The pneumatology of early Syriac theology is rooted in the Christian experience within the life of the believer and the church.

Themes in Pre-Nicene Syriac Spirit-Language

In this section I discuss several themes in pre-Nicene Syriac texts that pertain to the Spirit; feminine and maternal language, hovering or bird-like language, and liturgical language are all thematic of pre-Nicene Syriac texts. Each of these themes is also present in how Ephrem speaks about the Spirit. To be clear, there is no conclusive evidence that Ephrem read or was aware of these pre-Nicene texts. The connections that can be made to Ephrem show how Ephrem was part of the Syriac milieu.

Feminine and Maternal Language

One prominent theme in Syriac theology prior to Nicaea is the use of feminine imagery for God, with special reference to the Holy Spirit. Pre-Nicene Syriac authors, consistent with Syriac grammar, referred to the Holy Spirit using feminine nouns, verbs,

and adjectives. In addition, they described the Spirit's actions with feminine roles, even motherhood. This use of the grammatical feminine and maternal imagery with regard to the Spirit finds antecedents in the biblical text and in the way texts at Qumran spoke about God's *ruaḥ*.[37] In this section I discuss the fact that pre-Nicene Syriac's use of feminine grammar for the Spirit changes around 400CE. Then I discuss how grammatical gender regarding God does not indicate that God is gendered. In addition, I note that the feminine aspects related to God in pre-Nicene Syriac thought do not mean that there is a feminine deity from pagan religion. I then examine a text from the *Odes* and from Aphrahat to show how these pre-Nicene authors used feminine and maternal language regarding God and the Spirit.

Sebastian Brock argues that the grammatical gender of *ruḥā* (ܪܘܚܐ) influenced how Syriac-speaking Christians understood the Holy Spirit. Prior to 400CE, Syriac Christianity referred to the Holy Spirit with feminine verbs and pronouns, whereas after 400CE there is a movement to use the feminine noun *ruḥā* but with masculine verbs and adjectives, which does not follow correct grammar.[38] Brock believes that after 400 there

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[37] Arthur Everett Sekki, *The Meaning of Ruaḥ at Qumran* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 72. While the Hebrew Bible in most cases follows the same grammatical rules, there are examples of the word Spirit (*ruaḥ*), a feminine noun, used with masculine verbs. In 1 Kings 22:21–23, a spirit (a feminine noun) goes out (a masculine verb) and the spirit stands (another masculine verb) before the Lord to tell the Lord that she will go and give Ahab's armies a lying spirit (*ruaḥ šeqer*). The narrator of 1 Kings thus uses masculine verbs to describe the actions of the feminine spirit. This use of the feminine *ruaḥ* and masculine verbs can also be found in Job 4:15–5:1. Here the Spirit (feminine noun) stands before (masculine verb), the same verb used in 1 Kings 22. There is at least a trend in both Syriac and Hebrew to use masculine verbs with certain feminine nouns. What such a noun-verb agreement means about how gender applies to language is what is difficult to determine. Grammatical gender does not often connote that same gender in the reality expressed by the words. Still, this use of the feminine spirit with masculine verbs is not uncommon in the Hebrew Bible.

[38] Sebastian Brock, "The Holy Spirit as Feminine in Early Syriac Tradition," *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition* ed. Janet Martin Soskice (London: Marshal Pickering, 1990), 75. Joseph P. Amar, "Christianity at the Crossroads: The Legacy of Ephrem the Syrian," *Religion & Literature* 43:2 (2011): 1–21, notes that the Hellenization of Syriac Christianity contributed to the loss of a distinct Syriac theology and culture. This loss changed the person of Ephrem into a Greek monastic instead of a son of the covenant. Amar also notes that the Hellenization of Syriac Christianity changed how Syriac

is a "Hellenization" of Syriac theology, where Syriac theologians were attempting to align their theology with the rest of the church. In so doing, the feminine verbs and pronouns were converted to masculine, even if it altered the requisite grammar. It is important to note that authors like Jacob of Serugh would, at times, use the feminine verbs and pronouns when they were more advantageous for the poetic form and meter.

Another example of how grammatical gender plays a role in Syriac biblical translations can be seen in the Johannine prolog (John 1:1–14). As Brock notes,

> In Syriac *Logos,* 'Word,' is translated by another feminine noun, *mellta.* Accordingly in the Prologue of the Gospel of John the Old Syriac treats *Melita,* the Logos, as feminine, and this usage is reflected, not only in the fourth-century writer Ephrem (which is to be expected); but also very occasionally in texts of the fifth, or even later centuries, even though in the Peshitta revision the gender had already been altered to masculine.[39]

Within the Syriac biblical tradition grammatical gender does not necessitate that human gender needs to be applied to a word. Because *ruḥā* is feminine, this does not have to mean that the Holy Spirit is a woman. In fact, there is good reason to think that even in the early Syriac thought world, describing the godhead with grammatical gender was intended to show the transcendence of God.[40] The fluid nature of grammatical gender pertaining to the Spirit highlights the belief that God is beyond human gender. As Susan

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Christians spoke about the Holy Spirit. Instead of maintaining the grammatical feminine form, Syriac Christians after 400CE began to refer to the Spirit in the masculine grammatical forms in order to accommodate Byzantine Christianity.

[39] Brock, "Holy Spirit as Feminine," 77. This observation is also asserted by Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," in *Images of Women in Antiquity* eds. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 292.

[40] Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, The Odes of Solomon, and Early Syriac Tradition," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37 (1993): 139, notes: "Religious language, according to this understanding, serves as a reminder that gender lies within the essence of identity in ways that exceed literal (social, biological) understandings; but being metaphorical by its very nature, religious language cannot define that essence here, on the matter of gender, or in any other consideration."

Harvey notes, "Early Syriac Christian writers did not present the Spirit as a female being, in distinction from, though not necessarily in opposition to, a male God."[41]

It could be suggested that part of the reason Syriac theology maintained the feminine pronouns and verbs when speaking of the Holy Spirit was because Syriac has no neuter grammatical gender and the Syriac authors were trying to accommodate the Greek neuter word πνεῦμα. This suggestion fails for at least two reasons. First, Theodore Nöldeke notes that Greek neuter words, of which πνεῦμα is one, were more often transposed into Syriac as masculine than as feminine.[42] Second, the suggestion fails to address why the *Vetus Syra*'s use of feminine verbs and adjectives is maintained in the Peshitta version of the Gospels.[43] After all, the *Vetus Syra* or Old Syriac Gospels are, along with the Diatessaron, the gospels for 4th century Syriac Christians, not the fifth century Peshitta. According to Brock, "much more frequently in the Gospels, the Peshitta simply retains the feminine of the Old Syriac; this includes two contexts of central importance, the Annunciation (Luke 1.35) and the Baptism."[44] As Brock notes "we

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[41] Harvey, "Feminine Imagery for the Divine," 114.

[42] Theodore Nöldeke, *Compendius Syriac Grammar*, trans. James A. Crichton (London: William & Norgate, 1904), 60 §88.

[43] The *Vetus Syra* or Old Syriac Gospels are found principally in two manuscripts, the Curetonian and Sinaitic. These mss. date to the fifth and sixth centuries, but provide a glimpse into what the gospels were in Syriac theology prior to 400. F.C. Burkitt, *Saint Ephrem's Quotations from the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), 55–57, argued that Ephrem's primary Bible was the Diatessaron and that his agreement with the Old Syriac Gospels was due to his reliance on the Diatessaron. Matthew Crawford, "Diatessaron, a Misnomer? The Evidence from Ephrem's Commentary," *Early Christianity* 4 (2013): 385, highlights the fact that (Ps)-Ephrem's commentary on the Diatessaron helped continue the long-term usage of the Diatessaron even after Rabbula and Theodoret ensured that only the separated gospels were used in liturgy. Whether or not the commentary on the Diatessaron attributed to Ephrem was in fact written by Ephrem is debated. Nonetheless, Ephrem appears to have used the Diatessaron as his text for the gospels. For the text of the Old Syriac Gospels from Sinai see, Robert L. Bensly, J. Rendel Harris, and F.C. Burkitt, *The Four Gospels in Syriac.*

[44] Brock, "Holy Spirit as Feminine," 75. For a history of the Syriac translations for Luke 1:35 see, Brock, "The Lost Old Syriac at Luke 1:35 and the Earliest Syriac Terms for the Incarnation," in *Gospel Traditions in the Second Century,* ed. W. L. Petersen (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame: 1989), 117–131;

should not necessarily think that the surprise which we may feel if we hear the Holy Spirit described as 'she' would have also been felt in a language where the word for 'spirit' is feminine anyway."[45] While the grammatical gender employed in Syriac for the Holy Spirit is intriguing because it coincides with several other themes of the feminine divine, there is nothing to necessitate that the Syriac authors were implying a gendered divinity. Nonetheless, the transition from feminine to masculine verbs and pronouns referring to the Holy Spirit, which occurs after 400CE, indicates that there was a conscious effort to change how grammar was applied to the Holy Spirit.

Several pagan cults in the regions of Syria and Mesopotamia emphasized feminine deities and maintained a lasting influence throughout the Roman period. The cult of the Syrian goddess, which lasted several centuries in different variations (Ashtoreth, Atargatis, etc.), was prominent in Edessa in the first five hundred years of the common era.[46] In the pagan cosmology that surrounded her, there was a divine triad of Mother, Father, and Son. This triad may have been behind Ephrem's understanding of Bardaisan's peculiar cosmology and triad.[47] While these cults were present in regions

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Idem., "An Early Interpretation of *pāsaḥ: 'aggēn* in the Palestinian Targum," *Interpreting the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of E.I.J. Rosenthal,* eds. J.A. Emerton and S.C. Reif (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1982), 27–34; Idem., "Passover, Annunciation and Epiclesis. Some Remarks on the Term *aggen* in the Syriac Versions of Lk. 1:35," *Novum Testamentum* 24 (1982): 1–11; Idem., "From Annunciation to Pentecost: The Travels of a Technical Term," *Eulogema: Studies in Honor of R. Taft S.J.* (Studia Anselmiana 110, 1993), 71–91.

[45] Brock, "Holy Spirit as Feminine," 74.

[46] Lucian, *Dea Syra*. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, 76–121. John F. Healey, "The Pre-Christian Religions of the Syriac-Speaking Regions," in *The Syriac World* ed. Daniel King (London: Routledge, 2018), 47–67. J.B. Segal, *Edessa the Blessed City* (Oxford: Clarendon, Press, 1970),46–49. Cf. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," in *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 288–290.

[47] See Ephrem's treatment of the issue in *HCH* 55 and H. J. W. Drijvers, *Bardaiṣan of Edessa*, (Assen: Van Gorcum: Prakke, 1966), 143–152.

where Syriac was spoken, there is little evidence that Christian Syriac authors thought of God in the same conceptual framework as these pagan religions.

Pre-Nicene Syriac writers describe the Spirit with maternal language, which Gail Corrington notes is not unique to the Syriac milieu.[48] While Corrington argues that the use of feminine language shows how early Christians were interested in showing a divine triad of Father, Mother, Child, it is also probable that the use of feminine and maternal language is a way of expressing the unknowability of the divine. As noted above, Susan Harvey suggests that the *Odes's* use of feminine language for the Holy Spirit does not require the Odist to think the Holy Spirit is female *in se*. Instead, Harvey argues that the purpose of using feminine language is to show the otherness of God. By using feminine and masculine metaphors for God, the early Syriac authors were showing that God is beyond human gender.[49]

Ode of Solomon 19 is an interesting example of feminine imagery for the divine.[50] J. Rendel Harris and Alphonse Mingana described this Ode as "grotesque" because of its use of feminine language applied to God the Father.[51] In the Ode, God has breasts and the milk from God's breasts provides salvation for the Odist. The Spirit of Holiness milks the Father. Later, the Spirit of Holiness opens her womb and mixes the milk of the Father's

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[48] Gail Paterson Corrington, "The Milk of Salvation: Redemption by the Mother in Late Antiquity and Early Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989): 393–420, highlights Clement of Alexandria as an example of this phenomena. I disagree with Corrington on the nature of Christian salvation, which she terms, 397, as "historically and conceptually gendered as male."

[49] Harvey, "Feminine Imagery," 139.

[50] Lactantius quotes *Ode* 19.6–7 in his *Divine Institutes* 4:12. Lattke, 3, notes that it is probable that Lactantius translated the ode into Latin from Greek and that no Latin version of the *Odes* existed.

[51] J. Rendel Harris and Alphonse Mingana, *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon: Re-edited for the Governors of the John Rylands Library* vol. 2 (New York: Longmans Green, 1920), 304.

two breasts in order to give this mixture to the world, even though the world did not know it. But those who did receive it are in the perfection of the right hand. The second half of the Ode speaks to how the Virgin received conception and gave birth to a son. This son gives his mother life. Lattke is confident that there is no trinitarian reference in this Ode and that the Spirit of Holiness is not a prefiguration of the Christian Trinity.[52] In contrast, Drijvers believes the *Odes* are Christian compositions and finds explicit Christian themes within this particular Ode.[53] What is clear is that feminine, maternal imagery was also implemented in describing the Father. Such attestation indicates that gender was not conceived of as part of God's existence.

Aphrahat mentions God as Father, and the Holy Spirit as mother in Demonstration 18.10 in which he is encouraging the virginal, chaste life. Aphrahat expands upon Gen. 2:24 ("A man shall leave his father and mother") by saying that when a man leaves his parents he clings to God his Father and the Holy Spirit his Mother.[54] If a man chooses to be married, he instead abandons his parents and gives less attention to God and so focuses his desires to the world. Aphrahat says,

> Who would leave his father and mother when he takes a wife? This is the meaning: that when a man has not yet taken a wife, he loves and honors God his Father, and the Holy Spirit his Mother, he does not have another love. And when a man takes a wife, leaving his father and his mother, those who were mentioned above, and his mind is seized by this world. Then his mind and his heart and his thinking are drawn away from God toward the world. And he loves and enjoys it

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[52] Lattke, 269.

[53] Drijvers, "The 19th Ode of Solomon: Its Interpretation and Place in Syrian Christianity," *JTS* 31 (1980): 337–355. While Ode 19 is significant, it is not the only Ode in which the Spirit has an elevated status and prominence. In Ode 36 the Spirit's actions are described with feminine verbs and this ode showcases how the Spirit could have a status higher than Christ. Cf. Barnes, "The Beginning and End," 175.

[54] Robert Murray, *Symbols*, 312, suggested that part of the reason that early Syriac theology does not reference, or makes little use of, the image of church as Mother, is because the theme of the Holy Spirit as Mother is strong in authors like the *Odes of Solomon* and Aphrahat.

> as a man enjoys the wife of his youth. And his love is different from that of his Father and Mother.[55]

Here we see how the Holy Spirit (*ruḥ qudšâ*) is referred to as the Mother of the believer. Aphrahat makes no clear distinction between the role and work of Christ and that of the Spirit.[56]

Aphrahat, the *Odes*, and *ATh* all use feminine imagery to describe the Holy Spirit and deploy maternal language for the Holy Spirit in different ways. In the *Odes,* the Spirit's womb is where the milk of God is conceived. In Aphrahat, the Spirit is mother to the believer, but not quite distinct from the Son. In the *ATh* the Spirit is the compassionate mother present in the sacrament of baptism and eucharist. Robert Murray says, "In comparison with Gnostic or eclectic elaborations one feels that they [Aphrahat and the *Odes*] are simply attributing to the Holy Spirit the motherly character which the latter parts of Isa. (49: 14-15; 66: 13) find in God. Very close to Aphrahat's language are a number of phrases in the Macarian homilies."[57] Murray's observation draws attention to what Michel Barnes calls the Jewish characteristics of early Christian pneumatology.[58]

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[55] Aphrahat Dem. 18.10.

ܡܫܡܫܐ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܠܒܪܐ ܡܫܡܫܐ ܕܒܥܝ ܐܢܬܬܐ ܕܨܒܝܐ ܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܐܒܘܗܝ ܘܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܐܡܗ. ܘܚܘܒܗ ܫܢܐ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܚܘܒܗ ܕܐܒܘܗܝ ܘܐܡܗ. ܡܫܡܫܐ ܕܒܥܝ ܐܢܬܬܐ ܕܨܒܝܐ ܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܐܒܘܗܝ ܘܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܐܡܗ ܘܚܘܒܗ ܫܢܐ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܚܘܒܗ ܕܐܒܘܗܝ ܘܐܡܗ. ܡܫܡܫܐ ܕܒܥܝ ܐܢܬܬܐ ܕܨܒܝܐ ܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܐܒܘܗܝ ܘܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܐܡܗ ܘܚܘܒܗ ܫܢܐ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܚܘܒܗ ܕܐܒܘܗܝ ܘܐܡܗ.

[56] Bogdan Bucur, "Early Christian Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Aphrahat the Persian Sage," *Hugoye* 11 (2011): 161–205. Cf. Aryeh Kofsky and Serge Ruzer, "Logos, Holy Spirit and Messiah: Aspects of Aphrahat's Theology Reconsidered," *OCP* 73 (2007): 347–378, where Kofsky and Ruzer argue that Aphrahat proposes a hierarchical understanding of the Father and Son, but lacks a distinction between Son and Spirit.

[57] Murray, 318. While the Macarian homilies could serve as intriguing conversation partners with Aphrahat's work, there is no reason to suppose that the homilies are dependent upon Aphrahat or vice versus.

[58] Barnes, "Beginning and End," 170–172.

The proclivity of pre-Nicene Syriac authors to discuss the Holy Spirit and the Godhead with feminine imagery and maternal language continues even in Ephrem. Ephrem is fond of birth imagery and imagery that discusses God's womb.[59] Ephrem's depiction of baptism as womb recalls the *Odes*, but this does not mean that Ephrem read the *Odes*. The use of feminine language to describe the divine is not unique or the sole property of Syriac Christianity. Nonetheless, Syriac use of feminine language for the Holy Spirit begins with the grammatical connection of feminine "spirit" and continues into reflection on the Holy Spirit as a mother, even as a mother hen who broods over her nest.

Hovering and Bird Imagery

Syriac reflection on the Spirit as feminine, expands to describe the Spirit's action in language evocative of birds. The verb *raḥep* (ܪܚܦ), meaning 'to hover, to brood,' plays an important role in Syriac theology about the Holy Spirit. This is important because *raḥep* is found in Gen. 1:2b describing the Spirit or wind's actions hovering over the waters of creation. *Raḥep* is a common verb in the Peshitta, but not in the Hebrew text as it only occurs in Gen. 1:2, Deut. 32:11, and Jer. 23:9. In the passage from Deuteronomy, the Lord is described as a bird brooding or hovering over its nest. Emphasis on this verb is evident in early Syriac theology's use of bird-like imagery when speaking of the divine action of the Spirit. The bird motif in Syriac is carried over into liturgical language in later Syriac writings, likely because of the thematic connection to

[59] Kathleen E. McVey, "Ephrem the Syrian's Use of Female Metaphors to Describe the Deity," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 5 (2001): 261–288, esp. 262–276. McVey notes that "Mother is never explicitly used as a name for God or for any of the three persons of the Trinity" in Ephrem's theology, 264.

the baptism of Jesus.[60] As Sebastian Brock says, *raḥep* "is perhaps the most important word of all" Syriac words about the Holy Spirit and notes that it is used to translate the Hebrew words for "have pity or compassion on" in several instances.[61]

In the *Acts of Thomas* the Holy Spirit broods over all created things. In *ATh* 4.39 the author describes the Spirit using the verb *raḥep*. The story details an encounter between Thomas and a colt. The colt walks up to Thomas and Thomas grants the colt the ability to speak. The colt then offers Thomas a ride into the city. In response to this invitation, Thomas praises Jesus, the hidden one, the good shepherd, "the one who has overcome the wolf and rescued lambs; we glorify you and we lift you up to right hand of your exalted Father, who is not seen, and the Holy Spirit who broods over all created things."[62] The Holy Spirit is worshipped and honored along with Jesus and the Father, and the Spirit is described as a bird brooding over all creation. Thomas says that the Spirit broods over all created things, this phrase indicates that the Spirit is continuous and not limited to the Genesis creation account. Thomas also notes that the reason the Spirit receives worship is because of her act of hovering.

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[60] Brock, *Holy Spirit in Syrian Baptismal Tradition,* 17–20.

[61] Brock, *Holy Spirit in Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 7 notes, "Although it only occurs once in connection with the Spirit in both Hebrew and Syriac [Bibles], the verb *raḥḥef*, 'hover' is perhaps the most important word of all, for it has become, together with *aggen* ('overshadow,' taken from the New Testament), a technical term for the action of the Holy Spirit in Syriac writers. The verb is actually quite common in the Peshitta Old Testament (in contrast to the Hebrew), and it translates the Hebrew 'have pity or compassion on' in several places (e.g. Isaiah 27:11, 30:18; Jer 13:14)." While Brock here mentions *aggen* as an important word for the Spirit's action, this verb is not found in either Ephrem or Aphrahat with reference to the Holy Spirit.

[62] *ATh* 4.39.

ܡܫܒܚܝܢ ܡܘܕܝܢ ܠܟ ܐܒܐ ܕܠܐ ܚܙܝܬ ܘܪܘܚ ܩܕܫܐ ܕܡܪܚܦܐ ܥܠ ܟܠ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܘܢܫܒܚ ܘܢܪܘܡܡ ܠܟ ܒܝܡܝܢ ܐܒܐ ܕܝܩܪܟ ܘܠܐ ܚܙܝܬ ܘܪܘܚ ܩܕܫܐ ܕܡܪܚܦܐ ܥܠ ܟܠ ܒܪܝܬܐ

The Greek version reads, "your Holy Spirit and the mother of all creation," adding the word Mother.

Aphrahat connects the Spirit hovering over the waters to the notion of baptism. Aphrahat's description of baptism is unclear as to who is received in baptism, either the Spirit of Christ or the Holy Spirit. At first Aphrahat says that at baptism people receive the Spirit of Christ, but then notes that after baptism the baptizand receives the Holy Spirit. Aphrahat interprets Ephesians 4:30 ("you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit until the day of salvation") by saying, "For from baptism we have received the Spirit of the Messiah. For in that hour when the priests call the Spirit, the heavens open and she descends and hovers over the waters. And those who are baptized put her on. For all who are born of the flesh are far off from the Spirit until they come to be born of the waters, and these receive the Holy Spirit."[63] In the context of baptism, Aphrahat does not differentiate between the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit. This ambiguity between the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Christ is one reason why Bogdan Bucur believes that Aphrahat exemplifies a binitarian approach to theology.[64] Even if he advances a binitarian perspective, Aphrahat ties Gen 1:2b to the Spirit hovering over the waters of creation and to baptismal practice.

In pre-Nicene Syriac texts bird-like imagery expands beyond the use of the verb *raḥep*. Ode 24 begins with what can be seen as an allusion to the baptism of Jesus and offers an image of a dove who flies over the head of the Messiah: "A dove flew over the head of our Lord the Messiah, because he was her head, and she sang over him and her

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[63] Aphrahat Dem. 6.14.
ܗܫܢ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܪܢ ܪܚܦ ܥܠ ܪܫܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܗܘ ܪܫܗ ܕܗܝ ܘܗܝ ܫܪܝ ܥܠ ܘܥܠ ܪܫܗ. ܘܒܗ ܒܫܥܬܐ ܗܝ ܕܡܬܩܪܒܝܢ ܟܗܢܐ ܠܪܘܚܐ ܢܦܬܚܘ ܫܡܝܐ ܘܢܚܬ ܗܝ ܘܪܚܦ ܥܠ ܡܝܐ. ܘܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܥܡܕܝܢ ܠܒܫܝܢ ܠܗ. ܟܠ ܕܒܪ ܒܣܪܐ ܪܚܩ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܪܘܚܐ ܥܕ ܕܢܬܝܠܕ ܡܢ ܡܝܐ. ܘܐܠܝܢ ܢܣܒܝܢ ܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ.

[64] Bogdan Bucur, "Early Christian Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Aphrahat the Persian Sage," *Hugoye* 11 (2011): 165.

voice was heard."[65] Despite the possible allusion in the first line, this Ode is not a reflection on the baptism of Jesus, and as Han Drijvers noted the rest of the Ode refers to an apocalyptic situation.[66] The imagery of a dove flying over the head of the Messiah and then a voice speaking over the Messiah would seem to have been a natural allusion to the baptism of Jesus. Stephen Gero does not believe that the dove in this Ode is referring to the Holy Spirit, but rather is symbolic of Jesus' Messianic or royal character.[67]

The second stanza of Ode 24 reads, "Because she had him as her head."[68] Lattke argues that if one is to accept that the dove in Ode 24 is an image for the Spirit, then the text displays a "subordination of the Spirit to the Messiah."[69] If this Ode is referencing the baptism of Jesus, and the dove is representative of the Holy Spirit, what is learned about early Syriac pneumatology is scant, because the rest of the Ode does not pertain to the Spirit, but is instead an apocalyptic retelling of the baptism of Jesus. The Spirit is seen

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[65] *Ode* 24.1, ܡܠܐ ܚܫܒܘ ,ܡܠܐ ܒܟܘܬܐ ܕܠ ܪܘܚܐ ܪܚܝܢܐ ܠܟܪ ܪܫܝܫ ܚܝܬ ܡܢ ܠܥܠ ܠܪܫܗ ܗܘܐ

[66] Han Drijvers, "Kerygma und Logos in den Oden Salomos dargestellt am Beispiel der 23. Ode," in *Keryma und Logos. Beiträge zu den geistesgeschichtlichen Beziehungen zwischen Antike und Christentum. Festschrift C. Andresen,* ed. Adolf Martin Ritter, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 153–172. On page 168, note 53, Drijvers says, "M.E. hat Ode 24,1 ff. nichts mit der Taufe Jesu zu tun, sondern bezieht sich auf 'apokalyptische' Ereignisse, die anknüpfen bei einer christologischen Exegese der Sintflutgeschichte. Ich hoffe das demnächst detailliert darzulegen."

[67] Gero, "Spirit," 19. Gero contends that there is no reason to assume that the dove in Ode 24 is the Spirit. Gero argues that while the Ode is clearly referencing the baptism of Jesus, there is no guarantee that the Odist is using the canonical version of the story. If the Marcan version of Jesus' baptism is not behind Ode 24, then Gero suggests that Ode 24 uses the dove as a reference to divine approval. In the case of Jesus, this approval would be his royal or Messianic characteristic. While Gero's caution is important, there is also no evidence for a second baptismal tradition other than what he offers as his interpretation of Ode 24. Thus, while Gero may be correct that there is nothing which would force one to interpret the dove in Ode 24 as referring to the Holy Spirit, the fact that this is referencing Jesus' baptism and the fact that there is only one Christian tradition of that baptism on which the Odist can rely, makes it probable that the dove in Ode 24 is a reference to the Holy Spirit.

[68] ܡܢ ܠܥܠ ܠܪܫܗ ܗܘܐ

[69] Lattke, 345, also attempts to find the original Greek, which would lie behind the Syriac text. This leads to some conjecture about the preposition ܠܥܠ and its significance in determining which of the Synoptics is being referenced.

as a dove and the voice of the baptism seems to come from the Spirit. If the Spirit is somehow subordinated to the Messiah, then it appears that the *Odes* have a pneumatology consistent with Latin and Greek traditions of the first three centuries, wherein the Spirit is not articulated as coequal with the Father and Son.[70]

Bird imagery to describe the Holy Spirit is prominent in pre-Nicene Syriac authors. In both Aphrahat and the *ATh* the Spirit hovers, while in the *Odes* a dove flies over the head of the Messiah and the Spirit is described as having wings. Using the Genesis creation account as its base, early Syriac theology utilized the theme of the Holy Spirit brooding like a bird over her nest to speak about the action of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's hovering is related to the baptism of Jesus and then transfers to the initiation of believers. The Holy Spirit's hovering takes place primarily over the waters of baptism indicating that Spirit's role is in the life of the church.

Liturgical Language

The themes of feminine, maternal, and bird-like language regarding the Holy Spirit coalesce in the liturgical language of the *Odes* and the *ATh*.[71] Whereas Aphrahat writes often about baptism and its importance, his language regarding the Spirit and baptism does not emphasize the feminine aspects of grammar or theology. Pre-Nicene

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[70] For another example of bird imagery in relation to the Spirit within the *Odes* see Ode 28.

[71] Arthur Vööbus, "The Institutions of benai qeiâmâ and benat qeiâmâ in the ancient Syrian Church," *Church History* 30 (1961): 19–27. E.J. Duncan, *Baptism in the Demonstrations of Aphraates, the Persian Sage* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1945). G. Widengren, "Réflexions sur le baptême dans la chrétienté syriaque," in *Paganisme, Judaïsme, Christianisme: Influences et Affrontements dans le Monde Antique. Mélanges offerts à Marcel Simon* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1978), 347–357. G. Alencherry, "The Baptismal Doctrine of Aphraates the Persian Sage," *Christian Orient* 14 (1993): 91–99. G. Winkler, "The origins and idiosyncrasies of the earliest form of asceticism," in *The Continuing Quest for God: Monastic Spirituality in Tradition & Transition*, ed. W. Skudlarek (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982), 9–43.

Syriac theologians speak often about the Spirit's role in baptism and anointing. The consistent presence of the Spirit in liturgical actions indicates a nascent theology about the personhood of the Spirit. In this section I show how pre-Nicene Syriac authors describe the Spirit's work in relationship to the liturgical actions of baptism and anointing.

The *ATh* provides a unique perspective into the liturgical nature of early Syriac theology regarding baptism. Even though, as Myers has argued, the primary action of initiation was the application of oil as a sign (*rušmâ*), there are three instances in which the Apostle Thomas offers an epiclesis prior to baptism in *ATh*.[72] These instances highlight the importance of the Holy Spirit in early Syriac theology. Not only is the Holy Spirit included in liturgical settings, but the Holy Spirit is worshipped along with the Father and the Son.

In the *ATh,* Judas is contracted to build a new palace for King Gondophares, and Judas takes the money intended for building the palace and instead gives it to the poor. The king's brother Gad sees the apparent treachery of Judas and encourages Gondophares to kill Judas in the most painful manner possible. After this accusation, Gad suddenly dies where in the afterlife he is shown the celestial palace that Judas had built for the King. Gad recovers from his death in order to tell his brother, the King, of the palace he saw in heaven. In response to this heavenly vision, both Gad and Gondophares ask Judas to give them a sign (*rušmâ*) of their conversion, because all of God's sheep are known to

[72] Susan Myers notes that of the five initiation stories in the *ATh,* the first two (chapters 27 and 50), show signs of being written by the same author or redactor. These two initiation narratives include a prayer to the Holy Spirit prior to baptism. In the account in chapter 27 the initiates are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Myers notes that the Greek text of the *ATh* is older and so reveals the older nature of the narrative.

him by this sign. After a waiting period of seven days, Judas begins the baptismal initiation for Gad and Gondophares. Judas pours oil over their heads and prays,

> Come, holy name of the Messiah, come, power of grace, which art from on high; come perfect mercy; come exalted gift; come sharer of the blessing; come revealer of the hidden mysteries; come, *mother of the seven houses*, whose rest was in the eighth house; come, messenger of reconciliation; and communicate with the minds of these youths; come, *Spirit of holiness, and purify their reins and hearts*. And he baptized them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Spirit of holiness[73]

This passage contains feminine language for the Spirit, such as "mother of the seven houses." The Spirit's role is described as purification during baptism. The Spirit is invoked over the waters of baptism because the Spirit purifies the baptizand. The Spirit's actions in this account are all actions that are true of the Father and the Son.

From the *ATh* it is evident that the Holy Spirit played a crucial role for pre-Nicene Syriac authors within liturgical actions. The Spirit is described with feminine language and invoked over oil, water, and baptizands. While the Spirit plays an important role in the initiation accounts, there is little in the rest of the *ATh* where the Spirit is prominent. Whether or not the author of *ATh* thought of the Spirit as a separate person is unclear.

The genre of the *Odes* indicates some sort of liturgical context, yet because of the enigmatic nature of the *Odes* there is no discernable liturgy within the text. Within the *Odes* there is use of evocative language to describe baptism, the Eucharist, and other Christian actions similar to the Lord's Prayer. Throughout the *Odes* the Holy Spirit is

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[73] *ATh* 2.27. Translation by Albertus Frederik Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 77, italics mine.

ܡܫܝܚܐ ܗܘ. ܡܫܚܝܬ ܡܫܚܐ ܗܘ. ܡܫܠܡܬ ܡܫܡܫ ܗܘ. ܡܫܝ ܠܝ ܒܫܒ ܫܠܡ ܗܘ. ܡܫܥܝ ܡܫܝ ܫܥܐ ܗܘ
ܡܫܚܫܒ ܪܙܐ ܡܢ ܗܘ. ܫܡܫ ܒܫܒ ܡܫܒܐ ܡܫܒܬ. ܫܒܥ ܡܫܥ ܡܫܐ ܗܘ. ܡܫܐ ܡܝܢ ܫܠܡ ܗܘ. ܡܫܚܫܒ
ܡܫ ܫܥ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܐ. ܫܡܫܒܠܐ ܫܡܫܒܠܬ ܫܥ. ܫܝܥܐ ܫܡܐ ܗܘ. ܡܫܠܫ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܒ ܫܡ ܫܒܫܥܐ
ܡܫ ܫܥ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܐ. ܫܡܫܒܠܐ ܫܡܫܒܠܬ ܫܥ. ܫܝܥܐ ܫܡܐ ܗܘ. ܡܫܠܫ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܒ ܫܡ ܫܒܫܥܐ
ܡܫ ܫܥ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܐ. ܫܡܫܒܠܐ ܫܡܫܒܠܬ ܫܥ. ܫܝܥܐ ܫܡܐ ܗܘ. ܡܫܠܫ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܒ ܫܡ ܫܒܫܥܐ
ܡܫ ܫܥ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܐ. ܫܡܫܒܠܐ ܫܡܫܒܠܬ ܫܥ. ܫܝܥܐ ܫܡܐ ܗܘ. ܡܫܠܫ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܒ ܫܡ ܫܒܫܥܐ
ܡܫ ܫܥ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܐ. ܫܡܫܒܠܐ ܫܡܫܒܠܬ ܫܥ. ܫܝܥܐ ܫܡܐ ܗܘ. ܡܫܠܫ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܒ ܫܡ ܫܒܫܥܐ
ܡܫ ܫܥ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܐ. ܫܡܫܒܠܐ ܫܡܫܒܠܬ ܫܥ. ܫܝܥܐ ܫܡܐ ܗܘ. ܡܫܠܫ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܒ ܫܡ ܫܒܫܥܐ
ܡܫ ܫܥ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܐ. ܫܡܫܒܠܐ ܫܡܫܒܠܬ ܫܥ. ܫܝܥܐ ܫܡܐ ܗܘ. ܡܫܠܫ ܫܠܡ ܫܡܫܒ ܫܡ ܫܒܫܥܐ

invoked as a means of enabling the individual to praise God. The use of baptismal and eucharistic imagery within the *Odes* allows for one to interpret them as liturgical expressions and is perhaps why the *Odes* were preserved within Christian communities.

Aphrahat, despite not dedicating a full Demonstration to baptism, describes baptism with the full range of biblical images, encompassing the Pauline concept of death and resurrection as well as the Johannine idea of new birth. Aphrahat mentions that the Spirit hovers (*raḥep*) over the baptismal waters, but outside of that reference Aphrahat's discussion of the Spirit is not inherently feminine. The Spirit in Aphrahat is the Spirit of Christ and lacks individual personhood, for this reason I think that Aphrahat's theology leans in a binitarian direction.[74]

Aphrahat mentions an epiclesis, said by a priest, for the Spirit to come upon the baptismal waters. The two principal effects of the epiclesis are the presence of God in the font and the transformation of the font into the womb for new birth. This invocation of the Spirit over the baptismal waters is paralleled two centuries earlier by Tertullian and Origen.[75] As E.J. Duncan says, "Besides this power of sanctification conferred upon the waters of baptism by the descent of the Spirit, Aphraates attributes to the presence of the

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[74] While I refer to his theology as binitarian, I do not perceive this as a mark against Aphrahat's "orthodoxy." Part of the reason I include Aphrahat as a pre-Nicene Syriac voice is because of his lack of engagement with Nicaea. Pre-Nicene theologies do not need to have a developed high pneumatology, in order to be on an orthodox trajectory. Rowan Williams, "Does it make sense to speak of pre-Nicene orthodoxy," in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in honour of Henry Chadwick* ed. Rowan Williams (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1–23, suggests on page 18 that there is "an interwoven plurality of perspectives," about the person of Jesus within the normative stream of Christianity. David Taylor, "The Syriac Tradition," in *The First Christian Theologians*, ed. G.R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 201–224, in addition to Bernadette McNary-Zak, "The Indwelling Spirit of Christ and Social Transformation: The Case of a Late Antique Syriac Christian Community," *Mystics Quarterly* 31 (2005): 117, and J. Edward Walters, "Son of Man, Son of God: Aphrahat's Biblical Christology," in *The Old Testament as Authoritative Scripture in the Early Churches of the East* ed. Vahan S. Hovhanessian (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 9–18, all assert the orthodoxy of Aphrahat's Christology.

[75] Duncan, *Baptism*, 124–125.

Deity the effect of transforming the baptismal font, as it were, into a womb, whence men are born again, for immediately after describing the descent of the Holy Spirit he speaks of the 'regeneration of the water.'"[76] Out of the water the baptizand comes forth with the presence of God as a new person.

Despite Aphrahat's association of the Spirit with baptism, he is not clear on whether or not he views the Spirit as a person distinct from the Son. Aphrahat refers to the Spirit as both "the Holy Spirit" and "the Spirit of Christ." In addition, at times the Spirit is described performing the actions of Christ. Duncan highlights the confusion in the *Demonstrations*:

> A great deal of confusion arises from Aphraates' apparent lack of consistency in his references to the 'spirit.' At times he seems to identify the Spirit with Christ, as when he says: 'we also have received the Spirit of Christ and Christ dwells in us.' Again he seems to have reference to a Person distinct from Christ, as when he pictures the Spirit urging Christ to raise the body by which he had been kept in purity.[77]

It is unclear whether or not Aphrahat views the Spirit as a distinct person. This line of thinking is not uncommon in pre-Nicene orthodox trajectories.

One of the distinctive aspects of Aphrahat's theology of baptism arises out of his context in the *bnay qyāmā*. Aphrahat's discussion of baptism is connected to the communal life of ascetics. The *bnay qyāmā* were an ascetical group of early Syriac Christians who practiced celibacy and lived in community.[78] If the baptizand wanted to

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[76] Duncan, *Baptism*, 127.

[77] Duncan, *Baptism*, 140–141. He goes on to say, "Despite these discrepancies, however, we recognize in the 'Spirit' a great similarity to what we know today as sanctifying grace. For, like sanctifying grace, the Spirit is received in baptism, must be carefully guarded lest Satan take possession of the soul, and assures a glorious resurrection to the man who keeps it in purity until death."

[78] Sidney H. Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in *Asceticism* eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 220–245.

participate in the ascetic life and join the children of the covenant, the baptizand was thought to have followed the more perfect path. While baptism was stilled available to those who did not want to join the ascetical group, the lay Christians were seen as not having taken the higher path. As Duncan notes, "At the time of baptism, however, the candidates were divided into two groups—those who wished to dedicate themselves to leading a life of ascetism, which, of course, included the practice of continence, and those who were to be content with keeping the commandments."[79] An ascetic was able to leave the group if the higher path was too difficult, but the one leaving needed to make amends through penance before he would be allowed to leave.

Aphrahat notes that the Spirit received at baptism is the same Spirit whom the prophets received. The Spirit comes and goes from the individual to the one who sent it. Aphrahat bases his theology of the Spirit's movement to and from the individual in the Samuel narrative where the Lord sends an evil Spirit to Saul. When the Spirit speaks with God, the Spirit accuses people of neglecting the temple of the Spirit. When the Spirit departs from an individual it is perilous because Satan attacks people who are without the Spirit.

Pre-Nicene Syriac liturgical language appears indebted, at least in part, to Jewish and Jewish-Christian communities. Gerard Rouwhorst argues on the basis of architecture, liturgical readings, and Eucharistic liturgies that pre-Nicene Syriac sacramental practice traces its roots to Judaism, suggesting that Syriac Christianity formed in a context with a strong Jewish presence.[80] In addition, Michel Barnes suggests that early Christian

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[79] Duncan, *Baptism*, 103.

[80] Gerard Rouwhorst, "Jewish Liturgical Traditions in Early Syriac Christianity," *VC* 51 (1997): 72–93.

pneumatology would not be distinguishable from Jewish pneumatology of the same period.[81] While there is no doubt that Syriac Christianity, like all Christianity, owes some of its forms and methods to Judaism, this debt is not unique. Syriac Christianity prior to Nicaea evinces a liturgical theology with marked similarities to the Greek and Latin tradition. The biggest difference is the order in which the baptizand is anointed.

The Bible describes Christian baptism with a multiplicity of metaphors and images. The Spirit's role in baptism is evinced in pre-Nicene Syriac theology through the doxological formulas, the Pauline and Johannine images of death, resurrection, and rebirth. Individual Christian baptism is also seen as a repetition of Christ's baptism in the Jordan, with the reception of the Spirit coinciding with the baptism process.

While there are not enough details about the Holy Spirit in pre-Nicene Syriac texts to formulate the same theology as that of the fourth century, the groundwork is laid for greater reflection on the nature and character of the Holy Spirit, rooted in readings of Scripture and in Christian practice. Questions still remain as to the distinct nature of the Holy Spirit in these texts. At times, Aphrahat indicates that the Spirit is a separate entity from Christ, but other times the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The *Odes* and the *ATh* lack enough detail to provide a thorough articulation of who the Spirit is. Despite this lack of information, the Spirit is described with feminine imagery and language, depicted with bird imagery, and connected to sacramental actions. The connection of the Spirit with these themes shows that the theology of the Holy Spirit was burgeoning during the pre-Nicene period.

Conclusion

[81] Barnes, "Beginning and End," 170.

The undeniable connection between Syriac Christianity and Jewish or Semitic traditions is not the only context out of which Syriac theology formed. Mesopotamia during the late antique period exemplified the multilingual world and empires of that time. The fact that Greek and Syriac appear side by side in early Syriac texts indicates a cross pollination of culture and ideas. Pre-Nicene Syriac language pertaining to the Spirit thus evinces connections with the broader Greek theological traditions while at the same time holding to Jewish conceptions and ideas. The Spirit is depicted with feminine imagery, bird-like language, and liturgical actions while not being presented as having a unique person. In these texts the Spirit is often subordinated to the Son which is consistent with the broader theology of the Greek and Latin traditions. While it is tempting to think of Syriac Christianity as set apart from the Latin and Greek churches, such a thought does not do justice to the multiplicity of cultures found in Mesopotamia. It is fitting, then, that Ephrem's theology emerges out of a cultural matrix that engages Greek, Latin, and Jewish thought.

CHAPTER TWO: EPHREM'S THEOLOGY OF DIVINE NAMES AS ARTICULATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S DIVINITY

Introduction

In his theology of divine names, Ephrem asserts the divinity of the Holy Spirit and ranks the Holy Spirit on equal standing with the Father and the Son.[1] Ephrem argues that the names Father, Son, and Spirit provide humanity with the ability to comprehend as much about God as is possible for humans. These names function as a barrier for theological inquiry into God's essence, as well as a bridge for understanding God's reality or nature. The proper response to this divine revelation of names, according to Ephrem, is contemplative silence and worship. He believes that the names of God point

[1] Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church*, 166, remarks, "It could be said, in fact, that Ephrem has a whole implicit theology of the validity of symbols and names for divine realities, which in some respects anticipates the symbolic theology of the Iconodule Fathers and classical Byzantine iconographical theory." Murray, "The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology," *PdO* 6/7 (1975/1976): 3, also noted the way in which Ephrem's method is similar to how Paul Ricoeur understands analogy, "If in his theology of types, symbols, and 'mysteries' Ephrem stands close to the primitive Church yet looks forward to the theology of icons, while in his doctrine of 'names' he anticipates the classical theory of analogy, his defence of the symbolic method seems, to me at least, an extraordinary anticipation, by sixteen centuries, of the basic philosophical position of Paul Ricoeur." Murray here references Paul Ricoeur, "Herméneutique des symboles et réflexion philosophique," in *Le Conflit des interpretations: Essais d'herméneutique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), 283–329. Ricouer discusses the relationship between a theory of symbolism and philosophy by examining symbols of evil. He notes that the symbols for evil, such as a "stain," show the importance of symbolism. Ricouer attempts to establish a way of interpreting symbols that acknowledges the depth and complexity of symbols. He says on 296, "Je voudrais essayer une autre voie qui serait celle d'une interprétation créatrice, d'une interprétation qui respecte l'énigme originelle des symboles, qui se laisse enseigner par elle, mais qui, à partir de là, promeuve le sens, forme le sens, dans la pleine responsabilité d'une pensée autonome.". Cf. Murray, "The Theory," 9–14, for his brief discussion on Ephrem's theology of names. Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 60–66, provides several translations of select passages from Ephrem's theology of names. Irénée Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus,* trans. Charles Cummings (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Press, 1978), 42–52, was one of the first scholars to focus on Ephrem's theology of divine names. Hausherr notes similarities with many other patristic authors, including Aphrahat. Hausherr's study focuses on Ephrem's use of divine names for Jesus and gives tangential attention to the trinitarian aspects of Ephrem's use of divine names, "Ephrem was concerned not only with proper names but with all words classified as nouns and used either substantively or adjectively, though he was principally interested in the names of God and of Christ," 42.

to the real substance (*qnomā*) of God.[2] God's names and titles are revealed to humanity in the Scriptures and come in two forms or categories: true names and borrowed names.

In this chapter, I argue that Ephrem uses his theology of divine names to affirm the divinity of the Holy Spirit and so provides an apologetic against Eunomian theology.[3] I explain how Ephrem understands names and titles and their relationship to the reality of the objects they signify. Next, I show how Ephrem's understanding of divine names establishes his theology for the equality of the Son to the Father because they are both beyond human understanding. Related to the transcendence of the Father and the Son, I point out that Ephrem uses his theology of names to claim that the Holy Spirit, just like the Father and the Son, is beyond human understanding and ought not to be investigated. By placing the Holy Spirit at the same status as the Father and the Son, Ephrem affirms the divinity of the Spirit and the Spirit's place in the Trinity. Last, I highlight how Ephrem's theory of language bears marked similarities to Basil's *Contra Eunomium*, and I argue that Ephrem was aware of the Eunomian controversy even if Ephrem never read Greek.

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[2] Payne Smith, *Compendious Syriac*, 3667–3670, notes that *qnomā* is an equivalent to ὑπόστασις, saying that *qnomā* means substance or true/real thing (*substantia, res vera*). Ephrem uses this term as a synonym for nature ܟܝܢܐ *kyānā* in *SdF* 4.129–136. Ephrem does not use *qnomā* as a divine epithet, but he does say that God has *qnomā*. See Ute Possekel, *Evidence*, 65–78, for her discussion of Ephrem's use of the term *qnomā*. Possekel expands upon Beck, *Ephraems Reden über den Glauben: ihr Theologischer Lehrgehalt und ihr Geschichtlicher Rahmen* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum, 1953), 8–12, and Edmund Beck, *Ephräms des Syrers: Psychologie und Erkenntnislehre* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1980), 52–67, by noting the different layers of meaning present in the term *qnomā* for Ephrem. Guy Noujaïm, "Essai sur quelques aspects de la philosophie d'Ephrem de Nisibe," *PdO* 9 (1979–1980), 27–50, also highlights the different meanings of *qnomā* and argues that, for Ephrem, the idea of God having a *qnomā* does not mean that there is a material limitation to God. Noujaïm thus notes how Ephrem uses the idea of God's *qnomā* to articulate divine transcendence.

[3] Edmund Beck, *Die Theologie des Heiligen Ephraem in seinem Hymnen über den Glauben* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi, 1949), 64, notes that it is difficult by quotations alone to discern if Ephrem is writing against the Arians or other non-Nicenes. Ephrem's references to the Arians are limited and do not give enough details about his understanding of the Arian crisis. Beck suggests that what is needed to determine Ephrem's opponents is a study of the ideas that Ephrem is confronting.

Ephrem on the Reality Behind Names

In this section, I set out Ephrem's theory of names and titles and focus on how Ephrem applies this theory to God. Ephrem's theory of language focuses on symbols and their relationship to reality. For him, names and titles are words that have significance if they express part of the reality of the object they signify.[4] Words are symbols that communicate a reality. As a specific type of word, names and titles function for Ephrem in two main categories: true names and borrowed names. The distinction between true and borrowed names is one that undergirds Ephrem's theology of the divinity of the Son, and I believe is essential for understanding how Ephrem articulates the divinity of the Holy Spirit in the *HdF* and *SdF*. Throughout these texts Ephrem speaks of the Holy Spirit in two inter-related ideas, the church's mysteries or sacraments, and the idea of divine names. Ephrem believes that the descriptive names and titles for God that have been revealed in the Scriptures are given to humanity so that humanity can understand itself and at the same time gain partial understanding of God.

Ephrem uses the two categories of true and borrowed names to organize his understanding of divine names even though he does not always use the exact terms "true" and "borrowed."[5] True names indicate that the names used apply to God "in an essential

[4] Ephrem speaks of names, ܫܡܗ, to describe the depictions of God throughout the Bible. At times Ephrem will refer to titles or appellations, ܟܢܝܐ , instead of names. Titles function, for Ephrem, in the same way as names.

[5] Ephrem will also describe true names as "accurate," "perfect," and "true." He will call borrowed names transitory or describe how they are not related to God's essence.

way,"[6] while borrowed names describe God through metaphors and are often transitory.[7] True names reveal something about God that is part of God's *qnomā*, while borrowed names communicate the divine to humanity in terms that are not reducible to God's true nature and essence. The importance of divine names in the *HdF* and *SdF* is two-fold. First, Ephrem uses his theory of divine names to stifle any question about the legitimacy of calling the Son God. Second, Ephrem's theology of divine names allows him to assert the divinity of the Holy Spirit by placing the name Holy Spirit on equal standing with the Father and the Son.

In the *SdF,* Ephrem argues that the divine names show that the Holy Spirit has the same substance (*qnomā*) as the Father and the Son. In *SdF* 4.45, Ephrem argues that the Father, Son, and Spirit "attain their *qnomē* through their names."[8] Ephrem uses the word *qnomā* to describe what is grasped or understood when using the names Father, Son, and Spirit. For Ephrem, *qnomā* connotes some aspect of God's nature. True names correspond to the *qnomā*, or true reality, of the object signified in the name. Ephrem believes that names have a correlation to the *qnomā*. By contrast, Ephrem does not think

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[6] Jeffery Wickes, "Mapping the Literary Landscape of Ephrem's Theology of the Divine Names," *Dumbarton Oakes Papers* 69 (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oakes, 2015), 3–4. Cf. Jeffery Wickes, *Hymns on Faith,* 36–37. Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 68–69, notes that in Ephrem's theory of names, "Er umfaßt häufig zugleich auch das zum onoma (šmâ) gehörige pragma. Ephräm kann aber auch beide Größen auseinanderhalten. Dann erscheint für das pragma entweder ein šrârâ (das reale Ding) oder ein qnōmâ (das voll existierende Ding) oder auch kyânâ, das also hier eine dem šrârâ und qnōmâ ähnliche Bedeutung haben muß."

[7] It is important to note that while Ephrem does use both "true" and "borrowed" (ܫܠܡܐ) to describe divine names, Ephrem is not consistent in every instance. At times it is clear because of the context that Ephrem is referring to a borrowed or true name.

[8] *SdF* 4.45. ܫܡܥ̈ܬ ܐܝܟ ܐܒܐ ܘܒܪܐ ܘܪܘܚܐ ܩܢܘܡ̈ܗܘܢ ܒܫܡ̈ܗܬܗܘܢ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܠܒ̈ܢ ܫܡ̈ܗܬ̈ܐ ܘܬܠܬܐ ܒܩܢܘܡ̈ܗܘܢ ܡܫܬܠܒ̈ܢ ܒܫܪܪܐ. "You have heard that the Father, and Son, and Spirit attain their *qnomē* through their names; the names are not mingled, the three [*qnomē*] in truth are mingled." The substance behind the names is united or mixed, but the names are distinct from each other. Mixture and mingling are the key terms that Ephrem uses to emphasize the unity and distinction of the persons of the Trinity.

that verbs or nouns have *qnomā,* a theory that is consistent with Stoicism.[9]

Ephrem's understanding of names and language is similar to the Greek philosophy of Platonists and Stoics.[10] Despite not being fluent in Greek, Ephrem is aware of Stoic and Platonic ideas regarding language and corporeality.[11] In fact, Ephrem references an otherwise unknown work on corporeality by Albinus, the middle Platonist philosopher.[12] Even though Ephrem has a general philosophical awareness, his application of philosophy, as Ute Possekel shows, is not always precise or congruent with the traditions that he references.[13]

For Ephrem, the name connects to the existence and reality of the object signified. While this bears similarity to Plato's description of language in the *Cratylus*,[14] Possekel,

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[9] *PR* II, 18. Cf. Ute Possekel, *Evidence*, 164–165. Possekel highlights the fact Ephrem does not think words themselves have substance, the objects to which they signifiy do. This parallels the Stoic concept of λεκτόν.

[10] The nature of language in ancient Greek and Latin philosophy is a major topic which I do not deal with in a substantial way here or in the dissertation. The topic of language forms an integral part of the context for Ephrem's theology of names, especially because it extends beyond the Syriac milieu. For a full treatment of the Greek context, see Mark DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names* (Boston: Brill, 2010), 49–95.

[11] *PR* II, 7. Ute Possekel, 156–161. Possekel highlights the similarities between Ephrem's discussion of space in the *PR* and the Ps-Galenic treatise *On the Incorporeity of Qualities,* specifically how both texts use the same order of space, dimensions, length, and breadth. Cf. Beck, "Ephräms Rede," 29 n. 17.

[12] *PR* II, 7. "Albinus introduced a work called, *On Incorporeals*." Cf. John Dillon, *Alcinous*: *The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 111–114, for Dillon's assessment of Albinus's thoughts on Incorporeals.

[13] Possekel, *Evidence*, 161, discusses how Ephrem ascribes to the Platonists a position on corporeality that is not theirs, revealing an ignorance in Ephrem's understanding of Platonic ontology. This ignorance does not mean that Ephrem was not engaged in the debates about God's name that occurred in the later half of the fourth century. As I show later in the chapter, theories of divine names are an integral part of the trinitarian controversies. I show how Ephrem's theology of names fits into that controversy in relationship to Basil and Eunomius.

[14] Ephrem's theory is not the same as Plato's natural theory of names discussed in the *Cratylus.* The *Cratylus* is Plato's attempt to unearth what names signify and serves as the *locus classicus* of discussions about how names relate to nature (φύσις) and convention (νόμος). In this work, Socrates dialogues with Cratylus, who believes that names reveal the nature of what they signify, and with Hermogenes, who believes that names are conventional and applied without relationship to the nature of

following Beck, locates Ephrem's philosophical affinities, as they pertain to the word *qnomā*, with the Stoics for several reasons.[15] First, Ephrem believes that objects or persons with *qnomā* are superior to those without. Second, Ephrem's belief that God has *qnomā* resembles the corporeality of God in Stoic thought. Third, Ephrem's belief that all objects and persons have *qnomā* is similar to the Stoic idea of particulars.[16] Ephrem's similarities to Stoic thought are also evident, I believe, in his use of mixture language.[17]

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the object. Socrates rebukes the idea that names are conventional and appears at first to advocate a naturalist theory of names. If words and names related to the object signified, it would be impossible for a person to lie because their words would have no connection to reality. Socrates argues that the Greek language, before it was corrupted by foreign influences, would have been entirely naturalist. Socrates notes that names function more like portraits or icons. A portrait of a person is both connected to the nature of the person and still conventional. The image of the person in the portrait corresponds to the reality of the person, though it is not the same object. A portrait both has the capacity to be close to the image of a person and far from it. Names, for Plato, operate in the same fashion. Plato is not alone in his discussion of how names relate to the objects they signify. Aristotle in both *The Categories* and *De Interpretatione,* discusses how words relate to reality. Among the Stoics Diogenes Laertius 7:58, notes the difference between titles and proper names. DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory*, 97–134, argues that the heterousian theory of names espoused by Eunomius was not the result of an adaptation of Platonism, but that Eunomius drew upon the theory of names present in the Eusebians from the early fourth century. DelCogliano also suggests that the heterousians took Athansius's arguments for the simplicity of God and used them against the pro-Nicenes. David G. Robertson, "Stoic and Aristotelian Notions of Substance in Basil of Caesarea," *Vigiliae Christianae* 54:4 (1998) 393–417, argues that Basil is not indebted to Stoic thought with regards to how Basil understands substance. Paul Kalligas, "Basil of Caesarea on the Semantics of Proper Names," *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources* ed. Katerina Ierodiakonou (Oxford: Oxford, 2004), 31–48, argues that Basil's theory of names comes from familiarity with Porphyry. Beck, *Die Theologie*, 36, claims that Ephrem was familiar with Aristotle's categories on the basis of *HdF* 30:1–4, wherein Ephrem discusses different measurements or categories. Building off of this, and off of Ephrem's awareness of the *Asomata,* Corrie Molenberg, "An Invincible Weapon: Names in the Christological Passages in Ephrem's 'Hymns on Faith' XLIX–LXV," *V Symposium Syriacum* ed. Rene Lavenant (Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit, 1988), 136, notes that Ephrem was aware of the middle Platonist Albinus. Cf. *PR* II, 7:9.

[15] Possekel, *Evidence*, 65. Stoics differentiated between proper names (ὄνομα κυριοκον) and appellations (προσηγορία), noting that proper names serve to help identify individuals out of a common type. See, David G. Robertson, "A Patristic Theory of Proper Names," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 84 (2002): 1–9. Also, Kalligas, "Basil," 33–35. Chrysippus, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* ii. 147. Diogenes Laertius 7.58. Kalligas, "Basil," 34, following the logic of Chrysippus, notes that for the Stoic's the term οὐσία "implied no more about it than that it constitutes a real, material entity." While grammarians like Dionysius Thrax, *Ars Grammatica* 14, understand a proper name to relate to οὐσία or a particular substance, and appellations correspond to common substances held by a group.

[16] Possekel, *Evidence*, 74.

[17] While Ephrem's use of mixture language bears similarities to Stoic *krasis*, I am not confident he was more than peripherally aware of Stoic thought. I examine Ephrem's use of mixture language in chapter five of this dissertation.

The exact manner in which Ephrem encountered Stoic sources is uncertain, but it is evident that Ephrem was aware of Stoic concepts and implemented his own understanding of them in his writings.

Ephrem's theory of names and their relationship to reality can be seen in his discussion of the concept of space (*'atrâ*) in his *Treatise Against Bardaisan's Domnus*.[18] In this text, Ephrem is concerned with refuting Bardaisan's cosmology and how cosmology relates to God's own existence. The most basic problem Ephrem sees in Bardaisan's theology is that he does not preserve God's transcendence. Ephrem thinks that for Bardaisan, names of God reveal God's substance and nature to such a degree that God can be comprehended and contained. The concept of space provides Ephrem with an example of how the incorporeal God is understood through names. What makes Bardaisan's views on the cosmos and space troublesome to Ephrem is the fact that Bardaisan equated the name "space" with God's essence. Ephrem says, "And thus Bardaisan closed his mind to the names and thought that the nature (*kyānā*) of things would be their names."[19] Ephrem, on the contrary, supposes a notional state between a name and the nature of a thing's existence. In this way, space cannot be equated with the God of the Christian faith.

In the *SdF,* Ephrem reveals his theory that names relate to the actual existence or *qnomā* of the object signified. He argues in *SdF* 2 that the names Father and Son are connected to distinct *qnomē* but that the names or *qnomē* are united in a single divine

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[18] Noujaïm, "Essai sur quelques aspects," 42–50, highlights how Ephrem's statement that "God is his own space," is a response to the cosmologies of the followers of Marcion, Mani, and Bardaisan. Ephrem grounds this idea of God's space in the distinction of the Creator from the creation, a distinction which he believes his opponents forget.

[19] Ephrem, *Against Bardaisan's Domnus*, *PR* II, 49.

existence.[20] Ephrem notes that just as fruit receives its quality of taste from the root of a tree so too is the Son of the same substance as the Father. Ute Possekel argues that in this instance, Ephrem's use of the word *qnomā* is similar to how the Greek word ὑπόστασις is used in Stoic philosophy.[21] Ephrem notes that the names of God are to be contemplated. The names are the boundaries of human knowledge because they have been given to humanity by God.

Ephrem says, "*qnomā* teaches you, that it truly is a thing. But knowing that it is a thing, we have not comprehended how it exists. Because you know that it exists, does not mean that you have comprehended how it exists. And just because its definition is hidden from you, does not mean that it does not exist."[22] For Ephrem, the name is true as evidenced by the *qnomā* or substance behind that name, which is a concept consistent with Stoic understanding of οὐσία.[23] The *qnomā* of a name for God is hidden and unknowable to humanity, similar to God's essence. One is not able to worship God with just the names, one must have comprehended that there is a reality behind the names.

Ephrem uses the divine names as a heuristic to teach humanity how to talk about God. To do this, Ephrem employs a humorous metaphor of a person teaching a bird to talk.

> And also, someone teaching a bird to speak // Hides behind a mirror and teaches it. // But when the bird turns to the voice that is speaking, // To find her own

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[20] *SdF* 2.629, "The Names are two, and the *qnomē* are two; in one power of love they are mingled."
ܬܪ̈ܝܢ ܫ̈ܡܗܝܢ ܘܬܪ̈ܝܢ ܩܢ̈ܘܡܝܢ ܒܚܕ ܚܝܠܐ ܘܚܘܒܐ ܡܙܝܓܝܢ

[21] Possekel, *Evidence*, 65–78.

[22] *SdF* 4.57–61.
ܘܩܢܘܡܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܠܦ ܠܟ ܕܗ̇ܘ ܫܪܝܪܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܡܕܡ // ܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܕܝܢ ܡܕܡ ܐܝܕܥܢ ܕܐܝܟܢ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܠܐ ܐܕܪܟܢ //
ܠܘ ܡܛܠ ܕܝܕܥܬ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܐܦ ܕܐܝܟܢ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܐܕܪܟܬ // ܘܠܐ ܬܘܒ ܒܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܟܚܗ، ܬܚܫܘܒ ܠܟ ܕܐܦ ܠܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ،

[23] Possekel, *Evidence*, 68.

> image before her eyes. // And thinking it is her friend, she speaks with it. // The man places her image before her so that she might learn to speak with it. // But the bird is a fellow creature with the man, // While there is a common creaturehood they are like strangers. // He taught her through a ruse, speaking with it by himself. // The Essence, who is in all and above all exalted, // In his love bent down from his height and acquired our habit. // He labored in all to turn all to himself.[24]

Just as the bird in this image learns to speak through a mirror, Ephrem notes that humanity has learned to speak about God through the mirror of the Scriptures. God has taken on human terms and through those terms has taught humanity about himself. With regard to the question of how incapable humans are of understanding God, Brock notes, "Ephrem's answer is to say that prior to the Incarnation, God 'put on' human terms, that is, allowed himself to be described in human language in the biblical text, even though almost all terms used were necessarily borrowed and so by no means represented God's true nature: in modern terminology they are just anthropomorphisms."[25] Ephrem believes that God has condescended into human language by means of names and titles so that humanity can have the capacity to speak about God.

Divine Names as Essential for Faith

Ephrem uses his theology of true and borrowed names in *HdF* 44 to show that the names for God that the church has received in the Scriptures are essential for proper faith

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[24] *HdF* 31.6–7.
ܘܐܦ ܗܘ ܕܡܠܦ ܠܗ ܡܡܠܠܐ ܠܦܪܚܬܐ // ܒܣܬܪܗ ܕܡܚܙܝܬܐ ܛܫܐ ܘܡܠܦ ܠܗ // ܗܝ ܕܝܢ ܡܟܐ ܕܣܒܪܬ ܠܚܒܪܗ ܕܗܘ ܡܡܠܠܐ//
ܕܡܘܬܗ ܩܕܡ ܥܝܢܝܗ ܡܩܝܡܐ // ܘܡܣܒܪܐ ܕܚܒܪܬܗ ܗܘ ܡܫܬܘܕܐ ܥܡܗ // ܕܡܘܬܗ ܐܩܝܡ ܩܘܕܡܝܗ ܕܒܗ ܡܡܠܠܗ ܬܐܠܦ//
ܗܝ ܕܝܢ ܦܪܚܬܐ ܡܟܝܢܐ ܗܝ ܠܒܪܢܫܐ // ܘܟܕ ܛܒ ܐܟܣܢܝܘܬܐ ܗܝ ܐܝܟ ܗܘ ܕܢܘܟܪ̈ܝܢ// ܠܗ̇ ܒܗ̇ ܥܕܠ ܘܐܠܦ ܒܗ ܗܘ ܗܘ ܡܠܠ ܥܡܗ̇//
ܐܝܬܘܬܐ ܕܒܟܠ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܥܠܝܐ // ܒܚܘܒܗ ܪܟܢ ܡܢ ܪܘܡܗ ܥܝܕܢ ܩܢܐ ܥܡܢ // ܥܡܠܬ ܒܟܠ ܡܛܠ ܕܬܗܦܟܐ ܠܟܠ ܠܓܒܗ

[25] Sebastian Brock, "The Imagery of the Spiritual Mirror in Syriac Literature," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 5 (2005), 5. Cf. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 74–77 and Beck, "Das Bild vom Spiegel bei Ephräm," *OCP* 19 (1953): 5–24. Throughout Ephrem's writings, the imagery of a mirror is important. The mirror gives humanity a pure vision (luminosity) of the spiritual life. The mirror can reflect the divine image in the person as in *Nisibis* 16, or the mirror can be prayer as in *Eccl.* 29.

in God. The names are the starting point and limit to human understanding of God. He uses the Jews as a foil for what happens when a person does not believe in one of the many names of God. Ephrem notes that because of their rejection of one name, the Jews have fabricated a messiah in their mind and their conscience. Ephrem believes that the names of God are sufficient in themselves for knowledge about God and that there should be no debate or investigation into the names. Regarding the Son, Ephrem notes that one ought to, "Watch out! Do not build an idol with your debating. // Watch out! Do not paint in your thoughts // something invented by your own mind, and begotten by your own reckoning."[26] The purpose of divine names is to give humanity the correct, albeit limited, insight into God's nature and essence.

Ephrem begins *HdF* 44 by saying that God's names teach humanity how to address God: "His names convince you how and what you ought to call him."[27] These names show humanity that God is or exists and that God created the world. God's role as creator is fundamental to how Ephrem understands what can be known about God. The idea that God is creator indicates in Ephrem's mind that humanity is incapable of knowing or containing God. Between humanity and God is a chasm or barrier that is too great for humanity to cross. Through these names, God reveals what can be known about God. Ephrem says, "He showed you that he is both good, and made known to you that he is also just, // The good Father he has been named and called."[28] Ephrem notes that the

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[26] *HdF* 44.10.

ܚܙܝ ܕܠܐ ܬܒܢܐ ܐܝܟܢ // ܚܙܝ ܕܠܐ ܬܣܝܪ ܒܡܠܠܟ // ܚܙܝ ܕܠܐ ܬܟܬܘ ܒܪܥܝܟ

[27] *HdF* 44.1.

ܫܡܗܝܗ ܡܫܟܢܝܢ ܠܟ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܘܡܐ ܕܐܢ ܩܪܝ ܠܗ

[28] Ibid.

ܐܝܬ ܠܟ ܕܗܘ ܛܒ ܘܐܝܬ ܠܟ ܕܗܘ ܙܕܝܩ ܐܦ // ܐܒ ܛܒ ܕܫܡܝܗ ܘܩܪܝ

interpretation of the Books[29] has become a theological challenge, and Ephrem says that one should test the crucibles of God's names and distinctions. The refrain Ephrem gives is "Praises to you from all who have believed your titles," indicates that faith in the names and titles for God is connected with how one worships God.

In *HdF* 44.2, Ephrem develops his distinction between true and borrowed names. God has names that are perfect and accurate as well as names that are borrowed and transient. These borrowed names are anthropomorphisms; they speak of God acting like a human in order to help teach humanity about God. God has put on these names and "quickly taken them off," because they do not apply to the essence and existence of God.[30] Borrowed names are ways to describe God's actions toward the world that are befitting for human understanding but not as qualities of God. Ephrem notes examples of borrowed names like "regretted, forgotten, and remembered" in order to show that while the Scriptures say "God remembered Israel" this does not mean that God in God's Essence is forgetful, or even that God has the capacity to forget.[31] Rather, these passages

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[29] Ephrem also speaks of the two books or fonts of divine knowledge in *HdF* 35:7–10. In addition to the book of Scripture, Ephrem speaks of the book of nature. He notes that the Scriptures and Nature are pure fonts and that those who deny the divinity of the Son pollute the fonts. Ephrem's theological practice uses the natural world for examples to help clarify concepts derived from the Scriptures.

[30] Throughout his writings, Ephrem portrays the incarnation in terms of the Son putting on the clothing of humanity. Here and in *HdF* 29:2, Ephrem makes it clear that the Son put on humanity, or human names, in order to make God comprehensible to humanity. Brock, *The Luminous Eye,* 85–97, details how this theme permeates Ephrem's writings as a sign of Christ's restoring humanity to the state of paradise. Cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 69–94, 310–12, details the image in Syriac literature up to the fourth century while Brock explores this idea in Syriac literature from the 4th–7th centuries, "Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition," *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter. Internationales Kolloquium, Eichstätt 1981* eds. Schmidt, Margot and Geyer, and Carl Friedrich (Eichstätter Beiträge 4. Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1982), 11-38, and argues that the clothing metaphor provides a shorthand version of the salvation story, with humanity losing then regaining the garment as a sign of the return to paradise.

[31] Ephrem, *HdF* 44.2, translation from Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, "For he has names that are perfect and accurate, he has names that are also borrowed and passing. Quickly he adorns them and quickly he undresses. He has rued, and forgotten, and recalled. And just as you have affirmed that he is just and good, affirm that he is the Begetter and believe he is creator."

of Scripture use human language to describe God, who is beyond human understanding in terms that will be understood by people.

Ephrem proceeds to discuss the distinction between Jews and Christians in their reception of divine names. A common theme in Ephrem's theology is that the Jews are called "circumcised" or "the People," while Christians are "uncircumcised' or "the peoples."[32] In *HdF* 44, Ephrem notes that the people stripped off and cast aside the names of God because they rejected the one name. Because of the Jew's rejection of one divine name there is now a chasm between the People and the peoples.[33] The names of God are therefore connected to proper belief in Ephrem's mind. One cannot pick and choose which names to believe and which to ignore. The names of God revealed in the Books of Scripture and the natural world are there so that people will come to faith. If a person rejects one name, then all the names have been rejected.

Several aspects of Ephrem's theology of names come to the forefront in *HdF* 44. First, Ephrem makes a distinction between true and borrowed names. True names show an aspect of the divine existence to humanity. Borrowed names use human language in order to describe an action of God that would otherwise be unbecoming of God's essence. Second, Ephrem believes that one must believe in the names of God in order to

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ܥܠ ܫܡܐ ܚܕ ܕܫܡܐ // ܟܬܝܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܥܒ ܟܬܒ ܠܗ ܒܪ // ܟܠܗܝܢ ܟܬܝܒ ܒܝ ܟܬܒ ܠܗ ܒܪ
ܕܐ ܟܘܬܒ ܫܡܐ ܕܐ ܟܬܒ ܒܗ ܒܪ // ܟܠ ܫܡ ܕܐ ܟܬܒ ,ܠܗܝܢ ܫܡ // ܒܝܢ ܟܠ ,ܠܗܝܢ ܫܡ ܕܐ // ܒܪ

[32] Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 41–68. Cf. Christine Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria*, Patristic Monograph Series, v. 20 (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 38.

[33] Wickes suggests that this is a reference to Ephrem's anti-Jewish and anti-Arian sentiment. Ephrem says that the Jews have rejected one name and in so doing are themselves rejected by many names. Ephrem does not make explicit what name has been rejected, Wickes thinks it is any name that rejects God as "Begetter." See Wickes*, Hymns on Faith*, 241 note 8. Edmund Beck, ed., *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide* CSCO vol. 154, ss. 74 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1955), 118 note 7, suggests that the rejected name is the name Son. See Beck*, CSCO* vol. 155, page 118. Either option arrives at the same conclusion with regard to Ephrem's understanding of the Jews.

have proper faith. The Jews rejected the name of God and consequently do not understand God. Third, throughout his discussion about the names and the debate regarding those names, Ephrem argues that God's being is beyond understanding and that the appropriate response to God's transcendence is silence.

Ephrem is able to assert the importance of divine names in both their true and borrowed categories because he understands the relationship between names and the objects they signify. In *HdF* 63, Ephrem explains how names relate to the objects they signify and then he reiterates the importance of true and borrowed names. He begins by saying, "My son, who does not understand, that whoever has been given a [nick]name, // is called by those monikers for a reason? // And when greatly necessary, they stay back and are left behind. // In the time of a will, or the time of loan documents true names are sought // that the truth might be sealed."[34] Ephrem notes the importance of true names in legal and contractual situations. In a similar way, God has made the effort to reveal himself to humanity by means of true names. In this we can agree with Wickes, that Ephrem asserts a conventional understanding of language here, where titles and names are given because of their usefulness or convention.[35]

In the next four strophes, Ephrem recounts how Christ's passion showed his Sonship to the Father and how by virtue of the name "Son," Christ proves himself to be beyond investigation. Ephrem recounts the centurion's claim that the crucified Christ is the "Son of God," in order to show that the name "Son" indicates that he is God. In the

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[34] Wickes, *Out of Books,* 100–101, notes that Ephrem thinks names are applied because of necessity and builds upon that observation to say that Ephrem's theory of language is conventional. *HdF* 63.1.

// ܡܬܚܬܡ ܦܥܡ ܚܕ ܗܘ ܕܐܠܗ ܡܫܬܡܗ ܠܗ ܕܫܡ // ܐܡ ܠܐ ܡܕܥ ܒܪܝ ܕܟܠ ܗܘ ܕܫܡ ܐܬܝܗܒ // ܗܘ ܡܬܩܪܐ ܒܗܢܘ ܫܡܗܬ

ܚܕ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܟܚ ܐܦ ܒܙܒܢ ܕܥܠ ܡܫܬܐܠ ܐܬܝ // ܘܒܙܒܢ ܕܣܓܝ ܠܚܘܕ ܡܬܩܛܢ ܘܫܒܩ // ܒܙܒܢ ܕܨܒܝܢ ܠܡܬܟܬܒ ܐܬܝ ܫܡܗܬ ܫܪܪܬܐ

[35] Ibid., 100–101.

HdF in general, and this *madrāšā* specifically, Ephrem believes that if Jesus is called the Son of God, that proves he is of the same substance as the Father. For Ephrem, the problematic word in these Christological discussions is the word "creature," not "Son." If Christ is a creature, then Christ is not divine in Ephrem's theology, but if Christ is Son, then he is truly God.

The name "Son" thus connotes for Ephrem a real existence and essence that is the same as "Father." After discussing the importance of the name, Ephrem turns the focus of his hymn to how names relate to understanding the Son's Being or Essence:

> From him, the Lord of all, learn how sweet he is: // For not by the name 'Essence,' did he call himself, // Because the name Being is greater and higher in its righteousness // Than that of grace. And his highness did not bend down // That his name and titles might be worn by creatures, // Because his name is 'Essence.'[36]

Ephrem says that the name of God, which relates to God's essence, is not given to creatures. The only way to experience or know the Lord of all is through his sweetness. Ephrem uses a sensory category here, and he will expand upon it later in the hymn, to describe how to experience and know the Lord. There is always a distinction between creator and created and this distinction, in Ephrem's thought, is preserved by the idea of God's essence. Wickes notes that Ephrem is arguing for a hierarchy of names of God. Names that sit at the top of the hierarchy are names relating to the "essence" of God or are words that derive from the Syriac word *'it*, the particle of existence. The second tier

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[36] *HdF* 63.6.

// ܡܢܝܢ ܕܟܠ ܒܝܬ ܕܝ ܡܪܝܐ ܟܠ // ܕܠܐ ܒܫܡܐ ܕܐܝܬܘܬܐ ܩܪܐ ܠܗ // ܕܫܡܐ ܕܟܝܢܘܬܐ ܪܒ ܘܪܡ ܡܢ ܙܟܘ // ܕܫܡܐ ܕܛܝܒܘܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܟܪܥ ܪܡܝܘܬܗ // ܕܫܡܗ ܘܫܡܗ ܢܬܠܒܫܘ ܒܪܝܬܐ // ܕܫܡܗ ܐܝܬ ܐܝܬܝܐ ܩܪܐ ܠܗ //

of names concerns true names, or names that point toward God's nature and real existence, and the third tier of names are borrowed names or anthropomorphisms.[37]

Ephrem argues that God placed his names throughout creation and that in God's actions toward the world, such as the incarnation, God put on those names for the benefit of human understanding.

> Who would not marvel at his name and mercy? // His name is beyond all, but his love bowed down to be with all. // And that he has other sweet names, // And they are poured out on creation, and have bowed down to make great // His works with his titles, in which he came down and put on // His names as his own property.
>
> The King of heaven called his servants 'kings'. // And although he is God, he even called them gods. // And even though he is judge, behold! his works are a judge. // And he called himself weary, because they walk around. // And because people had mounts, he even made for himself a chariot, // That in all things he might be like us.[38]

Not only did God put those names on himself in the incarnation, but God also placed those names on people. Wickes suggests that here Ephrem is saying that God put true

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[37] Wickes, *HdF* 318, note 21 and 319, note 23, says "at the top sits those names which relate to God's existence and which ultimately are derived from the divine name of Ex. 3.14. At a slightly lower level are those names—Father, Son, etc.—which belong properly to God, but which God shares with humanity. At the lowest level are those terms which relate properly to humanity, but with which God clothes himself." Wickes follows Possekel, *Evidence*, 57; Beck, *Die Theologie,* 11; and Thomas Koonamakal, *The Theology of Divine Names,* Mōrān Ethō 40, (Kerala, India: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2015), 299, who all argue that Ephrem equates the word *'ityā* as an epiteth for the divine name Yahweh. This idea is rooted in the fact that the Hebrew text is likely in the background of the Peshitta of Exodus 3:14 where Yahweh declares "I am who I am." In Hebrew, the phrase "I am" is *'ehyê* and the Syriac text of the Peshitta reads as a transliteration of the Hebrew. Possekel, *Evidence*, 57, notes, "The Syrian theologians interpret the transliterated word *'ehyê* (as does the Septuagint) as meaning 'he who exists' and associate it with the word *'ityâ* or *'itutâ*." Robert Hayward, *Divine Name and Presence: The Memra* (Totowa, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun, Publishers, 1981), 15–26, highlights association of *'ehyê* with the divine name in Rabbinic literature and also notes that the *'ehyê* indicates God's presence with the people of Israel. So in translating Ex. 3:14, Hayward suggests *'ehyê* means "I will be there" with you. While the concept of God's devoted presence to God's people may be found in rabbinic literature, I am not sure this is Ephrem's intent when he uses *'ehyê.*

[38] *HdF* 63.7–8.

//ܟܬܝܒ ܡܢ ܫܡܗ ܘܡܪܚܡ ܠܗ // ܕܫܡܗ ܥܠ ܟܠ ܗܘ ܒܪ ܚܒܗ ܟܪܥ ܥܡ ܟܠ // ܘܕܫܪܝ ܠܗ ܫܡܗ ܐܚܪ̈ܢ ܛܒ̈ܐ // ܘܐܢܘܢ ܡܬܬܟ̈ܝ ܥܠ ܒܪ̈ܝܬܐ ܘܟܪܥ ܠܡܥܒܕ ܪܒ // ܥܒ̈ܕܘܗܝ ܒܫ̈ܡܗ ܕܒܗ ܐܬܐ ܘܫܪܐ // ܘܒܫ̈ܡܗ ܕܝܠܗ ܐܦ ܥܒ̈ܕ ܠܗ//

ܘܐܦ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܗܘ ܐܦ ܐܠܗ̈ܐ ܩܪܐ ܠܥܒ̈ܕܘܗܝ // ܘܐܦ ܕܕܝܢܐ ܗܘ ܗܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܗܘ ܥܒ̈ܕܘܗܝ // ܘܥܠ ܕܡܬܗܠܟ̈ܝܢ ܐܬܥܝܦ // ܘܥܠ ܕܠܒ̈ܢܝ ܐܢܫܐ ܪܟ̈ܒ ܠܗ ܐܦ ܪܟ̈ܒ ܠܢܦܫܗ // ܕܒܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܝܟ ܚܢܢ

names on people.[39] The implication of this action is that humanity's existence is contingent upon God's existence. The true names applied to humanity show how human existence is derived from divine condescension.

Ephrem, however, rebukes the notion that just because God has given true names to humanity that humanity and God are equals or share the same nature. He says that the names of God, when applied to humanity, are only similitudes or metaphors for humanity. God and humanity have different natures; God is the maker, humanity is the thing made.

> Who, then, acts so stupid and stubborn // That they might think, even a little, that because by his names // People are called, that there is then one nature // Of humanity and of God? For even the Lord // Is called by the name of his works, 'thing made,' and 'maker' // Balance in one similitude.
>
> For whenever he called us his own name, 'King,' // It is true to him and a simile to us. // And again, when he called himself by the name of his servants, // It is our nature, but an appellation to him. // One knows a name of truth and even a borrowed name is known, // To us and to him.[40]

True and borrowed names are given to humanity in order for humanity to be able to know God according to human capacity. A name that is true for God, when applied to humanity, is only a likeness or similarity of the divine reality.

Despite names that point to the essence of God, Ephrem does not believe that further investigation into the divine being is necessary or prudent. Instead he calls for people to marvel in awe that God crossed the chasm dividing humanity from divinity.

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[39] Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 319 note 25.

[40] *HdF* 63.9–10.
ܡܢܘ ܕܗܟܢ ܒܪ ܒܠܗ ܣܟܠ ܘܥܣܩ // ܕܢܣܒܪ ܐܦ ܩܠܝܠ ܕܡܛܠ ܕܒܫܡܗ̈ܘܗܝ، // ܐܬܩܪܝܘ ܒܢ̈ܝ ܐܢܫܐ ܕܚܕ ܗܘ ܟܝܢ ܡܟܝܠ //
ܕܐܢܫܐ ܐܦ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܘܡܛܠ ܕܐܦ ܡܪܐ // ܐܬܩܪܝ ܒܫܡ ܥܒ̈ܕܘܗܝ، ܒܥܒܕܐ ܘܥܒܘܕܐ // ܢܬܩܠܘܢ ܒܚܕ ܦܘܚܡ //
ܡܐ ܓܝܪ ܕܩܪܐ ܠܢ ܡܠܟܐ ܒܫܡ ܢܦܫܗ // ܫܪܝܪܐ ܠܘܬܗ ܗܘ ܘܕܡܘܬܐ ܠܘܬܢ ܗܘ // ܘܡܐ ܬܘܒ ܕܩܪܐ ܗܘ ܢܦܫܗ ܒܫܡ ܥܒ̈ܕܘܗܝ،//
ܟܝܢܐ ܠܘܬܢ ܗܘ ܠܘܬܗ ܐܦ ܟܘܢܝܐ// ܝܕܥ ܫܡܐ ܕܩܘܫܬܐ ܘܝܕܝܥ ܫܡܐ ܫܐܝܠܐ // ܠܐܝܕܢ ܘܐܦ ܠܐܝܕܘܗܝ،

> So, for discerning ones, he gave names, by means of his mercies, // Designated as his possessions, not for discussion, // But for sweetness. Let investigation fail, my brothers. // Let prayers multiply. For while he is not our kin, // He is like our genus. And while he is separate from all, // He is above all and in all.
>
> For if he had separated himself, // He would not have been able to dress his property in his names. // And if, according to our evil, he greatly loathed us, A chasm would have been made, that could never be crossed // By the scribes, who have decimated walls with questions, // And borders with discussions.[41]

The purpose of the divine names, according to Ephrem, is sweetness. Throughout Ephrem's thought, sweetness is a spiritual sense through which individuals experience God.[42] Regarding this hymn, Murray argues that Ephrem's theology of names shows how human expressions for God can be used in a correct manner. "Without philosophical language, Ephrem is saying clearly that human terms and epithets can be used validly of God, not univocally but analogically, above all because they *have been used* in God's own work of revelation."[43] For Ephrem, the names of God are related to the object they signify, and because the names of God related to God's substance, when applied to humanity these names define aspects of human existence. Ephrem relates the point of the divine names by using the spiritual senses, in which the individual tastes the goodness of

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[41] *HdF* 63.11–12.
ܡܛܠ ܠܦܪ̈ܘܫܐ ܫܡܗ̈ܘܗܝ، ܒܝܕ ܪ̈ܚܡܘܗܝ،// ܐܦܪܫ ܠܩܢܝܢܘܗܝ، ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܒܘܨܝܐ // ܐܠܐ ܠܒܣܝܡܘܬܐ ܢܫܬܠܐ ܒܘܨܝܐ ܐܚ̈ܝ//
ܘܢܣܓܘܢ ܨܠܘ̈ܬܐ ܕܟܕ ܠܐ ܚܣܝܢ ܠܗ // ܐܝܟ ܗܘ ܓܢܣܢ ܗܘ ܘܟܕ ܦܪܝܫ ܡܢ ܟܠ // ܥܠ ܟܠ ܘܒܟܠ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ، //
ܡܛܠ ܕܐܠܘ ܓܝܪ ܢܦܫܗ ܡܦܪܫ ܗܘܐ // ܡܨܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܠܐ ܢܠܒܫ ܩܢܝܢܘܗܝ، ܠܫܡܗ̈ܘܗܝ، // ܘܐܠܘ ܐܝܟ ܒܝܫܘܬܢ ܐܣܠܝ ܠܢ ܛܒ
// ܦܚܬܐ ܗܘ ܗܘܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܥܒܪܐ ܠܥܠܡ // ܡܢ ܣܦܪ̈ܐ ܕܪܡܘ ܥܘܪ̈ܐ ܒܡܫܐܠܬܐ // ܬܚܘ̈ܡܐ ܒܒܘ̈ܨܝܐ

[42] For a discussion of spiritual senses see Marcus Plested, "The Spiritual Senses: Monastic and Theological," Paper presented at Dumbarton Oaks April 27, 2014. Ephrem often alludes to spiritual perception of God and God's work in the work see *HdF* 12, 16, 76, as well as *SdF* 2.45. The theme of spiritual senses in Syriac literature, with particular attention to scent, is also treated by Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006). In addition, Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "St Ephrem on the Scent of Salvation," *JTS* 49, no. 1 (1998): 109–128, argues that Ephrem envisions paradise as basking in the divine odor.

[43] Murray, "The Theory," 12.

the Lord. In this way, Ephrem is successful at communicating his understanding of divine revelation without as Murray notes, philosophical language.[44]

In his theology of true and borrowed names, Ephrem expresses God's capacity for revelation to humanity. This revelation does not apply to the "essence" of God, but provides adequate knowledge for proper worship of God. Ephrem notes that it is through the names found in scripture[45] that one can understand aspects of God's existence, but not of God's essence. Because of the chasm that separates humanity and divinity, God's communication to the world through divine names highlights the kenotic condescension of God toward humanity.

Ephrem's theory of names and titles and their relationship to God has a philosophical and epistemological character. The closest connection between Ephrem's theology of divine names and Hellenistic philosophical schools is with Stoicism. Ephrem believes that there are true and borrowed names that relate to God as God exists. True names evoke ideas about God which are true to God's substance and existence. True names reveal that God exists and that God's existence is completely different from human existence. The ideas about God which are evoked by true names, insofar as they remain true to scriptural revelation, provide insight into the nature of God's existence. The true names of God are not reducible to God's essence. Ephrem's theory of borrowed names highlights the fact that he has a conventional theory of naming, but his theology of true names expands his theory about names. True names evoke notions or ideas about

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Ephrem refers to the Gospels as a mirror in *HdF* 41:10. Throughout the *HdF,* Ephrem uses the language of mirror to discuss the hiddenness of God, cf. *HdF* 1:12; 2:1; 34:4. Cf. Sebastian Brock, "Imagery of the Spiritual Mirror in Syriac Literature," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 5 (2005): 3–17, and Beck, "Das Bild vom Spiegel bei Ephräm," *OCP* 19 (1953): 5–24.

who God is and give humanity insight into the unknowable God.

Divine Names and the Persons of the Trinity

Ephrem's theology of names has direct application to his understanding of the nature of the Son's relationship to the Father, and Ephrem extends the logic in his theology of names to affirm that the Holy Spirit has the same status as the Father and the Son. In this section I, examine how Ephrem uses divine names to show that the Son is equal to the Father. I then will illustrate how Ephrem asserts the Holy Spirit's place in the Trinity, albeit often in a tertiary manner.[46] I begin with a discussion of Ephrem's interpretation of Prov 8:22, noting how Ephrem engages in the polemics of the fourth century. I then transition to show how Ephrem asserts that the Son is hidden in the same way that the Father is hidden. Next, I discuss how there are true names for both the Father and the Son and that these names point to a unified reality. Last, I argue that Ephrem's logic about divine names and the Son's relationship to the Father extends to the Holy Spirit's relationship to both the Father and the Son.

Proverbs 8:22 and the Hiddenness of God

In *HdF* 53, Ephrem engages in the pro-Nicene polemic against the Arian reading of Prov 8:22.[47] Arians implemented Prov 8:22, "the Lord created me the beginning of his

[46] Since Ephrem does not have a treatise dedicated to discussing the Holy Spirit, his pneumatology is derived from his works, often polemical, that concern different subjects.

[47] As Paul Russell, *St. Ephraem and St. Gregory Confront the Arians* (Kerala, India: Saint Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1994), 183, notes about the difference between Gregory Nazianzus and Ephrem, "The most striking difference we have perceived is between Gregory's greater willingness to confront his adversaries through the quotation of Scripture or by directly citing their teachings to refute them and Ephraem's much less frequent explicit references to the specifics of his opponents' teachings and his less frequent direct repudiations of their ideas." For another example of Ephrem engaging in

works," to support their logic that the Son was a created being.[48] In *HdF* 53, Ephrem interprets Prov 8:22 as a reference to the humanity of the Son. Ephrem is concerned with which names are appropriate to apply to God, with special attention to the difference between "creature" and "Son." Texts that mention aspects of the Son's smallness thus reference the humanity of Jesus and texts that speak about the grandeur of the Son refer to his divinity.

After affirming the unity of the Father and the Son because of their hiddenness, Ephrem offers a hermeneutic for discerning which names describe Jesus with greatest accuracy. He suggests counting the number of times he is called "Son" or "Begotten," and comparing that number to how many times he is called "creature." Ephrem says the tally should persuade the people who doubt. Ephrem then asserts that Jesus is called a creature only once, by Solomon in Prov. 8:22, while the rest of the Scriptures call him Son.[49] This is evident in the Father, prophets, apostles, and even the demons.[50] Ephrem's concern for what the name "Son" entails shows that for Ephrem the names of God given in Scripture are the end point of contemplation on God's essence. Wickes argues that Ephrem's approach is "a-hermeneutical" and notes that it incorporates the hiddenness of

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controversies with Arian exegesis see Paul Russel, "An Anti-Neo-Arian Interpolation in Ephraem of Nisibis' Hymn 46 *On Faith*," *SP* 33 (1997): 568–572. Cf. Phil J. Botha, "The Exegesis and Polemical Use of Ps 110 by Ephrem the Syriac-speaking Church Father," *Old Testament Essays* 27, no. 2 (2014): 395–411. For how the Cappadocians read Prov 8:22 in the Arian controversy, see M. van Parys, "Exégèse et Théologie Trinitaire: Prov. 8,22 chez les Pères Cappadociens," *Irénikon* 43 (1970): 362–379.

[48] Manilo Simonetti, "Sull'interpretazione patristica di Proverbi 8, 22," in *Studi sull'Arianesimo* (Rome: Edtrice Studium, 1965), 9–87, is the classic study of this passage's reception and interpretation in the patristic age. Simonetti, 32–65, focuses on the Arian position and then on Eusebius of Caesarea and Marcellus of Ancyra.

[49] The Peshitta text of Prov 8:22 uses the verb ܚܕܐ to describe the Lord's action.

[50] *HdF* 53:14.

the divinity of the Son while at the same time providing a vision of the Son who can "neither be seen or known."[51]

Ephrem also emphasizes that the Son is hidden in the same way the Father is hidden. In Ephrem's thought, God is unknowable because of human inadequacy. What can be known about God is revealed to humanity by means of divine condescension into human language and human flesh. Wickes says that in *HdF* 53, "Ephrem suggests a more basic path forward: rather than worrying about meaning (the Son, anyway, 'is concealed from all,' and one's knowledge of that fact depends on one's own ascent), we should assess appropriate names."[52]

Even though he engages in the polemical exegesis of the fourth century, Ephrem's reading of Prov 8:22 is different from Basil's, while bearing similarities to other anti-Arian readings. Basil gives three reasons that this text does not mean that the Son is a creature.[53] First, Basil notes that Prov 8:22 provides the only example of a text in which the Son can be understood as a creature. Second, because the text is from the book of Proverbs, Basil does not think there is a clear interpretation of the verse. Third, Basil, following Eusebius of Caesarea, suggests that the translation of "he created me" would be better rendered as "he acquired me."[54] Ephrem is consistent with Basil in not wanting one passage of scripture to be read as authoritative without the full witness of the Bible. However, he diverges from Basil in associating the passage with the humanity of the

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[51] Wickes, *Out of Books,* 76.

[52] Wickes, *Out of Books,* 77.

[53] *Contra Eunomium* 2.20.

[54] Mark DelCogliano, "Basil of Caesarea on Proverbs 8:22 and the Sources of Pro-Nicene Theology," *JTS* 59 (2008): 183–190.

Son.[55] Ephrem's inclination to interpret the passage as referring to the humanity of Christ finds resonance with Marcellus of Ancyra.[56] At the same time, Ephrem's insistence that the passage can be understood[57] is similar to Eusebius of Caesarea's insistence that Solomon intended for his Proverbs to be understood by those who could look beyond the literal meaning of Scripture.[58]

In exegeting Prov 8:22, Ephrem reveals that his theology of divine names affirms that the Son has the same quality of hiddenness as the Father. The Son is thus beyond investigation because the Son is divine. Ephrem interprets the passage against an Arian or Neo-Arian reading that would subordinate the Son to the Father. This unity of the Father and the Son is evident throughout Ephrem's writings and is further emphasized in *HdF* 22.6, in which Ephrem notes that the Father and Son in their names are true.[59] Ephrem's concern with the true names for God comes out of the fourth century controversies surrounding the names "Son," "Begotten," "Unbegotten," and "Father." When Ephrem shows unity between the Father and the Son, he does so to argue against Arian and Neo-Arian readings of Scriptural passages.

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[55] DelCogliano, "Basil on Proverbs," 186, says "Basil would have none of this. Attributing Prov. 8:22 to the incarnate Christ was rife with difficulties and Basil by his silence does not endorse this interpretation."

[56] Marcellus, *Fragments* 28–29, in *Markell von Ankyra: Die Fragmente der brief an Julius von Rom,* ed. Markus Vinzent (New York: Brill, 1997), 30–31.

[57] *HdF* 53:8–14 assumes that the passage can be understood, that is why Ephrem provides his own interpretation of it.

[58] *Against Marcellus*, I.3.14–15.

[59] Wickes, *Out of Books*, 123, notes that Ephrem's theology of names is concerned with the controversies of the fourth century. Cf. Phil Botha, "Ephrem's Comparison of the Father/Son Relationship to the Relationship Between a Tree and its Fruit in his Hymns *On Faith*," *Ars Patristica et Byzantina* 4 (1993): 23–32, highlights how Ephrem uses the metaphor of a tree and its fruit to argue for divine unity between the Father and the Son.

Ephrem uses the concept of the hiddenness of God to show that the Father and the Son are of the same essence. Just as the Father is hidden from the world, so also is the Son concealed from the world. The hiddenness of God proves to Ephrem that God is transcendent; human weakness prevents people from understanding or knowing God. Because of human inability, there is an ontological gap between humanity and divinity but God descends into human language. In *HdF* 26, hymn Ephrem praises the hiddenness of God. The transcendent nature of God makes it so that humanity cannot know God, who is hidden. Still, through the Scriptures God has provided a way for humanity to know God. “But the Books of the Prophets have lifted the intellect by rendering him in names.”[60] The names of God are written in the Scriptures so that people might understand certain aspects about God.

In order to show how God is different from humanity, Ephrem goes on to describe the essence of God. While humanity is unable to understand God’s essence, God provides lexical aids to humanity in the form of images and words.

> That Essence is similar to creation // Is a great error for someone to think. // For where there is a mouth, ears, and eyes: // This construction is weak. // To give it a body is cause for fear. To construct it is terrible. // To restrict it is unjust. To limit it is evil. // Even though he is above these things, // In his mercy he bowed down beneath them.
>
> The images suitable for people // Come out from the treasury of the Lord of all. According to time and action, // he has appointed an image to assist. // In the time of indignation, the time of cheerfulness; // In the time of awe, in the time of serenity. // While he is the same in his existence, // In his law, to us he changes.”[61]

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[60] *HdF* 26.5.

ܟܬ̈ܒܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܢܒ̈ܝܐ // ܠܗܘܢܐ ܫܩܠܘ ܨܪܘܗ ܒܫܡ̈ܗܐ

[61] *HdF* 26.7–8.

ܕܐܝܬܘܬܐ ܕܕܡܝܐ ܠܒܪ̈ܝܬܐ // ܠܛܘܥܝܝ ܗܝ ܪܒܬܐ ܕܐܢܫ ܢܣܒܪ // ܐܝܟܐ ܓܝܪ ܕܦܘܡܐ ܐܕ̈ܢܐ ܘܥܝ̈ܢܐ // ܪܘܟܒܐ ܗܘ ܗܐ ܕܡܚܝܠܘܬܐ // ܕܢܓܫܡܘܢܗ ܡܠܝܐ ܗܘ ܕܢܪܟܒܘܢܗ ܕܚܝܠܐ ܗܘ // ܕܢܬܚܡܘܢܗ ܥܘܠܐ ܗܘ ܕܢܣܝܟܘܢܗ ܪܘܫܥܐ ܗܘ // ܘܟܕ ܪܡܐ ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ // ܬܚܝܬ ܗܠܝܢ ܒܚܢܢܗ ܐܬܪܟܢ // ܕܡ̈ܘܬܐ ܕܫܦܝܢ ܠܐܢܫܘܬܐ // ܡܢ ܓܙܐ ܢܦܩ ܗܘܝ ܕܡܪܐ ܟܠ // ܐܟܘܬܗ ܕܙܒܢܐ ܘܕܣܘܥܪܢܐ // ܐܦܪܫ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܥܕܪ ܒܗ // ܒܥܕܢ ܕܟܦܝܦܘܬܐ ܒܥܕܢ ܚܘܣܝܘܬܐ // ܒܥܕܢ ܕܚܝܠܘܬܐ ܒܥܕܢ ܒܫܠܝܘܬܐ // ܟܕ ܗܘ ܫܘܐ ܗܘ ܒܟܝܢܘܬܗ // ܒܢܡܘܣܗ ܕܠܘܬܢ ܐܫܬܚܠܦ

Ephrem notes that God revealed himself to the people of Israel and to Moses by use of images. Ephrem says, "This image was not divinity," it was rather, "a disguise made for // Greatness, a help for the inexperienced."[62] The purpose of the images is to communicate to people at their level of understanding. God does this because it benefits humanity, "For he himself exists without our necessity, but by us he is seen according to necessity."[63] God's communication of himself to the world is done for the benefit of humanity and only provides a way for people to contemplate God. The images, words, and names for God all evoke an idea on which people are meant to contemplate.

Ephrem's insistence on the hiddenness of God is built on two related concerns. First, humanity is incapable of knowing God because of human finitude. Human inability to know God is coupled with, second, God's transcendent divine essence. God's existence is beyond human capacity to understand and so is unknowable to humanity. Ephrem thinks that those who subordinate the Son to the Father do so out of an arrogance, in which they presume to know more about God than what God has revealed to humanity.[64] God condescends to humanity so that humanity might be able to grasp who God is.

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[62] *HdF* 26.13.

ܕܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܘܬܐ // ܠܐ ܗܘܬ ܗܝ ܕܐܝܟܢܐ // ܕܐܝܟ ܒܝܬ ܐܢ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܗܝ,

[63] *HdF* 26.15.

ܐܢ ܕܠܝܬ ܠܢ ,ܐܝܟ ܗܘ ܒܠܚܕ // ܠܡܢ ܕܐ ,ܐܝܟ ܐܢ ܐܢ ܕܠܝܬ ܠܢ

[64] Robert Murray, "The Paradox of God's Hiddenness and Accessibility in St. Ephrem," *New Blackfriars* 85 (2004): 161, charts the differences between the Arian party's approach to God and what Ephrem thinks is the right approach to God. The wrong approach is characterized by presumption, determinism, and schisms, while the right approach is exemplified in humility, free-will, and the contemplation of God, and the continued unity and love in the church.

When speaking of Ephrem Vladimir Lossky notes, "the apophatic moment is dominant when he speaks of God, and there is an accent of religious dread…he refuses to seek a knowledge of God…he wishes that there no longer be a search for mystical gifts or representation of the contemplation of God as the goal of the Christian life."[65] Lossky thinks that a Christian apophatic approach owed nothing to Platonism or Neoplatonism.[66] In Lossky's view, the Neoplatonists thought that God was comprehensible *per se.* Conversely, a true Christian approach meant that God was incomprehensible *per se*.[67] Lossky suggests that the apophatic approach to theology found in Dionysius does not owe anything to Neoplatonism and represents Christian thought that lacks a debt to Greek philosophy. In fact, Lossky suggests that through cataphatic approaches to understanding God, Greek philosophy crept into Christian theology. He hints that the origin of this infection started with Origen.

In contrast to Lossky's reading of Ephrem, I suggest that Ephrem's approach to God is one that implements both apophatic and cataphatic elements, even though Ephrem does not use that technical language. While Ephrem imposes a boundary on the limits of human understanding about God, this fencing is evident in Ephrem's different

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[65] Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God,* trans. Ashleigh Moorhouse (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), 92.

[66] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1973), 30, says, "If Plotinus rejects the attributes proper to being in seeking to attain to God, it is not, as with Dionysius, on account of the absolute unknowability of God: an unknowability obscured by all which can be known in creatures. It is because the realm of being, even at its highest levels, is necessary multiple: it has not the absolute simplicity of the One. The God of Plotinus is not incomprehensible by nature."

[67] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, 32, notes, "To a philosopher of the Platonist tradition, even though he speak of the ecstatic union as the only way by which to attain to God, the divine nature is nevertheless an object, something which may be explicitly defined—the ἐν—a nature whose unknowability lies above all in the fact of the weakness of our understanding, inseparable as it is from multiplicity."

excoriations concerning debate and investigation into God's essence.[68] Ephrem nevertheless thinks that there is something positive to say about God.[69] What can be said about God comes from the images and names that God has provided humanity in the Scriptures and in nature.[70] The names are the starting point and boundary for reflection on who God is, but provide little to no evidence of how God is.

Ephrem's interpretation of Prov 8:22 highlights his understanding of God's relationship to humanity and the relationship between the Father and the Son. God's hiddenness is the quality that connects the Son and the Father. Both are beyond human understanding, because humans are incapable of knowing God. Ephrem identifies the difference between humanity and God is one that Ephrem refers to as a chasm (*peḥtâ*).[71] God crosses the chasm by means of language in true and borrowed names in order to communicate with humanity about God's existence. The images God uses by means of language are not reducible to God's essence; rather they provide space for meditation and thought about who God is.

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[68] Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 43–52, highlights Ephrem's vocabulary pertaining to improper investigation in the *HdF*. Ephrem is clear that investigation of God is improper if that investigation is not oriented toward loving God. Wickes contrasts how Ephrem uses categories such as "investigators," "debators," or "presumptuous ones" to describe his opponents, while Athanaius uses the category or grouping of "Arians."

[69] Paul Russell, "Ephraem the Syrian on the Utility of Language and the Place of Silence," *JECS* 8 (2000): 21–37, notes that Ephrem prefers silence as the response to revelation. While this is true, it does not mean that Ephrem thinks there is nothing to say concerning God's revelation. The content of praise, in Ephrem's thought, is informed by silence and wonder. Russell also argues that the persons of the Trinity communicate through silence.

[70] For Ephrem the significance of divine names is that they are tools used for the level of human understanding. People are incapable on their own of understanding God. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 27–28, in discussing the differences between the hidden and revealed of God suggests that Ephrem provides two starting points. The hidden begin with human experience, while the revealed begin with experience from God's point of view.

[71] Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 26, notes that Ephrem uses the same word that is used in Luke 16:26 to describe the distance between the rich man and Lazarus in Abraham's bosom.

True Names for Father and Son[72]

Ephrem's philosophical reasoning about divine names is rooted in his interpretation of Scripture. He continues to extrapolate his theory of divine names from the Scriptures in *HdF* 62. He uses Adam's naming of animals from the Genesis creation account in order to show how the Son has been represented through parables in the Scriptures using multiple names or titles with the purpose of teaching humanity about the nature of God's salvific work in the world. Because God approved of Adam's naming of the animals, Ephrem remarks that it is imprudent for Adam's children to question God's names for his Son.

Ephrem says: "From and within a name, its power (*ḥaylê*) // is able to be perceived. A name can interpret itself for us. "[73] Here, Ephrem reveals that in his theory of language names share some connection to the object they signify and this is self-evident in an etymological sense.[74] Speaking about this *madrāšā* Wickes notes that there

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[72] Beck, *Die Theologie des Heiligen Ephraem in seinem Hymnen über den Glauben* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi, 1949), 65–68, suggests that Ephrem's arguments in *HdF* 62–64 are centered on the proper name "Son." Beck believes that Ephrem uses the word "Son" to refute the Arian word "creature." This forms a play on words in Syriac with son, *brâ*, and creature, *brîtâ*.

[73] *HdF* 62.4.

ܠ ܦܥܠ ܡܫܡܥ ܒܝܬܗ ܒܗܕ ܫܡ ܐܝܟ // ܡܫܟ ܚܠܦܬ ܒܝܬ ܒܗܕ ܡܕܝ ܡܢ

Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 311, translates the word *ḥaylê* as "meaning." In so doing, he emphasizes that the concepts of power and meaning correlate.

[74] Ute Possekel, "Ephrem's Doctrine of God," 214–215, notes that in Ephrem's thought names correspond to the reality of objects and things that exist. If there is no *qnomā* then the thing does not exist and there is no correlation between the word and reality. Possekel suggests that, for Ephrem, true names are those which correspond to divine nature, but are not limited to God's essence. While David Bundy, "Language and the Knowledge of God in Ephrem Syrus," *The Patristic and Byzantine Review: The American Institute for Patristic and Byzantine Studies* 5 (1986): 101, suggests that, in Ephrem, language is "symbolic of reality and neither defines nor equals reality." Ephrem maintained a strong insistence that the name "Father" was a true name for God. The importance for Ephrem of the name Father in the context of the Eunomian controversy indicates that Ephrem was aware of Eunomius's reduction of true names for God.

is one process of naming for humanity and one for God and that this process indicates that there are divine names and human names:

> This passage suggests a two-tiered process of naming: on the one hand, Adam names the animals, which represents a purely human phenomenon, albeit approved by God. On the other hand, God himself names his own Son. If we map this onto Ephrem's understanding of 'true' and borrowed' names, we could perhaps suggest that borrowed names are ultimately Adamic, whereas true names are ultimately divine though inevitably limited according to human understanding.[75]

Hausherr, who notes that Ephrem shows how "the incarnate Word has divine names and human names," also suggests the division of true and borrowed names into the two categories of divine and human.[76] Ephrem's theory of language utilizes the categories of divine and human names in order to underscore that the name "Son" indicates that he is begotten and divine.

After Ephrem establishes the distinction of divine and human naming, he argues that the divine names are beyond questioning, investigation, or denial. The names are true, and the most prominent true name for the Son is "Son." This name implies that the Son is begotten.

> Who is able to lie about the names of the True One? // Listen to the truth in his name. And if the name 'Son' or 'Begotten' // Happens to be untrue, then // Even the name 'creatures,' is fraudulent. But if // every agreeable and sound name is found to be true, then the name 'Son' is tasteless? // We have become tasteless, because we have made him tasteless.[77]

Ephrem employs language that relates to the sense of taste to indicate that the name of the Son is true. Ephrem uses the Syriac word (*pecah*) for "tasteless." This word is also used

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[75] Wickes *Hymns on Faith*, 310–311, note 6.

[76] Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, 44.

[77] *HdF* 62.11.
ܡܢܘ ܡܨܐ ܕܢܕܓܠ ܥܠ ܫܡܗ̈ܘܗܝ ܕܫܪܝܪܐ // ܫܪܪܗ ܫܡܥ ܒܫܡܗ ܘܐܢ ܫܡ ܒܪܐ ܘܝܠܕܐ // ܡܫܬܟܚ ܕܠܐ ܫܪܝܪ ܕܓܠ ܗܘ //ܐܦ ܫܡܐ
ܕܒܪ̈ܝܬܐ ܘܐܢ ܐܫܬܟܚ ܫܪܝܪ // ܟܠ ܫܡ ܦܐܝܐ ܘܚܠܝܡ ܘܗܘ ܫܡ ܒܪܐ ܦܟܝܗ // ܦܟܗܢ ܕܦܟܗܢ

in the Peshitta of Matt 5:13 to speak about the salt of the earth.[78] Ephrem believes that the person who denies the name Son becomes tasteless because to deny the Son is to be untrue.

Ephrem continues by saying that accurate names about God are full of taste and have given that taste even to the scribes, perhaps of the Scriptures.

> And who makes tasteless the accurate names // of Father, Son, and Spirit, through whom the // Scribes, who have no sense, gain taste? Everything that is // Can be tasteless in mixture, while Father, Son, and Spirit // Are alone steadfast. For their strength // Is not related to mixture.[79]

The strength of the Father, Son, and Spirit is not related to their mixture. This is unique to God, according to Ephrem, because he assumes everything that exists loses its potency, or taste, through mixture. But the names of Father, Son, and Spirit maintain their taste and potency even within their mixture.[80] In addition, one can extrapolate that the strength of God remains the same even before mixture. By this mixture of names, Ephrem provides an example of the unified essence of God.

True Names for the Holy Spirit

What Ephrem argues about the function of divine names with regarding the person of the Son can be carried over into his views on the Holy Spirit. Ephrem affirms that the names of God are boundaries for reflection into the essence of God. The proper

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[78] It is notable that the (Ps)-Ephrem Commentary on the Diatessaron does not include the last half of Matt 5:13. Instead it reads "you are the salt of the earth."

[79] *HdF* 62.12.

// ܡܢ ܕܝܢ ܒܥܐ ܠܡܫܕܐ ܠܐ ܡܦܠ // ܡܫܕܐ ܡܢ ܕܐܒ ܘܒܪ ܘܪܘܚ ܩܕܫ ܕܒܗ // ܟܬܒܐ ܕܠܝܬ ܠܗܘܢ ܪܥܝܢܐ ܡܬܛܥܡ // ܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܡܫܬܚܠܦ ܒܫܘܝܬܐ // ܐܒ ܘܒܪ ܘܪܘܚ ܩܕܫ ܕܒܠܚܘܕܝܗܘܢ ܩܝܡ // ܠܝܬ ܠܗ ܚܠܦ ܠܗ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܚܠܦ ܒܫܘܝܬܐ // ܕܚܝܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܟܚ ܠܫܘܝܬܐ

[80] Ephrem's ideas of mixture resonate with the Stoic understanding of *krasis*. I discuss Ephrem's theory of mixture and blending further in chapter five.

response to God's gift of names is worship. Ephrem's emphasis on the worshipping Christian community highlights the importance of Christian practice in his theology. In *HdF* 59, Ephrem reiterates his arguments about divine names in order to say that the Holy Spirit is divine and coequal with the Father and Son. In this hymn, Ephrem articulates the Holy Spirit's equality with the Father and the Son on the basis that the Holy Spirit's name has the same status and connotation as the Father and the Son. The name Holy Spirit indicates a nature that cannot be known. Ephrem begins this hymn by discussing a dispute that has arisen concerning the "waters of our forgiveness," indicating within the first strophe that there is a disagreement concerning the baptismal waters. The issue at stake in this hymn regards the efficacy of sacramental actions in light of schismatic priests and church communities.

Edmund Beck notes that Ephrem's affirmation of the Holy Spirit's divinity is indirect in this hymn. Beck thinks that *HdF* 59 was written in response to pneumatomachians.[81] He then notes how Ephrem's indirect method is similar to that of Basil the Great, but he also suggests that the similarity does not necessitate influence or a similar ecclesial situation.[82] The most plausible explanation for Beck was the use of Holy Scripture and the language of Nicaea. While Beck realizes the common resources for theological reflection, I am suggesting that this correlation is related to the same polemical context, in response to Aetian and Eunomian theories of language.

In *HdF* 59.3, Ephrem notes that even though the Holy Spirit does not have a body,

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[81] Edmund Beck, *Die Theologie des hl. Ephraem in seinen Hymnen über den Glauben* (Rome: Pontificum Institutum S. Anselmi, 1949), 84–85.

[82] Ibid., 84. Referencing Basil's *De Spiritu Sancto* I, 3.

she is exalted above the body because she is proclaimed as the Spirit.[83] The absence of scriptural depictions of the Holy Spirit's body serves to affirm Ephrem's point; the Holy Spirit is divine because God has revealed the Trinity to humanity. This revelation is given through correct names, which have been received through the church and interpreted through the natural world. Through the divine names, God has revealed the natures associated with those names. These are names that show what the nature behind the word is and these names provide a boundary for investigation.

Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Ephrem says,

> And who is like the Holy Spirit, who did not receive a body? // And there is no place where the Prophets introduced her weakness, // [Nor] the Apostles her need. Maiden and maidservant, // Created being and thing-formed they never called her, // As they called him 'Son.' She is higher than the body, // Exalted above all things.[84]

Within this text Ephrem highlights the incorporeality of the Holy Spirit, and emphasizes the fact that the Holy Spirit is never called a creature. Because the Holy Spirit is not a creature, like the Son who is also not a creature, she has a status above everything. Ephrem puts the Holy Spirit on equal standing with the Son and the Father. Fundamental to Ephrem and pro-Nicene theology is the fact that God is not created, but creator. If the Spirit is not a creature, the Spirit is at the same status as the creator.

As Ephrem continues to discuss the Godhead, he notes that the revelation of the

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[83] Ibid., 84, Beck notes that Ephrem does not speak of the Holy Spirit using the word "God," but does affirm the Holy Spirit as a person of the Trinity who shares in divine essence and is therefore above any corporeal or created thing: "Ephräm spricht zwar nicht ausdrücklich vom hl. Geist als Gott oder von der Gottheit des hl. Geistes. Doch ist nach seiner Lehre der hl. Geist unzweifelhaft eine Person der Trinität. Er gehört daher zur Einheit der göttlichen *ītūthâ* (*essentia*) und is dadurch über jedes Geschöpf unendlich erhaben. Hymnus 59,3 hat dies ausrücklich gesagt: der hl. Geist ist keine Kreatur und kein Werk (der Hände Gottes), er ist erhaben über alles Körperliche."

[84] *HdF* 59:3.

// ܟܬܝܒ ܟܬܒ ܡܬܩܒܠ ܫܠܝ // ܡܬܠܫ ܟܝ ܠܐ ܐܬ ܠܗ ܓܘ // ܘܐܝܟ ܒܠ ܐܬ ܟܬܝ ܒܗ ܢܒܝ
ܡ ܟܝ ܐܡܐ ܘ // ܐܝܟ ܘ ܡ ܟܝ ܐܬ ܐܝܟ ,ܡܐ ܐܬ ܟܬ // ܒܠ ܐܬ ܟܬ ܒ ,ܡ ܟܝ ܐܡܐ ܘ

Trinity to humanity does not include a revelation of how the Trinity exists. Still, Ephrem believes that it is self-evident, presumably from the Scriptures, that the Trinity is ordered in the names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

> About her let us dispute; if it were pressing // that the natures (*kyānê*) of the Father and the Son and the Spirit, should be written for us. // And reveal, about the Maker, that, while he is unmade, he makes, // And as it is said, it is also written concerning the Son, that he is Creator, // Why then was the Trinity not revealed to us— // The nature of how it is?
>
> Who does not know that he has arrayed and numbered them, // And ordered (*taxis*) the three names // Of Father, Son, and Spirit? And it is right that just as // He numbered their names, he revealed their **natures** (*kyānê*). // So if it is written, let us pronounce [it]. If it is not written, let us confess // That their **nature** (*kyānā*) is hidden.[85]

These names reveal the nature of each person in the Trinity. For Ephrem, nature (*kyānā*) is related to the Greek word φύσις, but also has connotations that relate to the Syriac words *'it* and *'itutā*. Even though the connotation of *kyānā* relates to the idea of being or essence, Beck says that *kyānā* is not synonymous with *'itutā*.[86] Possekel notes that Ephrem uses *kyānā* with three meanings: individual creature, inner nature, and element.[87] When Ephrem applies *kyānā* to God the second meaning is most appropriate because

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[85] *HdF* 59:4–5.

// ܕܢܬܚܟܡ ܠܢ ܕܐܢ ܢܗܘܐ ܫܐܠ ܠܢ ܟܝܢܝ ܕܐܒܐ ܘܒܪܐ ܘܪܘܚܐ ܕܢܬܟܬܒ ܠܢ // ܘܢܬܓܠܐ ܥܠ ܦܪܩܢܐ ܕܐܦ ܗܘ ܕܠܐ ܐܬܥܒܕ ܥܒܕ // ܘܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܝܪ ܐܦ ܟܬܝܒ ܥܠ ܒܪܐ ܕܗܘ ܒܪܝܐ ܐܡܪ // ܠܡܢܐ ܠܐ ܐܬܓܠܝ ܠܢ ܬܠܝܬܝܘܬܐ // ܡܢ ܗܘ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܠܗ ܕܐܝܟ ܗܘ ܐܬܝ // ܡܢ ܕܠܐ ܝܕܥ ܕܗܘ ܣܕܪ ܘܡܢܐ ܠܗ // ܕܟܕ ܣܕܪ ܫܡܗ ܐܦ ܟܝܢܗ ܓܠܐ // ܐܢ ܟܬܝܒ ܢܫܬܟܚ ܐܢ ܠܐ ܟܬܝܒ ܢܘܕܐ // ܕܟܝܢܗ ܓܢܝܙ ܗܘ

In this strophe Ephrem asserts that the Father and the Son are both active in the work of creation. Ephrem then notes that the Spirit is the same status as the Father and the Son, indicating that the Spirit is also creator. I discuss this theme more and its relationship to the pro-Nicene trajectory in chapters three and four of this dissertation.

[86] Beck, *Theologie*, 15, says "Die Verwandtschaft dieses *kyânâ-natura* mit *ītūtâ-essentia* ist aber keine volle Gleichheit." Elsewhere Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 70, articulates that Ephrem is indebted in his understanding of "nature" (*kyānā*) to Greek thought: "Dort aber, wo er singularisch «ihre Natur» sagt, ist offenbar ein Einfluß der Terminologie der großen griechischen Theologen seines Jahrhunderts anzunehmen. Das Nebeneinander beider Ausdrucksweisen zeigt, wie wenig philosophisch Ephräm denkt und spricht. Es bleibt auch hier im Kern bei seinem: eins die drei sind."

[87] Possekel, *Evidence*, 59–60.

Ephrem is clear that God is not a creature or an element.[88] When Ephrem uses *kyānā* here, he is referring to the revealed aspects of the Godhead. The names reveal what can be known about the nature of God. The nature of how the Trinity exists is apart from what is revealed in divine names.

Because the nature of God's existence is not revealed in the Scriptures, Ephrem thinks that this creates a barrier for investigation. Ephrem believes that relying on God's mercy and love is more necessary than knowing the nature of the divine life. People are to accept what is written in the Scriptures by names and titles. Debates and arguments are not the appropriate response.

> Because he did not reveal the Three to us, // He showed clearly that the natures// Of the Father, Son, and Spirit must not be investigated. // But the forethought of that Good One is such that // In all ways and means, // He is merciful to humans.
>
> Therefore, without contention, admit that through everything // That is written and spoken by names and titles—// He wanted to include the best for the life of humanity. // Not for debating or contention // Should we investigate their nature, but to perceive // How great their love is.[89]

Ephrem trusts that the revelation about God provided in names and titles is sufficient for human flourishing. The type of debate that Ephrem approves of is one about the greatness of the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The purpose of investigation into God's nature matters for Ephrem. The names of God function as a barrier to improper investigation. Proper investigation is possible with the correct motivation, which is praise of God.

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[88] Possekel, *Evidence*, 59–65.

[89] *HdF* 59:6–7.
ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܓܠܐ ܠܢ ܟܠ ܗ̇ܘ ܬܠܝܬܝܬܐ // ܚܘܝ ܦܫܝܩܐܝܬ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܟܝܢܝܗܘܢ // ܕܐܒܐ ܘܒܪܐ ܘܪܘܚܐ ܐܠܐ ܬܠܝܬ ܕܛܒܐ ܗܘܐ //
ܐܠܐ ܒܛܝܠܘܬܗ ܗܕܐ ܗܝ ܕܗܘ ܛܒܐ // ܕܐܝܟ ܒܟܘܠ ܦܘܪ̈ܣܝܢ ܘܐܝܟ ܒܟܠ ܚܠܠ// ܚܐܣ ܥܠ ܐܢܫܐ // ܡܟܝܠ ܕܠܐ ܚܪܝܢ ܘܕܝ ܕܒܟܠ
ܡܕܡ // ܕܐܬܟܬܒ ܘܐܬܡܠܠ ܒܫܡܗ̈ܐ ܘܒܟܢܘ̈ܝܐ // ܨܒܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܢܪܒܐ ܠܚܝܘܗ̇ ܕܐܢܫܘܬܐ // ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܒܘܨܝܗ ܐܦ ܠܐ ܠܚܪܝܢܐ
// ܕܟܝܢܗܘܢ ܢܒܨܐ ܐܠܐ ܕܢܣܬܟܠ // ܚܘܒܗܘܢ ܟܡܐ ܗܘܐ

Ephrem returns his attention to the Holy Spirit and reiterates that the incorporeality of the Holy Spirit indicates that she is above the divisions spoken about the Son's humanity and divinity.

> Thus, because the Holy Spirit did not receive a body, // She is higher than the voices and the words // Which are spoken about the divinity // Of our Lord, and his humanity. While, the scribes, with contention, // Cause trouble and fling these words // Into the ears of people.[90]

Ephrem notes that the controversy of the Son's humanity, which has come about because of the scribes, infiltrates human ears.[91]

The Spirit, according to Ephrem, is mentioned in the baptismal formula, and is considered one with the Father and the Son. This unity is expressed in the fact that the Spirit's nature, like that of the Father and Son, is unknowable to humanity. The Spirit is also beyond investigation by virtue of her being named with the Father and the Son. Ephrem emphasizes that one ought not investigate or pursue the nature of the divinity because in so doing one will not understand, and one will be in error. Instead, one should attempt to understand the depth of God's love. Throughout *HdF* 59, Ephrem is concerned with those who debate the received traditions and beliefs of the church. The Spirit is the specific subject under discussion in the debates and Ephrem affirms the incorporeality of the Spirit, and notes that the Spirit is named as a divine person of the Trinity. The nature of God is revealed, according to Ephrem, in the names that are given to describe God. Thus, in the names of Father, Son, and Spirit one finds aspects of the divine nature.

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[90] *HdF* 59.8.

ܟܝܢ // ܡܫܬܡܗ ܠܟ ܠܡܫܬܡܥ ܥܡ // ܡܠܐ ܛܒ ܟ ܒܗ ܡܠܐ ܟ ,ܡ ܡܟ // ܡܝܟ ܚܠ ܡܚܠ ܠܟ ܡܒܪܗ ܘܥܢ ܠܟ
ܡܫܒܥܢ ܡܝܟ // ܠܡܠ ܛܒ ܡܠܐ ܘܥܕ ܥܡ // ܡܫܬܡܥ ܡܫܒܥ

[91] This observation is intriguing because Ephrem thought that the virgin Mary conceived Jesus through her ear. See Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 32–33. Cf. *HEccl* 49.7.

ܫܟ ܡܫܬܡܥ ܠܟ ܛܒ ܟ ܡܫܝ // ܡܝܟ ܒܪ ܟ ܡܫܡ ܡܫܬܡܥ ܠܟ // ܡܝܟ ,ܘ ܡܝܟ ܡܟ ܟ ܡܟ

Ephrem believes that this should be enough to silence disputers and encourage worship of God.

Ephrem's affirmation of the Spirit's divinity and place in the Trinity is also evident in *SdF* 4.129.[92] Ephrem notes that the three persons are beyond investigation and that the true names of Father, Son, and Spirit have been given to humanity for contemplation. Contemplation of the names does not allow for investigation into the essence of the godhead. In *SdF* 4.41, Ephrem references the Holy Spirit, saying, "you have heard concerning the Spirit that she is the Spirit of Holiness; call her the name with which she is called. You heard *his* Name, confess *his* name; to investigate *her* nature (*kyānē*) is not permitted."[93] Ephrem uses both masculine and feminine pronouns here and is either referring to the Father or Son, or to the Holy Spirit. Regardless of his use of pronouns, Ephrem notes that one is not allowed to investigate the nature of the Holy Spirit, and so he places the Holy Spirit's nature on equal standing with the Father and the Son. Ephrem says that, "through their names the Father, Son, and Spirit their *qnomē* is reached."[94] Ephrem is not saying that the Father, Son, and Spirit reach their existence on

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[92] Mark Weedman, "Revisiting Ephrem's Trinitarian Theology," *Christian Scholars' Conference* 2016, argues that Ephrem's theology of divine names undergoes a transformation after Ephrem encountered the theology of Eunomius. Weedman suggests that if the *SdF* are dated after the *HdF* then one can see a different development of Ephrem's name theology. Beck (in the *CSCO* critical editions) originally dates the *SdF* to Ephrem's time in Nisibis and the *HdF* to his time in Edessa. While many scholars accept these dates, I remain unconvinced by the confidence in these assertions. See Blake Hartung, "The Authorship and Dating of the Syriac Corpus attributed to Ephrem of Nisibis: A Reassessment," *ZFAK* 22, no. 2 (2018): 296–321. Instead of focusing on how names reveal natures, Weedman reads Ephrem to say that one ought to be cautious when associating names with natures. While Weedman's suggestion that Ephrem's turn away from language's association with nature anticipates a pro-Nicene turn is admirable, I am not convinced that Ephrem's use of nature language reveals a logic that is counter to the one found in Basil. Nonetheless, Weedman's suggestion about the development of Ephrem's understanding of names is helpful in thinking anew about Ephrem's writings. I am grateful to Professor Weedman for sending me a copy of this paper.

[93] *SdF* 4.41.

[94] *SdF* 4.45.

account of their names, but rather, that the Father, Son, and Spirit are comprehended in their names. Ephrem asserts his name theology in *SdF* 4, within the context of the distinction between God and humanity, in which he notes that something fashioned has no right or capacity to investigate the one who fashioned it. On this basis, Ephrem explains that God's names, Father, Son, and Spirit, indicate that God is beyond human understanding.

To conclude this section, Ephrem uses his theology of divine names to show that the Son has the same hidden nature as the Father. Ephrem extends this logic to the Holy Spirit and notes that the name Holy Spirit indicates that she is beyond human comprehension. Divine names function as barriers to theological inquiry into the essence and existence of the persons of the Trinity. While Ephrem is engaged in the disputes of the fourth century, as is evidenced in his exegesis of Prov 8:22, Ephrem does not use the same logic or exegetical maneuvers that his Greek pro-Nicene counterparts use. Nevertheless, Ephrem's conclusions about fourth century polemics, indicate that he is on the side of the pro-Nicenes. Ephrem's concern with a theology of divine names shows that he engaged in the same kind of theological discussion that was taking place in the Greek world in response to Eunomius and his theology of divine names. In the next section I suggest that Ephrem's concern with divine names is, in part, a response to Eunomian theology.

Ephrem and Basil Confront Eunomius

ܟܬܒܐ ܕܡܫܒܚܬܐ ܘܫܘܒܚܐ ܡܪܝ ܐܦܪܝܡ ܟܪ ܒܪ

The connection between Basil of Caesarea and Ephrem the Syrian was recognized early on in the reception history of Ephrem's life.[95] The hagiographical tradition about Ephrem recounts a time when Ephrem traveled and met with Basil.[96] While there is no other evidence to suggest that Ephrem met Basil face to face, I believe Ephrem's theology of names and the corresponding theory of language bear a marked similarity to Basil's *Contra Eunomium*. In this section, I highlight the ways in which Ephrem and Basil's theory of language and theology of divine names are similar. This similarity suggests that Ephrem, while still lacking facility in the Greek language, was aware of pro-Nicene responses to Eunomius's question of the Son and the Holy Spirit's divinity. First, I examine Basil's approach found in his writings against Eunomius. I then turn to Ephrem's utilization of name theology and theory in order to show both the divinity and equality of the Son and Spirit with the Father. Ephrem does not exegete the same biblical passages as Basil; instead, Ephrem relies on his name logic to support his theology.

Basil's Contra Eunomium

In December of 359 at Constantinople, Eunomius, not yet a bishop, set forth his first *Apology* on his views concerning the term *homoousios* and the relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit.[97] The *Apology* was meant to defend the teachings of Eunomius'

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[95] Joseph Amar, *The Syriac Vita Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian*, CSCO vol. 630, ss. 243 (Louvan: Peeters, 2011). For a study of the immediate context in which these texts were written see, Nestor Kavvadas, *Ephraem der Syrer und Basilios der Große, Justinian und Edessa: Die Begegnung griechischer und syrischer Traditionsautorität in der Ephraemvita und der miaphysitisch-chalkedonische Konflikt* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), who suggests that the vita tradition displays the theological concerns of the Greek and Syriac churches of the late fifth and sixth centuries.

[96] Chapter 25 of the *Ephrem Vita*.

teacher and ally Aetius. In the *Apology*, Eunomius argues that the single name most appropriate for God is "Unbegotten," and that this name reveals God's essence.[98] To say that the Son and the Father are the same essence is a contradiction in terms, because "Begotten" cannot be the same essence as "Unbegotten." If the Son is begotten, then the Son is not the same essence as the Father.

Thomas Kopecek suggests that Eunomius relies on the logic of Albinus (*Intro*. 7.10). In so doing, Eunomius attacks the positions of the Homoians and Homoousians by saying that the names Father and Son do not connect to the same essence (*ousia*).[99] It is clear that Eunomius is writing against positions that elevate the status of the Son to be equal with the Father. Eunomius's theology met resistance from Basil, and later from Gregory of Nyssa.[100] The Cappadocian brothers argue that the name "Unbegotten" does not define God's essence and notes that God's essence is beyond human understanding.

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[97] Thomas A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism Volume II* (Philadelphia: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), 299. Cf. Philostorgius *HE* 4:12. Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius the Extant Works* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 5–9.

[98] Michel Barnes, *The Power of God*, 173–219, notes that Eunomius's concern for the ingenerate nature of God translated into a doctrine of creation. For Eunomius, God's activity (ἐνέγεια) must be contemporaneous with the product (ἔργον) of that activity. This means that the Son must create the world in the fashion of a demiurge. Eunomius holds two related ideas about names: first, the best name for God is Unbegotten; second, God's existence is simple. These two ideas translate, for Eunomius, into the thought that the name Unbegotten necessarily means Unbegotten essence.

[99] Kopecek, *A History*, 321.

[100] Jean Daniélou, "Eunome l'Arien et l'exégèse néo-Pltonicienne du Crayle," *Revue des Études Grecques* 69 (1956), argues that Basil and Eunomius are using Neoplatonic sources as part of their debate. This argument comes under scrutiny by Lionel Wickham, "Syntagmation of Aetius the Anomean," *JTS* 19 (1968), 558 note 1, who notes that Daniélou's conclusion needs to be approached with caution. John Rist, "Basil's 'Neoplatonism': Its Background and Nature", in *Basil of Caesarea Christian, Humanist, Ascetic* Part 1 ed. Paul Jonathan Fedwick (Toronto: Pontifiical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1981), 137–220, argues that Basil did not even know Plontinus or Porphyry in any significant manner until after he wrote *Against Eunomius*. Michel Barnes, *The Power of God*, 203, note 132, suggests that the source for Eunomius's theory of names if Eusebius of Caesarea's *Preparation for the Gospel*. DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory,* 48–95, details the diverse thinking about the sources of Eunomius's theory of names.

Basil's refutation of Eunomius is rooted in his logic of how divine names and titles inspire humanity to contemplate God's characteristics and actions. While Eunomius wants to define God's existence, Basil argues that God interacts with the world in ways that show God's care for the world. The names for God evoke notions or conceptualizations that provide fodder for human contemplation of divine action in the world. The conceptualizations that emerge from the names and titles for God are not revelatory of God's essence but do reveal the character of the God of the Christian faith. For Basil, as for Ephrem, divine names are a barrier to God's essence, but do not leave humanity at a loss for contemplation on God's character and actions in the world.

Mark DelCogliano, while noting that Basil does not offer his own systematized theory, delineates three themes or rules that build Basil's theory of divine names. First, Basil notes that names are not equal to substances. This is a direct refutation of Eunomius's logic. Second, each name used to describe God has a distinct meaning. God's names are not synonyms and God is not a polynym. Third, names used to describe God operate in the same way when they describe the mundane. These three rules help Basil articulate that descriptions about God's essence are necessarily figurative and thus meant to give humanity worth notions (ἔννοια) about God.[101]

Basil refutes Eunomius's claims by challenging Eunomius's theory of language. DelCogliano argues that Basil's theory of names is neither "conventional" or "naturalist," but rather a "notional" theory, meaning that names correlate to a notion (ἔννοια) or idea between the name and its meaning or substance. For Eunomius, names convey the

[101] DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory*, 151–152.

substance, but for Basil, names convey a notion that can lead one to the substance. As DelCogliano says,

> While in the Heterousian theory, name and substance were inseparable and effectively identical, in Basil's notionalist theory, because of the 'mental space' between name and referent in the notional order, the meanings of names can be manipulated…for Basil there is a creative role for the human mind in understanding and even constructing what names mean when applied to the divine beings. It is not simply a matter of determining, as Eunomius has done, the most accurate descriptor for a substance based on assumed meanings. Rather, one figures out how all the names for God, which have been handed down by scripture and tradition, can be used in a way that is appropriate for God.[102]

Basil countered the Eunomian theory of language by denoting a cognitive process between a word and its essence.

Basil's notionalist theory of divine names is evident in the following quote from *Contra Eunomium* Book 1:

> When our Lord Jesus Christ spoke about himself to make known both the Divinity's love of humanity and the grace that come to humanity from the economy, he did so by means of certain distinguishing marks considered in connection with him. He called himself 'door,' 'way,' 'bread,' 'vine,' 'shepherd,' and 'light,' even though he is not a polynym. All these names do not carry the same meaning as one another. For 'light' signifies one thing, 'vine' another, 'way' another, and 'shepherd' yet another. Though our Lord is one in substrate, and one substance, simple and not composite, he calls himself by different names at different times, using designations that differ from one another for the different conceptualizations.[103]

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[102] DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names,* 185.

[103] St. Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius* 1.7 trans. Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 99–100. Sesboüé, *Basile de Césarée: Contre Eunome, SC* (Paris: Cerf, 1982), 188. Ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἐν τοῖς περὶ ἑαυτοῦ λόγοις τὴν φιλανθρωπίαν τῆς θεότητος καὶ τὴν ἐξ οἰκονομίας χάριν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις παραδηλῶν, ἰδιώμασί τισι τοῖς θεωρουμένοις περὶ αὐτὸν ἀπεσήμανε ταύτην, θύραν ἑαυτὸν λέγων καὶ ὁδὸν καὶ ἄρτον καὶ ἄμπελον καὶ ποιμένα καὶ φῶς, οὐ πολυώνυμός τις ὤν· οὐ γὰρ τὸ σημαινόμενον ῾φωτὸς᾽καὶ ἄλλο ῾ἀμπέλου᾽καὶ ἄλλο ῾ὁδοῦ᾽καὶ ἄλλο ῾ποιμένος᾽. Ἀλλ᾽ ἓν ὤν κατὰ τὸ ὑποκείμενον, καὶ μία οὐσία καὶ ἁπλῆ καὶ ἀσύνθετος, ἄλλοτε ἄλλως ἑαυτὸν ὀνομάζει, ταῖς ἐπινοίαις διαφερούσας ἀλλήλων τὰς προσηγορίας μεθαρμοζόμενος.

The purpose of the different names for God were the different conceptualizations (ἐπινοίαις) about God within God's economic action to the world. The concepts that are brought to mind for Basil, in words such as 'door,' 'ways,' and 'bread,' are concepts or notions about the character of God. This character is revealed in the name, precisely because these names provide avenues for reflection about God's economic work in the world.

The different names applied to God are done so with the purpose of providing room for thinking about the goodness of God. Basil continues:

> On the basis of his different activities and his relation to the objects of his divine benefaction, he employs different names (ὀνόματα) for himself. For instance, when he calls himself 'the light of the world,' he points out the inaccessibility of the glory in the divinity. He also calls himself this because he illuminates those who have purified the eye of their soul with the splendor of his knowledge. He calls himself 'vine' because he nurtures those who have been planted in him by faith so that they may bear the fruits of good works. And 'bread' because he turns out to be a rational being's most appropriate nourishment, since he maintains the soul's constitution, preserves its distinguishing mark, and, always filling up from himself what is lacking, does not allow it to be dragged down to the weakness that enters it from irrationality.[104]

Basil teaches that descriptions about God and the Son are starting points for reflection on the character of God, and are appropriate for individuals at whatever level they find themselves. These names do not reveal the essence of God's existence, but instead point to different aspects of God's work in the world.

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[104] St. Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius* 1.7 translated by Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2011), 99–100. Sesboüé, *Basile de Césarée: Contre Eunome, SC* (Paris: Cerf, 1982), 188. Κατὰ γὰρ τὴν τῶν ἐνεργειῶν διαφορὰν καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὰ εὐεργετούμενα σχέσιν διάφορα ἑαυτῷ καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα τίθεται. Φῶς μέν γὰρ ἑαυτὸν τοῦ κόσμου λέγει, τό τε ἀπρόσιτον τῆς ἐν τῇ θεότητι δόξης τῷ ὀνόματι τούτῳ διασημαίνων, καὶ ὡς τῇ λαμπρότητι τῆς γνώσεως, τοὺς κεκαθαρμένους τὸ ὄμμα τῆς ψυχῆς καταυγάζων. Ἄμπελον δέ, ὡς τοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ κατὰ τὴν πίστιν ἐρριζωμένους ἐπ᾽ ἔργων ἀγαθῶν καρποφορίαις ἐκτρέφων. Ἄρτον δέ, ὡς οἰκειοτάτη τροφὴ τοῦ λογικοῦ τυγχάνων, τῷ διακρατεῖν τὴν σύστασιν τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ τὸ ἰδίσμα αὐτῆς διασώζειν, καὶ ἀναπληρῶν ἀεὶ παρ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ τὸ ἐνδέον καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἐξ ἀλογίας ἐγγινομένην ἀρρωστίαν οὐκ ἐῶν ὑποφέρεσθαι.

While there is one substance that the names refer to, Basil notes that the conceptualizations help people think about God's action and character.

> And if anyone should examine each of the names one by one, he would find the various conceptualizations, even though for all there is one substrate as far as substance is concerned. Who, then, has so sharpened his tongue for blasphemy that he dares to say that these conceptualizations are dissolved together with the sound of the words?[105]

While there are multiple names, the names point to one substance. The one substance is unknowable to humanity, but the conceptualizations are the place in which people can contemplate God.

Basil's logic is that the Son's names, though they are many, reveal characteristics about God's economic activity in the world. The notions and conceptualizations about God's work in the world are the fodder for reflection on the character of God. Divine revelation, in scripture specifically, is essential to how Basil constructs this theology against Eunomius's reductive logic.

The third book of Basil's *Contra Eunomium* is an affirmation of the Holy Spirit's divine nature. He notes that the Spirit is named with the Father and the Son in the baptismal formula and suggests that this means no creature, no begotten thing, is named along with the Father and the Son. The Spirit, while third in trinitarian order (taxis), is still divine, because the name "Holy" is applied to the Spirit. The type of holiness that typifies the Spirit is such that the Spirit gives holiness to others, is the evidence of divine indwelling in Christians.[106] Basil so applies his logic about names to the person of the

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[105] St. Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius* 1.7, translated by Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2011), 99–100. Sesboüé, *Basile de Césarée: Contre Eunome, SC* (Paris: Cerf, 1982), 188. Καὶ οὕτως ἄν τις τῶν ὀνομάτων ἕκαστον ἐφοδεύων, ποικίλας εὕροι τὰς ἐπινοίας ἑνὸς τοῦ κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν τοῖς πᾶσιν ὑποκειμένου. Τίς οὖν οὕτω τὴν γλῶσσαν πρὸς βλασφημίαν ἠκόνηται ὥστε τολμῆσαι εἰπεῖν ταῖς φωναῖς τὰς ἐπινοίας ταύτας συνδιαλύεσθαι;

Spirit. He looks at the economic activity of the Holy Spirit by focusing on the word "Holy" and noting how divine revelation allows for contemplation of the Spirit's work in the world.

Ephrem Against Eunomius

In this chapter, I have outlined Ephrem's theory of divine names in the following manner: there are two categories for names that describe God, true or borrowed. True names speak to an aspect of God's character and substance, while borrowed names describe an action of God in terms that make sense to humans but do not necessarily apply to God's existence. True names form a boundary for theological inquiry into the essence and existence of God. A true name provides the individual with an avenue for reflection on God. Ephrem's theory of divine names is a critique of Eunomius's theology.[107] In this section, I note that Ephrem's context for his theology of names is both his Syriac milieu and the Aetian and Eunomian controversies.[108] I suggest that Ephrem's critique of the Neo-Arians is not because they use Greek philosophy but because Ephrem

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[106] In chapter five of this dissertation I address the concept of divine indwelling as it relates to the theology of the undiminished giver.

[107] Russell, "Utility of Language," 2, note 8, outlines what he perceives to be examples of Ephrem quoting Eunomius. None of these apparent quotations appear to be exact, perhaps due to the difficulty of translating from Greek into Syriac. Even though these are not precise quotations, it is apparent that Ephrem is writing about concepts that are part of Eunomius's writings.

[108] Wickes, "Mapping the Literary," 7–11, locates Ephrem's theology of names in two related arenas: his Syriac and Mesopotamian milieu, as well as the Aetian and Eunomian controversy. He suggests that the *Gospel of Philip* and Aphrahat's 17th *Demonstration* show a similar understanding of names. Wickes describes Ephrem's approach to divine names as an "apophatic bent" to Ephrem's theology. Ephrem's theology of divine names has similarities to how the *Gospel of Philip* describes names, but is different in Ephrem's insistence on the orthodox Christian character of the names. Wickes appears to be following Murray, "Theory of Symbolism," 10, who notes the connection between the *Gospel of Philip* and Ephrem on the theory of divine names. Murray never expanded upon this observation. He references the idea that the Syriac tradition, including the *Gospel of Philip*, speaks about God in terms of "names," in "The Paradox," 160, but does not expand on the concept.

believes that they are wrong in their assessment of who God is. I note that Ephrem's theology of divine names affirms that the name "Father" is a true name, but that it functions as a barrier to God's essence or substance.

In *HdF* 52, Ephrem articulates his understanding of how God's names teach the faithful about God's nature. Ephrem says, "From God, let us learn about God // How, in his names, it is perceived that he is 'God,' // 'just,' and 'good.' Thus his name 'Father' // makes known that he is begetter, while the name 'fatherhood' // witnesses concerning his Son."[109] Ephrem says that God's fatherhood implies, because of the meaning of the word 'Father', that there is a Son, and vice versus. Additionally, Ephrem notes that the names of God designate different realities that are present in God; like goodness, justice, and later in the passage, creation. Ephrem thinks that the name "Father" is a true name, not a borrowed name. Eunomius believes that the only true name is unbegotten, meaning that the name "Father" does not relate to the essence of God.[110] In contrast, Ephrem is convinced that "Father" reveals something important about God's existence or *qnomā*, and that the name is true.

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[109] *HdF* 52.1.

ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܢܬܠܦ ܐܢ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ // ܐܝܟ ܒܫܡܗܝ ܡܬܚܙܐ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ // ܐܠܗܐ ܘܙܕܝܩ ܘܛܒ // ܗܟܢܐ ܫܡܗ ܐܒܐ ܡܓܠܐ // ܕܗܘ ܐܝܟ ܕܒܪܗ ܡܣܗܕ // ܫܡܗ ܐܒܘܬܐ ܕܒܪܗ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ //

[110] In his study on Ephrem's relationship to Arianism, Peter Bruns, "Arius hellenizans?" 53, argues that Ephrem is averse to Arianism of the Aetian persuasion because Ephrem has an instinctive rejection of anything Greek added to theology. "Ephräms Abneigung gegen den Arianismus aëtianischer Prägung entspringt nicht der expliziten Bejahung einer vom Konzil autoritativ vorgelegten Formel, sondern eher einem unreflektierten, fast instinktiven Unbehagen am Griechischen in der Theologie. Die ganze arianische Debatte erscheint dem Syrer als etwas ihm von außen, d. h. von den Griechen her, Aufgezwungenes, mit dem er sich notgedrungen auseinandersetzen muß, auch wenn es ihm und seinem Glaubensverständnis arg zuwiderläuft." Ephrem, according to Bruns, does not affirm the conciliar rejections of Arianism.Rather, Ephrem rejects Arianism because it adds Greek philosophy to pure Christian theology. In this view, Ephrem is unadulterated by the philosophical ideas that permeated the Greco-Roman world. While Bruns is correct in identifying the manner and means in which Ephrem rejects Arian and Neo-Arian thinking, I do not believe that Ephrem's rejection is rooted in his Semitic character. Rather, Ephrem engages the Neo-Arian position because he believes it is wrong and speaks about God incorrectly. Ephrem's rejection of Greek philosophy has typically been evidenced in a quotation in which Ephrem says, "poison of the Greeks."

Ephrem theology of divine names shows that the names function as a barrier to investigation of God's essence, and as fodder for contemplation of God's goodness. The names Father, Son, and Spirit are a barrier to God's divine essence, but are used to contemplate God's economic action in the world. Ephrem's use of this distinction further connects his ideas with Heterousian conflict.[111] The names of God reveal, for Ephrem, aspects about the character and nature of God. This does not mean that one understands and comprehends the totality of God when one knows God's name, only that aspects of God are revealed in the names. Ephrem's theology of divine names has a notional element that reveals the same logic present in Basil's refutation of Eunomius.

In conclusion, Ephrem's and Basil's logic of divine names extends to their understanding of the Holy Spirit. Both thinkers envision a space between word and reality that provides room for contemplation of God's character. This space for contemplation refutes a Eunomian position of divine names equaling divine essence. While Basil's and Ephrem's logic of names is most pressing for their understanding of the Son, their logic reaches out and notes, because of the baptismal formula, the Spirit's divine status. I believe that such a close connection between their theological logic and found within the same general polemic serves as a reason to create a fictitious meeting between the two.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that Ephrem's theology of names, while pertaining primarily to the divinity of the Son, also extends to his views on the Holy Spirit. Ephrem

[111] See DeCogliano, *Basil's Theory*, 34.

asserts that only God is inscrutable and that investigation into God's essence is impossible and fraught with error. Even though God's essence is beyond human capacity for understanding, God provides humanity with names and titles so that humanity might learn how to speak about God. The names God gives correspond to the reality of those names. Ephrem asserts that these names relate to God's existence in a way that is essential to God. Like Basil, Ephrem acknowledges a notional state between names and their reality. According to Ephrem one of the names that are essential to baptismal, Christian faith, is Holy Spirit. The name Holy Spirit connotes something about the real existence of God and the active work God does in the world.

CHAPTER THREE: EPHREM ON THE HOLY SPIRIT IN GENESIS 1:2B AND INSEPARABLE OPERATIONS

Introduction

The ambivalent meaning of the word "πνεῦμα" (ܪܘܚܐ/*ruḥā*) led to differing interpretations of Gen. 1:2b in the patristic age.[1] Basil interpreted the "Spirit over the waters" as the Holy Spirit, while John Chrysostom and Ephrem interpreted it as the element of wind.[2] The "Spirit as creator," according to Michel Barnes, is a fundamental category to Jewish pneumatology that remains in early Christianity and is reinvented in the pro-Nicene tradition.[3] Lewis Ayres describes the inseparable operation of the Trinity

[1] The word for spirit, also connotes wind in Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac. This ambivalence is part of the reason for the varying exegetical traditions of Gen 1:2b. In addition, the importance of the word ܫܦܐ, to hover, in the later Syriac biblical tradition of Gen 1:2b indicates that as part of ensuring that the Holy Spirit was not interpreted as present in Gen 1:2b, some manuscripts employed a synonym, ܚܦܛ, to disassociate the passage from the Holy Spirit. See T. Jansma, "'And the Spirit of God Moved Upon the Face of the Waters' Some remarks on the Syro-Hexaplaric Reading of Gen. I 2," *Vetus Testamentum* 20 (1970): 16–24, where he notes that Nestorian exegetes follow Theodore of Mopsuestia and associate the ܪܘܚܐ Gen 1:2b with wind.

[2] *Epiph*. 8.16 the text says the Holy Spirit broods of the waters of creation and likens this action to the baptismal font. I remain unconvinced that this text represents authentic Ephrem. Cornelia Horn, "Überlegungen zur Rolle der Pneumatologie Ephräm des Syrers im Umfeld des Ersten Konzils von Konstantinopel," in *Syriaca II*. Beiträge zum 2. Deutschen Syrologen-Symposium in Vierzehnheiligen 2002 eds. M. Tamcke (Münster 2004), 39–40, and Mathai Kadavil, "Worlds as Sacrament: Ethical and Liturgical Response to Creation in Saint Ephrem," *Questions liturgiques* 84 (2003): 13–14, rely on this text to say that Ephrem connects the Spirit with Gen. 1:2b. In light of Ephrem's rejection of this connection in his commentary, and the dubious nature of the *Epiphany* cycle, I do not think this connection is authentic to Ephrem. Chrysostom in *Hom Gen* 3 notes that the Spirit of God hovering over the waters is more akin to the creative capacity that would come out of the water on the fifth day. For an overview of the Patristic interpretation of the passage see, Paul M. Blowers, *Drama of Divine Economy* (Oxford: Oxford, 2012), 113–126.

[3] Michel Barnes, "The Beginning and End of Early Christian Pneumatology," *Augustinian Studies* 39 (2008): 171–174, notes that the crucial biblical texts were Psalm 33:6 and Psalm 104:30. In addition, after Irenaeus the Spirit as creator pneumatological theme disappears until the fourth century. Lewis Ayres, "Innovation and *Ressourcement* in Pro-Nicene Pneumatology" *Augustinian Studies* 39:2 (2008): 187–205, also highlights how the Spirit as creator motif served to bolster pro-Nicene pneumatology against the anti-Nicene trajectories of the *Tropici* and Macedonians. Ayres describes this as an act of recovery.

as an essential belief of the pro-Nicene movement.[4] The capacity to create serves as a fundamental aspect of inseparable operation, because what the Father creates, both the Son and the Spirit do as well. In affirming that Holy Spirit over the primordial waters pro-Nicene theologians were affirming that the Spirit was not separated from the creation.

Ephrem's interpretation of Gen 1:2b is surprising because it appears as though he departs from his pro-Nicene counterparts when he says that the Holy Spirit is not hovering over the primordial waters. Such an interpretation implies that Ephrem does not envision the Holy Spirit as creator. In this chapter I argue that Ephrem's self-professed "literal" interpretation of Gen 1:2b affirms that the Holy Spirit creates, thus showing how Ephrem affirms the inseparable operations of the Trinity. I begin by contextualizing Ephrem's interpretation against his polemical interlocutors. Ephrem writes his commentary against the theologies of Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani who each espouse, in Ephrem's understanding, a faulty cosmology. I then note how Ephrem joins his pro-Nicene counterparts in interpreting Psalm 33:6 to indicate the Holy Spirit's divinity.

Next, I provide a brief discussion of two factors in the cultural memory of Ephrem that would reinforce his reticence to associate the Holy Spirit with the waters of creation. I then examine Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* in order to show that Ephrem interprets the *ruḥā* over the waters of creation as wind to preserve the unique status of the Holy Spirit. It is crucial to note that Ephrem's commentary is, by his own admission, a literal commentary. Ephrem's literal interpretation of Genesis guides his understanding of the term *ruḥā* and does not permit him to allegorize or look for symbols and mysteries in

[4] Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 236, notes that the third hallmark of pro-Nicene theology is a "clear expression of the doctrine that the persons work inseparably."

the text. Last, I argue that while Ephrem does not envision the Holy Spirit hovering at the creation of the world, he, nevertheless believes the Holy Spirit hovers over the baptistery in the new creation of the Christian. This connection indicates that Ephrem envisioned the creative capacity of the Holy Spirit in the Christian sacraments. Such action, I believe, indicates that Ephrem affirms inseparable operations in the Trinity.

Ephrem, The Spirit, and The Heretics

Ephrem writes his *Commentary on Genesis* in a polemical context against the cosmologies of his interlocutors. These cosmologies varied and supported creation by means of *hulē*, by means of an intermediary figure, or through a mingling of essential beings.[5] One of Ephrem's tasks in his Genesis Commentary is to dismantle the cosmologies of his interlocutors. Throughout his career, Ephrem wrote against the theologies of Marcion, Mani, and Bardaisan.[6] Ephrem connects these three opponents often in his writings, mentioning them all even if he starts a hymn focused only on one of them. These three heresiarchs are problematic to Ephrem because they each espouse a

[5] Ephrem's familiarity with the primordial *hulē* shows a touchpoint between his context in Edessa and Nisibis with the broader Greek philosophical tradition. Ephrem, to some degree, is aware of the Platonic creation myth, even if this myth is mediated through his polemical interlocutors.

[6] While there is some debate as to when in his career he wrote the *Prose Refutations* and the *Hymns Against Heresies*, due to the literary output of these two collections, I believe that it is probable that Ephrem would have encountered the theologies of these arch heretics at both Nisibis and Edessa. Lange suggests that the *HCH* and the *PR* are products of Ephrem's time in Edessa, but I do not think that just because Ephrem references Bardaisan, these works are by matter of course part of his time in Edessa. Because Bardaisan was a Syriac speaker and author, it seems probable that his theology would have reached Nisibis. Robert Joseph Morehouse, "Bar Dayṣān and Mani in Ephraem the Syrian's Heresiography," (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2013), 67–97, argues that the rhetorical purpose for Ephrem's association of Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani is to highlight their lineage as "sons of error" related to their progenitor Satan, who was the serpent in the Genesis narrative. This argument is also laid out in Phil J. Botha, "The Textual Strategy of Ephrem the Syrian's Hymn *Contra Haereses* I," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 15 (2004): 57–75, where he suggests Ephrem argues that Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani are each different appearances of the same error, and so from the family of Satan.

doctrine of the creation of the world that does not match Ephrem's plain, literal reading of the Genesis account.[7] In addition, Ephrem indicates that the teachings of Marcion, Mani, and Bardaisan were part of competing religious communities in both Edessa and Nisibis. This section examines Ephrem's rebuttals to their teachings on the Holy Spirit in his *Prose Refutations* and *Hymns Against Heresies* in order to show that Ephrem's interpretation of the spirit in Gen 1:2b was a reaction to the cosmologies of Marcion, Mani, and Bardaisan.

Marcion

From the point of view of the proto-Orthodox, Marcion of Sinope is perhaps the first great heresiarch in the Christian faith. His teachings created a lasting impact on Christianity by questioning the relationship between the Christian faith and the Jewish religion as well as between Jesus and the God of the Old Testament.[8] What little that can

[7] *Com Gen* 1.1, Ephrem thinks that the text of Genesis is straightforward. He says that Moses' account of the creation of the world was not symbolic (ܡܬܠܐ ܠܐ), and that the words Moses used mean what they say.

[8] Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God* trans. John E. Seely and Lyle D. Bierma (Durham, North Carolina: The Labyrinth Press, 1990), thought of Marcion as the first true textual critic and envisioned Marcion as a turn of the century Protestant Liberal who uncovered the gritty faith questions ignored by the pious traditionalists. Harnack's admiration of Marcion was persistent throughout his career. Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria: Principles, Problems, Polemics," *Second Century* 6:3 (1987): 153–172, argues that Ephrem's polemic against Marcion was selective and that Ephrem critiqued the aspects of Marcionism that were held in common with Middle Platonism. Drijvers highlights Plutarch of Chaeroneia and Porphyry, 168. Idem., "Die Oden Salomos und die Polemik mit den Markioniten im Syrischen Christentum," *Symposium Syriacum 1976* Orientalia Christiana Analecta 205 (Rome: Pontificum Institum Orientalium Studiorum, 1978), argues that the *Odes of Solomon* are, in part, a polemic against Marcion. Sidney Griffith, "Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire," in *Diakonia: Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer,* ed. T. Halton (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 22–52. Idem., "The Marks of the 'True Church' According to Ephraem's *Hymns Against Heresies,*" in *After Bardaisan: Change and Continuity in Syriac Christianity, in Honor of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers*, ed. G.J. Reinink and A.C. Klugkist (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 125–140, idem., "Setting Right the Church of Syria: Saint Ephraem's *Hymns Against Heresies*," in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R.A. Markus* ed. William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 97–144, argues that Ephrem was a proponent of the Roman Empire and that Ephrem envisioned the church as part of that Empire. The

be known about Marcion is derived from Christians who wrote against him. Ephrem's polemic against Marcion is one that may or may not reflect Marcion's own position.[9] Nevertheless, Ephrem's treatment of Marcionite teaching shows how Ephrem understood the theology of Marcion's followers and so provides a unique account of the pervasive quality of Marcion's teaching.

Ephrem believes that the fundamental problem of Marcionite cosmology is that the created world is a place where the "Just One" rewards wicked and unjust people.[10] Ephrem critiques this Marcionite theology on three fronts. First, as an advocate of creation ex nihilo, Ephrem finds the Marcionite creator's use of *hulē* to be a theological and linguistic problem. There cannot be multiple entities with the same essence as the God who creates the world. The word "creator" implies an eternal essence, of which there is only one. Second, Ephrem is troubled by how Marcionite theology lacks names for God that connect to the real existence of God. Marcionite names for God are lacking because they are idols that do not have any association to the reality behind the name. Third, Ephrem confronts the Marcionite view that the Spirit brooding over the waters is connected to the destruction of the creator. This narrative troubles Ephrem because it connects the Spirit with an evil creation. Such an idea is not found in an orthodox reading of Genesis.

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theologies of the three heresiarchs in general, and Marcion in particular, are problematic to Ephrem because they are not part of the official religion. Griffith also argues that Ephrem, as a proponent of the Church of the Empire, wrote against the Arian teaching. Judith Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic*: God and Scripture in the Second Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 143–176, has offered a comprehensive treatment of the scholarship surrounding Marcion as well as noted the varied theological contours of Ephrem's polemic against Marcion.

[9] Edmund Beck, "Die Hyle bei Markion nach Ephräm," *OCP* 44 (1978): 5–30. D. Bundy, "Marcion and the Marcionites in Early Syriac Apologetics," *Le Muséon* 101 (1988): 21–32.

[10] *PR* II. xxv, 54–55.

Ephrem, writing against Marcionite teaching, portrays Marcion's theology as one in which the creator made a contract with the primordial *hulē*. This contract with the *hulē* meant that the creator needed material substance to create the world. Ephrem thinks that the substance God would have used to create the world must have had the same essence as God. Both the creator and the *hulē* would have to share the eternal essence. Such a deity is not the God Ephrem sees in the Scriptures. Ephrem disagrees that there are other essences which could compete with or aid the Christian God in the process of creation. In *HCH* 48, Ephrem's refrain indicates the nature of his disagreement with Marcion's theology: "Glory be to the only one in his essence (*b'itutē*)!"[11] Here Ephrem affirms that the one God has a unique essence. For Ephrem, the essence of God is unique and not divisible, nor in need of aid by means of pre-existent matter in order to create the world.

Not only did Ephrem observe the linguistic and theological problem of the *hulē* in Marcionite cosmology, but Ephrem also noticed that in Marcion's theology there was a second god who would come to redeem humanity from the corrupt creation. Ephrem called this figure the "Stranger." The problem Ephrem has with this Stranger is that it is not a biblical concept. This Stranger comes and saves people from the evil world, which is the product of the evil creator. Such a position is untenable in Ephrem's mind because there is only one God with one divine essence and this single created a good world.

Ephrem thinks that Marcion introduced the concept of *hulē* into the church and so blames Marcion for this dualistic teaching.[12] Writing against the concept of the *hulē*,

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[11] *HCH* 48. Refrain.

ܒܗܘܢ ܕܠܝܬ ܒܗ ܟܠ ܫܘܒܚܐ

[12] *HCH* 48.1. Cf. Tryggve Krohnholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian: with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Tradition* (Lund, Sweeden: CWK Gleerup, 1978), 36.

Ephrem says, “Moses wrote that God // created the heavens and the earth. // From the earth that he created, he formed [us], // and the name ‘creator’ testifies [it]. // And if the *hulē* is a single thing, // where do the myriad kinds // of heavens and water and fire // and darkness, light and wind come from; // natural elements separated from each other?”[13] Ephrem criticizes the nature of what the *hulē* was supposed to be; if this pre-existent *hulē* is simple, how does it provide the matter for various elements? If it provides matter for multiple elements then it would be complex.[14] This is a foundational philosophical argument that God must be simple.

Not only does Ephrem attack the concept of the *hulē* on the basis of its divisibility, Ephrem also notes that Marcion’s use of names for God do not correspond to the reality behind those names. Marcion’s theology is not creative, Ephrem asserts, because he does not introduce new names for God. Marcion uses the name Jesus, which is written in the law; the name Holy Spirit, which is the hope and treasury of the prophets; and the name God, which every nature proclaims.[15] Ephrem opposes Marcion’s denial of the unity of God. Instead of a good God who cares for the creation, Marcion sees a stranger who is working against the created world. Ephrem is troubled by Marcion’s theology because it does not teach that the names of God revealed in the Scriptures are satisfactory revelation. Marcion has to add a name: “They all divided and

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[13] *HCH* 48.2.

ܐ ܡܠܐ ܠܡܐ // ܐܡܪ ܡܘ ܡܢ ܡܟܬܒ // ܟܠ ܠܟ ܡܢ ܐܪܥܐ // ܡܢ ܐܪܥܐ ܡܕܒܪ ܡܢ ܫܡܝܐ // ܘܫܡܗ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܡܥܝܕ // ܘܐܢ ܟܠ ܐܢ ܚܕ ܡܕܒܪ // ܐܝܟ ܡܢ ܐܝܟ ܡܢ ܡܢ ܐܝܟ // ܡܢ ܫܡܝܐ ܘܡܝܐ ܘܢܘܪܐ // ܘܚܫܟܐ ܢܗܝܪ ܘܪܘܚܐ // ܡܢ ܐܝܟ ܡܢ ܐܝܟ ܡܦܪܫ ܐܢ ܐܢ

[14] T. Krohnholm, *Motifs*, 35 says, “Ephrem’s fundamental criticism of Marcion’s heterodoxy concerns precisely his erroneous doctrine of creation.” The unity of the creator is essential in Ephrem’s mind and Marcion’s two deities is not part of the biblical story.

[15] *HCH* 49.1.

ܐ ܡܕܒܪ ܒܪܝܬ ܫܡܥ ܡܫܬܒܚ ܫܒܚ // ܕܒܪ ,ܝܚܝܕ ܡܕ ܐܬܝܪ ܡܫܡ ܡܕ ܒܪܝܬ // ܡܫܬܒܚ ܫܡܥ ܡܕ ܡܢ ܡܫܡ ܡܕ ܒܪܝܬ // ܐܬܝܪ ܡܫܡ ܡܕ ܐܬܝܪ ܡܫܡ ܡܕ ܐܬܝܪ // ܡܫܬܒܚ ܫܡܥ ܡܕ ܐܬܝܪ ܡܫܡ ܡܕ ܐܬܝܪ

distributed the name, which is never // divided and distributed. The one denier has created // another name for the name of God, // a cursed, alien one. And his two sons united // the name of the single being into separate beings."[16] This new name for God that Marcion has added, the "Stranger," does not correspond to the reality (*qnomā*) of the name because there is no such "Stranger." Marcion's system is idolatry because it is name that does not have a basis in reality.

Ephrem believes that God's names correspond to the reality of God's actions toward the world.

> Ashamed is Marcion, who was wrong and misled for there is no other (God). // He is one and his names correspond to his deeds. // For he creates and nourishes us, he judges and spares us, // he chastises and possesses us, he redeems and saves us. // His judgment is just and his mercy benevolent, // but where is the stranger?[17]

Ephrem criticizes Marcionite theology that has separated the name creator from the good God. For Marcion, the creator is not the good God, the good god is the Stranger who would act to save the world. Ephrem highlights the fact that there is one God whose names all correspond to actions of creation, mercy, and redemption.

Ephrem's disdain for Marcion's cosmology is that it requires a distant, impersonal god. Ephrem notes that the true God is mindful of everything, both the good and the bad about humanity, and yet God still forgives humanity. The one true God has compassion on, redeems, and saves humanity. This kind of action cannot be done by a remote, strange

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[16] *HCH* 49.6.

ܟܬܒ ܒܝܫ ܡܢܐ ܡܣܟܝ ܡܢܐ ܕܠ // ܡܝܬܝܗ ܐܚܪ ܐܠܐ ܚܕ ܗܘ ܕܓܕܦ ܘܛܥܐ // ܘܫܘܝܐ ܗܘ ܘܫܡܗܝ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܢܝ ܠܗ // ܘܗܘ ܚܕ ܗܘ ܘܫܡܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܚܕ // ܐܠܐ ܫܡ ܐܚܪ ܒܝܫ ܟܬܒ ܒܝܫ ܐܚܪ // ܕܐܠܗܐ ܒܝܫ ܕܐܠܗ ܐܚܪ ܒܝܫ ܡܢܐ ܕܠ // ܘܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܟ ܒܝܫ ܟܬܒ ܒܝܫ ܐܚܪ

[17] *HCH* 50.1.

ܠ ܟܝܢ ܟܝܢ ܠ ܟܝܢ ܟܬܒ // ,ܡܬܟܠܡ ,ܡܬܡܫܟ ܥܡ ܟܠ ܕܒܪ ܗܘ ܕ // ܒܝܫ ܒܢܐ ܒܪܝܐ ܟܠ ܥܡܝܩ ܒܫ
ܟܬܒ ܒܪܝܐ // ܗܘ ܟܒܝܫ ܒܢܐ ܗܘ ܟܒܝܫ ܒܢܐ // ܠ ܟܫܦ ܒܝܫ ܠ ܟܦ ܟܬܒ//

figure; the action of redemption is one that is carried out by an involved and personal God.

Ephrem accuses Marcion, Mani, and their followers of believing that the Spirit hovering over the waters of creation was a sign that the stranger would destroy the creator. Ephrem says, "And of the spirit (wind) that brooded over the waters, naturally, // they took on a brooding, another ugly one. // And they blasphemed that the stranger would destroy the creator. // Fear yourselves, my brothers, and do not wander around in that outer filth // that is the image and shadow // of that inner filth!"[18] Because Marcionite cosmology entailed the destruction of the creator, Ephrem finds this theology lacking. Ephrem indicates that the hovering or brooding of the Spirit in the creation account takes on a negative connotation that leads to the destruction of the Maker. Against this interpretation, Ephrem reads Genesis in a literal manner in order to preserve the Holy Spirit from being equated with the death of the Maker.

Marcion's teaching denies the unity of the Godhead, but Ephrem believes this unity is affirmed in the Bible. The Bible uses the names of God to describe how God has worked in the world and to show that there is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ephrem's contention with Marcion is that Marcion has created two gods and has abandoned monotheism. In *HCH* 3.4 Ephrem notes that the substance (*qnomā*) for the name God is singular, meaning that there is only one God. The single substance of God means that the Father, Son, and Spirit are the same, but also distinct.

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[18] *HCH* 50.8.

ܕܡܫܬܐ ܗܘܐ // ܕܪܘܚܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܡܪܚܦܐ ܥܠ ܡܝܐ ,ܡܫܟܚ // ܒܥܘ ܠܗ ܡܕܡ ܕܡܚܘܐ ,ܡܫܟܚ // ܒܡܫܟܚ ܒܚܘ ܕܠ ܡܚܘܐ // ܕܐܠܗܐ ,ܡ ܡܚܘܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ,ܗܘ // ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ,ܗܘ // ܡܕ ܡܫܟܚ ܬܘܒ ܠܐ ܡܪ

In his *Prose Refutations*, Ephrem attacks Marcion in three separate treatises.[19] Marcion's theology lacks continuity between the Old and New Testaments, so Ephrem goes to great lengths to show the is consistency between the testaments. Ephrem highlights figures like John the Baptist, Elijah, and Moses. Marcion's cosmology also comes under Ephrem's scrutiny. Ephrem notes that if the elements of fire, water, and wind were made out of an eternal substance, then they should not be subject to change. This is so because things created from nothing are able to be changed but not eternal substances.[20] Ephrem also highlights the incongruity of Marcionite theology of the Stranger. Ephrem notes that Jesus is portrayed as the creator in Marcionite thought, but because the world is saved by the Stranger, Ephrem thinks Jesus would better fit the role of the Stranger.

In summary, Ephrem's primary concern with Marcion's cosmology is that Marcionites believe that the created world is evil. As a theologian who affirms *creatio ex nihilo*, Ephrem also affirms the goodness of creation. Ephrem thinks that Marcionite cosmology interprets the creation to be evil and so removes the name creator from its connection to the reality of a creator. Ephrem cannot accept this starting position because the book of Genesis claims that God called the creation "good." Marcionite cosmology not only interprets the creation of the world as bad, it also, in Ephrem's estimation, compromises the role of the Holy Spirit who works within the created world.

Bardaisan

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[19] *PR* II, xxiii–lxv, pages 50–142.

[20] *PR* II, xxx–xxxviii, pages 65–83.

In Ephrem's mind the arch heretic of the Syriac world is Bardaisan.[21] What is known about Bardaisan comes from works that are not his own.[22] He is described as an official counselor in the royal court and regarded for his poetry, wisdom, and his ability with archery.[23] The only surviving work that is attributed to Bardaisan's school of thought is the *Book of Laws and Countries* and there is little to no indication that Ephrem was familiar with this work. The *BLC* describes the different nations of the world and the unity of God, and it has been suggested that the *BLC* is, in part, a refutation of Marcionite theology.[24] Ephrem finds Bardaisan's cosmology problematic because Bardaisan taught that the world was the result of different essences and essential beings in combination. Ephrem accuses Bardaisan and his followers of believing in the zodiac calendar and of

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[21] Han Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, 96–126 cf. 133–143. Sidney Griffith, "St. Ephrem, Bar Dayṣān and the Clash of Madrāshê in Aram: Readings in St. Ephrem's Hymni contra Haereses," *The Harp* 21 (2006): 447–472. E. Beck, "Bardaisan und Seine Schule bei Ephräm," *LM* 91 (1978): 271–333, esp. 271-88. Ute Possekel, "Bardaisan and Origen on Fate and the Power of the Stars," *JECS* 20.4 (2012): 515–541. Idem., "Bardaisan's Influence on Late Antique Christianity," *Hugoye* 21.1 (2018):81–125. Idem., "Bardaisan of Edessa: Philosopher or Theologian?" *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 10 (2006): 442–461. Illaria Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment of the Evidence and a New Interpretation* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2009), provides an attempted rehabilitation of Bardaisan as a theologian who was praised by his contemporaries, but then vilified in future generations. Attempts to rehabilitate Bardaisan often do so at the expense of Ephrem. T. Kremer, *Mundus Primus: Die Geschichte der Welt und des Menschen von Adam bis Noach im Genesiskommentar Ephräms des Syrers* (Louven: Peeters, 2012), 65, notes that Ephrem's critique was not unfounded saying, "Ephräms Kritik hat Bardaisan nicht unbegründet getroffen."

[22] In *HCH* 53 Ephrem provides a few biographical details about Bardaisan. He notes that Bardaisan spoke about the zodiac calendar and wrote 150 *madrāšē,* which Bardaisan attaches music to in order to appear similar to David. Kathleen McVey, "Were the earliest *madrāšē* Songs or Recitations?" in *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers* eds. G.J. Reinink and A.C. Klugkist (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 187–189, notes that Ephrem's description of Bardaisan in *HCH* 53.6 indicates that possibility that the earliest madrāšē could have been recitations instead of songs.

[23] Eusebius, *Ecc.His.* 4.30.

[24] Bundy, "Marcion and the Marcionites," 23–24, asserts that Bardaisan's *BLC* is a refutation of Marcionite theology.

having a deterministic view of the world and of human nature. Ephrem's critique of Bardaisan's cosmology even extends to the theology of the Holy Spirit.[25]

Ephrem's first concern with Bardaisan's cosmology is Bardaisan's idea that the world was created from a combination of *'ityē.* Ephrem notes that Bardaisan came up with seven beings (*'ityē*),[26] and Ephrem connects this idea with the zodiac calendar.

> The "woe" that our Lord gave attached itself to Bardaisan, // who established seven beings as the iron of truth // he determined and gave it to him. He preaches the signs of the zodiac, // observes the hour, teaches the seven // and questions the times. He accepted the sevenfold woe // and passed it on to his disciples.[27]

For Bardaisan's transgression of the seven beings, Ephrem envisions seven woes against him. A cosmology with a mixture of beings is a theological problem that Ephrem thinks undermines Bardaisan's thought. If the divine beings can be mixed, they ought not be termed "beings."[28]

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[25] T. Kremer, *Mundus Primus,* 27–36, details Bardaisan's cosmological system and highlights the discrepancies between Ephrem's account in *HCH* 55 and the *BLC* with regard to the Spirit and creation. Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, 159, suggests that Ephrem turns Bardaisanites into Manicheans. Ramelli is quick to point out that Ephrem's description of Bardaisanites would not be reflective of Bardaisan himself. Later she says, "What led Ephrem to the assimilation of Bardaisan to Mani was his polemic engagement and the threat that Manichaeism represented for orthodoxy in his own day, whereas this was not the case in the time of Bardaisan, of course, when it did not yet exist. Another factor that influenced Ephrem surely was the fact that, later on, some Bardaisanites actually adhered to Manichaeism," 165. While it is undoubtedly true that Ephrem is not writing against the original or real Bardaisan, it seems much more difficult to establish what Bardaisan thought.

[26] Ephrem believed that Bardaisan thought that the human soul was composed this way as well in *PR* 1, xxxii, Ephrem calls Bardaisan Mani's teacher and references "seven parts of the soul."

[27] In *HCH* 3.2, 6; 41.7 Ephrem refers to Bardaisan believing in 5 or 6 "beings." Ephrem references both and shows a confusion about how many beings were in the Bardaisanite system. The confusion rests upon whether or not darkness is counted among the beings. Possekel, *Evidence*, 116–126, shows how Ephrem uses Stoic philosophy of mixture of the whole (κρᾶσις δι᾽ ὅλων) to refute Bardaisan's cosmology. More about this concept in Ephrem will be discussed in chapter 5. *HCH* 51.13.
ܘܝܐ ܕܝܗܒ ܡܪܢ ܠܗܘ ܠܒܪ ܕܝܨܢ // ܕܣܡ ܐܝܬܝܐ ܫܒܥܐ ܕܦܪܙܠܐ ܕܩܘܫܬܐ // ܦܣܩܗ ܘܝܗܒܗ ܠܗ ܡܟܪܙ ܠܡܠܘܫܐ // ܘܠܫܥܬܐ ܢܛܪ
ܘܡܠܦ ܫܒܥܝܐ // ܘܫܐܠ ܒܙܒܢܐ ܘܗܘ ܫܩܠ ܫܒܥܐ // ܘܐܘܪܬ ܠܬܠܡܝܕܘܗܝ،

[28] Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, 162, suggests that the "beings" here are not ontological but instead are astronomical. Ramelli argues that, for Bardaisan, "beings" were not to be equated with the God of the Bible, 173.

In *HCH* 41.7 Ephrem critiques the cosmology of Bardaisan, saying that Bardaisan has made other gods out of the 'beings'. But these so-called gods have no real substance (*qnomā*). Ephrem says, "But yet another [Bardaisan] calls wind, fire, // and water 'beings' (*'ityē* ܐܝܬܝܗ). And while the essence // is only one thing, and nothing [else] is able // to receive its seal, it is the name of the darkness, // A hateful [name]! It marks this seal by calling it 'essence'."[29] Ephrem is unsure whether or not the darkness is counted as a 'being' and so it leads to his inconsistency in counting self-existent beings in Bardaisanite theology.

In *HCH* 53–56 Ephrem outlines the faulty logic in Bardaisan's teachings by first noting a gross misunderstanding of the nature of God's essence and being. The Syriac terms "essence" and "being" both derive from the particle of existence (*'it*) and, according to Possekel, "do not have parallels in the Greek philosophical terminology."[30] Ephrem and Aphrahat, in addition to the later Syriac tradition, use *'ityā* as an epithet for God. Possekel claims that *'itutā* is the later of the two forms and that it is a synonym for *'ityā*.[31] Despite deriving from the particle of existence, these words do not correspond to the Greek οὐσία, but they correspond to τὸ ὄν.[32]

According to Possekel, the main difference between *'ityā* and *'itutā* is that *'ityā* has a plural form (*'ityē*) while *'itutā* does not.[33] Because of the singularity of *'itutā*, Beck

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[29] *HCH* 41.7.
//ܟܬܝܒ ܒܗ ܫܬܩܠ ܢܦܫ ܟܠ ܚܕ ,ܡ ܫ// ܟܐܢܐ ܕܐ ܐܦ ܟܬܒ ܚܕ // ܟܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܟܐܝܬܝܗ ܕܐܫ ܘܡܝܐ// ܟܐܝܬܝܗ ,ܡܫܡܐ ܕܫ ܕܫܩܠ ܟܣܐ

[30] Possekel, *Evidence*, 55. Also, Aphrahat in *Demonstration* 23.52 uses both *'ityā* and *'itutā* as synonymns. This is the first instance in Syriac literature where *'itutā* is used.

[31] Possekel, *Evidence,* 56.

[32] Nöldeke, *Syriac §*199.

notes that *'itutā* is the inaccessible, spiritual essence of God, which always exists outside of itself and creates all things out of nothing.[34] Bardaisan failed to see that God's *'ityā* or being was unique. Saying that the world was created from multiple *'ityē* denies that God's *'ityā* is the only being.

In addition to Bardaisan's problematic vocabulary, Ephrem notes that Bardaisan lacked an appropriate theology of names. Ephrem says that Bardaisan fails because he connects a true name, that ought to be applied to God, with a non-existent force:

> David did not name the beings that he named. // Because there is only one being. So from the name "being" // he made the names of the beings that do not exist. // If the names are equal, their natures would be the same. // From itself and in itself let their teaching burn, my brothers!
>
> See just how much he was afraid to equate the natures, // of the beings that he (so) had named! To show how daring he was // to make their name the same. It is terrible in two ways// for the insightful: as it is not right, to equate the natures and not equate the names.[35]

Ephrem even says that Bardaisan was afraid to equate the natures with the name "beings." Because Bardaisan did not equate the nature of *'ityā* with God's nature, Bardaisan failed in his attempt to be like David.

Ephrem believes there are names of God that correspond only to God's nature, and the best articulation of those names is *'ityā* (ܐܝܬܝ). It is clear that Ephrem uses *'ity*ā as a reference to Exodus 3:14. In the Peshitta, the Syriac for Yahweh's self-description

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[33] Possekel, *Evidence,* 57.

[34] Beck, *Die Theologie*, 7, "Man kann daher abschliessend formulieren: *ītūtâ* besagt die unzugangliche, geistige Wesenheit Gottes, die immer aus sich selber existiert und alle Geschopfe aus dem Nichts erschuf."

[35] *HCH* 53.7–8.

ܠܘܡ ܒܫܡ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܐܡܬܩܪ ܠܝܬ // ܠܚܕ ܟܝܢܐ ܒܥ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܐܬ ܠܗ ܫܡ // ܐܡ ܡܢܐ ܟܝܢܐ ܡܢܐ ܕܠ ܒܥ
ܟܝܢ ܟܐ ܠܒ ܟܚ ܕܐ ܐܝ // ܫܡ ܐܡܬܠܐ ܚܕܐ ܡܢ ܡܢ // ܐܡܬ ܠܘܡ ܗܘ ܐܡܬܩܪ ܗܘ ܐܝ//
ܟܐܝܢ ܟܚܠ // ܐܡܬܝܫ ܡ ܟܠܐ ܐܡܬܩܪ ܐܝܟ // ܫܒܩ ܟܚ ܟܫܒ ܟܐ ܡܢܐ ܟܝܢܐ // ܐܡܬ
ܟܡܢ ܟ ܒܫ ܚܡ ܐܝܟ ܟܚ // ܒܓ ܟ ܚܡܝ

given to Moses is transliterated from the Hebrew. In at least two places in the *HdF,* Ephrem refers to *'ehyê* (47:10; 63:6) as a synonym for the divine name. In *HCH* 53 Ephrem parallels *'ityā* with the *'ehyê* as a reason to find fault with Bardaisan's cosmological system:

> He revealed the name to Moses: *Ehyeh* he called himself, // which is the name of the Essence (*'itutā*). And he never named // another with this name. // As he renamed the many with his (other) names, // so that by the one name he excluded, // he would know that he alone is the being (*'ityā*) and no other.
>
> And though all the names of God are praiseworthy // because of (His) Majesty, and all praiseworthy, was (even) the name that God excluded, // in order to honor His essence, but the evil, jealous one, // incited the deniers to use the name 'beings.' // The idols they tied to his name, even 'beings' to his name.[36]

Bardaisan, according to Ephrem, ends up as an idolater because the names he uses are illogical and do not correspond to the reality behind them.[37]

Ephrem also argues against Bardaisan's understanding of the Holy Spirit's nature. In *HCH* 55 Ephrem outlines some of the problems he finds in Bardaisan's theology and cosmology as it relates to the Holy Spirit. In an odd passage Ephrem says that Bardaisan taught that the Son was the result of a divine sexual union.[38] The Father joined with the

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[36] *HCH* 53.12–13.
ܠܡܘܫܐ ܓܠܝܗ̇ ܠܫܡܐ ܕܐܗܝܗ ܩܪܐ ܢܦܫܗ // ܕܫܡܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܝܬܘܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܡܢ ܡܬܘܡ ܟܢܐ// ܒܗܢܐ ܫܡܐ ܠܐܚܪܢ ܐܝܟ ܗܟܐ
ܕܒܫܡܗܘܗܝ // ܟܢܐ ܠܣܓܝܐܐ ܕܒܚܕ ܫܡܐ ܕܢܦܩ // ܢܕܥ ܕܗܘܝܘ ܠܚܘܕ ܐܝܬܝܐ ܘܠܝܬ ܐܚܪܢ // ܘܟܕ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܫܡܗܘܗܝ ܫܒܝܚܝܢ.
ܒܪܒܘܬܐ // ܘܫܒܝܚ ܠܡܫܬܡܗܘܬܐ ܒܗܘ ܫܡܐ ܕܢܦܩ// ܠܐܝܩܪ ܐܝܬܘܬܗ ܒܝܫܐ ܚܣܡ ܒܫܡܗ// ܘܓܪ̈ ܠܟܦܘܪܐ ܕܢܫܡܗܘܢ
ܠܐܝܬܝܐ // ܓܠܝܦܐ ܬܠܐ ܒܫܡܗ ܘܐܝܬܝܐ ܒܫܡܗ

[37] Christian Lange, *The Portrayal of Christ in the Syriac Commentary on the Diatessaron* (Louven: Peeters, 2005), 139, suggests that in Ephrem's rejection of Bardaisan Ephrem here creates a new name for God *'ityā.*

[38] T. Krohnholm, *Motifs*, 44, suggests that Ephrem would be aghast at this creative and procreative activity associated with the Spirit. I think that Krohnholm is right to say Ephrem despises the idea that the Holy Spirit procreates, but I do not think that Krohnholm is correct to say that Ephrem would be concerned over the Spirit creating. Dominique Cerbelaud, "Création et trinité," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 72 (1988): 91, says Ephrem is vigorously opposed to the creative action of the Spirit and suggests that Theodore of Mopsuestia follows in Ephrem's footsteps.

mother, the Holy Spirit, who "like a fish conceived and gave birth" to the Son.[39] The Holy Spirit, in Ephrem's depiction of Bardaisan's thought, remains close to the water and gives birth to two daughters. Such a cosmology is untrue for Ephrem because of his fidelity to the doctrine of creation out of nothing and because of his trinitarian monotheism. Bardaisan's system, as Ephrem understands it, involves a kind of generation or birth near the waters of creation. Ephrem removes the Holy Spirit from the water in order to maintain the purity and simplicity of the godhead and to avoid confusion with the Bardaisanite system.

Ephrem also says that underlying Bardaisan's troubles with the Holy Spirit is an inattention to the names used for God. After saying that the nature of angels and of the soul is singular because their name is singular, Ephrem notes that:

> He [the Creator] called his servants by his name gods and lords, // and by the name of his Son he signified, the sons of grace, // and with the name of the Holy Spirit, a spiritual lineage. // Here are the natures separated, immediately the names, // so that you thank his kindness and worship his Lord.
>
> Therefore, ask them: Who named // the beings according to the name of that (divine) being. If (God) Himself, then that would be // entirely grace. But if it was not his (deed), // then it is totally against (him). And who would be more powerful than he, that he could have torn // his name away from him, to name the beings![40]

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[39] The second strophe of this hymn references "light from light." Possekel, *Ephrem's Doctrine of God*, 200, interprets this to mean that Ephrem was familiar with the Nicene creedal statement. Griffith, "St. Ephrem, Bar Dayṣān," 469–471, details how Ephrem used this hymn to critique Bardaisan's poetic style. *HCH* 55.1.

ܓܠܘ ܕܝܢ ܐܚܝ ܥܠ ܒܢܘܗܝ ܕܒܪ ܕܝܨܢ // ܕܠܐ ܬܘܒ ܢܫܬܠܘܢ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪܝܢ ܥܒܪܐ// ܡܕܡ ܪܕܝܐ ܘܒܛܢܬ ܡܢ ܗܘ ܐܒܐ ܕܢܘܢܐ //
ܘܐܡܗܐ ܒܪܐܙ ܢܘܢܐ ܒܛܢܬ ܝܠܕܬܗ// ܘܐܬܡܪ، ܒܪܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܢܥܘܒ ܡܕܝܢܐ // ܬܫܒܘܚ ܠܝܠܘܕܗ

[40] *HCH* 54.6–7.

ܠܥܒ̈ܕܘܗܝ ܩܪܐ ܒܫܡܗ ܐܠܗܐ ܘܡܪ̈ܢܐ// ܘܒܫܡ ܒܪܗ ܪܫܡ ܒܢ̈ܝܐ ܕܛܝܒܘܬܐ// ܘܒܫܡܐ ܕܪܘܚ ܩܘܕܫܐ ܠܛܘܗܡܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ// ܦܪܝܫܢ
ܟܝ̈ܢܘܗܝ ܘܦܣܝܩ ܫܡ̈ܗܝܗܘܢ// ܕܬܘܕܐ ܠܛܝܒܘܬܗ ܘܬܣܓܘܕ ܠܡܪܘܬܗ// ܫܐܠܘܢ ܗܟܝܠ ܕܡܢܘ ܩܪܐ // ܠܐܝܬܝ̈ܐ ܒܫܡܗ ܕܗܘ
ܐܝܬܝܐ ܐܢ ܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܩܪܐ ܐܢܘܢ // ܟܠܗ̇ ܕܛܝܒܘܬܐ ܗܝ، ܘܐܢ ܠܐ ܗܘܬ ܕܝܠܗ// ܟܠܗ̇ ܣܘܩܒܠܐ ܗܝ، ܘܡܢܘ ܕܪܒ ܡܢܗ // ܕܫܡܗ
ܚܛܦ ܡܢܗ ܕܐܝܬܝ̈ܐ ܢܫܡܗ ܒܗ

Names, especially those names God gives, that signify a singular nature do so because that is the reality behind the name. Ephrem says that God has the capacity to provide names with multiple parts, but that God is explicit when God acts this way. Bardaisan's error is that he has taken a name with a singular reality and applied it to multiple idols. Ephrem says that "their invention is a word without truth, // a name without an object; Names that are // and beings that are not."[41]

Ephrem's critique of Bardaisan's cosmology is twofold. The first issue is that in Ephrem's theology there is no such thing as multiple "essences;" there can only be one "Essence." This is the divine Essence or existence that belongs to or is God. What makes Bardaisan's creation account problematic for Ephrem is that if God used "essences" then God is not unique, and God did not create out of nothing. This implies that there are forces or powers that co-exist alongside of God. Ephrem goes to great lengths to explain that the term "essence" can only be applied to God. If there are multiple "essences" then they are not God.

The second issue Ephrem has with Bardaisan's cosmology is that Bardaisan associates the Holy Spirit with specific acts of progeny in the creation. The association of the Holy Spirit with the primordial waters and with progeneration leads Ephrem to assert that the *ruḥā* in Gen. 1:2b is not the Holy Spirit. If Ephrem were to identify the Holy Spirit in this instance, he would be affirming the Bardaisanite cosmology, which Ephrem will not do.

Mani

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[41] *HCH* 54.8.

ܠܐܢ ܒܗܠ ܡܒܛܠܢܐ // ܠܐ ܫܡܝܐ ܕܫܪܪ // ܫܡܐ ܕܠܐ ܐܝܬ ܒܗ // ܫܡܗܬ ܕܠܐ ܐܠܗ ܐܝܢ ܕܐ ܠܐ

Mani and the Manichean religion occupied a significant amount of Ephrem's writings.[42] His five discourses to Hypatius are concerned with Manichaean thought and practice.[43] In addition to a specific treatise against Mani in the *PR*, Ephrem writes against Mani throughout his *Hymns Against Heresies*. Mani, Ephrem says, learned from Bardaisan and wrote *madrāšē* to propagate his message. As Peter Brown observes, the Manichean religion maintained a strong connection with Syriac speaking peoples well after the life of Ephrem.[44] Ephrem's criticism of Manichean cosmology is similar to his critique of Marcion and Bardaisan.

The importance of *creation ex nihilo* to Ephrem is evidenced in his *Prose Refutations* against Mani. In this text, Ephrem notes that the fundamental problem with Mani's theology of creation is that it assumes that there is more than one *'itutā.* Ephrem believes that only one *'itutā* exists and that this *'itutā* is God, the creator of the world.

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[42] Edmund Beck, *Ephräms Polemik gegen Mani und die Manichäer* (Louvain: CSCO, 1978). David Bundy, "Ephrem's Critique of Mani: The Limits of Knowledge and the Nature of Language," in *Gnosticisme et Monde Hellénistique. Actes du Colloque de Louvain-la-Neuve (11–14 mars 1980)*, ed. J. Ries, et al., Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, no. 27 (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1982), 289–298; and idem, "Language and the Knowedge of God in Ephrem Syrus," 91–103. H.J.W. Drijvers, "Mani und Bardaisan. Ein Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte des Manichäismus" in *East of Antioch*. Sidney H. Griffith, "Thorn among the Tares: Mani and Manichaeism in the Works of St. Ephraem the Syrian," *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001): 394–427. T. Kremer, *Mundus Primus*, 73–74, discusses the impact Mani's theology had on Ephrem's theological project noting that Mani undermined the biblical account by stressing the imperfection of the creation. "An Mani lässt sich demnach erkennen, wie sehr eine bestimmte kosmologische Konzeption den Offenbarungsanspruch der Heiligen Schrift unterlaufen, ja sogar konterkarieren kann. Mani musste aufgrund seiner kosmologischen Prämissen und seiner Haltung gegenüber dem Alten Testament zu theologischen Positionen gelangen, die mit dem christlichen Glauben unvereinbar sind, ja seine Fundamentalkritik am christlichen Glauben setzt bewusst an der Unvollkommenheit der Schöpfung an, um auf diese Weise den biblischen Gott zu desavouieren."

[43] While doubt is often cast against Ephrem for his portrayal of Mani, see Jason David BeDuhn, *The Manichean Body In Discipline and Ritual* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 2000), 8–9, there is an interesting connection between Ephrem's description of Manichean cosmology and that of Alexander of Lycopolis a third century Egyptian philosopher, whose *Critique of the Doctrines of Manicheaus* chapters II–IV describe a similar system to Ephrem's depiction. See, P.W. van der Horst and J. Mansfeld, *An Alexandrian Platonist Against Dualism: Alexander of Lycopolis' Treatise 'Critique of the Doctrines of Manichaeus* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

[44] Peter Brown, "The Diffusion of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 59:1/2 (1969): 92–103.

Thus, for Ephrem the elemental forces of fire, wind, and water are not aspects of *ʾitutā* but elements created from nothing. Within this understanding of creation, Ephrem notes that evil is not from the *ʾitutā*, the divine essence, so Ephrem describes the presence of evil in the world as a non-entity. Ephrem's refutation of Mani centers on the fact that the mingling of spirit and flesh, or of good and evil in the world, is a mingling that occurred from nothing. As such, this nothing is the intended destination of creation unless it is saved by God.[45] Because the elements were created from nothing, their natural return is to nothing.

Ephrem claims that Mani's theology differs from *creation ex nihilo* in that creation occurs as the result of a mixture of bound natures. However, Ephrem does not think that this is possible because those bound natures are not able to create composite things. The bound natures are simple, and creating a composite is not possible except in creation out of nothing. Ephrem says that Mani,

> proclaims an existence (*ʾitutā*) which is diminishing in everything, and this its diminishing refutes the ones who proclaim it…For they put forward two roots, in names even though while searching they found that there are many. For he brings up births and succession which are the opposite of one another. But, while this Entity is one, there are births from it (which are) the opposite of its nature—this is not pleasant to the ear of Truth. For how can that natural element (*kyānā*) bring forth anything foreign to itself? In the case of creation from nothing, this can be but in the case of a 'natural element bound by existence' there is no (such means); above all (it is impossible), when it (i.e. the Nature) is one and other Entities are not mixed with it.[46]

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[45] Ephrem's discussion of evil and its impact on the world bears a marked similarity to Athanasius' work *De Incarnatione* I.3–II.10, where Athanasius notes that the image of God impressed upon humanity is in a state of decay and only God is able to repair the image.

[46] Ephrem, *PR* 1, translation adapted from C. W. Mitchell, *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912), xxxiii.
ܡܟܪܙ ܝܬܘܬܐ ܕܒܟܠ ܚܣܝܪܐ ܗ̇ܝ، ܚܣܝܪܘܬܗ ܡܟܣܐ ܠܟܪܘܙܘܗ ܪܟܒܗ ...ܣܡܘ ܓܝܪ ܬܪܝܢ ܥܩܪܝܢ ܒܫܡ̈ܗܐ ܟܕ ܠܒܨܝܬܐ
ܗܦܟܐ ܡܫܬܥܝܢ ܡܟܠ ܓܝܪ ܝܠܕܐ ܘܫܘܒܠܐ ܕܣܩܘܒܠܝܢ ܚܕ ܠܚܕ. ܟܕ ܚܕ ܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܐܝܬܘܬܐ ܢܦܩܘܢ ܡܢܗ ܝܠܕܐ ܣܩܘܒܠܐ ܕܟܝܢܗ
ܗܕܐ ܠܐܕܢܐ ܕܫܪܪܐ ܠܐ ܡܬܛܝܒܐ ܐܝܟܢ ܓܝܪ ܡܘܠܕ ܗܘ ܟܝܢܐ ܡܕܡ ܕܢܘܟܪ، ܠܗ ܠܘܬ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܠܐ ܡܕܡ ܡܨܝܐ ܠܡܗܘܐ
ܠܘܬ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܐܣܝܪܐ ܕܐܝܬܘܬܐ ܠܝܬ ܦܘܪܣܐ ܝܬܝܪܐܝܬ ܐܡܬܝ، ܕܚܕ ܗܘ ܘܐܚܪ̈ܢܝܬܐ ܐܝܬܘܬܐ ܠܐ ܡܚܠܛܢ ܠܗ

Mani's theology of mixture fails, in Ephrem's estimation, because it tries to create what it is not. Mani's two roots transition to five Ziwâne or Bright Ones. Which include the elements of wind, water, light, and fire.[47] Mani's creation then is a process of mixture between elements that found the world. Ephrem rejects this creation narrative because he believes that the creation was made good, and because he does not believe that mixture between two elemental forces creates creatures that are dissimilar to the forces.

Ephrem associates theologies of mixture with Manichean thought.[48] He criticizes Manichean theology of evil within the human person by saying that "instead of 'the good words' which they teach, they should divide good portions so that men and women may eat and drink them. So that those good portions having entered might lessen the taste of the strength of evil."[49] The Manichean system that Ephrem confronted thought that evil existed as an independent thing in individual people; as such, evil could be cast out by a separate good alone. "For power casts out power (*ḥaylâ*) and substance is cast out by substance (*qnomā*) and violence is vanquished by violence."[50] But this does not conform with how Manicheans understand the will. Ephrem notes that while Manichaeans say that the will alone is enough to cast out evil, they still need material foods in addition to the will to cast out the evil substance. In Ephrem's understanding of the Manichean system,

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[47] *PR* 1, xcvii-xcviii.

[48] Richard E. Payne, *A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 1–22, highlights the ways in which Iranian Zoroastrianism of the sixth and seventh centuries developed a mixed political culture that included both East Syriac Christians and the ruling Zoroastrian parties.

[49] *PR* 1, xxvii. Syriac from Overbeck, 57.
ܠܡܕ ܒܗܝ ܕܐܡܪ ܐܢ ܡܫܬ ܠܗ ܒܗ ܠܚܝܠܗ ܕܚܠܝܐ ܕܡܢ ܠܥܡ ܐܢ ܡܫܬ ܡܫܬ ܒܚܠܝܐ ܘܚܠܝܐ ܡܫܬ ܒܥܢܦ ܡܫܬ ܒܥܢܦ ܕܡܫܬ ܒܗ ܡܫܬ ܒܚܠܝܐ ܕܡܫܬ ܒܗ

[50] PR 1, xxvii. Overbeck, 57.
ܡܫܬ ܡܢܗ ܒܗ ܡܢܗ ܒܫܒܝܠ ܕܡܫܬ ܒܗ ܡܫܬ ܒܫܒܝܠ ܕܡܫܬ ܒܗ ܐܡ ܡܫܬ

the human person is a microcosm of how the world was created.[51] Therefore the mixture of evil and good within a person is evident in the creation. Morehouse observes the mixture of light and darkness in Ephrem's interpretation of Manichaeism:

> According to Ephraem, Manichaeism taught that the world began out of the intermingling of the realms of light and dark when the realm of dark assaulted the light because of an intense passion it had for the light. The ultimate result was that the world was composed of elements of both. The cosmic roots of the universe, in turn, become the roots of good and evil in the individual. The Manichaean defense of both the cosmic and anthropological role of these roots relied on Luke 6:43-45, a close parallel to Matthew 7:16-20.[52]

Ephrem finds this cosmology and anthropology lacking because it takes away freewill from people and makes God the source of evil.[53] The problem with this imagery of mixture, according to Ephrem, is that mixing light and darkness or parts of the soul, is the mixture of good and evil.

Ephrem's critique of Mani's cosmology is similar to his criticisms of both Marcion and Bardaisan. Mani's cosmological system portrays the material world as evil and sinful; this evil has been inherent in the world since the beginning. Ephrem balks at such a position because the world is a good gift from God. In Ephrem's mind, an evil world implies an evil god. This idea does not conform with Ephrem's reading of scripture of his understanding of God.

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[51] Payne, *A State of Mixture*, 9, notes that mixture in the Zoroastrian empire related to the understanding of the cosmos, "The Iranian Empire was conceived as a cosmological project to organize beneficent humans to accelerate the restoration of the world to the primordial state of perfection that would mark the end of the state of mixture."

[52] Morehouse, 112.

[53] Ephrem is a strong proponent of humanity's free will. He asserts that God desires for humanity to choose to love God out of this free will. While the consequences of sin, or mis-ordered free will, are a perpetual reality, Ephrem believes that human choice is fundamental to God's goals for the created world. See *HCH* 11. Cf. T. Kremer, *Mundus Primus*, 167–170. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 34–36. A selection of four hymns from the cycle *Eccl.* (2–3, 6, 13) appear as a set with the Latin title *De Libero Arbitrio*.

Ephrem's Interlocutors

The difference between Bardaisan and Marcion in Ephrem's interpretation of their theologies is that Marcion taught two gods, while Bardaisan taught one god who created by means of essences and five powers. Ephrem critiques Bardaisan because the divine essence Bardaisan imagines is just one of many essences. Without a single unique divine essence, Bardaisan's doctrine of creation limits god to creating by means of other and, in Ephrem's understanding, equal essences. In contrast, Ephrem believes that Marcion teaches a form of polytheism, which Ephrem finds completely untenable to the Christian faith. Ephrem articulates his position by saying that both Bardaisan and Marcion misunderstand how the names of God operate. The names and titles that Bardaisan and Marcion use do not correspond to the acts of God or to the reality of God's existence.

Ephrem discusses what distinguishes Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan in *HCH* 3. The root problem for these three heretics is that they stole the names of God and replaced them with names of things that do not exist. They replaced names that had a real substance behind them with names that were imaginary. Such a process reminds Ephrem of the idolatry found in the Old Testament. Ephrem's defense of his theology is a defense of creation ex nihilo and of the pro-Nicene doctrine of the Son's relationship to the Father.

Ephrem criticizes Marcion, Mani, and Bardaisan for their heretical cosmologies. Ephrem notes that Bardaisan even disagrees with Marcion, but in so doing, Bardaisan refutes himself. Bardaisan did not believe that there were two gods like Marcion did. But because Bardaisan confesses one God, Ephrem notes that this means there is only one Essence, and if there is only one Essence, then Bardaisan's cosmology of five essences is

refuted. Mani's cosmology falls into error because it allows for different powers to be at war in order to create the world.

Despite these heretical theologies, Ephrem notes that Marcion and Bardaisan, without always knowing it, affirm the divinity of the Son. None of these heretics, unlike the Arians, deny that Jesus is Son and that he is eternal.

> They are put to shame, the proponents of the error, because they stole from the unique one // the names which they put on to things that do not exist! // In his Son his names are united, there is no doubt. // Marcion and Bardaisan testify because, // even if they oppose [each other], they agree on his begetting, // confessing that he is God and not disputing that he is Son.[54]

Ephrem remarks that Marcion and Bardaisan disagree with each other, in fact, Bardaisan even opposed Marcion; but Ephrem notes that the two heretics agree concerning the nature of the Son, that he is God. This affirmation from heretics highlights the incongruity of the faithful church who, Ephrem sees as disagreeing concerning the divinity of the Son.

> Who does not confess him as a true Son // better than those weeds that proclaim his birth? // May those deniers who do not deny his begetting shame us! // Who would not weep and be sorry // when seeing those outside who believe without investigation // and beholding those inside unsatisfied until they go crazy?[55]

Ephrem remarks that it is a shame that the true church is unable to be united on the core doctrine of the Son's relationship to the Father, while heretics like Marcion and Bardaisan affirm the core doctrine. This idea extends to the nature of the Holy Spirit.

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[54] *HCH* 3.8.

ܐܝܟ ܕܠܐ ܡܘܕܝ ܒܗ ܒܪܝܪ // ܡܢ ܫܡܗ̈ܝ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܐܝܬ ܐܠܐ ܒܒܪܗ ܫܡܗ̈ܝ ܐܬܚܕܝ // ܠܐ ܡܢ ܗܘ ܕܠܐ ܡܘܕܝ ܒܒܪܘܬܗ // ܡܣܗܕ̈ܢ ܐܢ ܡܪܩܝܘܢ ܘܒܪܕܝܨܢ // ܕܐܦ ܥܠ ܦܘܠܚܢܗ ܡܣܗܕ̈ܢ ܐܢܘܢ // ܕܐܠܗܐ ܗܘ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܡܪܝ ܒܗ ܕܒܪ ܗܘ

[55] *HCH* 3.9.

ܡܢ [ܠܐ] // ܡܬܟܣܝ ܐܦ ܡܢ ܕܡܫܟܚ ܒܢܘܗܝ // ܡܢ ܕܡܫܟܚ [ܠܐ ܡܘܕܝ ܒܢܘܗܝ // ܕܒܪܘܬܗ ܕܝܢ ܕܠܐ ܡܘܕܝ ܡܢ ܠܐ] // ܡܢ ܕܚܙܝ ܐܢܫ̈ܐ ܕܒܪ ܡܢ ܗܢ // ܕܡܗܝܢ ܒܠܐ ܒܪܗܢ ܘܡܗܝܡܢ // ܕܡܢ ܗܢ ܕܒܪ ܡܢ ܗܢ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܪܥܝ ܥܕ

As the Jews missed seeing how the Son was revealed in his books, which for Ephrem refers to both nature and the Bible, so too the heretical Christian misses the faith while at times affirming it.

> Nor did the Jew seek secret things // even though in his books what is hidden becomes clear to him. // But if he searches with passion he is blinded by her smoke. // He confesses the Holy Spirit, without debate. // But if we question him, he denies; and since he is largely defeated, he blasphemes. // Their crown is death, and their armor is despair.[56]

Ephrem exhibits an ingenious theological demarcation, while he is critical of Jews and Judaism throughout his writings, he here details how the Jews still preserved the divine teaching of the Scriptures. In a similar way, Ephrem's heretical opponents✣ while wrong, still get some details correct. Thus, the heretic confesses the Holy Spirit, but does not realize how other aspects of his theology diminish and repudiate that confession.

In the sixth century Syriac Ephrem Vita tradition, Ephrem teaches Basil how to interpret Gen 1:2b, and instructs Basil in the trinitarian doxological formula.[57] While the Vita tradition speaks to an encounter between the two figures, Ephrem's approach diverges from that of Basil, whose concern with the Holy Spirit's divinity was rooted in an exegetical and polemical tradition writing against Macedonians and Pneumatomachians.[58] Whereas Basil understood the Holy Spirit to be proven as divine

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[56] *HCH* 3.10.

//ܫܘܫܠ ܡܫܝܚ [ܡܥܡ]-ܕ ܟܝ ܡ ܟܫܚ // ܣ ܒܝܬܗ ܟܬܒ ,ܡܬܝܗ ܟܝ ܟܕ ܒܗ// ܟܫܝܫܗ ܟܝ ܟܬܘܡ ܟ ܫܟ
ܐ ܟܝܟ ܡܡ ܟܝܫܝ ܐ ܟܫܚ ܟܡܠܠ// ܚܝ ܒܝ ܒܗ ܟܡ ܚܙ ܫܟܫܝ ܟ// ܒܝ ܟ ܟܬܘ ܡܝ ܟܬ

[57] Joseph Amar, *The Syriac Vita Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian*, CSCO vol. 630, *scriptores syri* 243 (Louvan: Peeters, 2011), 54–69 details the encounter between Ephrem and Basil as well as what Basil learned from Ephrem regarding the Holy Spirit. For a current study on the importance of the Ephrem vita see Nestor Kavvadas, *Ephraem der Syrer und Basilios der Große, Justinian und Edessa: Die Begegnung griechischer und syrischer Traditionsautorität in der Ephraemvita und der miaphysitisch-chalkedonische Konflikt* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

[58] I follow Mark DelCogliano, "Basil of Caesarea, Didymus the Blind, and the Anti-Pneumatomachian Exegesis of Amos 4:13 and John 1:3," *JTS* 61:2 (2010): 644 note 1, and refer to Basil's opponents with regard to the Holy Spirit as both pneumatomachian and Macedonian, even when Basil is

from pro-Nicene exegesis of Psalm 33:6 and Psalm 104:32, Ephrem assumes the Holy Spirit's divinity of his theology of divine names and the liturgical or sacramental character of the church. Basil's theological concern for the Holy Spirit's divinity is to avoid subordinationism. In contrast, Ephrem desires to maintain divine unity, so he ensures that Holy Spirit is not considered a separate deity.

Ephrem affirms the divinity of the Holy Spirit using the text from Psalm 33.6. This is the only text wherein Ephrem uses the same scriptural texts that are used in the pro-Nicene theological movement of the fourth century.[59] Here, Ephrem asserts that the Holy Spirit is God and that this is confirmed because the Bible says the Spirit is the breath of the Lord's mouth. Not only is the Spirit the breath of the Lord, but Ephrem expands upon this to say that there was not a time when the Spirit was not with God, in a statement reminiscent of the famous Arian maxim, "There was when he was not."[60] Ephrem continues his description of a hypothetical Jew and says:

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writing against the theology of Eunomius. For Basil's remarks about the Holy Spirit and the waters of creation see *Hex* 2.6 *SC* 26: 166-171, here he refers to τοίνυν τὴν τῶν Σύρων, which led to the assumption that he meant Ephrem. *DSS* 11, 27; 21, 52 for Basil referring to pneumatomachi.

[59] Michel Barnes, "The Beginning and End of Early Christian Pneumatology," *Augustinian Studies* 39:2 (2008): 171–174, has recognized the importance of Ps. 33:6 and Ps. 104:30 as a source for Spirit Creator theology, noting that after Irenaeus the use of Ps. 33:6 is absent until the late fourth century. Ephrem's *HCH* 3.10 is the only instance where Ephrem is engaged in the same scriptural polemic about the Holy Spirit as his pro-Nicene counterparts. Jacob of Serugh, who is considered to be of the same theological tradition as Ephrem will reference Ps. 33:6 with the purpose of affirming the Trinity. Jacob highlights the fact that the Spirit perfects (ܫܠܡ), while the Son creates. Lewis Ayres, "Innovation and *Ressourcement* in Pro-Nicene Pneumatology," *Augustinian Studies* 39:2 (2008): 195, suggests that the Nicetas of Remesiana's *ressourcement* of the exegesis of Ps. 33:6 was done to connect the Spirit's role as creator to the sacramental action of the church.

[60] Ephrem also responds to the Arian formula in *HdF* 40.1. Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 41–42. Ute Possekel, "Ephrem's Doctrine of God," in *God in Early Christian thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G. Patterson*, eds. Andrew McGowan, Brian Daley, Timothy J. Gaden (Boston: Brill, 2009), 236–237, suggests that Ephrem's doctrine of God formed as part of polemics against the Neo-Arian threat. Edmund Beck, *Die Theologie des Heiligen Ephraem in seinem Hymnen über den Glauben* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi, 1949), 62–80, argues that Ephrem is part of the Nicene proto-orthodox party but that Ephrem prefers antinomy to express his theology.

> When he denied the Son, the buried ones went out from their graves, // and there they reproved him. Here again, if he denies // the Spirit [by pretending that he] does not exist, it is the Scriptures that rise up against him, // for "the Spirit is that breath from the mouth of the Lord // Spirit that is by his side!" And if there was a time // when he was without the Spirit, let them explain it indisputably![61]

Lange notes that despite Ephrem's consistent interpretation of Gen 1:2b, the Holy Spirit remained a subject of theological debate and this passage highlights how Ephrem assumes that the Jews should have a theology of the Holy Spirit.[62] Ephrem affirms that the Spirit is the acting force of God's voice. Ephrem also betrays an awareness of the Arian controversy and in so doing connects his interpretation of Ps. 33:6 with the pneumatomachian and Neo-Arian controversies. Ephrem thus, affirms that the Holy Spirit is creator, but not the manner in which his opponents assume.

Ephrem continues by saying that the heretics mistakenly think that the Holy Spirit created alongside the Son. Or, perhaps Ephrem is saying that his heretical opponents' cosmologies include a feminine spirit who functions as a counterpart in the creative action. This is not something that Ephrem affirms, because it is not found in the Genesis narrative. She, the Spirit, did not create with the Son.

> And instead of [admitting] that it was fitting to create through his Son, // they declare that when he created, she created with him, // she who with him fixed the sky and the creatures. // Alienated, they deny the Son and ignore him. // They take boast of this other Maker who helped him. // Having sent out and dismissed the truth, they find shame.[63]

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[61] *HCH* 3.11.

ܟܝܢ ܕܟܕ ܫܩܠ ܠܗ ܠܒܪܗ // ܐܦ ܗܢܘܢ ܡܝܬ̈ܐ ܕܩܒܪ̈ܐ ܢܦܩܘ // ܘܬܡܢ ܐܝܟ ܗܟܢ ܐܦ ܗܟܝܚ ܠܗ // ܐܢ ܟܕ ܡܟܚܫ ܠܪܘܚܐ // ܕܟܬ̈ܒ̈ܐ ܩܡ ܥܠܘܗܝ // ܕܪܘܚܐ ܗܝ ܢܫܡܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܐ // ܪܘܚܐ ܕܥܡ ܓܢܒܗ ܗܘ // ܘܐܢ ܗܘ ܙܒܢ // ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܥܡ ܪܘܚܐ // ܢܗܘܘ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܕܝܢ ܡܦܫܩ

[62] Christian Lange, *The Portrayal of Christ*, 137.

[63] *HCH* 3.12.

ܘܐܦ ܒܕܠ // ܕܒܪܗ ܒܪܝ ܥܡ ܒܪܗ ܐܡܪ // ܕܟܕ ܒܪܐ ܥܡ ܗܘ // ܕܥܡ ܗܘ ܩܒܥ ܫܡܝܐ // ܘܒܪ̈ܝ̈ܬܐ // ܡܬܒܕܝܢ ܟܦܪ̈ܝܢ ܒܗ // ܘܡܫܕܪ̈ܝܢ ܒܗ ܠܗ // ܘܫܕܪ̈ܝܢ ܘܫܕܝܢ ܫܪܪܐ // ܡܬܒܕܝܢ ܟܦܪ̈ܝܢ ܒܗ ܠܗ // ܘܫܕܪ̈ܝܢ ܘܫܕܝܢ ܫܪܪܐ //

The problem, in Ephrem's mind, with this theology is that it misreads the Genesis text. The Spirit did not create with the Son as a cooperative action.

In response to this heterodox thinking, Ephrem remarks that his baptism provides legitimacy to his trinitarian theology. God's essence is singular and Ephrem was baptized in the name of the Holy Spirit three times. This connection emphasizes Ephrem's belief that the Holy Spirit is equal with the divine substance and must be God.

> I have learned and believe that you are one in your essence; // I have heard and I am assured that you are Father by your only begotten; // I received the triple immersion in the name of your Holy Spirit: I have learned all this is certain. // Although your wealth is widespread, your treasure remains inscrutable. // Praise to you from all those who are aware of their humanity![64]

Ephrem affirms the Trinity's unique and singular essence and mentions a triple immersion in the name of the Holy Spirit. In so doing Ephrem affirms that Holy Spirit as divine.

In summary, Ephrem's polemical writings against Marcionites, Manicheans, and Bardaisanites shaped his theology. In trying to extract and piece together Ephrem's theology of the Holy Spirit it is important to remember that Ephrem's purpose in writing against his opponents is not to provide a theology of the Holy Spirit. When Ephrem reads the Genesis account he cannot see the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters, because to do so would imply that he was agreeing with the heretical doctrine of Marcion, who thought that this Spirit would enable the Stranger to destroy the creator. Ephrem cannot posit creation out of pre-existent matter because to do so would validate the teaching of Bardaisan who thought that there were multiple essences. Such an idea is a contradiction

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[64] *HCH* 3.13.

ܡܕܝ ܕܝܠܝ ܫܡܥ ܒܡܥܡܕܐ ܒܫܡ // ܫܡܥ ܘܐܡܝܢ ܐܢܐ ܒܗ ܕܐܒ ܐܢܬ ܒܝܚܝܕ ܕܝܠܟ // ܩܒܠ ܬܠܝܬ ܛܒܝܠ ܒܫܡ ܪܘܚܟ ܩܕܝܫܐ // ܝܕܥ ܟܠ ܗܢ ܕܫܪܝܪ ܐܢܐ // ܐܦ ܥܡ ܕܫܪ ܥܬܪܟ ܦܪܘܫ ܗܘ // ܠܟ ܫܒܚܐ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܕܝܕܥܝ ܒܢܫܘܬܗ

in terms to Ephrem. The people with whom Ephrem was debating shaped Ephrem's literal approach to the Genesis narrative.

Cultural Memory: Tiamat and Angelomorphic Readings

Before turning to Ephrem's remarks in his commentary on Genesis, I offer a brief treatment, in which I suggest there are two theological trajectories that could have also impacted Ephrem's exegesis of Gen. 1:2b. Behind Ephrem's writings lies the cultural memory of ancient Mesopotamian religious symbols and I believe that there is potential that part of Ephrem's reticence to invoke the Holy Spirit over the primordial creation waters is due to pagan religions like the cult of Bēl and Nebō.[65] In addition, I think that Ephrem is writing against the trajectory of angelomorphic pneumatology that would interpret an angelic being in the place of the Holy Spirit. Such vestiges of cultural memory could have strengthened Ephrem's resolve to not associate the Holy Spirit with primordial creation water.

Han Drijvers notes that the cult of Bēl and Nebō operated in Edessa from Babylonian times and remained part of the religious landscape until Jacob of Edessa (7–8th Century).[66] Drijvers notes that in texts like the *Doctrina Addai*, *Acts of Sharbel,* and in certain homilies from Jacob of Serugh, Bēl and Nebō were considered the most

[65] By cultural memory I am referring to the discipline of social memory. The modern discipline traces its origin to Maurice Halbwachs and his collection of essays on social memory. Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 10–32 offers a concise history of social memory and its application to early Christian history. Chris Keith, "Social Memory Theory and Gospels Research: The First Decade," *Early Christianity* 6 (2015): 354–376 and "Social Memory Theory and Gospels Research: The First Decade (Part Two)," *Early Christianity* 6 (2015): 517–542 traces the application of social memory in the field of gospel studies. Robert Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings* (South Bend: Notre Dame Univserity Press, 1971), was one of the first scholars of early Christianity to engage Halbwachs's writings.

[66] Han Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden: Brill, 1980).

prominent deities at Edessa.[67] Drijvers also asserts that the cult at Edessa did not take the name Bēl and apply it to a local deity, rather because authentic Babylonian traditions remained for a long time in Edessa, cultic practices went back to the original Babylonian deities.[68] Drijvers claims that Ephrem was aware of Nebō because he writes about an "eloquent star," which Drijvers believes Ephrem used to describe Nebō.[69] While, it is debatable that this reference must be to Nebō, I do find it plausible that Ephrem was aware of the cultic traditions surrounding Bēl and Nebō.

Bēl is the titular name given to Marduk after his defeat of the goddess Tiamat. The *Enuma Elish* details the mythic conflict between these two deities and how their battle sparked the creation of the world.[70] The epic begins in the waters of creation, "When the heavens above did not exist, and earth beneath had not come into being— There was Apsû, the first in order, their begetter, And demiurge Tiāmat, who gave birth to them all; They had mingled their waters together…The gods were created within them."[71] As the story unfolds Marduk uses an evil wind (imḫullu) to defeat Tiamat. Marduk's winds were either good or evil. Natural disasters and misfortune are associated

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[67] Ibid., 40.

[68] Ibid., 56, "It seems reasonable…to assume that at least at Edessa the cult of Nebo and Bel belonged to the traditional religion in an area under strong influence from the great Mesopotamian centers." This is in contrast to other regions where the Babylonian gods' names were used for local deities. Still, caution in associating the ancient deities with the fourth century practices is in order, see John F. Healey, "Pre-Christian Religions of Syriac Regions," in *The Syriac World* ed. Daniel King (London: Routledge, 2018), 51–52, for a description of Bēl and Nebō.

[69] Ibid., 75. Cf. *HCH* 9.1, where Ephrem references ܟܘܟܒܐ ܡܠܠܐ (*koḥbā mlilā*) the "eloquent star" whom Drijvers thinks references Nebō.

[70] Connected with the concept of divine names (see chapter 2) is the fact that within this creation epic there is a driving importance on the names of the gods. Marduk is ascribed some 50 names after his victory over Tiamat. In addition, during the preparations for war Tiamat enlists Kingu as her general and expresses the desire that his name may become greater than the rest of the pantheon.

[71] Tablet 1, 1-5. Translation from W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 50.

with Marduk's evil winds.[72] In addition, there were seven demons who were associated with the evil winds of Marduk. Once Marduk has killed Tiamat he uses her corpse to create the world.

If this evil wind, found in the context of primordial water, is in the background of Edessan pagan religion, it is plausible that another reason why Ephrem would not want to associate the Holy Spirit with water and the creation of the world. Not only would Ephrem have difficulty with the evil wind and numerous demons associated with it, but he would also be troubled by ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies that used a polarity between water and wind.[73] Two main ways that ancient Near Eastern cosmologies accounted for the creation of the world were chaos and polarity. Both myths an evil world, either by violence or sexual union among the pantheon. Ephrem would not want to associate the Holy Spirit with either primordial violence or sex. By keeping the Holy Spirit separated from the creation of the world, Ephrem preserves the Holy Spirit from confusion with the evil spirits of an evil world.

The second piece of cultural memory behind Ephrem's reticence to connect the Spirit with the creation account is also a type of biblical interpretation. In his commentary on Genesis, Ephrem says that the *ruḥā* over the waters cannot be the Holy Spirit because, "the evil Spirit of God consumed Saul."[74] Ephrem is referencing the biblical account of Saul and his relationship with David, which is found in 1 Sam. 10–19. John Levison has

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[72] H.-J. Fabry, "רוּחַ *rûaḥ,*" ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. 13 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 369–370.

[73] Fabry, *TDOT*, 384–385, "Wind and water appear as polar opposites in ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies," and "It is generally true for both the OT and the ancient Near East that the starting point for the origin of the world is not simply chaos, but rather a fundamental preexisting polarity."

[74] *ComGen*, 11. ܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܕܪܘܚ ܩܘܕܫܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܫܬܠܡ ܫܐܘܠ

found this passage foundational to the concept of angelomorphic pneumatology.[75] I suggest that Ephrem's reference to 1 Sam. 10–19 represents his rejection of angelomorphic pneumatology. God's sending an evil spirit to Saul is one of the primary texts used to discuss the idea that the angel takes on the role of the Spirit and that the Spirit is thus a derivative or lesser being than God. In highlighting this text, Ephrem implicitly denies the tendency to assert angelomorphic qualities to the Holy Spirit, while at the same time affirming the Holy Spirit's place in the Trinity. Ephrem's theology of the creation account serves then as a safeguard for pro-Nicene trinitarian theology.

To sum up this section, the two examples from the cultural memory and the Jewish exegetical tradition both offer insight into why Ephrem might have been hesitant to connect the *ruḥā* over the waters with the Holy Spirit. The ancient Near Eastern myth of Marduk and the creation of the world involved an evil wind as the product of either divine violence or sexual union. Ephrem was already concerned with divine violence and sexual union in his polemic against Bardaisan, so it is plausible that Ephrem would be reticent to interpret the Bible in a way that would legitimize his opponents' cosmologies. Also, the trajectory of angelomorphic pneumatology incorporates spirits who interact in the world in an evil manner. Ephrem does not want to associate the Holy Spirit with this kind of action.

Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis*[76]

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[75] John R. Levison, "The Angelic Spirit in Early Judaism," *SBL 1995 Seminar Papers* 35: (1995), 464–493. Idem., *The Spirit in First Century Judaism* (Boston: Brill Academic, 2002).

[76] The text for Ephrem's commentary on Genesis is found in a fifth century manuscript, *Vat.sir.*110 on folios f.1v–76r. In addition, the Roman Edition (*ER*) of Assemani contains the text in the fourth volume. The critical text was edited by R.M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii*, CSCO vol. 152, scriptores syri 71 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1955).

In Ephrem's commentary on Genesis he notes that the *ruḥā* hovering over the waters of creation in Gen 1:2b is not the Holy Spirit.[77] This is so, Ephrem says, because the *ruḥā* does not create and because the Lord sent an evil spirit to Saul. Ephrem's brief remarks on this passage make clear that he is not the "certain Syrian" from whom Basil says he received his insight concerning the Spirit and the waters of creation.[78] Ephrem's denial of the Holy Spirit's presence in the creation narrative shows a divergence in his thought from the pro-Nicene position concerning the unity of operations in the godhead.[79] At first glance, Ephrem denies that the Holy Spirit is creating, but upon closer reflection Ephrem is affirming the Spirit's creative capacity.

One of the defining characteristics of a pro-Nicene theologian was a commitment to the inseparable operation in the Trinity.[80] The actions of the Father and the Son are the

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[77] Yifat Monnickendam, "How Greek is Ephrem's Syriac? Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* as a Case Study," *JECS* 23:3 (2015): 213–244, argues that Ephrem's limited knowledge of Greek impacted his use of Greek theology and ideas. Monnickendam suggests that it is possible Ephrem knew no Greek, but was familiar with Greek exegetical traditions. Serge Ruzer and Arieh Kofsky, "Ephrem on Justice, Free Will and Divine Mercy in the Story of the Fall," *Syriac Idiosyncrasies: Theology and Hermeneutics in Early Syriac Literature*, (Boston: Brill, 2010), 41–60, speaking about Adam and Eve, note that Ephrem avoids "familiar mythological motifs," and has a, "general lack of interest in angelology and demonology," 59. Jerome A. Lund, "Observations on Some Biblical Citations in Ephrem's Commentary on Genesis," *Aramaic Studies* 4 (2006): 207–220, notes that Ephrem's commentary is not a commentary on the text per se, but is instead a commentary on the general story of Genesis. Lund also notes that Ephrem's treatment of crucial texts within the Noah narrative agrees with texts from a version of the Genesis Peshitta dating to the fifth century.

[78] Lucas Van Rompay, "L'informateur syrien de Basile de Césarée," *OCP* 58 (1992): 245–251, argues that the Eusebius of Emesa's *Commentary on Genesis* was what Basil was referring to and that this commentary was preserved by Diodore of Tarsus. Cf. R.B. ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress: The Use of Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac Biblical Tests in Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis* (Lovanii: Peeters, 1997). *Eusèbe d'Émèse Commentaire de la Genèse: Texte arménien de l'édition de Venise (1980) Fragments grecs et syriaques*, trans. Françoise Petit, Lucas van Rompay, Jos J.S. Weitenberg (Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011).

[79] Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford, 2004), 236, outlines his perception of the Pro-Nicene position. Michel Barnes, *The Power of God* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 169–172, diverges from Ayres by saying that the pro-Nicene movement occurs after neo-Nicene.

[80] Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 236.

actions of the Holy Spirit. In Ephrem's commentary on Genesis, he does not exegete the *ruḥā* in Gen. 1:2b, "Spirit over the face of the waters," as the Holy Spirit; instead, Ephrem interprets the spirit or *ruḥā* as a created element, wind. Ephrem notes emphatically that the *ruḥā* in this passage does not create. Because Ephrem notes that the *ruḥā* does not create, it could appear that his theology relegates the Holy Spirit to a status that is not equal with the Father and the Son, who are agents of creation. In this section I first examine Ephrem's commentary in order to suggest that he does not deny the creative capacity to the Holy Spirit, rather, Ephrem argues that the wind in Genesis plays no creative role and so cannot be the Holy Spirit. Then I turn to several passages from the *HdF* that relate to the action of the Holy Spirit and the waters of baptism in order to suggest that Ephrem associates the Spirit with the new creation of Christian in baptism. Ephrem's emphasis on the Spirit's role in baptism reinforces that his reticence to associate the Spirit with creation was part of his polemic against competing cosmologies of Manichaeism, Marcionism, and Bardaisanism. By describing the Spirit's action in baptism using the word "hovering," Ephrem evokes the Genesis narrative where the same verb is used to describe the Spirit and the primordial waters of creation.

As Lewis Ayres remarks, "Ephrem does not clearly state the doctrine of inseparable operation, but he clearly speaks of the power and action of God being present in all three persons."[81] The argument for Ephrem's lack of a clearly stated doctrine of inseparable operations is based on a certain reading of Ephrem's argument in the commentary. If the Spirit of God hovering over the waters is not the Holy Spirit, but just elemental wind, then the Spirit of God is not the creator.

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[81] Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 234.

The polemical nature of Ephrem's commentary on Genesis is evident from his prologue,[82] where Ephrem notes that from the beginning of creation the Creator was known to the minds of the world's first generations. After Abraham's children entered Egypt however, they became estranged from the beautiful commands of God that are fixed in human nature. The result of this estrangement was idolatry, which Ephrem describes as the belief that substances or natures (*kyānā*) are self-existent beings. By starting his commentary this way Ephrem makes evident his concern for the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo,* which he maintains in order to preserve the unique essence of God, in contrast to the multiple "beings" in the theology of Bardaisan.

As he continues his prologue, Ephrem argues that Moses wrote Genesis to prove the singularity of God, a point which emphases his polemic against Bardaisan:

> [Moses] wrote about the natural elements (*kyānē*) that were created out of nothing so that people might know that they (the elements) were falsely called beings. And he wrote about the creatures that were made out of something and that were worshipped as gods in error. He wrote that God is one, alongside whom thousands and myriads were placed. He wrote concerning the mysteries of the Son that were engraved when creatures were created He also noted the types that were depicted in the just ones, who were before Him, and {the allegorical and symbolic meanings} which were signified by the actions of his staff.[83]

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[82] T. Jansma, "Ephraems Beschreibung des ersten Tages der Schöpfung," *OCP* 37 (1971): 300–305 and A. Guillamont, "Genèse 1,1–2 selon les commentateurs syriaques," in *IN PRINCIPIO: Interpretations des premiers versets de la Genese, EA*, no. 152 (Paris, 1973), 115–132 both argue that Ephrem's commentary on Genesis is a polemic against Bardaisan.

[83] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* Prologue, text ed. R.M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1955), 3–4.
ܟܬܒ ܥܠ ܟܝ̈ܢܐ ܕܐܬܒܪܝܘ ܡܢ ܠܐ ܡܕܡ ܕܢܕܥܘܢ ܕܒܐܦܐ ܐܝܬ̈[ܝ]ܐ ܡܬܩܪܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܘܟܬܒ ܥܠ ܒܪ̈ܝܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܠܐ ܡܕܡ ܐܬܥܒܕ.
ܘܒܛܥܝܘ ܐܝܟ ܐܠܗ̈ܐ ܡܣܬܓܕܝܢ ܗܘܘ, ܟܬܒ ܥܠ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܚܕ ܗܘ ܗ̇ܘ ܕܐܠ̈ܦܐ ܘܪ̈ܒܘܬܐ ܩܕܡܘܗܝ ܩܝܡܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܟܬܒ ܥܠ ܐܪ̈ܙܝ, ܒܪܐ
ܕܐܬܪܫܡܘ ܒܗ ܡܬܒܪܝܢ ܒܪ̈ܝܬܐ ܪܫܡ ܬܘܦ̈ܣܘܗܝ, ܕܐܬܬܨܝܪܘ ܒܟ̈ܐܢܐ ܕܩ[ܕ]ܡܘܗܝ, ܘ[ܦܠܐ]ܬܐ ܘ...ܬܐ ܕܐܬܪܫܡ ܒܣܘܥܪ̈ܢܐ
ܕܚܘܬܪܗ
Note here that the terms "allegorical and symbolic" are not found in the Syriac manuscript. The text is corrupted here and the first word "allegorical" was suggested by Assemani and Tonneau followed. The use of allegorical interpretation does not appear to align with Ephrem's emphasis in the commentary on the literal, plain meaning of Genesis. Note also that Tonneau's edition writes ܚܘܬܪܗ meaning "pride, glory," instead of what is found in Vat.sir.110, 2^{rb} and the *Editio Romanum*, ܚܘܛܪ meaning "staff."

This emphasis on creation out of nothing and its implications, that those same substances cannot be considered “self-existent beings,” show the unity and uniqueness of God as creator. The name “creator” indicates to Ephrem that God is entirely other than humanity. In the creation account and in the books of Moses, Ephrem sees the status of the Son as equal to the Father.

Ephrem begins the body of his commentary by discussing that the six days of creation recorded in Genesis are a true and real account of how the world was made. Moses did not write, Ephrem says, an allegorical interpretation.[84] The reason for this literal interpretation is that names and titles signify what they intend to communicate. He says, “There was no other thing than the names ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ that was named for us. The remainder of the works and things made that came after were not empty titles, for the substances (*qnomē*) of their natures (*kyānē*) are joined to the titles of their names.”[85] Ephrem applies a ‘conventionalist’ theory of names,[86] not a naturalist theory, to the created world in order to note that the text of Genesis provides a plain meaning.

Remarking on Gen 1:1 he says:

> For even the natural elements (*kyānē*) that were made on that day had not yet been made. For if the they had been created along with heaven and earth, he would have said so. But he did not say it, lest he make the *names of the natural elements older than their substances* (*qnomē*). Therefore it has been shown that heaven and earth came from nothing because until then *neither water nor wind had been created*, *nor had fire, light or darkness been named* [into being], because they

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[84] In his translation of the commentary Matthews, 74, translates *targum* as, “allegorical interpretation.” The reason for this translation is that ܬܘܪܓܡ ܡܠܐ can mean allegory, see Payne Smith, *Compendious Syriac*, 4496. The text reads, ܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܐܢܫ ܢܣܒܪ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܥܒ̈ܕܐ ܕܐܫܬܬ ܝܘ̈ܡܬܐ ܬܘܪܓܡ ܡܠܐ, which translates, “But let no know think that there is for the work of the six days, an interpretation.”

[85] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*1.1, text ed. R.M. Tonneau, 8. ܘܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܕܡ ܐܚܪܢ ܒܫܡ ܫܡܝܐ ܘܐܪܥܐ ܐܬܩܪܝ ܠܢ ܐܦ ܫܪܟܐ ܕܥܒ̈ܕܐ ܘܕܬܘܩܢ̈ܐ ܕܒܬܪܟܢ ܠܐ ܗܘ̈ܘ ܟܘܢܝ̈ܐ ܐܝܟ ܣܪ̈ܝܩܐ ܕܩܢ̈ܘܡܐ ܗܘ ܕܟܝ̈ܢܝܗܘܢ ܢܩܝܦܝܢ ܠܟܘ̈ܢܝܐ ܕܫܡ̈ܗܝܗܘܢ.

[86] Wickes, *Out of Books,* 100–101, for a brief description of Ephrem’s conventional use of names. Cf. chapter two of this dissertation for Ephrem’s theory of divine names.

> were younger than heaven and earth. These things that were created came after heaven and earth and they were not beings for they did not exist before them.[87]

Ephrem appears to be writing against Marcion, Mani, and Bardaisan in this passage. I believe this is so because Ephrem notes that names of elements do not take a more important place than the substance. Ephrem is concerned with cosmologies that allow for a *hulē*, a pre-existent matter that God uses to create the world. Here we see an insight into Ephrem's theory of names; names are not equivalent to the substance behind the name, rather the reality behind the name is superior to the name itself.

Ephrem believes that the order of events in the Genesis narrative shows an order of importance. Because heaven and earth are mentioned first, the elements (*kyānē*) are secondary to the primary heaven and earth. Ephrem says that only after the earth is described as formless and void, does Moses begins to discuss the elements of the world. This order in creation shows that the elements are not pre-existent. Again, Ephrem is concerned with a Bardaisanite theology of creation that allows for entities that are different from the single divine Entity.

It is with this context that Ephrem is able to deny that the *ruḥā* who hovers over the primordial creation waters is the Holy Spirit. Ephrem does not interpret *ruḥā* in Gen. 1:2b as the Holy Spirit partly because he is writing against Bardaisanite cosmology; in doing so he is noting that the elements are not eternal. Ephrem's commentary on Genesis is a polemic against Bardaisan, and Mani, and Marcion;[88] when Ephrem speaks about the

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[87] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 1.2, text ed. R.M. Tonneau, 8–9.
ܟܬܒ ܐܒܗ ܕܐ ܐܠ ܟܘܡ ܐܒܗ ܐܝܟܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܐܢ ܐܠ ܐܝܟܐ ܐܠ ܕܒܪ ܐܝܟܐ ܟܬܒ ܡܛ ܐܢ ܗܠ ܕܐ
ܗܠ ܐܠ ܕܒܪ ܠܐ ܟܘܡ ܒܪܐ ܠ ܒ ܟܬܝ ܟܬܒ ܒܫܒܝܠ ܕܒܪ ܡܢ ܟܘܡ ܫܘ ܕܐܡܪ ܕܐ
ܗܠ ܐܠ ܕܒܪ ܐܠ ܟܬܒ ܒ ܐܢ ܐܠ ܐܠ ܐܝܟܐ ܟܬܒ ܐܢ ܟܝܡܐ ܟܝܐ ܐܠ ܐܝܟܐ ܟܘܐ
ܐܠ ܐܡܪ ܟܬܒ ܒ ܠ ܟܬܒ ܟܘܡ ܐܠ ܐܡܪ

[88] Ephrem articulates his polemic against the three hereisarchs in *HCH* 3 and 55 which are discussed above.

spirit over the waters of creation he does not want to indicate that this spirit is a separate "self-existent being" from God the Father. In order to limit his opponents' options to interpret the Holy Spirit as a separate divine entity, Ephrem denies that the Genesis text says the Holy Spirit is present in the creation account.

It is possible to read this portion of the commentary and think that Ephrem denies a creative capacity to the Holy Spirit. El-Khoury suggests that when Ephrem says, "some posit…" that the "some" could refer either to Basil of Caesarea or Hellenistic Jewish exegetes.[89] A preliminary reading of a translation of the passage from Ephrem's Genesis commentary makes this assumption quite plausible:

> Because he called it the *wind* (*ruḥā*) of God and from this he said *it was hovering* (*raḥep*), some people posit that this is the Holy Spirit and connect it with the act of creation from what is written in this place. But the faithful do not make this connection, for these things are not similar But, by those things that are truly spoken concerning it, they connect it with that natural element (*kyānā*), from these names, *they are not able to posit the* ***wind*** *as maker*, for it is said that an evil spirit of God consumed Saul.[90]

Edward Matthews' translation of the passage leads one to think that Ephrem believes that the Holy Spirit is not associated with the activity of creation. Matthews renders

ܡܫܬܡܫ ܪܘܚܐ ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܕܪܚܦ ܗܘܐ ܘܡܢ ܗܢܐ ܐܡܪ ܕܪܚܦ ܗܘܐ ܐܝܬ ܐܢܫ ܕܡܫܬܡܥ ܠܗ ܕܗܘ ܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܘܡܩܪܒ ܠܗ ܠܒܪܝܬܐ ܡܢ ܗܢܐ ܕܟܬܝܒ ܒܗܢܐ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܐܠܐ ܗܝ ܕܡܗܝܡܢܐ ܠܐ ܡܩܪܒ ܠܗ ܗܢܐ ܣܒܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܢܘܢ ܕܠܐ ܗܢܘܢ ܐܠܐ ܡܢ ܗܢܘܢ ܕܫܪܝܪܐ ܐܡܪܝܢ ܥܠܝܗ ܡܢ ܗܢܘܢ ܫܡܗܬܐ ܗܠܝܢ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܟܚ ܠܗܘܢ ܕܢܫܝܡ ܠܗ ܠ**ܪܘܚܐ** ܐܝܟ ܕܥܒܕ ܐܡܪ ܕܐܝܬ ܪܘܚ ܒܝܫ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܫܩܠ ܠܫܐܘܠ

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[89] Nabil El-Khoury, *Die Interpretation der Welt bei Ephraem dem Syrer: Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte* (Mainz: Grünewald Verlag, 1976), 51, "Wenn Ephraem sich gegen "einige" wendet, die anderes behaupten, so könnte man annehmen, daß er damit Basilius anspricht, sowie hellenistisch geprägte jüdische Exegeten."

[90] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 1.7, text ed. R.M. Tonneau, 11.
ܟܝ ܕܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܒܪܝܫ ܒܟ ܒܗܘ ܡܟܬܒܐ ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܕܪܚܦ ܗܘܐ ܐܝܬ ܐܢܫ ܕܡܫܬܡܥ ܠܗ ܕܗܘ ܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܘܡܩܪܒ ܠܗ ܠܒܪܝܬܐ ܡܢ ܗܢܐ ܕܟܬܝܒ ܒܗܢܐ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܐܠܐ ܗܝ ܕܡܗܝܡܢܐ ܠܐ ܡܩܪܒ ܠܗ ܗܢܐ ܣܒܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܢܘܢ ܕܠܐ ܗܢܘܢ ܐܠܐ ܡܢ ܗܢܘܢ ܕܫܪܝܪܐ ܐܡܪܝܢ ܥܠܝܗ ܡܢ ܗܢܘܢ ܫܡܗܬܐ ܗܠܝܢ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܟܚ ܠܗܘܢ ܕܢܫܝܡ ܠܗ ܠ**ܪܘܚܐ** ܐܝܟ ܕܥܒܕ ܐܡܪ ܕܐܝܬ ܪܘܚ ܒܝܫ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܫܩܠ ܠܫܐܘܠ .

> Rather, by those things that are truly said about it, they associate it with that element, just as, on the basis of the names employed, *they cannot posit the **Spirit** as maker,* for it is said that an evil spirit of God consumed Saul.[91]

I suggest that the phrase "*they cannot posit the **Spirit** as maker*" is a confusing translation because the word for "Spirit" is *ruḥā* with no modifier, like the word "holy," in the Syriac. Another possible translation would be to say "they cannot posit the **wind** as maker." If, instead of "Spirit," *ruḥā* is read as "wind," the meaning of this phrase is transformed. Instead of meaning that the Holy Spirit is not the creator, Ephrem is saying that the wind in the Genesis narrative does not have any creative capacity and does not act in creation. Ephrem confirms this translation in the next paragraph where he notes that on the fifth day when God creates fish and birds, there is no wind/spirit present. He explains that this means the wind of God in 1:2b is not the Holy Spirit because in his understanding the Holy Spirit has creative capacity.[92] By saying that the *ruḥā* over the waters is the wind, Ephrem is affirming the Holy Spirit's creative capacity.

Ephrem begins the body of his commentary noting that Moses provides a clear message in Genesis, not an "interpretation" or "targum."[93] For example, in Ephrem's reading of Genesis heavens are heavens, and earth is earth. Ephrem also notes his concern with the polemics of Bardaisan, and implicitly Marcion and Mani, who all held to creative cosmologies in which the wind is either an active or passive agent of creation. Ephrem is not saying that the Holy Spirit lacks creative capacity, rather that the "wind of God" hovering over the waters of creation is not a maker and is not the creator. This is

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[91] Edward G. Matthews Jr., *St. Ephrem the Syrian Selected Prose Works* FOTC vol. 91 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 78–79.

[92] See, Matthews, 80. Tonneau, 12.

[93] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 1.1.

confirmed in the next paragraph, when Ephrem says that because the wind is not mentioned on the fifth day of creation when animals came out of the waters, the wind is not associated with the creative activity. Because nothing came out of the waters over which the wind was hovering, that wind is not the maker and is not the Holy Spirit.

In his discussion of the spirit/wind in Gen. 1:2b, Ephrem preserves the uniqueness God's creation from nothing while at the same time defending the existence of God. Ephrem does not interpret the *ruḥā* over the waters of creation as the Holy Spirit for two reasons. First, this interpretation would equate the Holy Spirit with the elemental forces that act in the world in evil ways. Ephrem attempts here to preserve the goodness of God's creation against what he perceives as Bardaisanite cosmology. Ephrem's reliance on *creatio ex nihilo* preserves the goodness of creation. Second, Ephrem's reading of Genesis is, by his own account, literal. The *ruḥā* over the waters in Gen. 1:2b does not create anything. In fact, Ephrem will point out that when created animals come out of the water, the *ruḥā* is not present. The *ruḥā* is thus not the Holy Spirit because the *ruḥā* does not create, which implies that the Holy Spirit does.

Ephrem, The Holy Spirit, Baptism

Even though in his commentary Ephrem denies that it is the Holy Spirit who hovers over the waters of creation, it is clear that he does believe that the Holy Spirit hovers over the baptismal waters. Sebastian Brock notes that Ephrem's contention that the "*ruḥā* of God" could be equated with the Holy Spirit is because the verb *raḥep,* "to hover," is an action associated with the Holy Spirit's creative role. At least three times in the *HdF* Ephrem refers to the Holy Spirit's action in relationship to baptism, or to the

work of the Trinity, as an act of hovering. In *HdF* 38 Ephrem says, "Behold the breath of the Holy Spirit: Through its hovering, it cleanses."[94] The Holy Spirit cleanses the individual so that the individual is able to speak truth instead of remain silent. The "granary of life" is cleansed from the tares.[95]

The whole of *HdF* 38 is concerned with the relationship between speech and silence. The Holy Spirit cleanses an individual and purifies her so that she is able to speak about the truths of God. Jeffery Wickes says, "Ephrem is using the language of Gn 1.2 to speak theologically about the movement of the Holy Spirit, or, as in 51:8 and 77:20, the movement of the Trinity as a whole."[96] Ephrem thus uses the language of Genesis to talk about the action of the Holy Spirit. This highlights the fact that Ephrem's concern in his commentary was to avoid the heretical opinions and ideas of his opponents.

In *HdF* 77, Ephrem articulates the work of God during baptism. He says, "The names of Father, Son, and Spirit // are equal and they are of one mind in the hovering // at baptism. // The names are united, proceeding equally. // They come bearing One will, like one bond. // And because they are equal in the hovering at baptism, // thus they are also equal in unity."[97] The names invoked at baptism are the names Father, Son, and Spirit.

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[94] *HdF* 38.12.

ܗܘ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܗܘ // ܒܪܚܦܗ ܡܕܟܝ ܐܢܘܢ

[95] Sidney H. Griffith, "Thorn among the Tares: Mani and Manichaeism in the Works of St. Ephraem the Syrian," *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001): 394–427 for examples where Ephrem uses the term tares to speak of the Marcionites and their heresy.

[96] Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 220 note 13.

[97] *HdF* 77.20–22.

ܫܘ // ܪܘܚ ܩܘܕܫ ܪܘܚ ܡܫܝܚ // ܒܥܡܕܐ // ܡܫܘܝܝܢ ܐܢܘܢ ܒܪܚܦܗ // ܒܥܡܕܐ // ܫܡܗ ܚܕ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ // ܘܡܫܘܝ ܐܢܘܢ ܒܪܚܦܗ // ܒܥܡܕܐ // ܗܟܢ ܐܦ ܫܘܝܝܢ ܒܪܚܦܗ // ܒܥܡܕܐ ܒܟܠ ܚܕ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ // ܗܟܢ ܐܦ ܫܘܝܝܢ ܒܟܠ

These names hover and are equal, they come down upon the person being baptized, and the image is like that of Jesus' baptism.

In *HdF* 51:7–8 Ephrem details a brief interpretation of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. Ephrem uses name theology and notes the trinitarian baptismal formula for followers of Jesus. He says,

> It is audacious that one would call you by a name foreign // To the one your Father called you. For he called you only 'my Son' // at the Jordan river. And where you also were baptized, // The three are symbols that baptized your humanity: // The Father with his voice, the Son with his power, // And the Spirit with her hovering. Praises to your hovering! // 'Who is able to lie about the three names // Whose hovering formerly ministered at the Jordan? // It is true that in the names into which your body was baptized, // Behold, bodies have been baptized. And while there are many // names of the Lord of all are many, in the Father, and the Son, And the Spirit // We distinctly baptize. Praises to your greatness![98]

In the baptism of Jesus, Ephrem, like many other theologians, sees an image of the Trinity. It is interesting to note that Ephrem describes the Holy Spirit's action as "hovering," the same verb used in Genesis 1:2b.

Concerning this issue about the meaning of *raḥep*, Wickes notes: "Here again it [*raḥep*] is associated with the Spirit, though in the next stanza it will be associated with the 'three names' of the Trinity. Even there, however, the reference to a trinitarian hovering above water suggests a connection to Gn 1.2."[99] The hovering of the Spirit over the baptismal waters is connected even to the names of God and evokes the imagery and language of the Genesis narrative. If, as I am suggesting,[100] portions of the *HdF* are

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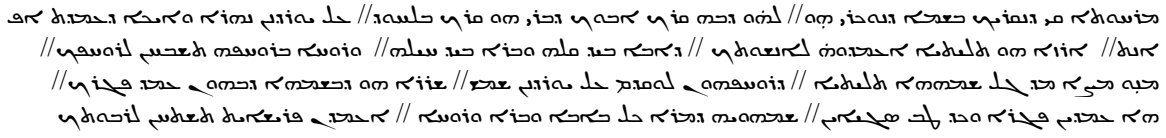
[98] Beck, *Trinitätslehre*, 63–65 connects this hymn with *HdF* 40 and notes the connection between the three mysteries in each passage. *HdF* 51.7-8.



[99] Wickes, *The Hymns on Faith*, 267 note 12.

written within an anti-Eunomian context, then it seems fitting that Ephrem would want to affirm that the Spirit's operation is inseparable from the Father and the Son, and that in his commentary Ephrem affirms that the Holy Spirit creates. While he does not say that the Spirit creates in the Genesis narrative, Ephrem does show the unity of divine operation by connecting the Spirit's creative action to baptism.

Ephrem affirms that the Holy Spirit hovers over the waters of the baptistry in a similar manner to the way the Spirit hovered over Christ's baptism. Ephrem affirms that the Holy Spirit participates by cleansing the believer through hovering over the waters of baptism. This cleansing act purifies the believer to speak in truth. The name of the Spirit is invoked during baptism along with the names Father and Son.

Conclusion

Like all theologians engaged in polemical controversy, Ephrem's theology is shaped by his interactions with his opponents. The theologies and cosmologies of Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani, coupled with Ephrem's literal reading of the Genesis text, lead Ephrem to interpret the *ruḥā* over the waters of creation as the element of wind. Ephrem wants to preserve the unity of the Trinity and the purity of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, he did not want to leave any room to connect the Holy Spirit in association with a creation that was the result of a mixture and thus an evil creation. Even though Ephrem is careful to keep the Holy Spirit separated from such a creation account, this does not mean that Ephrem denies the Holy Spirit the capacity to create. In fact, part of the reason Ephrem interprets the *ruḥā* as wind is because the wind in the Genesis

[100] See chapter 2.

narrative does not create. Thus, Ephrem does not deny that the Holy Spirit can create; he also affirms that the action of hovering (connected with the verb *raḥep*) is an action of the Holy Spirit. Last, Ephrem affirms that the Holy Spirit participates in the sacramental action of baptism transforming the lives of the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: FIRE IN OUR BAPTISM: EPHREM, THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND THE SACRAMENTS

Introduction

Ephrem and the Syriac tradition link the theology of the Holy Spirit with the sacramental actions of the church. In this chapter I continue with the argument began in chapter 3 by showing that Ephrem's sacramental theology of baptism and Eucharist elevates the status of the Holy Spirit to equality with the Father and the Son. In doing so, Ephrem exhibits a theology of inseparable operation. Such a pneumatology in his sacramental theology of places Ephrem within the pro-Nicene trajectory, and exhibits tendencies that are close to that of Cyril of Jerusalem. While the hagiographical tradition remembers that Ephrem taught Basil about the doxological formula, it is by no means probable that Ephrem even knew Basil.[1] Nonetheless Ephrem's affirmation of the Holy Spirit's role in baptism, in the baptismal formula is evident because of his insistence on the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the baptismal liturgy. Such an emphasis in the authentic Ephrem indicates that the hagiographic tradition was embellishing how Ephrem was remembered in the tradition.

In this chapter, I argue that Ephrem's theology of the sacraments reveals a pneumatology where the Holy Spirit purifies participants in the sacraments of baptism

[1] The imagined relationship between Ephrem and Basil is significant for the context of the fifth and sixth centuries. The imagined relationship helps position Syriac Christianity in a more authoritative and orthodox posture after the debates of Chalcedon. Nestor Kavvadas, *Ephraem der Syrer und Basilios der Große, Justinian und Edessa: Die Begegnung griechischer und syrischer Traditionsautorität in der Ephraemvita und der miaphysitisch-chalkedonische Konflikt* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), suggests that this imagined relationship between Ephrem and Basil is a subversive way for the non-Chalcedonian Syriac church of the sixth century to add legitimacy to their theological position. The Vita shows Ephrem giving deference to Basil, while at the same time teaching Basil about the Trinity. Ephrem, representing the Syriac church, becomes a teacher to the Greek sage Basil.

and Eucharist. The type of purification that the Spirit enacts is a divine act in unity with the Father and the Son.[2] Ephrem also affirms that the Spirit is a necessary person in the doxological formula at baptism. Ephrem's pro-Nicene theology of baptism makes Ephrem's theology of the Holy Spirit consistent with the orthodox trajectory. I assert that Ephrem's baptismal practice worked against the theologies of Marcion, Mani, Bardaisan, and even Eunomius.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Ephrem's theology of the pre-baptismal anointing. The Spirit's role and mark are found in the oil on the individual. After noting how the Spirit enacts forgiveness and begins the transformation of the baptizand, I proceed to a discussion of Ephrem's theology of baptism. For Ephrem, the mark of the Spirit is left on the baptizand in the oil and sealed in rising out of the water. The oil begins the work of sanctification as an outward sign of the inward reality. I then argue that several of Ephrem's concerns regarding baptism fit within the pro-Nicene and anti-Eunomian trajectories.

Anointing with Oil and Syrian Baptismal Tradition

Baptismal practices and the purpose of anointing with oil, in the province of Syria experienced a change in the fourth century. Gabriele Winkler argues that Syrian baptismal practice and theology prior to the fifth century was envisioned as a mimesis of Christ's baptism in the Jordan. The purification aspect of baptism was relegated to the

[2] Baby Varghese, "Saint Ephrem and the Early Syriac Liturgical Traditions," *St. Vladimirs Theological Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2011) 17–49, argues that the parallels in theme and content between Ephrem's liturgical theology and earlier Syriac writings like the *ATh* and the *Odes* indicate that Ephrem developed early Syriac ideas. I prefer to see these developments as a sign that Ephrem was already integrating the ideas and themes of his Syriac milieu into the questions and problems of the fourth century.

pre-baptismal anointing in oil (*rušmâ*). With Cyril of Jerusalem there was a shift in Eastern practice surrounding baptism, the metaphors for baptism changed and fell more in line with Pauline (Rom 6) theology. Instead of the baptismal font being a womb, it became a tomb. Instead of a birthplace, it became the place where resurrection happens.[3]

Despite the wide acceptance of her article,[4] Winkler's argument has met some criticism. Rowan Williams notes that while the "broad outline of Winkler's thesis is indisputable," the distinction she draws between the Western emphasis on catharsis and the Syrian emphasis on new creation is "overdrawn."[5] Simon Jones has also written against Winkler's assessment that the Syrian baptismal liturgy did not acknowledge a Pauline death-and-resurrection motif until after the fourth century by showcasing a variety of baptismal practices in the Syrian church which in fact used Pauline language.[6] While Joseph Chalassery does not mention Winkler's article in relationship to Ephrem,

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[3] Gabriele Winkler, "The Original Meaning of the Pre-Baptismal Anointing and Its Implications," *Worship* 52, no. 1 (1978): 24–45. Winkler's idea is supported with regard to Ephrem in George Saber, *La Théologie Baptismale de Saint Ephrem* (Lebanon: Kaslik, 1974), 173 who suggests that Ephrem's Pauline theology in relationship to baptism is not developed to a mature level. Joseph Hage, *L'Esprit Saint: chez saint Éphrem de Nisibe et dans la tradition syriaque antérieure* (Lebannon: USEK, 2012), 242–245 traces pre-baptismal anointing in Syriac texts leading up to Ephrem. Toward the end of the fourth to the beginning of the fifth century the Syriac Acts of John were circulating and provide another example of the pre-baptismal anointing, see A.F.J. Klijn, "An Ancient Syriac Baptismal Liturgy in the Syriac Acts of John," *Novum Testamentum* (1963): 216–228. Because the Syriac Acts of John date to a time just after Ephrem's death I refrain from substantive engagement with the text.

[4] Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*: *History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 430 note 7, notes that Winkler's position has become the "widely accepted."

[5] Rowan Williams, "Baptism and the Arian Controversy," in *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* eds. Miche R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 178.

[6] Simon Jones, "The Womb and the Spirit in the Baptismal Writings of Ephrem the Syrian," *Studia Liturgica* 33 (2003): 175–193.

he does argue that both the Pauline and Johannine baptismal theologies are present in Ephrem.[7]

Paul Bradshaw, in an article about the role of women in early Christian baptism, suggests that Winkler's argument about the pre-baptismal and post-baptismal anointing misses a more practical aspect concerning the clothing of those anointed and baptized. Bradshaw suggests that instead of a change in practice there were, in fact, two differing traditions:

> Gabriele Winkler's classic study of pre-baptismal anointing argued that the references to anointing of the head alone and those that included both head and body reflected two successive stages in the evolution of the ritual, in which both the action and its meaning changed. However, because examples of both practices—the head alone and the head with the body—continue to be recorded in later sources, it seems more likely that they are two parallel and distinct traditions.[8]

Bradshaw later concludes that the purpose of the change in the pre-baptismal anointing or the confluence of different traditions was to preserve the modesty of women and discourage the possibility of inappropriate actions taken by priests and bishops administering the sacraments.

Winkler's article has made clear that from the Syriac texts we have concerning baptism there was a pre-baptismal anointing during the time of Ephrem. Ephrem

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[7] Joseph Chalassery, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Initiation in the East Syrian Tradition* (Rome: Mar Thoma Yogam, 1995), 54–55, although Chalassery relies on the *Epiphany Hymns* which I believe are of dubious authenticity to make his assertion about Pauline and Johannine baptism theology, I think both traditions are nevertheless found in authentic Ephrem texts. The authenticity of the *Epiphany Hymns* is debatable. Gerard Rouwhorst, "Le Noyau le Plus Ancien des Hymnes de la Collection 'Sur L'Epiphanie' et la Question de Leur Authenticité," *Vigilae Christianae* 66 (2012): 139–159, suggests that the arguments against the authenticity of the Epiphany Hymns are overstated. Rouwhorst argues that there is a core of authentic Ephrem material within the collection. Joseph Obeid, "L'onction baptismale d'après HdE III de Saint Ephrem," *Parole de l'Orient* 17 (1992): 7–36, assumes the authenticity of Ephrem's *Epiphany Hymns* and outlines the theological typology of pre-baptismal unction.

[8] Paul Bradshaw, "Women and Baptism in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*," *JECS* 20:4 (2012), 644

mentions a pre-baptismal anointing with oil that includes forgiveness of sins. Ephrem describes oil as the "friend of the Holy Spirit"[9] and at times equates oil's functions with those of the Son.

Ephrem even connects oil to his theology of names. Without the proper names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit baptism is mute and void. Ephrem highlights that in the pre-baptismal anointing oil is applied with the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three names are similar to the symbol of the four rivers named in the Eden story. Ephrem notes, in his typical style of parallelism, that the oil and waters of baptism are a symbol that works both in the church and in human bodies. The baptismal formula with the three names is like a trumpet heralding the event.

> The river of Eden is divided in a mystery in four paths, // And the flowing oil is divided to the churches in a glorious mystery. // That mystery waters the Garden of Eden, this mystery brings light to the holy church. // That one makes trees joyful, and this one bodies // To the one of Eden there are four names, the announcers of the rivers, // And to the oil there are three names, the trumpets of baptism.[10]

Ephrem's insistence on the three names finds an interesting parallel in the Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari.[11] In this prayer there is a direct reference to the glorious names

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[9] *Virg*. 7.5. Eugene F. Rogers Jr. , *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 55–59, uses this phrase from Ephrem to assert that the Holy Spirit befriends matter.

[10] *Virg*. 4.14.
ܢܗܪ ܒܥܕܢ ܡܦ̈ // ܡܬܚܠ ܡܫܚܐ ܡܝܪܝ ܠܥܠܡ ܡܫܚܐ ܡܦ̈ // ܡܫܚܐ ܗܘ ܡܝܪܝ ܠܥܠܡ ܒܥܕܢ ܢܗܪ ܡܝ̈
ܡܫܚܐ // ܡܚܝܝܢ ܡܝ̈ ܗܘ ܡܫܚܐ ܡܚܝ ܒܥܕܢ ܢܗܪ ܡܝ // ܡܚܕܐ ܠܡܐ ܡܠܟ ܡܝ̈ // ܡܚܕܐ ܒܢܝ ܐܢܫ ܠ
ܡܬܩܪܢܝܐ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܠܟ ܡܫܝ̈ܚ

[11] For an English text of the anaphora see R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cummings, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 39–44. Robert J. Daly SJ, "Trinitarian Theology in Early Christian Anaphoras," in *God in Early Christian Thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G. Patterson*, ed. Andrew McGowan, Brian Daley, and Timothy J. Gaden (Boston: Brill, 2009), 252, notes that the lack of the institution of the eucharist by Christ may indicate the antiquity of the prayer.

of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This anaphora has its origins in the second and third century and the use of the trinitarian names may reflect that time period.[12]

In addition to the three names, Ephrem affirms a triple immersion in baptism. In *HCH* 3 Ephrem says, "I have been baptized thrice in the name of your Holy Spirit."[13] While some people read this as a statement of Ephrem's own baptism, which it may or may not be, it is clear that the normative pattern in Ephrem's mind was a triple immersion using the three names.

Ephrem, Oil, and the Holy Spirit

Ephrem associates oil with the both the Son and the Spirit, and making such an association indicates that Ephrem sees the Holy Spirit and the Son within the same status. Ephrem notes that oil is like the Holy Spirit in that oil gives power to lamps, just as the Holy Spirit empowered the prophets. In addition, Ephrem says that oil is the "friend of the Holy Spirit and her minister."[14] From his own writings, as well as from the Syriac tradition of the *Acts of Thomas*, we can infer that Ephrem's baptismal practice included a pre-baptismal anointing. Ephrem says that oil imparts forgiveness on the baptizand and that this forgiveness comes from the Holy Spirit.

Ephrem's hymn *On Virginity* 7 highlights the Holy Spirit's role in baptism, along with the relationship Ephrem sees between the Holy Spirit and the oil of anointing

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[12] Stephen B. Wilson, "The Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari," in *Essays on Early Eastern Eucharistic Prayers,* ed. Paul F. Bradshaw (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 19–37, provides a thorough introduction to the history of scholarship surrounding the text.

[13] *HCH* 3.13.

ܥܡܕܬ ܒܫܡ ܪܘܚܟ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܬܠܬ ܙܒܢ̈ܝ

[14] *Virg*. 7:5.

associated with baptism. In this hymn Ephrem affirms that the divine action of God during baptism is the united work of the Trinity. Ephrem notes that oil's relationship to the Holy Spirit is similar to oil's relationship to the Son. Oil is an image of both the Son and the Spirit. Oil's relationship between the Son and the Spirit indicates that the Spirit is at the same status as the Son.

> With visible pigments the image of majesty is painted, // and the hidden image of our hidden king is drawn publicly with oil. // In the pictures that baptism labors to birth within her womb, // from the portrait of the first man who was corrupted // she paints in them a new image, and she gives birth to them with three pangs // of the three glorious names of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.[15]

Ephrem notes that the names of God that constitute the doxological baptismal formula are like three pains of childbirth from the baptistry. Out of this baptistry is birthed a new person, and this process occurs through the united action of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Ephrem continues his discussion of the transformative process of baptism by noting the relationship of oil to the Holy Spirit. Oil follows after the Holy Spirit like a disciple and provides an outward manifestation of the Spirit's work on the inner person.

> For oil is the friend of the Holy Spirit and her minister. // And like a disciple it goes with her, because by it She marks priests and anointed ones, // *for the Holy Spirit with the Anointed One marks Her sheep* // In the symbol of a signet ring that in wax marks its seal, // also *the hidden mark of the Spirit by means of the oil is sealed on bodies // that are anointed in baptism and sealed in the immersion*.[16]

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[15] *Virg*. 7.5.

ܟܬܝܒ // ܟܡܐ ܚܠܡܐ ܟܡܐ ܟܠܝ ܒܝܟܐ ܡܠܟ ܟܥܡܝܩ // ܟܒܚܠܡܐ ܟܠܝ ܒܝܟܐ ܣܝܡܐ ܟܟܝܣܐ ܟܠܒ ܟܒܫ ܟܠܝ ܥܡܐ ܒܝܢ // ܒܕܒܝܢܐ ܕܐ ܟܕܐ ܒܝܪܐ ܡܒܝܩ ܒܝ // ܫܒܚ ܚܟܐ ܥܡܠ ܡܛܒܥܐ ܟܒܝܢܟܐ ܟܒܝܢ ܒܝܢ ܟܕܐ ܒܝܪܐ ܡܒܝܩ ܒܝ // ܒܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܥ ܟܡܫܒܥ // ܟܠܐ ܡܛܒܥ ܥܡܠ

[16] *Virg*. 7.6.

ܒܝ // ܟܡܫܬܥ ܟܝܟ ܒܫܒܥ ܫܒ ܠܟ ܟܐܡ ܟܒ ܟܒܛܠܐ ܒܟܟ // ܫܒܫܒ ܟܒܐܒ ܒܝܢ ܟܫܒ ܐܡ ܒܟ ܐܡ ܟܫܒܝ ܟܒܝܢ ܟܐ ܐܡ // ܫܛܚ ܒܫ ܐܡ ܟܫܛܫܒ ܟܫܒܐ ܒܝܢ // ܫܛܚ ܠܟ ܫܒܫܒ ܒܫ ܟܫܒܫ ܒܟ ܐܡ // ܟܚܟ ܠܟ ܟܚܠܫܒ ܟܫܒܫ ܟܫܒܫ ܟܫܒܫ // ܟܫܒ ܠܟ ܟܚܠܫܒ ܟܫܒܫ

The Holy Spirit leaves her mark on the baptizand first, in a visible manner, by means of the oil from the pre-baptismal anointing and second, in an internal manner, in the process of dipping the individual in water. Oil imprints the hidden mark of the Holy Spirit.[17]

Ephrem references Na'man's rejuvenation and cleansing from leprosy (2 Kings 5) as an analog to how baptism purifies individuals who are reborn as part of God's royal family.

> For by the *oil of separation* are anointed for absolution // bodies that are full of stains, are whitened, while not being broken. // They descend in sins as filthy ones and come up pure like babes // because they have baptism, another womb. // It makes the old young in rebirth, just like the river healed Na'man.// O to the womb that births everyday royal sons without birth pangs![18]

The baptismal font is, for Ephrem, a womb in which the baptizand is purified and gains the status of a child of God. The baptizand is a new creation who has been marked with the Holy Spirit, both through oil and the immersion. From the womb of the baptismal font, the new child is ready to eat from the eucharistic table.

The role of the priesthood in the process of baptism is that of a midwife. While the priest aids in the process of new birth, the Holy Spirit hovers and broods over the baptismal waters. As the new child of God is born, the celestial watchers rejoice in the lost who are found (Luke 15).

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[17] Sebastian Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 27–29, discusses the paired concepts of the "hidden" and "revealed" in Ephrem's writing and notes that Ephrem often uses this concept to speak about how humans interact with "God's actual Being (*ituta*), which objectively exists, but which can only be experienced in a hidden and (as we have seen) subjective way." In the example of the oil, Ephrem is describing a divine reality that is experienced through the symbolic imagery of baptism. Cf. Ute Possekel, "Ephrem's Doctrine of God," 202–206, for a discussion of how Ephrem views the hidden and revealed in God.

[18] *Virg*. 7.7.
ܒܡܫܚܐ ܗܘ ܓܝܪ ܕܦܘܪܫܢܐ ܡܬܡܫܚܝܢ ܠܚܘܣܝܐ // ܦܓܪ̈ܐ ܕܡܠܝܢ ܟܘܬ̈ܡܬܐ ܘܡܬܚܘܪܝܢ ܟܕ ܠܐ ܡܬܦܫܚܝܢ // ܢܚܬܝܢ ܒܚܘ̈ܒܐ
ܐܝܟ ܨܐ̈ܐ ܘܣܠܩܝܢ ܕܟ̈ܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܥܘ̈ܠܐ // ܕܗ̇ܘܝܐ ܠܗܘܢ ܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܐ ܟܪܣܐ ܐܚܪܬܐ // ܚ̇ܠܠܐ ܠܣ̈ܒܐ ܡܥܠܕܗ̇ ܕܐܝܟ ܢܗܪܐ
ܐܣܝ ܠܢܥܡܢ // ܐܘ ܠܟܪܣܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܒܟܠܝܘܡ ܕܠܐ ܚܒ̈ܠܐ ܒ̈ܢܝ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ
Ephrem references Na'man's healing, in which the story describes his healed skin as, "like a newborn babe's."

> Priesthood is a midwife [literally "servant"] to this womb in her giving birth. // Anointing runs before her; the Holy Spirit *hovers over* (*raḥep*) her rushing streams; // the crown of Levites encircles her; the High Priest has been made her servant. // The watchers rejoice in the lost who were found by her. // O to the womb of the one who gave birth, and by the altar is nourished and exalted. // O to the babes who from the start eat perfect bread instead of milk![19]

Consistent with the practice of Jerusalem and elsewhere, after the baptizand comes out of the water she participates in the Eucharist.[20] Ephrem notes that instead of milk the newborn can eat perfect bread, which appears to be a reference to the Eucharist. From the womb of baptism the newborn Christian is brought to the table where she is nourished, not with milk but with the bread of life.

Ephrem describes how oil wipes away sins or debts in the same way that the Noahic flood cleansed the world of the wicked. Oil drowns sin in the baptism process, and in this regard, it acts like Christ. Not only does oil act like Christ, but when a person looks at her reflection in oil she sees Christ by means of symbols.

> The face that looks upon a vessel full of oil // sees an image of itself there, but the one who gazes in a hidden manner // sees Christ in its symbols: and as the beauty of Christ is manifold, // so too the olive's symbols are manifold. Christ has many facets, and the oil acts as a mirror to them all: // from whatever angle I look at the oil, Christ looks out at me from it![21]

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[19] *Virg*. 7.8.

[20] Chalassery, *The Holy Spirit*, 52, suggests that from this text one can see the four stages of the baptismal liturgy in Ephrem's context. The stages are: 1) Pre-baptismal anointing, 2) Holy Spirit consecrates the water, 3) Immersion in water, 4) Eucharist. Varghese, "Ephrem Liturgy," 29, notes that in Ephrem there is no evidence of a post baptismal anointing.

[21] Ephrem, *Virg*. 7.14 trans. Sebastian Brock and George A. Kiraz, *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems* (Provo, UT: BrighamYoung University Press, 2006), 197.

The symbols of Christ are made known in the oil. In the new birth of baptism both the Son and the Spirit play an integral role. The Spirit and the Spirit's friend oil mark the baptizand so that he can be transformed into a new person who has God living in him. This work of baptism involves both the Son and the Spirit in a unified operation of grace.

The primary images Ephrem draws from baptism are those that relate to God's work in the life of the individual Christian. The Christian is born anew and transformed so that God is able to dwell in her.[22] Through baptism the baptizand is transformed and born anew in the baptismal womb where the Holy Spirit clothes the baptizand in new humanity modeled on the risen Lord. From the waters with which the Spirit hovers and then is mixed, the participant is marked with the imprint of God. The Spirit who was present for Christ's baptism is now present in the church's baptism and, by means of the oil, is the hidden seal upon the baptized.

Ephrem and Baptism in the pro-Nicene Movement

Ephrem's theology of baptism incorporates all the major symbols and themes associated with baptism up to the fourth century. Ephrem's affirmation that the names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are necessary and that triple immersion is also necessary indicate that he holds a high pneumatology in which the Spirit is essential in the sacramental actions. Ephrem's theology of baptism suggests that the new person is renewed and transformed by baptism so that within that person the presence of God may dwell. The new person is put on like a garment and the garment is the presence of God. This transformation does not mean that the baptized is incapable of sin, rather that post-

[22] Virg. 46.17–18, and elsewhere Ephrem notes that there is no re-baptism. Ephrem does say that if a person sins after baptism they can be absolved with a sprinkling or a washing of the sick.

baptismal sin can be purified through a washing for the sick. The baptized person's transformation enables the person to consume both fire and spirit, because both fire and spirit are essential aspects of valid baptism. In Ephrem's vocabulary fire and Spirit are often descriptions of the divine presence in the sacraments.

Ephrem's baptismal theology is also polemical and even criticizes Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani. In *HdF* 65, the last hymn in the cycle with the meter "To the Herd of Bardaisan," Ephrem discusses how the baptism of "presumptuous ones," of whom he mentions Marcion by name, reveal their error in debating against the faith in which they claim to be baptized:

> Who is likely when baptized, that he would debate and destroy // The thing into which he was baptized? He is not able to break it // Because he is not able to be baptized apart from the names// Of the Father, Son, and Spirit. And while the Word stands by itself // in everything, it bears the testing// Of those who are rash.[23]

It is incredulous to Ephrem that someone baptized into the true faith would use their own baptism as a way to divide the church. The fourth century debates about baptism, appear to have reached Ephrem in Nisibis or Edessa, even if through his regular interlocutors.

Ephrem believes that baptism is empowered by the real presence of God, as indicated by the use of the true names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ephrem notes that the apostles went and baptized people without internal conflict, "The Gospel is your marvelous mirror. // In it the three are seen without arguing, // For in them, the apostles went forth and baptized without investigation."[24] Christ gave the apostles the mandate to

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[23] *HdF* 65.5.
ܡܢܘ ܕ[ܡܟܐ ܕ] ܥܡܕ ܕܪܫ ܘܣܬܪܐ ܠܗ // ܠܡܕܡ ܕܥܡܕ ܒܗ ܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܡܨܐ ܣܬܪܐ // ܒܕܠܐ ܡܨܐ ܡܥܡܕ ܒܠܥܕ ܫܡܗܝܗܘܢ // ܕܐܒܐ
ܘܒܪܐ ܘܪܘܚܐ ܘܟܕ ܩܝܡܐ ܠܢܦܫܗ // ܡܠܬܐ ܒܟܠܡܕܡ ܢܣܝܘܢܗܘܢ ܫܩܠܬ // ܕܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܡܪܚܝܢ

[24] The theme of a spiritual mirror is common in Ephrem's writings, see Sebastian Brock, "Imagery of the Spiritual Mirror in Syriac Literature," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 5 (2005): 3–17; and Edmund Beck, "Das Bild vom Spiegel bei Ephräm," *OCP* 19 (1953): 5–24. Beck notes that the

go and baptize in three names. Ephrem expands upon this reference and imagines that there was no divisive interpretation in the apostolic practice of baptism.

The baptismal formula with the true names of Father, Son, and Spirit is foundational to Ephrem's understanding of baptism. Baptism is contingent upon the names, which act as symbols that illuminate the faith. These names are traditioned and passed down through the church. Ephrem says, "Our baptism is hung by three names. // Our faith shines in three symbols. // Our Lord passed down three names to the twelve, // in them we take refuge."[25] The three names provide a safe haven for those who have been baptized. Ephrem indicates that baptism without the three names does not provide the same comfort.

Just like Jesus' baptism where the Father, Son, and Spirit were present, baptism within the church is a trinitarian event. This is so because the Trinity was present in Jesus' baptism. Ephrem describes Jesus' baptism and notes that the Spirit came down upon Jesus in the form of a dove. He says, "The star stood over him, // declaring without arguing // That 'he is the light of the peoples,' // For they saw in him the truth. // She stood above him when he was baptized, // The Spirit, in the form (*tupsâ*) of a dove. // She shows, without a question, // That he baptizes with fire. // A voice called out in the open // That this is my Son and my beloved."[26] The Spirit indicates that Jesus baptizes with

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mystery of the Trinity, in Ephrem's thinking, is made known through the Scriptures: "Das Geheimnis der Trinität tritt im Wunderspiegel der Evangelien vor unsere Augen, oder genauer gesagt, die Gestalten des Vaters, des Sohnes und des hl. Geistes werden in ihm sichtbar," 6. *HdF* 41.10

ܩܕܡ ܗܘ ܟܘܟܒܐ ܘܩܐܡ ܠܥܠ ܡܢ // ܕܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܟܪ ܕܢܘܗܪ ܥܠܡܐ ܗܘ // ܕܒܗ ܕܚܙܘ ܫܪܪܐ ܡܢ ܕܒܗ // ܗܝ ܩܐܡܬ ܥܠ ܡܠܥܠ ܟܕ ܐܬܥܡܕ // ܪܘܚܐ ܒܬܦܣܐ ܗܘ // ܗܝ ܡܚܘܝ ܕܠܐ ܫܐܠ ܕܗܘ ܡܥܡܕ // ܩܠܐ ܐܬܩܪܝ ܒܓܠܝ // ܕܗܢܐ ܒܪܝ ܘܚܒܝܒܝ ܗܘ

[25] *HdF* 13.5.

ܐܡܪ // ܡܫܝܚܐ ܠܐ ܡܠܝܢ ܫܡܥ ܡܢ // ܕܟܠ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܗܘ // ܕܒܫܡܗ ܕܝܢ ܐܬܝ ܡܢ // ܕܒܫܡܗ ܡܠ ܫܡܥ ܡܢ ܗܘ ܕܚܝ

[26] *HdF* 7.8.

ܡܥܡܕ ܡܢ // ܒܗ ܕ ܒܗ ܡܠ // ܡܢ ܐܬ ܡܢ // ܕܒܗ ܡܢ ܐܬ // ܒܗ ܐܬ ܡܢ // ܕܒܗ ܡܠ // ܡܢ ܐܬ ܡܢ // ܕܒܗ ܡܠ ܡܢ // ܡܢ ܐܬ ܒܗ ܡܢ // ܕܒܗ ܡܠ ܡܢ // ܡܢ ܐܬ ܒܗ ܡܢ

fire, a symbol for the divine presence in Ephrem's thought and an echo of John the Baptist's statement that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Ephrem's concern for the names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in baptism was not unique to his milieu. The baptismal formula became a focal point in describing the unity of divine action during the fourth century debates concerning Arianism. Athanasius, in his *Letters to Serapion* and Basil in his *De Spiritu Sancto,* highlight the importance of the baptismal formula as a way to show the unity of divine operations.[27] He notes that baptism without all the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was ineffectual. Basil, too, notes the importance of the baptismal formula to ensure the divinity and equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. While both Basil and Athanasius focused on the baptismal formula, it is not possible to tell if liturgical practices shaped theology or theology shaped liturgical practices.[28] To put it another way, the relationship between liturgy and theology is fluid and the boundaries are permeable. It is difficult to determine which precedes the other and which has precedent because both appear to have an impact on the other depending on this situation.[29] What complicates matters further is that the writings of both Athanasius and Basil indicate that the non-Nicene parties used a nearly identical baptismal formula.

The debates about baptism spread into the second generation of the Arian controversy. Eunomius and his baptismal practices came under scrutiny by the pro-Nicenes. Eunomius, as Rowan Williams notes, was accused of teaching a baptism that

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[27] Athanasius, *Letters to Serapion* 1.30.1. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 12.28.

[28] Robert J. Daly SJ, "Trinitarian Theology in Early Christian Anaphoras," in *God in Early Christian Thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G. Patterson*, ed. Andrew McGowan, Brian Daley, and Timothy J. Gaden (Boston: Brill, 2009), 239–269.

[29] Ibid., 68–69.

did not include three immersions or the baptismal formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

> The Eunomian dialectic uncouples naming and immersion because of the risk of implying that the Trinity is one agent doing one thing under different names: the unity of baptism is the single event of transition to new life through participation in the Easter mystery. That this transition is effected by the hierarchically ordered work of the three persons is not in dispute, but the only way of strictly distinguishing them is by removing any hint that the work of one is indistinguishable from that of another.[30]

Williams' remarks highlight the fact that the pro-Nicene theologians stressed the unity of divine operations, even in baptism. In the fourth century, the liturgy became a battleground for theological disputes about the nature of the Son and the Holy Spirit. All sides of the controversy made references to liturgical practices as a way of showing their own orthodoxy, but the arguments made by pro-Nicene theologians focused on the Holy Spirit's role in baptism.[31]

Ephrem's focus on the three names in the baptismal formula and the three immersions indicate that he was not on Eunomius' side of the debate. While Ephrem does not reference Eunomius by name, he does refer, albeit briefly to the Aetians in *HCH* 22:4. Being against Eunomius does not mean that Ephrem was with the pro-Nicenes. Jeffery Wickes suggests that Ephrem's theology of the Holy Spirit resembles Cyril of Jerusalem more closely than any other fourth century figure.[32] This is due to the fact that both

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[30] Rowan Williams, "Baptism and the Arian Controversy," 176.

[31] Hanson, *The Search*, 778–790, details the different fourth century positions on the Holy Spirit and the sacraments.

[32] Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 40. Wickes assertion bears consideration when one takes into account what Hanson, *The Search*, 407–408, says about Cyril's theology of the Spirit:

> On the subject of the Holy Spirit, Cyril is perhaps more remarkable than on any other point. He describes the Spirit's functions but also comes closer to defining hi status than anybody else in the mid-fourth century. The Spirit is 'undivided, multiple in power, active in many directions but himself not split up' and he is 'honoured with (the same) dignity of status (τῆς ἀξίας τιμῇ

Ephrem and Cyril avoid the term *homoousios*, and both can appear as though they are not solely in the pro-Nicene camp.[33] A strong link between the theology of Cyril and Ephrem can be found in their insistence on the "incomprehensibility of the Son's generation."[34] Cyril's theology presents a high pneumatology with regard to the baptismal liturgies in the mid to late fourth century. His *Mystagogical Catecheses* are lectures given to recently baptized and were written sometime in the later part of Cyril's time in Jerusalem (late 370s and following). As such, these lectures can have no bearing on Ephrem's own thinking. However, Cyril's general *Catechetical Lectures* and the *Procatechesis* written for those preparing to be baptized were composed around the time that Cyril became bishop (ca. 350) and thus have at least the possibility of reaching Ephrem in some form.[35]

Cyril's rise to the bishopric was fraught with controversy and his position with regard to the pro-Nicene movement is not always clear.[36] Nonetheless, it is clear that in

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> τετίμηται) as the Father and the Son'; with the Father and the Son he 'sanctifies and brings apotheosis to everybody; he has spoken in the Law and the Prophets, in the Old and New Testaments.' Only the Holy Spirit, along with the Son, can fully see God. He is above and not comparable to angels of any rank. The Father gives everything to the Son, and the Son shares it with the Spirit. He is 'honoured with the Father and the Son and at the time of the holy baptism included in the Holy Trinity. But Cyril deprecates unnecessary speculation about the Spirit, especially curious inquiry about nature (*physis*) and *hypostasis*; 'if (this term) was in Scripture, we would have used it; but we should not venture (to use) what is not written.'…Cyril does his to distinguish the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, without the benefit of a single word to indicate what God is as Three in distinction from what he is as One.

[33] Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 40–41.

[34] Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy,*157. Part of Basil's argument for the Spirit's divinity in *De Spiritu Sancto* (22.53) is that the Holy Spirit, despite the scriptural titles applied to the Spirit, is unknowable in the same way that God the Father is unknowable. This position finds resonance in Ephrem's theology of what can be known about God. In Ephrem's mind, the names of God provide a small glimpse into who God is, and even that small glimpse is too great for human understanding.

[35] I am not suggesting that Ephrem read Cyril, rather I am saying that the theological ideas that Cyril expresses could have spread to Edessa and Nisibis. The proximity of Jerusalem to Nisibis and Edessa, coupled with the vibrant trade routes passing that way all indicate that the flow of theological ideas was rapid, even if Ephrem lacked facility with Greek.

his second round as bishop in Jerusalem he appears firmly grounded on the pro-Nicene side. There is a manuscript of his *Letter to Constantius* (dated around 351) where Cyril references the "consubstantial Trinity."[37] The reason for such a reference are unclear and appear to lack theological sophistication.[38] Upon his return to the office of bishop Cyril's theology of baptism and the Holy Spirit indicate that he fits within the pro-Nicene movement.[39]

In the *Procatechesis* Cyril discusses the purifying effects of baptism and says:

> At that time the doors of paradise will be opened to each man and woman among you. At that time you will enjoy the Christ-bearing waters with their sweet fragrance. At that time you will receive the name of Christ and the power of divine things. Already now you have lifted up for me the eye of your mind and have seen. Already now for me you think of the angelic choirs and God the Lord of all sitting, and the Only-begotten Son seated with him at his right hand, and the Spirit present with them, and the thrones and dominions offering their liturgy, and each man and woman among you receiving salvation.[40]

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[36] Robert C. Gregg, "Cyril of Jerusalem and the Arians," *in Arianism Historical and Theological Reassessments: Papers from the Ninth International Conference on Patristic Studies*, ed. Robert C. Gregg (Philadelphia: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1985), 85–109. Cf. Hanson, *The Search*, 398–413.

[37] Edward Yarnold SJ, *Cyril of Jerusalem* (London: Routledge, 2000) 195, suggests that this is an aberration and would not have come from Cyril himself. Cyril's letter would have been a first communication with the emperor as a result of Cyril's being installed as bishop.

[38] Lewis Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver': Didymus the Blind's *De spiritu sancto* and the development of Nicene pneumatology," in *The Holy Spirit in the Fathers of the Church: Proceedings of the Seventh International Patristics Conference, Maynooth, 2008* edited by D. Vincent Twomey SVD and Janet E. Rutherford (London: Four Courts Press, 2010), 57–72.

[39] After Valens was killed in battle, Cyril returned to Jerusalem as bishop ca. 378. From this point onward his theology is markedly pro-Nicene and he no longer appears to waver between the *homoiousian* and the Nicene *homousios* language. See, Hanson, *The Search*, 400–401.

[40] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 15 trans. Maxwell Johnson in *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments: The Procatechesis and the Five Mystagogical Catecheses Ascribed to St Cyril of Jerusalem* (Yonkers, NY: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017), 79–81. τότε ὑμῶν ἑκάστῳ καὶ ἑκάστῃ παραδείσου θύρα ἀνοιχθῇ. Τότε ὑδάτων ἀπολαύσητε Χριστοφόρων, ἐχόντων εὐωδίαν. Τότε Χριστοῦ προσηγορίαν λάβητε, καὶ ἐνέργειαν θείων πραγμάτων. Ἤδη μοι τῆς διανοίας τὸ ὄμμα ἀναβλέψατε· ἤδη μοι χοροὺς ἀγγελικοὺς ἐννοήσατε, καὶ δεσπότην τῶν ὅλων Θεὸν καθεζόμενον, Υἱὸν δὲ μονογενῆ ἐν δεξιᾷ συγκαθήμενον, καὶ Πνεῦμα συμπαρόν, Θρόνους δὲ καὶ Κυριότητας λειτουργοῦντας· καὶ ὑμῶν δὲ ἕκαστον καὶ ἑκάστην, σωζόμενον καὶ σωζομένην.

From this passage several themes emerge that coincide with Ephrem's baptismal theology. The emphasis on names, the Spirit's presence with the Father and the Son, and even the re-opening of the doors of paradise all relate to Ephrem's theology of baptism and rebirth.

Lewis Ayres argues that the doctrine of undiminished giver was crucial in formulating the pro-Nicene position on the Holy Spirit.[41] Pro-Nicenes noted that the Spirit gives without losing any part of the Spirit's essence. There can only be one such giver, God. Ayres notes that Cyril of Jerusalem also references the doctrine of the undiminished giver but does not take it to the conclusion that the Spirit is the same status as the Father:

> In the sixth of his *Catechetical Lectures* Cyril speaks of the Father as giving himself in many ways without being divided. And then in the sixteenth lecture, which focuses on the Spirit, he speaks of the Spirit as giving many gifts but without being diverse in himself. It is interesting, however, that true to his irenic form, Cyril never actually says 'and hence the Spirit has the same status as the Father, nor does he make anything of the Father or the Spirit giving without loss.[42]

Despite never going so far as to say the Spirit is the same status as the Father, Cyril nevertheless maintains a high pneumatology that resonates with Ephrem's.

The pro-Nicene trajectory wrote against the baptism of Eunomius because Eunomius had removed the trinity from baptism. Ephrem's baptismal practice aligns with the pro-Nicene trajectory and his theology of baptism resembles that of Cyril of Jerusalem. It appears that Ephrem, who was writing during the second generation of the Arian conflict, was opposed to Eunomian theology and baptismal practice. The purpose

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[41] Lewis Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver,' 57–72. The topic of the undiminished giver is the focus of chapter five of this dissertation.

[42] Ibid., 65.

of baptizing in the names of Father, Son, and Spirit is to indicate a unified divine action that conveys grace and new birth to the baptizand.

The Noah Narrative (Genesis 8:8)

Ephrem's similarity to Cyril of Jerusalem's theology of baptism is further linked in their interpretation of the Noah narrative (Gen 6–9) as typological of Christian baptism. The Noah narrative occupies a place of importance in Christian biblical interpretation because of its parallels to baptism.[43] The righteous man Noah, who saved humanity by means of escaping water and death, became a symbol for the work of Christ. The cross was prefigured in the wood of the ark, and Origen thought that the ark and its dimensions represented God's salvific work at the end of times, with Noah portraying a type of Christ.[44]

Ephrem interprets the dove in the Noah narrative as a symbol of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism. In this section I argue that Ephrem's interpretation is distinct because this motif was not adopted by all patristic interpretations of the text. Perhaps the reason for the patristic focus on the connection between Noah's ark and baptism comes from 1 Peter 3:21 where the flood water is said to symbolize the waters of baptism. Even though Ephrem does not reference 1 Peter 3:21 in his writings, he does make the same typological connection between Noah and baptism. Ephrem and Cyril of Jerusalem even extends the typology to include the anointing with oil.

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[43] Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers,* trans. Dom Wulstan Hibberd (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), 69–112, describes the breadth of the patristic interpretation of the Noah narrative.

[44] Origen, *Genesis Homily* 2.3.

While many writers reference the Noah narrative and its relationship to baptism, the connection between the dove that Noah sends out and the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism is not made by all theologians. Tertullian provides one of the earliest baptismal interpretations of the Noah narrative,[45] and the first interpretation that emphasizes the role of the Spirit and the dove. Because Tertullian relates the incident to Christ's baptism in the Jordan, he interprets the Holy Spirit coming down onto the baptizand once she has come out of the water. Once out of the water the priest lays his hands on the baptizand then Tertullian says:

> At this point that most holy Spirit willingly comes down from the Father upon bodies cleansed and blessed, and comes to rest upon the waters of baptism as though revisiting his primal dwelling-place. He came down upon our Lord in the form of a dove, and *thus the nature of the Holy Spirit was clearly revealed in a creature of simplicity and innocence*, since even physically the dove is without gall: which is why he says, Be ye simple, like doves. And this too has the support of a type which had preceded: for as, after those waters of the Flood, by which the ancient iniquity was cleansed away, after the baptism (so to express it) of the world, a dove as herald announced to the earth peace from the wrath of heaven, having been sent forth of the ark and having returned with an olive-leaf - and towards the heathen too this is held out as a sign of peace - *by the same <divine> ordinance of spiritual effectiveness the dove who is the Holy Spirit is sent forth from heaven, where the Church is which is the type of the ark*, and flies down bringing God's peace to the earth which is our flesh, as it comes up from the washing after <the removal of> its ancient sins.'[46]

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[45] While Justin, *Dialog with Trypho* 138, references the Noah narrative and baptism, he neglects to discuss the dove and the Holy Spirit. For a history of interpretation on the Noah narrative in Judaism and Early Christianity see Jack Lewis, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

[46] Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 8 trans Ernest Evans in *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism: The Text edited with an Introduction, Translation and commentary* (London: SPCK, 1964), 16–19, italics mine. [3] tunc ille sanctissimus spiritus super emundata et benedicta corpora libens a patre descendit superque baptismi aquas tanquam pristinam sedem recognoscens conquiescit: columbae figura delapsus in dominum ut natura spiritus sancti declararetur per animal simplicitatis et innocentiae, quod etiam corporaliter ipso felle careat columba. [4] ideoque Estote, inquit, simplices ut columbae: ne hoc quidem sine argumento praecedentis figurae : quemadmodum enim post aquas diluvii quibus iniquitas antiqua purgata est, post baptismum ut ita dixerim mundi, pacem caelestis irae praeco columba terris adnuntiavit dimissa ex arca et cum olea reversa - quod signum etiam ad nationes pacis praetenditur eadem dispositione spiritalis effectus terrae, id est carni nostrae, emergenti de lavacro post vetera delicta columba sancti spiritus advolat pacem dei adferens, emissa de caelis ubi ecclesia est arcae figura. [5] 'sed mundus rursus deliquit, quo male

Tertullian equates the actions of Noah's dove with the Holy Spirit at baptism. The Spirit rests over the waters of baptism, and cleanses the individual from her sins, which is seen as an announcement that the wrath of God has ended. The dove serves as a prefigured type (*praecedentis figurae*) of Christian baptism. The purity and innocence of the dove is part of the reason that the dove is equated with the Holy Spirit.

Origen says that Jesus descends into the waters of the Jordan to purify baptismal waters for Christians. While Origen does not speak about the dove or the Holy Spirit in his homily on Noah's ark, he does say in several fragments from his commentary on Matthew that the dove in the Noah story symbolizes the reconciliation between God and humanity. In addition, he notes that the Spirit comes as a dove "proclaiming the mercy of God to the world."[47] In Origen's thought the dove symbolizes an ideal life characterized by "purity, quietness, innocence, benevolence, and forgiveness."[48] It is difficult to grasp the extent of Origen's typology from these fragments, but it is still clear that the dove bears a symbolic relationship to the Holy Spirit in baptism.

After Origen and Tertullian little seems to be made of the connection of the dove with the Holy Spirit until the fourth century.[49] Hilary of Poitiers connects the Noah narrative and the Holy Spirit, but not to Jesus' baptism; instead he shows a connection

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comparetur baptismus diluvio.' itaque igni destinatur, sicut et homo cum post baptismum delicta restaurat: ut hoc quoque in signum admonitionis nostrae debeat accipi.

[47] Origen, *Commentary on Matthew Fragments*, *Fragment* 56 in Ronald Heine, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St. Matthew:* vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 328–329.

[48] Ibid., *Fragment* 202, pages 346–347.

[49] There are references made to Gen. 8:8–12 in Ps. Cyprian's *Ad Novatian* as well as Eusebius of Caesarea's *Chronicon* preserved in Armenian. I have been unable to access these sources.

between the dove and the fruitful life.[50] It is not until after Ephrem and Cyril that more writers make the explicit connection between the dove in both accounts.

Throughout his body of work Ephrem repeatedly references Noah.[51] In doing so, he asserts that Noah was a noble and chaste or virginal man, something that appears to contradict the Genesis narrative.[52] In his commentary on Genesis, which resembles a targum in style, Ephrem neglects a discussion of the dove and the raven, he skips ahead to the ark's passengers stepping out onto dry land. However, in his hymns Ephrem writes of Noah's ark traveling the four corners of the earth to show that the Savior's birth is spread to all regions. By going north, south, east, and west, the boat also makes the sign of the cross. About the boat Ephrem says,

> In its course it marked the sign of its keeper // The cross of its sailor, and the wood of its mariner, // Who came and constructed a church for us from within the waters. // In the name of the Trinity, he rescued the inhabitants // And the Spirit instead of the dove, ministered its anointing, // And the mystery of salvation. Glory to its Savior![53]

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[50] Hilary, *Tractatus Mysteriorum*, 14.

[51] In the first hymn of the Nisibene cycle Ephrem uses Noah as an image for Ephrem's current situation. It appears the city of Nisibis is under siege and Ephrem refers to the invading army as waves which Noah was dealt in the ark. The siege of Nisibis is depicted not as a baptism so that people might be pure, but as a way to instill the fear of the Lord. Ephrem references Noah: *Carm Nis.* 1.9; 57.5–6; *Virg*. 1.10; 8.14; *H.Pard.* 14.5; *HNat*. 1.22–23; *HEccl*. 34.6; *HCH* 21. In addition, Ephrem implements the theme of the Church as a ship on a voyage throughout his writings, see Murray, *Symbols*, 249–253. *HCH* 25–27 is an extended reflection on the theme of the way, and found within it are several nautical themes highlighting the role of the church as the ship on its voyage.

[52] Laura Lieber, "Portraits of Righteousness: Noah in Early Christian and Jewish Hymnography," *Zeitschrift für Religions-und Geistesgeschichte* 61:4 (2009): 332–355, notes how the Christian interpretations of Noah wanted to make him a model of celibacy, while Jewish interpretations came up with more creative answers. For instance, Noah was infertile for his first 500 years, not chaste. Ephrem appears in part to be following the same line of thinking as Aphrahat, see Naomi Koltun-Fromm, "Aphrahat and the Rabbis on Noah's Righteousness in Light of the Jewish-Christian Polemic," in *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Interpretation: A Collection of Essays,* eds. Judith Frishman and Lucas van Rompay (Lovanii: Peeters, 1997), 57–71.

[53] *HdF* 49.4.

Ephrem connects the dove from the Noah narrative with Jesus' baptism as well as with the Holy Spirit and anointing. Christ formulates the church in the waters of baptism by means of the trinitarian formula. Ephrem asserts that after Jesus' baptism, when the Spirit descends like a dove, Jesus was anointed by the Spirit.

Ephrem alludes to the idea that Noah's ark is a symbol of new birth and baptism in *Hymn on the Church* 11.[54] Here Ephrem says:

> Justice has fashioned for Noah a cage of winged birds. // The ark spread its wings and landed on the high mountain. // The pain of childbirth occurred to her: there she bowed and she gave birth. // Stupor and confusion! The wooden bird gives birth // To the reptile, the man and the cattle, as the bosom of the earth at the beginning! // Blessed is He who made a little sister on earth to give birth to her children![55]

Just as the ark gave birth to the new world and new creatures after the flood, so too the waters of baptism bring forth new creatures and creation. The ark symbolizes the church giving birth to children because of the Son's work on the wood of the cross. The Son encourages the church, his sister, to give birth to new creation.

In a similar fashion, Cyril connects the Noah narrative to Jesus' baptism and says,

> the Holy Spirit also descended upon the true Noah, the Author of the second birth, who draws together into one the wills of all nations, of whom the various dispositions of the animals in the ark were a figure…The spiritual dove therefore, as some interpret, came down at the season of his baptism, that he might show that it is he who by the wood of the cross saves them who believe, he who at eventide should grant salvation through his death.[56]

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[54] Cf. *Hymnen de Ieiunio* 7.5 where Ephrem equates the Spirit's action with the dove who settled on the olive branch.

[55] *Eccl.* 11.2.
ܐܠܗܐ ܒܠܚ ܠܢܘܚ ܒܝܬ ܛܥܢܐ ܕܨܦܪ̈ܐ // ܬܝܒܬܐ ܦܬܚܬ ܘܢܚܬ ܥܠ ܛܘܪܐ ܪܡܐ // ܟܐܒܐ ܘܝܠܕܬ ܒܗ ܬܡ ܟܪܥܬ ܘܝܠܕܬ // ܡܬܬܐ ܘܒܗܬܐ ܒܥܠܡ ܫܪܝܪ̈ܐ ܘܝܠܕ ܛܘܪ̈ܐ // ܒܪܝܟ ܗܘ ܕܥܒܕ ܟܝ ܐܚܬ ܙܥܘܪܬ ܕܬܝܠܕ ܠܒܢܝܗ

[56] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 17.10 translation adapted from Edwin Hamilton Gifford. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, vol. 7 eds. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894), 126. τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον κατῆλθεν ἐπὶ τὸν ἀληθινὸν Νῶε, τὸν τῆς δευτέρας γενέσεως ποιητήν, τὸν παντοίων γενῶν προαιρέσεις εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ συνάγοντα, ὧν τύπον ἔφερον αἱ διάφοροι τῶν ἐν τῇ κιβωτῷ ζώων καταστάσεις…ἡ νοητὴ περιστερὰ ἐν τῷ

The Noah narrative is used to highlight both the crucifixion and the presence of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' baptism. The divided and varied world is represented by the many animals in the ark. The Spirit's role in this interpretation is to indicate the salvific quality and capacity of Christ for those who believe.

Cyril and Ephrem are peers in their interpretation of the dove from the Noah narrative as the dove in the baptism of Jesus. In this interpretation the Holy Spirit is present and active in the baptism of Jesus and that is how the Spirit continues to act in Christian baptism. While it is not necessary for Ephrem to have read Cyril, Origen, or Tertullian to conclude that the dove in the Noah narrative is a type or symbol of the Holy Spirit, it is interesting that so few theologians make this connection prior to Ephrem. Within the Syriac tradition there is enough source material for Ephrem to connect the Holy Spirit and Noah's dove. The biblical connection itself is the strongest natural connection available to Ephrem. After Ephrem's life, Ambrose of Milan connects the dove with the Holy Spirit as well, noting that in the Noah narrative one aspect of the flood is that God is removing the Spirit from the world.[57]

Gregory of Nazianzus notes, in a passage celebrating the baptism of Christ, that the Spirit maintains a strong relationship with the dove. Gregory also highlights how Christ's baptism opens the doors of paradise to Adam, doors that were cut off on account of sin by the sword of an angel.[58] This motif is present in Ephrem and the Syriac tradition

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καιρῷ τοῦ βαπτίσματος, ἵνα δείξῃ ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ διὰ ξύλου σταυροῦ σώζων τοὺς πιστεύοντας, ὁ μέλλων πρὸς ἑσπέραν διὰ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ χαρίζεσθαι τὴν σωτηρίαν.

[57] *On the Mysteries*, 3.10, for the Spirit not remaining in the world and 4.24–25 for the dove as a type or symbol of the Spirit. In addition to Ambrose other Latin and Greek fathers made the connection between the dove and the Spirit. Jerome, *Epistle* 69, notes that the dove of the Holy Spirit came to both Noah and Christ proclaiming reconciliation.

in relationship to both baptism and Eucharist, although the source for Ephrem is not Jesus' baptism, but the piercing of Christ's side.[59]

Thus, Ephrem's interpretation of the Noah narrative emphasizes the Spirit's connection with Jesus' baptism. Jesus' baptism is the model of Christian baptism and Ephrem's insistence that the Spirit is part of Jesus' baptism translates to Christian baptism. Ephrem's interpretation of Gen 8:8 is distinct and bears similarity to Tertullian and Cyril of Jerusalem. Ephrem's theology of baptism reaches across the wide expanse of salvation history and the biblical witness in order to show that God, as Trinity, operates in the sacraments of the church.

Baptism and Clothing Metaphors

One of Ephrem's most prominent images for baptism is that of putting on a new robe or new clothing. Part of Ephrem's theology of baptism is that the participant

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[58] *Oration* 39.16.

[59] While both Murray and Brock note the importance of Christ's pierced side in the Syriac tradition as a symbol of the opening of the gates of paradise, see, Robert Murray, "The Lance which Re-opened Paradise a Mysterious Reading in the Early Syriac Fathers," *OCP* 39 (1973): 224–234; Sebastian Brock, "The Mysteries in the Side of Christ," *Sobornost* 7.6 (1978): 462–472; and Chalassery, *The Holy Spirit*, 63–64, none of these authors explore the rich interpretation of this passage in the broader Latin and Greek contexts. As early as Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 2.2.19, Christians interpret John 19:34 as a reference to baptism and to Eucharist. Origen (*Contr. Cel.* 2.36) and Gregory of Nazianzus (*Oration* 45.49) understand the blood and water to indicate the humanity and divinity of Christ. Origen also notes that the purpose of the blood and water is not to indicate a rebaptism for every sin, rather to show that all people are in need of help from the one whose side is pierced (*Homilies on Leviticus* 8.10 (12)). Irenaeus interprets the blood and water as a sign of the physical humanity of Christ opposed to a docetic Christ (*Against Heresies* 3.22.2; 4.33.2; and 4.35.3). Tertullian (*De Baptismo* 16), Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechetical Lecture* 3.10) all interpret John 19:34 with some connotation to baptism. In addition to opening the gates of paradise, the blood and water that flow from Christ's side carry a connotation of spiritual cleansing in Ephrem *Virg.* 30.10; *Carm Nis*. 39.7. One of the foundational texts in the Ephrem corpus that is used to show Ephrem's interpretation of John 19:34 is the 49th Armenian hymn. While there is little to suggest from their contents that the Armenian hymns are inauthentic to Ephrem, or that their translators add to the text, see Louis Mariès S.J., "Une *antiphona* de Saint Ephrem sur l'Eucharistie," *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 42 (1954): 394–403, I remain less than confident that one can trust the Armenian hymns as representative of authentic Ephrem.

receives forgiveness of sins. Ephrem speaks of this forgiveness as a transformation from an old to a new person and as putting on new clothing. Ephrem's use of the new clothing image is also found in Cyril of Jerusalem. When Ephrem speaks about this transformative process he is not always clear which person of the Trinity is offering the forgiveness. The lack of clarity that Ephrem shows in this regard hints that forgiveness is done by all three persons of the Trinity.

Ephrem speaks of baptism in terms of clothing individuals in new garments. In his *Sermon on our Lord*, Ephrem highlights the differences between the incarnation and the purpose of baptism for mortal people. While Christ began to wear humanity as a habit, that habit was not part of his divine nature. As a human, Christ was baptized so that humanity might be reborn according to the nature of divinity. Ephrem says, "He was begotten of Divinity, according to His nature, and of humanity, which was not according to His nature, and of baptism, which was not His habit; So that we might be begotten of humanity, according to our nature, and of divinity, which is not in our nature, and of the Spirit which is not our habit."[60] The Spirit is thus put on in the baptismal process as part of a new garment. Here the Spirit makes the Christian a new person who like Christ is both spiritual and human.

John the Baptist's baptism prepared the way for Jesus' baptism and the "robe of the Spirit given by our Lord."[61] At his baptism, Jesus mixed the Spirit with the water so that there would be an outward sign for the inward transformation. Not only does the

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[60] *SDN* 2.1, translation adapted from Edward Matthews, *Ephrem's Prose Works* FOTC 91 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 276.

[61] *SDN* 55.

Spirit descend upon the Son like a dove, but also the Spirit is with the Son in the waters of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. Ephrem references the fact that John's baptism in water cleansed debts with "common water," which served as a preparation for the reception of the Spirit.

> Therefore, since the Spirit was with the Son, he came to John that he might receive baptism from him to mix with visible water, the Spirit who cannot be seen. So that those whose bodies are aware of wetness of the water might also be aware of the gift of the Spirit in their minds, and whose outer bodies becomes aware of water flowing over them, as the inside of their mind becomes aware of the Spirit flowing over it. So that when our Lord was immersed down into baptism, He clothed himself in it and baptism came up with Him, just like when he was brought to the temple, He had put on prophecy and priesthood, and He left carrying the purity of the priesthood on His pure limbs and bearing the words of prophecy in His innocent ears.[62]

As the Lord entered the baptismal waters, he clothed himself in baptism so that he could take baptism with him. The baptizand is transformed both on the inside by the Holy Spirit and the outside through the effects of the water.[63]

Sebastian Brock outlines the importance of this clothing metaphor in Syriac Christianity and notes that at baptism the baptizand is immersed in the waters of the Jordan.[64] Brock draws upon the concept of "sacred time" to show that Christ's baptism is

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[62] *SDN* 55.

ܗܠܐ ܡܕܝ ܡܫܬܐ ܟܕ ܥܡ ܒܪܐ. ܐܬܐ ܠܘܬ ܝܘܚܢܢ ܕܢܣܒ ܡܢܗ ܡܥ ܡܝ ܓܠܝܐ. ܪܘܚܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܐ. ܕܟܠ ܐܢܘܢ ܓܫܡܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܝ ܡܫܬܐ ܡܕܥ ܒܗ. ܡܕܥ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܦ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܡܬܬܐ ܒܪܘܚܐ ܕܝܠܗܘܢ. ܘܓܫܡܐ ܕܒܪ ܡܢ ܓܘ ܡܝ ܡܬܟܣܐ ܒܗ. ܡܕܥ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܦ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܡܬܬܐ ܒܪܘܚܐ ܕܝܠܗ. ܕܟܕ ܡܪܢ ܐܬܛܒܠ ܠܬ ܡܝ ܡܫܬܐ. ܐܬܟܣܝ ܒܗ ܘܡܫܬܐ ܣܠܩ ܥܡܗ. ܟܕ ܗܘ ܕܐܬܝܠ ܠܗܝܟܠܐ. ܐܬܟܣܝ ܒܢܒܝܐ ܘܟܗܢܘܬܐ. ܘܫܒܩ ܢܫܩ ܥܡ ܕܟܝܘܬܐ ܕܟܗܢܘܬܐ ܥܠ ܦܓܪܘܗܝ ܕܟܝܐ. ܘܡܠܬܐ ܕܢܒܝܐ ܒܐܕܢܘܗܝ ܕܬܪܝܨܐ.

[63] Macarius Symeon, writing out of the same Syrian mileau as Ephrem, also connects the themes of new creation and mixture and mingling with the work of the Holy Spirit. See, Marcus Plested, "Pneumatology and the New Creation in the Macarian Writings: An Ecumenical Legacy," in *The Spirit in Creation and New Creation: Science and Theology in Western and Orthodox Realms* ed. Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 161–170.

[64] Sebastian Brock, "Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition," in *Eichstätter Beiträge Philosophie und Theologie: Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Verlage Friedrich Pustet Regensburg, 1981), 12–13. Idem., *The Luminous Eye*, 85–98.

the form of Christian baptism and all Christians are baptized in the Jordan just like Christ.[65] As the baptizand comes up out of the water she picks up the new garment that was left there by Christ.

Cyril of Jerusalem also connects baptism with the concept of new garments. Cyril, who was a contemporary with Ephrem, provides a touchstone to how Ephrem relates to the rest of the fourth century. In his third catechetical lecture, which was part of the Lenten cycle before an Easter baptism, Cyril discusses baptism and in doing so shares many points of confluence with Ephrem's theology. Baptism is treated as an event that cleanses the individual, but Cyril takes that a step further by saying that in preparation for baptism one is able to begin the cleansing process of repentance. He says, "Through sincere faith make the vessels of your soul clean and ready for receiving the Holy Spirit. Begin to wash your garments through repentance, so that you may be found clean when you are invited into the bridal chamber."[66] Not only does Cyril draw connections with cleansing, but he also relates baptism to a new clean garment.

The new garment inherited from baptism is the result of the Holy Spirit acting as a seal on the soul. Cyril says, "The water cleanses the body, and the Spirit seals the soul, so that we can approach God with hearts sprinkled and bodies washed in pure water. So when the time comes for you to go down into the water, do not attend to its common

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[65] Brock*, Luminous Eye*, 29–30, distinguishes between ordinary, historical time, and sacred time in Ephrem's writings. Brock says, 29, "Ordinary time is linear and each point in time knows a 'before' and an 'after.' Sacred time, on the other hand, knows no 'before' and 'after,' only the 'eternal now:'" Brock suggests, 30, that this understanding of sacred time impacts two aspects of Ephrem's theology: 1) his understanding of Christ's descent into hell and 2) his theology of the sacraments. The classic study in the field of religious studies on the concept of sacred time is Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959).

[66] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 3.2 trans. Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem*, 89. Ἑτοιμάσατε τῆς ψυχῆς τὰ ἀγγεῖα καθαρὰ διὰ τῆς ἀνυποκρίτου πίστεως, πρὸς ὑποδοχὴν τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Ἄρξασθε πλύνειν τὰς στολὰς ὑμῶν διὰ μετανοίας, ἵνα εἰς τὸν νυμφῶνα καθαροὶ κληθέντες εὑρεθῆτε.

nature; welcome your salvation by the power of the Holy Spirit; for you need both in order to be made perfect."[67] In the baptismal waters the baptizand must pay attention to the power of the Holy Spirit that makes the individual perfect.

The mechanics of baptismal grace are fluid in Ephrem's theology. Ephrem does not always make explicit which person of the Trinity imparting grace and forgiveness. This fluidity can be read as an affirmation of the unity of divine operations, when seen in the light of Ephrem's belief that the names of God are essential in the baptismal process. Ephrem's baptism theology also bears a marked similarity to Cyril of Jerusalem in several aspects. Such similarity shows how Ephrem's theology was connected with the theological conversations across the Roman Empire. Ephrem uses the same source material, Scripture, tradition, and the sacramental practices of the church to elucidate his theological concerns.

Fire and the Holy Spirit

The Syriac and Greek biblical tradition associated the divine presence and divine action with fire. As Sebastian Brock shows fire was seen as an example of God's acceptance of a sacrifice, noting that Aphrahat appears to use a Septuagint reading of "God enflamed the sacrifice" instead of "God regarded the sacrifice."[68] The biblical

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[67] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 3.4 trans. Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem* Yarnold, 90. Καὶ τὸ μὲν ὕδωρ καθαίρει τὸ σῶμα, τὸ δὲ Πνεῦμα σφραγίζει τὴν ψυχήν· ἵνα [πνεύματι] ἐῤῥαντισμένοι τὴν καρδίαν, καὶ λελουμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ, προσέλθωμεν τῷ Θεῷ. Μέλλων τοίνυν εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ καταβαίνειν, μὴ τῷ ψιλῷ τοῦ ὕδατος πρόσεχε· ἀλλὰ τῇ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἐνεργείᾳ τὴν σωτηρίαν ἐκδέχου· ἄνευ γὰρ ἀμφοτέρων ἀδύνατόν σε τελειωθῆναι.

[68] Aphrahat, *Dem.* IV.2. Sebastian Brock, "Fire from Heaven: from Abel's Sacrifice to the Eucharist. A Theme in Syriac Christianity," *SP* 25 (1993): 231, discusses how the Theodotian version of the LXX has a mis-reading of the Hebrew and translates "God regarded his offering" as "God ἐνεπύρισεν (enflamed)." Edmund Beck *Die Theologie des Heiligen Ephraem in seinem Hymnen über den Glauben*

witness also affirms that fire and the Holy Spirit coincide with one another (Acts 2). John the Baptist proclaims that the one coming after him will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. The book of Acts retells the details of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles as flames of fire. It is natural then, that Ephrem equates the divine presence with the concept and symbol of fire. Fire, I will show in the next chapter, provides Ephrem with a metaphor for discussing the Trinity. In relation to baptism, Ephrem notes that John the Baptist "baptized the Baptizer Who baptized the peoples // with a flow of fire and the Holy Spirit."[69] In the fulfillment of John's prediction, Christ then baptizes with fire and the Holy Spirit.[70] This idea expands upon the fact that Jesus did not baptize during his ministry to suggest that Christ's ministry continues past his resurrection. This idea is furthered by interpreting Pentecost as an act of Christ.

The two cornerstones of Ephrem's baptismal theology are the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.[71] Related to this is the image of the new person, who is put in baptism. Ephrem says that the "Carpenter of life" forms the individual and makes space so that he can dwell in the person. Baptism is the way that the person is transformed to become a temple and palace for Christ.

(Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi, 1949), 88, speaks about fire and spirit and their theological implications in Ephrem's writings.

[69] *Virg* 15.1.

ܡܥܡܕܢ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܚܝܐ ܡܝܬ // ܥܡ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܘܢܘܪܐ

[70] Cyril of Jerusalem notes, following Matthew 3:11 and Acts 2, that "The Savior baptized the apostles with the Holy Spirit and fire." Fire's association with the Spirit is drawn from John the Baptist's description of what Jesus would do and from the Pentecost story where the Holy Spirit descended in the form of fire and flaming tongues of fire. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 3.9 trans. Yarnold, *Cyril of Jersualem*, 93. Πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ τοὺς Ἀποστόλους ἐβάπτισεν ὁ Σωτὴρ.

[71] Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 499–518, outlines Ephrem's treatment of baptism. While the themes present in Ferguson's discussion are accurate, he uses certain texts that may not be from authentic Ephrem. Ferguson relies on the *Epiphany Hymns*, which are not considered to be authentic Ephrem.

> For in baptism our Lord renewed your old age // The Carpenter of Life, Who by His blood formed and built a temple for His dwelling. // Do not permit that old man // To reside in the renewed temple. // Body, if God lives in your temple, // Even you will become His royal palace.[72]

The human person is transformed in baptism and becomes the royal dwelling place for God. This Pauline image emphasizes the change that takes place in the individual during baptism.

The Holy Spirit's work in Ephrem's thought, can be divided into two parts: the actualization of the divine mysteries and the purification of the individual Christian.[73] As a symbol of the Holy Spirit, fire indicates the presence of God and the purification that occurs in the sacraments. This Spirit is mixed in the baptismal waters and present in the eucharistic bread.[74] Here Ephrem uses mixture language to note how mundane objects like water, wine, and bread become extraordinary through the mingling of the Holy Spirit.[75]

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[72] *Virg*. 1.2.

ܒܪ ܟܠ // [ܡܫܝܚܐ] ܟܕ ܡ ܟܒ ܠܟ [ܡܪ] ܒܪ ܟܡ [ܐܝܟ] // ܟܒܪܐ ܕܟܪܝܬ ܝܠܕܬܟ ܡܒܪ ܒܝ ܒܝ ܟܡ ܠܟ ܟܕܡ ܒܪ ܒܟ // ܟܡܠ ܟܕ ܟܒ ܟܒ ܒ ܟ // [ܒܪ] ܟܕ ܟܒ ܕ [ܟܬ // ,ܡܕܠ ܒܝ]
ܡܒܠ

[73] Yousif, "L'Eucharistie," 241, "l'Esprit est présent et toujours à l'oeuvre, et cela de deux façons: la première dans la réalisation des Mystères divins, surtout de l'Eucharistie; la deuxième dans la sanctification des chrétiens que l'Esprit accomplit au jour le jour en tant que Feu qui purifie et qui donne la vie." Lewis Ayres, "Innovation and *Ressourcement* in Pro-Nicene Pneumatology," *Augustinian Studies* 39:2 (2008): 194, notes that in the pro-Nicene trajectory of pneumatology the Spirit's role in sanctification is tied to Psalm 33:6 and John 3:3. Ephrem does not implement these texts for the purpose of sanctification, but instead uses the sacraments as the focal point for the sanctification and purification of the individual Christian. As Ayres notes, 197, "A recovery of the Spirit's role in creation thus enables a new appreciation of the Spirit's role in sanctification."

[74] Brock, "Fire from Heaven," 233–234, notes how the association of the Holy Spirit with fire finds resonance with the Macarian Homilies where there are references to the heavenly fire of the Spirit.

[75] Ephrem's use of mixture language and its relationship to Stoicism will be discussed in chapter 5.

> The Symbol of the Spirit is in it [the fire] a type of the Holy Spirit, // Who is mixed in the waters that are for pardon // And is mingled in the bread that is for a sacrifice.[76]

Ephrem notes that the Spirit symbolized by fire is mixed with the baptismal waters for the absolution of the individual. Not only that, but the Spirit is mingled with eucharistic bread in order to be a sacrifice. The Spirit is thus the person of the Trinity who enlivens the sacramental practices.

In speaking about the Son, Ephrem notes that he combines both fire and spirit in himself. He says, "For never did mortal minds touch him. // The one who has a hand of fire and a finger of spirit. // Who can pry into him, for even with our mind like a body // His hiddenness is searched for!"[77] Through the process of the sacraments God remakes humanity into fire and spirit. This remaking entails a humanity that is just lower than the watchers or angels but elevated above sinful humanity. The futility of searching for God in order to contain God is evident, for Ephrem, in the structure of humanity. Humans are not made of the right materials to understand God; "even the mind is like a body," even the most distinguished aspect of humanity is corporeal matter and is unable to understand God.

The presence of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism affirms that he baptizes with fire. The Spirit shows that the Son baptizes with fire. The Spirit is a confirmation of Jesus' divinity present in the sacramental actions. Fire is thus a symbol Ephrem uses to indicate the purifying and transformative action and presence of God found in the

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[76] *HdF* 40.10.

ܕܒܝܬܗ ܕܪܘܫܐ ܕܩܕܫܐ ܒܗ ܛܦܣܐ // ܕܡܬܚܠܛ ܒܡܝܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܘܡܬܒܠܠ ܒܦܬܝܬܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ

[77] *HdF* 19.4.

ܒܝܕܝ ܕܪܘܫܐ ܘܒܨܒܥ ܕܪܘܚܐ // ܡܢ ܕܡܫ ܒܗ ܒܪ ܐܢܫ // ܕܐܦ ܒܪܥܝܢ ܕܪܘܚܢ ܐܝܟ ܦܓܪܐ // ܡܚܦܝܬܗ ܡܬܒܥܐ ܗܘ //

practices of the church. As Baby Varghese says, "fire is a polyvalent symbol that indicates the dynamic presence ('warmth') of the Holy Spirit, who is life-giving, regenerating, absolving, perfecting, illuminating and sanctifying."[78] Baptism into the church is a purifying fire, cleansing the individual so that she will be transformed into a person who can physically participate in the Eucharist. Baptism provides purification, removes sin, and is a new birth because the fire of God's presence is in the sacrament.

In Ephrem's theology, fire and Spirit mingle in the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. The sacraments become places where the individual encounters divine presence and is transformed by it. In speaking about baptism, Ephrem places the Holy Spirit on equal standing with the Son. Ephrem does this by noting how the baptizand experiences what Jesus did in his baptism at the Jordan. As such, Jesus left the Holy Spirit to his followers so that the baptizand could be purified and transformed in the waters.

Eucharist

Without the Holy Spirit, Jesus is not communicated or revealed to the church in the sacrament of baptism, and the same is true in Ephrem's thinking about the Eucharist.[79] Ephrem's eucharistic theology highlights the role of the Holy Spirit by including the Spirit in the gifts of bread and wine through the image of fire. In one of

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[78] Varghese, "Saint Ephrem," 27.

[79] Joseph Amar, "Perspectives on the Eucharist in Ephrem the Syrian," *Worship* 61, no. 5 (1987): 441–454, argues that Ephrem's theology of the Eucharist is a less cerebral than counterparts in the West, 443, "For Ephrem, the sacred is a dimension that does not submit to analytical investigation by the faculties of reason; only the more fluid logic of scriptural imagery is subtle and allusive enough to evoke it." While the Armenian hymns provide a strong trinitarian theology with regard to the Eucharist, see Mariès, "Une *antiphona*," 401, I do not use these hymns in this section because the translations are removed from the original Syriac, which is unknown to us.

Ephrem's most famous hymns, *HdF* 10,[80] he discusses the nature of the Holy Spirit in relationship to the Eucharist. Ephrem affirms the Spirit's role in Jesus' baptism and in the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

Ephrem notes that the altar is dependent upon the Holy Spirit.[81] P. Yousif has said that for Ephrem, "The Holy Spirit embraced therefore all the action, activity of the church of which the Eucharist and the word of God are principle realizations: He animates these activities, which give life and constancy."[82] The life of the church is vivified by the Holy Spirit and is sustained through the Eucharist and reading of the Scriptures. The Spirit makes the presence of Christ real and bearable for the church, while at the same time opens the ears of people to hear the word of God.

Yousif argues that with regard to the sacraments the Spirit performs two actions: descending and hovering. The pairing of these two actions is most evident in Ephrem's understandings of the Spirit's work at the Eucharist. This descent takes place during the epiclesis where the Spirit is invoked to come upon the bread and wine. Then the Spirit hovers over the gifts of bread and wine in order to warm them (as fire) so that they will be transformed into the body and blood of Christ.[83]

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[80] Sidney Griffith, "Spirit in the Bread; Fire in the Wine: The Eucharist as 'Living Medicine' in the Thought of Ephraem the Syrian" *Modern Theology* 15 (1999): 225–246. Robert Murray, "A Hymn of St Ephrem to Christ on the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit, and the Sacraments" *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1970): 142–150. Pierre Yousif, "L'Eucharistie chez saint Éphrem de Nisibe" in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus: Studies in Early Christian Literature and Its Environment* ed. Robert H. Fischer (Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1977), 235–246. Idem., *L'Eucharistie chez saint Éphrem de Nisibe* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 244; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientale, 1984), 145–156.

[81] *HCH* 5.20, ܡܕܒܚܐ ܥܡ ܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܫܐ.

[82] Yousif, "L'Eucharistie," 237, "L'Esprit Saint embrasse donc toute l'action, l'activité de l'Église dont l'Eucharistie et la Parole de Dieu sont les principals réalisations: Il anime cette activité, lui donne vie et consistance."

[83] Yousif, "L'Eucharistie," 240, speaking of the term *raḥep* (ܪܚܦ), "Ephrem semble l'employer dans les trois sens. L'Esprit (rūḥā) alors est au féminin, genre de la colombe qui le symbolise, comme elle a

The Holy Spirit's work in baptism and Eucharist comes is the primary focus of *HdF* 10. Ephrem sets up his remarks about the Holy Spirit with a refrain that sets a Eucharistic tone for the hymn. The refrain is "Make me worthy, that in reverence, I might approach your gift."[84] Ephrem begins this hymn with a plea for leniency because of his humble status, asking that he start at the lowest step.[85] Ephrem starts this hymn with a humble plea that he would approach God's story from a lowly road. Like the Canaanite woman, Ephrem begs to be made worthy to gather the crumbs of God's wisdom. The path to understanding God's wisdom and the Eucharist fills Ephrem with trepidation. The fear and awe experienced in approaching the divine is alleviated because of the Lord's garment, which has healing qualities.

The Lord clothed himself in a garment of flesh and Ephrem plays with this idea, using it to refer to the incarnation, to the healing of the woman with a flow of blood (Mark 5), and to the purification that come from the sacrament.[86] Christ putting on human flesh is similar to how he put on human words and borrowed names.[87] The Lord's

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été aussi dans le Baptême du Christ. L'Esprit, comme la colombe, plane sur les dons; étant amour, il les couve comme une mère-oiseau, et étant Feu (voir plus bas) il les réchauffe, c'est-à-dire il leur insuffle vie, fécondité et chaleur en les transformant dans le corps et le sang du Christ." Amar, "Perspectives," 445, through the use of the Armernian hymns argues that "Ephrem views the eucharistic body of Christ in dynamic continuity with the actual body of the historical Jesus."

[84] *HdF* 10. Refrain.

ܥܒܕܢܝ ܒܗ ܕܢܬܩܪܒ ܒܕܚܠܬܐ ܠܡܫܩܠܗ : ܥܒܕ

[85] Similar to how he speaks about paradise in the Hymns on Paradise. Ephrem articulates his lowliness and asks to be on the lower levels of paradise because being there is an incredible honor for such a humble person.

[86] Ephrem's theological acumen is at play in these strophes. Ephrem insists that the body of Christ was real and tangible as a counterpoint to the Marcionite and Manichean dualism present in Ephrem's milieu. The power of God's presence, as fire and spirit in the sacrament, has the capacity to heal and transform bodies. See, Amar, "Perspectives," 246–248.

[87] See chapter 2 of this dissertation.

garment is a "font of healing," which heals by means of his "hidden power" (*ḥaylâ*).[88] The power of God leads Ephrem to allude to Christ even healing people with his saliva (John 9).

As the power of the divine was present with Christ in his garment during his life on earth, so too is the presence of God in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Ephrem says, "Hidden within your bread is the Spirit which cannot be eaten. // Dwelling within your wine is the fire that cannot be drunk. // Spirit in your bread, fire in your wine: // It is a distinguished wonder that our lips receive."[89] The Spirit and fire are inedible to humans, yet a paradox unfolds in the mystery of the church in which the Spirit in the bread and the fire in the wine are received by the people. In *HdF* 19.2–3 Ephrem refers to Christ's presence in the eucharistic bread as hidden fire. Ephrem says Christ's garments hid his humanity and his body hid his divinity; just as the body hid the brightness of divinity so too the garments hid the lowliness of his "weak nature." In a similar fashion, the bread hides the fire that dwells in the bread.[90]

Ephrem uses natural symbols of fire, light, and water to discuss the divine nature of the Son and Spirit. Ephrem speaks fluidly about these symbols, not always applying the same symbol to the same person of the Trinity. Ephrem affirms the divinity of the

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[88] *HdF* 10.7.
ܚܙܬܟ ܡܪܝ، ܐܢܬܘܗ، ܡܒܘܥܐ ܕܐܣܘ̈ܬܐ // ܒܠܒܘܫܟ ܓܠܝܐ ܫܪܐ ܒܗ ܚܝܠܟ ܟܣܝܐ // ܪܘܩܐ ܕܒܘܪܐ ܕܡ ܦܘܡܟ ܬܘܒ //ܢܘܗܪܐ
ܗ̣ܘ ܪܒܐ ܕܢܘܗܪܐ ܒܓܘ ܠܒܘܫܗ

[89] Ephrem refers to the Eucharist as Living Fire and the Medicine of Life in the *CNis.* 36:14. Stephen Bonian, "St. Ephrem on War, Christian Suffering, and the Eucharist," *PdO* 11 (1983): 157–165 discusses Ephrem's symbolic use of the third siege of Nisibis as a way to understand the Eucharist. *HdF* 10.8.
ܒܠܚܡܟ ܛܡܝܪܐ ܒܗ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܐܟܠܐ // ܒܚܡܪܟ ܫܪܐ ܒܗ ܢܘܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܬܝܐ // ܪܘܚܐ ܒܠܚܡܟ ܢܘܪܐ ܒܚܡܪܟ //
ܬܗܪܐ ܦܪܝܫܐ ܕܢܣܒ ܣܦܘ̈ܬܢ

[90] *HdF* 19.3.
ܡܢܘ ܕܠܐ ܢܬܡܗ ܠܒܘܫܐ ܕܡܚܝܠܘܬܢ // ܗܐ ܦܓܪܐ ܟܣܝ ܙܝܘܗ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܚܝܠܐ // ܢܚ̈ܬܐ ܟܣܘ ܟܝܢܐ ܡܚܝܠܐ // ܠܚܡܐ ܟܣܝ
ܢܘܪܐ ܕܫܪܝܐ ܒܗ

Holy Spirit by saying that the Holy Spirit is named in the doxological formula used at baptism, and that the Holy Spirit is present and active within the sacramental actions of the church. Ephrem also uses divine fire to speak of both the Holy Spirit and the Son. This two-fold theology allows Ephrem freedom in approaching scriptural texts.[91]

The presence of God in the sacramental gifts is capable of transforming humanity just as the presence of the incarnate Christ makes his followers a new creation. "When the Lord had come down to earth to be with mortals, // He made them, just like the watchers, a new creation // both fire and spirit are mingled within them, // because fire and spirit are hidden things."[92] Ephrem says that God raises humanity to the level of the watchers by the incarnation.[93] The incarnation thus raises humanity to the level of spiritual beings in whom both fire and spirit can dwell. People became spiritual creatures because of the Lord's condescension.

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[91] Ephrem's use of the Bible has been called "scriptural poetics" by Jeffrey Wickes, who notes that Ephrem is immersed in scripture but his poetic stylings do not provide a clear picture of what scriptural passages his opponents were using. Wickes's dissertation focuses on the "scriptural poetics" of Ephrem in order to better understand Ephrem's exegetical method, "Out of Books, A World: The Scriptural Poetics of Ephrem the Syrian's *Hymns on Faith*" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2013). Wickes describes these poetics by saying, "'Scriptural poetics,' then, denotes this turn from facing Scripture to understand and uncover its meaning (the goal of the commentary), to facing Scripture in order to understand and uncover the meaning of some other thing (God, the world, an audience), and to perform this meaning before an audience. Scripture thus becomes a raw matter with which Ephrem can *make* something else, namely, the *madrāšê*, the locus of this intersection between Scripture, world, God, and audience," 5.

[92] *HdF* 10.9.

ܡܪܝܐ ܟܕ ܐܬܐ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܠܡܥܡ ܒܢܝ ܐܢܫܐ // ܥܒܕ ܐܢܘܢ ܐܝܟ ܥܝܪ̈ܐ ܚܕܬܐ // ܒܗܘ ܢܘܪܐ ܘܪܘܚܐ ܡܫܬܪܒ̈ܢ // ܡܛܠ ܕܢܘܪܐ ܘܪܘܚܐ ܟܣܝܐ ܢ̈ܢ //

[93] P.J. Botha, "Fire Mingled with Spirit: St. Ephrem's Views on Angels and the Angelic Life of Christians," *The Harp* 8/9 (1995–1996): 95–104, distinguishes three levels of beings in Ephrem's thought; namely God, the angels, and humans. God is distinct and incomprehensible to both angels and humans. Even though the watchers are closer to God than humanity, Ephrem still believes that the watchers are unable to examine and investigate God. This distinction is proved throughout the *HdF*: see 4:1; 6:7–11; 51:5; 52:9.

In *HdF* 46[94] Ephrem indicates that the watchers are part of the spiritual realm while humanity, like Adam, is dust. He says, "Knowing that watchers are our companions, // Because their nature is more exalted than ours, // they were never called 'children of God,' // so they might not disturb their name because of their nature."[95] Earlier in the hymn Ephrem recalls the baptism of Jesus, noting that the heavens were rent open and God said, "this is my beloved Son." In Ephrem's mind such an event should silence the Christological disputes of the fourth century. For just as the father called the Son, Son, he called the Spirit, Holy Spirit: "Concerning his Son, he cried out 'Son,' and concerning his Spirit, 'Holy Spirit.'"[96] In closing this hymn, Ephrem notes that humans are called gods, but the Son is "God of all." People are called fathers, but God is the true Father. Some are called spiritual, but "There is a living Spirit."[97] This realization indicates for Ephrem that names like Father and Son are borrowed names, but the truth behind them is the God of all who exists in three persons.

Ephrem compares the gift of the Eucharist, fire and spirit, to the coal Isaiah's lips touched in Isaiah 6. But unlike the coal, which could neither be eaten nor held, the Lord has given humanity the capacity for both: "He [the Seraph] did not grasp it, and he

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[94] *HdF* 46.3 contains an interesting textual addition. In the *Editio Romano* there is an addition that concerns whether or not the Son was begotten willingly or unwillingly. This is not printed in Beck's edition of the text. Paul Russell, "An Anti-Neo-Arian Interpolation in Ephraem of Nisibis' Hymn 46 *On Faith*," *SP* 23 (1997), 568–572, suggests that a later author from an Ephremic school added this text after Ephrem to assert that Ephrem would be against the Eunomian position. Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 28–29 suggests that it is more difficult to determine Ephrem's position on the will than just saying Ephrem was anti-Eunomian. Nonetheless, Wickes affirms that Ephrem wrote against Eunomius.

[95] *HdF* 46.8.

ܕܡܫܬܥ ܕܥܡܢ ܗܘ // ܕܡܠܐܟ ܟܬ ܒܪܘܟ ܕܐܒܗ ܗܘ // ܕܡܫܬܥ ܟܕ ܥܡ ܒܪܢ// ܕܟܝ ܟܝܢ ܕܡܫܬܥ ܒܪ
ܡܠܐ ܕܡܫܬܥ

[96] *HdF* 46.7.

ܘܡ ܕܐܡܪ ܒܪܝ ܘܪܘܚ ܩܕܫ ܟܕ ܩܪܐ ܠܗ

[97] *HdF* 46.12.

ܪܘܚ ܚܝ ܐܝܬ

[Isaiah] did not consume it. // But to us our Lord has given both."[98] The fire and spirit are above the status of the angels and humanity. While Abraham offered his spiritual visitors physical food, the new wonder of the Eucharist is that in it the Lord offers bodily people spiritual gifts of fire and spirit. "A new marvel // of our great Lord: fire and spirit// for bodily ones to eat and drink."[99] As Robert Murray points out, the Eucharist becomes the reversal of Abraham's feeding angelic visitors in Gen. 18.[100] While Ephrem denotes eating and drinking both fire and spirit, it does not appear that he is saying fire is present in the food while spirit in the drink. Ephrem's use of fire in both the bread and cup as well as the baptismal waters becomes clear later in the *madrāšā*.

The purpose of fire is to transform everything it touches. For Elijah, Ephrem notes, the fire consumed sacrifices, but for those who partake of the gift, "the fire of mercy becomes for us a living sacrifice."[101] The congregation then consumes the fire in the bread and wine, which is contrary to the nature of fire; "Fire has eaten the offering: // Your fire, O Lord, we have eaten it in your offering."[102] Because of this Ephrem calls for Solomon to exclaim what the Lord has done; "Fire and Spirit, against their nature, // Mingle and flow into the hands of his disciples!"[103] This last phrase appears to be a

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[98] *HdF* 10.10.

ܡܫܬܝܬ ܠܝ ܐܦ ܡܢ ܕܝ ܠܝ // ܒܠܚܕ ܐܦ ܠܢ ܒܫܪܐ ܐܦ ܠܢ

[99] *HdF* 10.11.

ܡܥܒܕ ܥܡ ܠܚܡ ܡܝܗܒ ܡܝܢ // ܡܝܬܝܠܕ ܡܢ ܠܝ // ܡܫܪ ܡܡܫ

[100] Murray, "A Hymn," 148. Cf. Beck *Die Theologie des Heiligen Ephraem in seinem Hymnen über den Glauben* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi, 1949), 88–92.

[101] *HdF* 10.13.

ܡܢ ܒܫܒ ܠ ܒܐܡ ܡܒܝܗ ܡܝܢ

[102] *HdF* 10.13.

ܡܒܝܥܡ ܒܠܚܕ ܠܝ ܡܝܢ // ܡܒܝܥܡ ܒܠܚܕ ܡܝܢ

reference to receiving communion in the hand, which Murray says was an "universal primitive practice."[104]

Ephrem turns his attention in the next two strophes to the connection between the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. The waters of baptism are like Mary's womb and out of them are born new creatures, who upon leaving the baptistry take up a cloth to dry off.[105] Yet behind the cloth is the divine power.

> "Who has depicted the waters in a veil?"—he asked. // Behold! a font in a veil—the bosom of Mary! // From the cup of life, a drop of life, // That we, your handmaids, received from the veil. //
>
> Behold the hidden power in the veil of the Holy Spirit,// A power which the mind has never even confined: // His love bowed down, descended, and hovered // Over the veil of the altar of peace![106]

Ephrem appears to be describing the church altar in these strophes. Wickes suggests that Ephrem "refers to a practice of women receiving communion veiled."[107] Murray translates ܒܫܘܫܦܐ (*bšušpā*) as "in a cloth" and describes Mary holding a cloth, presumably around the incarnate Christ, as an image of the linen at the altar.[108] Ephrem's

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[103] Botha, "Fire Mingled," 104 follows Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition,* Moran' Etho 2 (Kottayam: SEERI, 1989), 42–44, and says that "fire and spirit" denote the consecration or the action of God through the Holy Spirit. *HdF* 10.14.

ܡܢ ܟܣ ܚܝܐ ܛܦܬܐ ܚܕ // ܕܢܚܢ ܥܒܕ̈ܝܟ ܩܒܠܢ ܡܢ ܦܪܣܬܐ

[104] Murray, "A Hymn," 148. Cf. Beck, *CSCO* 155, "Bei der Kommunioin im Abendmahlsaal, wo Ephräm Christus das eucharistische Brot den Aposteln in die Hände geben lässt nach altkirchlichem Brauch," 35.

[105] There are varied meanings to the word for cloth or towel (ܦܪܣܬܐ). In the liturgical tradition this same word indicates the cloth over the chalice on the altar and the towel with which one dries off after baptism. It seems that Ephrem is utilizing both connotations here.

[106] *HdF* 10.15–16.

ܦܪܣܬܐ ܕܝܢ // ܡܢ ܒܗܠܐ ܡܢ ܡܐ ܕܝ // ܒܝܬ ܓܢܙܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܦܪܣܬܐ ܕܡ // ܕܡ ܠܐ ܠܗܟ ܦܪܣܬܐ ܡܢ ܐ ܕܝ ܕܚ ܒܫܘ ܡܚܫܒ ܚܝܪ // ܡܒܥܝ ܒܥܐ ܟܒܫ ܠܟ ܫܒܩ ܠܟ // ܟܝܢ ܡܢ ܕܚܝ ܦܪܣܬܐ ܕܫܡ ܠܟ ܡܢ // ܟܒܫ ܒܚܒ ܢܚ
ܦܪܣܬܐ ܕܒܝܬ ܩܕܫܐ // ܕ

[107] Wickes, *HdF* p. 124, note 28.

[108] Murray, "A Hymn," 148.

remarks here could imply that the "love" of the Lord is the Spirit. The love bends down, and hovers over the cloth/veil of the altar of the Eucharist. The action of hovering, as has been shown,[109] is the action of the Holy Spirit and connotes a mother hen over her brood. By referencing the concept of love in regard to the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's actions, Ephrem discusses a theme that will become prominent in later theological reflection.[110] Ephrem highlights the Holy Spirit's action as a condescension of love found in the sacraments.

The hymn's themes come to a climax in the next two strophes, where Ephrem unties the theme of God's presence in the sacramental actions of the church.

> Behold fire and Spirit in the womb which bore you. // Behold fire and Spirit in the river in which you were baptized. // Fire and Spirit in our baptism. // In the bread and in the cup fire and the Holy Spirit. //
>
> Your bread killed the greedy one, who made us his bread. // Your cup destroys death, which, lo, had gulped us down. // We ate you, my Lord, and we drank you, // Not to bring you to an end, but to be enlivened in you.[111]

The same fire and spirit present in Christ's baptism are also present in Christian baptism. In addition to baptism, the fire and spirit are found in the bread and cup. Ephrem says that the Holy Spirit is present in the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist and that the Spirit is a sign of the life received in God. The Spirit is coupled with the fire of God as a mark of

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[109] Chapter 3. Cf. Murray, "A Hymn," 149.

[110] Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 1–70, traces the history of the question as to whether or not it is proper to speak of the Holy Spirit as love and gift.

[111] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 62, argues that the fire and the Spirit are here a reference to both the Son and the Spirit in the sacraments. Chalassery, *The Holy Spirit*, 65, suggests that "fire and Spirit," in this text represents the hidden power behind the sacraments. In *HdF* 40 Ephrem says that the Holy Spirit is in both the bread and the cup. The Spirit mingles with the bread and cup and when it is ingested, the eater is transformed by the life that comes from God. *HdF* 10.17–18.
ܟܬܝܒ // ܒܬܘܟܪܟ ܪܘܚܐ ܘܢܘܪܐ // ܒܡܥܡܕܟ ܕܝܪܬ ܢܘܪܐ ܘܪܘܚܐ ܘܢܘܪܐ ܕܡ // ܒܡܝܡܪܬܐ ܕܟܪܟ ܪܘܚܐ ܘܢܘܪܐ ܕܡ // ܒܦܬܐ ܘܒܟܣܐ ܢܘܪܐ ܘܪܘܚ ܩܘܕܫܟ // ܦܬܟ ܩܛܠ ܕܡ ܒܥܐ ܕܐܟܠ ܠܢ ܠܚܡ ܗܘ // ܟܣܟ ܡܚܪܒ ܡܘܬܐ ܕܒܠܥ ܗܐ ܠܢ // ܐܟܠܢ ܐܢ ܡܪܝ ܘܫܬܝܢ ܐܢ ܠܟ // ܠܐ ܠܡܫܕܝ ܠܟ ܠܣܘܦ ܐܠܐ ܕܢܚܝܐ ܒܟ

God's salvific work. Because this passage also recalls the baptism of Christ in the Jordan, Ephrem here evokes the trinitarian action of God united in the sacraments.[112]

The power of the bread of life is that the enemy is slain, death is defeated, and the one who partakes of the bread has life. The one who gives himself in the bread is not nullified or lessened even after being eaten, rather the one who is eaten gives life without diminishing. Ephrem indicates that the Spirit in the bread and wine, which is the fire of God, is not diminished by being consumed in the Eucharist. Consuming this bread and wine brings life because in them are fire and the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that Ephrem believes that the Holy Spirit is doing the same action as the Son in the sacraments of the church. In so doing Ephrem equates the Holy Spirit with the Son as divine. Both the Spirit and the Son are working in the holy mysteries to remove sin from the participant, and both the Spirit and the Son hold a status above humanity and the angels. The Spirit creates the hidden mark of God on the baptized Christian and recreates the individual in the baptismal font, thus operating in the work of new creation.

The evidence of fourth century baptismal practice found in Ephrem's writings shows that there was a significant concern about using the trinitarian formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the liturgy. Not only that, Ephrem also shows that a triple

[112] Beck, *Trinitätslehre*, 62 "Stimmt meine Annahme, dann werden hier Sohn und Geist zusammen als in den sakramentalen Elementen der Taufe und der Eucharistie anwesend und wirkend hingestellt, während unsre Ausgangsstelle nur vom Geist sprach. Und daß dazu hier überall auch noch die Person des Vaters mitwirkt, geht am deutlichsten aus der Taufformel hervor, von der oben schon die Rede war. Klar ausgesprochen wird das im gleichen Zusammenhang in einer Stelle, die anschließend in einem letzten Abschnitt der Ausführung über die Termini *ḥussâyâ* und *qurbânâ* zitiert wird."

immersion was needed. Because of the necessity for all three trinitarian persons in the baptismal liturgy, Ephrem indicates there is a unity of divine operation which is consistent with a pro-Nicene theology. Ephrem and Cyril of Jerusalem bear a marked resemblance in their understanding of baptism and the Holy Spirit's role. This similarity does not, as it did for Cyril, make Ephrem's pro-Nicene allegiance suspect. Instead, Ephrem's trinitarian focus highlights a doctrine of inseparable operations in the Holy Trinity.

The themes of this chapter can be summed up with words from Ephrem, who brings together the themes of the oil, baptism, and Eucharist in order to show the wonder and awe of the incarnation and the condescension of God to the world. God's love working in the actions of the church is a source of power hidden to the normal eye, but evident to those who partake and who see with luminous vision.

> For in the bread is eaten // the force which cannot be eaten. // In the wine, again, is drunk // the strength which cannot be drunk. // Even with oil we moderate // the power which cannot be moderated. // And just as food is surrounded in the mouth // and eaten, // he softened his appearance for the eyes. // He softened his strength in words // so even the ear can hear him.[113]

[113] *HdF* 6.4.

ܡܫܫܐ ܕܫܒܚ ܒܝ // ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܒܚ ܗܘ ܕܚܝܠ // ܒܚܡܪܐ ܕܬܬ ܡܬܫܬܐ // ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܬܐ ܗܘ ܕܚܝܠ // ܐܦ ܒܫܡܐ ܢܫܘܐ // ܕܠܐ ܡܬܫܘܐ ܗܘ ܕܚܝܠ // ܘܐܝܟ ܕܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠ // ܒܦܘܡ ܘܡܬܒܠܥ // ܐܪܟ ܠܥܝܢ ܐܪܟ // ܗܘ ܡܪܟ ܙܝܘܗ // ܒܡܠܐ ܕܐܦ ܐܘܕܢ // ܡܫܡܥ ܠܗ ...

CHAPTER FIVE: EPHREM'S TRINTARIAN THEOLOGY, THE SPIRIT AS UNDIMINISHED GIVER

Introduction

In this chapter I argue that Ephrem's theology of the Holy Spirit fit within the parameters of a broadly pro-Nicene trajectory without using the same exegetical techniques as his coreligionists and counterparts. Instead, Ephrem in his poetry used symbolic imagery to articulate the relationship of the persons of the Trinity.[1] I show how Ephrem's trinitarian images display a congruence with Stoic philosophy as well as express a theology of the undiminished giver. Ephrem affirms that the Holy Spirit is of the same essence as the Father and Son because the Holy Spirit gives without losing. The Holy Spirit is also mixed and mingled with the Father and the Son, united and distinct. Ephrem thus emphasizes the importance of the unity of the Trinity while noting the distinct personhood of each person.

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that Ephrem's pneumatology implements Syriac idioms and themes, which owe some of their origin to a broad category of Jewish Christianity, what some have called a Semitic form of Christianity.[2]

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[1] While I am not asserting that symbolic theology is the core of Ephrem's theological method, Ephrem does implement symbols throughout his theology. In thie chapter, I am saying that Ephrem's use of this one particular symbol of sun/fire, light, and warmth as a key image Ephrem uses to describe the Trinity. Kees den Biesen, *Simple and Bold: Ephrem's Art of Symbolic Thought,* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 37–51, follows T. Bou Mansour, *Pensée Symbolique* 11–19, in asserting that Ephrem's theology is rooted in symbolism, a symbolism that has multiple meanings. These scholars find a polysemous nature in Ephrem's symbolism. This reading of Ephrem is an application of Robert Murray's observation that Ephrem's work is reminiscent of Paul Ricouer's philosophy of symbolism, where symbols give rise to thought. Den Biesen, 37, suggests caution in using Ephrem's symbols to explain his theology saying, "A symbol is always in danger of being subjected to some kind of reduction, especially to the deformation into a concept—which is precisely the idolatry of the conceptual that Ephrem refutes in his anti-Arian polemics and from which, as we will see, certain approaches to Ephrem are not entirely free."

Ephrem writes in a time period where he is distancing himself from Judaism as well as from his polemical interlocutors, such as Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani. Nevertheless, Ephrem does not reject Jewish pneumatology outright. As I argue in chapters 3 and 4, Ephrem utilizes Jewish pneumatological themes, like the Spirit as Creator, to develop a theology of baptism and to reinforce a doctrine of inseparable operations. In addition, Ephrem uses feminine imagery in his descriptions of the Spirit, showing a connection to Jewish and pre-Nicene Syriac exegesis about the Spirit.[3]

Ephrem's pneumatology is not a complete aberration from the Greek and Latin traditions. In fact, what Ephrem has to say about the Spirit often falls in line with the general pro-Nicene trajectory.[4] Ephrem's articulation of his position, however, is what distinguishes him from his contemporaries. Ephrem affirms the pro-Nicene position on the Trinity, but he does so without the same exegetical techniques and in a context that shapes his theological movements. He interacts with the theology of Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani, whose followers in Nisibis and Edessa were part of Ephrem's social world.

Ephrem encountered the theology of Nicaea but without an official translation of the creed. David Bundy argues that it was not until the 380's that the Nicene creed was

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[2] Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 15, refers to Ephrem's theology as Semitic-Asian Christianity. Jean Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* trans. John A. Baker (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), details the foundational texts and theological themes present in Jewish-Christianity.

[3] I believe Ephrem rejects angelomorphic pneumatology as evidenced in his remarks about the Lord sending an evil spirit to Saul.

[4] While it is tempting to find in Ephrem a new type of theology from the fourth century, it seems to me more responsible to acknowledge the unique aspects of Ephrem's theological approach within the broader context of the fourth century. Theology in the early Christian era was a theology rooted in the Bible and in the practice of the early church communities. Even if there was broad variation in practice among early Christians, the common sources of Scripture and practice entail a certain amount of overlap and consistency. In a certain sense the attempt to find in Syriac Christianity a unique type of Christianity untainted by Greek thought was an attempt to show how a different mindset could impact the Christian faith.

translated into the Syriac language. This is so because Bundy dates the "Letter of Aithallah" to a later date than the letter purports to be.[5] While the exegetical debates about the Spirit's divinity focused on several key passages, Ephrem ignores those or at least moves them to the periphery of his argumentation.[6]

Pro-Nicene pneumatology was, to use the language of Lewis Ayres, "an act of recovery," first of the Spirit as Creator motif, then in connection to how the Spirit's actions of creation extend to the work of redemption. Ayres says,

> all pro-Nicene pneumatology proceeds by an act of recovery—especially of earlier insistence that the Spirit worked in creation and with God's full creative power—but by an act of recovery into a new metaphysical context within which the Spirit's action in creating and (especially) redeeming occurs as part of the inseparable and unmediated action of the divine.[7]

But who or what is Ephrem recovering in his pneumatology? The pre-Nicene Syriac evidence regarding Spirit language does not provide clear examples of the Spirit as Creator, or the Spirit as Redeemer. Without a strong Syriac antecedent, Ephrem either comes to the same conclusions as his pro-Nicene counterparts on some other basis, or Ephrem is dependent upon those counterparts to help shape his position.

In pro-Nicene pneumatology the retrieval of the Spirit as Creator served to show that the Spirit maintains the same operations as the Father and the Son. This affirmation

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[5] David Bundy, "The Letter of Aithallah (CPG 3340): Theology, Purpose, Date," ed. René Lavenant *Symposium Syriacum III* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum 1980), 135–142, and "The Creed of Aithallah: A Study in the History of the Early Syriac Symbol," *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 63 (1987): 157–163, argues that the "Letter" which purports to be from the time of Aithallah (324–345CE) is the product of the early fifth century and functions as a way to promote the Nicene-Constantinopolitan credal symbol. The "Letter" survives only in Armenian.

[6] Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Lewis Ayres, *Works on the Spirit: Athanasius and Didymus* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 37, point out that the texts which form the backbone of the pneumatological debates are: Amos 4:13, John 1:3; Heb 1:14, and 1 Tim 5:21.

[7] Lewis Ayres, "Innovation and *Ressourcement* in Pro-Nicene Pneumatology," *Augustinian Studies* 39:2 (2008): 190.

united the Father, Son, and Spirit in their work and essence. The next phase of pro-Nicene pneumatology notes that the Spirit is the undiminished giver, meaning that the Spirit is present in multiple places without diminishing. Related to the undiminished giver is the idea of divine indwelling. God can give of God's self and dwell in individuals without diminishing God's essence. Such a doctrine, in addition to affirming the Spirit's same essence as the Father and Son, showed how the Spirit is present in all believers, serving as a sign of God's work in the world.

In this chapter I argue that Ephrem's trinitarian image of fire/sun, light, and warmth shows his adherence to the doctrine of the undiminished giver. I begin first by discussing the concept of the undiminished giver and providing Syriac antecedents to Ephrem. I show Aphrahat's discussion of the undiminished Christ in detail to emphasize that this concept is present in the Syriac tradition prior to Ephrem. In order to understand Ephrem's trinitarian symbol/image, I discuss Ephrem's epistemology and the role of the natural world in his theology. Ephrem concerns himself with the natural world as a source of divine revelation and he draws his trinitarian symbol from the natural world. I spend the largest portion of the chapter examining this image drawn from nature. Last, I show that Ephrem's trinitarian metaphor differs from the Sabellian image discussed by Epiphanius because of Ephrem's understanding of mixture. In the end, Ephrem's trinitarian symbol shows that Ephrem affirms the Holy Spirit as the undiminished giver. All of this suggests a familiarity with the debates of the fourth century and indicates that Ephrem was contributing to the theological landscape of his time.

Undiminished Giver and Divine Indwelling in the Syriac tradition

By the last quarter of the fourth century, the doctrine of the undiminished giver had become an essential part of the logic that supported the Holy Spirit's divinity.[8] This doctrine states that there is one undiminished giver, who gives without losing any part of their essence. Knowledge and wisdom enable people to participate in the undiminished giver, who is present everywhere. Lewis Ayres, with whom I engage and follow throughout this section, notes that this concept traces its origins to the Platonic tradition, then to Philo, and later is found in the pro-Nicene movement.[9] As the undiminished giver gives life to all, all are able to participate in the giver. The giver does not participate, but is participated in. This means that God dwells in all people, without losing God's uniqueness. The Holy Spirit as the undiminished giver is the "boundless source of all sanctification," who is uncreated and whose strength and power are not external.[10]

Ayres describes the pro-Nicene usage of the logic of the undiminished giver in the following manner:

> Building on earlier foundations in Plato, but appearing clearly for the first time in the context of Hellenized Judaism, this doctrine presents the divine as giving without loss (or while remaining in itself). Important assumed corollaries of the doctrine include the arguments that the divine is immediately present to that to which it gives, and that the possession of wisdom is in some sense a participation in the giver.[11]

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[8] Lewis Ayres, The Holy Spirit as Undiminished Giver," in *The Holy Spirit in the Fathers of the Church: The Proceedings of the Seventh International Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 2008* eds. D. Vincent Twomey SVD and Janet E. Rutherford (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2010), 57–72.

[9] Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as Undiminished Giver," 59–65.

[10] Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as Undiminished Giver," 58.

[11] Lewis Ayres, "Innovation and *Ressourcement*," 196.

The divine giver gives to humanity without losing or diminishing himself. The indwelling of the individual believer is a sign that God has given a portion of God's self to her and that God is present to and in her.

Ayres notes that the doctrine of the undiminished giver is applied in a slightly different manner by each pro-Nicene theologian.

> In emerging pro-Nicene contexts the doctrine takes on a new significance: for Athanasius and Didymus the doctrine provides a way of asserting that the Spirit's power to create and sanctify implies that the Spirit does not participate in but simply is sanctification itself and thus is uncreated and in union with Father and Son, who share the same attributes…Basil seems to have encountered and adopted the doctrine as specifically pneumatological: in the two Gregories it is made more central, as a central way of defining the divine nature as well as being used to explain why the Spirit's functions imply the Spirit's divinity. As with Didymus and Athanasius, the two Gregories use this theme to present sanctification itself as a sharing in the Spirit. [12]

The underlying logic about the Spirit's action in the world and in the life of the Christian indicates that the Spirit is divine because the Spirit creates and sanctifies without loss. Creation and sanctification are actions that can only be done by the one God. Ayres asserts that for Basil the doctrine of the undiminished giver holds a special place in the defense of the Holy Spirit's divinity. This contrasts with Ephrem, for whom the doctrine is central to understanding the unity and distinction of the Trinity. Ephrem's application of this doctrine is implicit in his trinitarian symbol and evident in his use of the word *ḥsar* (to diminish).

The doctrine of the undiminished giver shows that God is present and dwells in the believer. Ayres argues that the use of this doctrine "helps to push those who link the Spirit's role in creation and sanctification toward developing accounts of the unmediated presence of Father, Son and Spirit in the creation and toward accounts of the Christian

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[12] Ibid., 196.

life as a participation in the divine life."[13] The Spirit serves as the mark of God's unmediated presence to the individual believer and because of this presence, the Spirit is true God. The doctrine shows that the Spirit is divine because the Spirit acts in ways that God acts.

Mark DelCogliano notices that in Tatian, the *Acts of Thomas*, and Aphrahat there is a doctrine of divine indwelling.[14] In making this observation, DelCogliano highlights the Christo-centric nature of divine indwelling. The logic of divine indwelling that DelCogliano shows in these texts is an extension of a theology of the undiminished giver. In the biblical period there were multiple ways to speak of God's indwelling and the biblical authors "could variously speak of the indwelling of specific divine persons such as the Spirit of Christ, or of God in general, whether in the corporate body or in certain individuals, even if at times their language is imprecise and their exact meaning ambiguous."[15] The same holds true for the early church and for early Syriac literature. For instance, Tatian and the *Acts of Thomas* both reference the Spirit dwelling in individual people, and that a precondition of the Spirit's indwelling the temple of the body was purity.[16]

In Aphrahat it is clear that the Spirit who indwells all Christians is the Spirit of Christ, not the Holy Spirit.[17] DelCogliano suggests that Aphrahat has four modes or ways

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[13] Ibid., 197.

[14] Mark DelCogliano, "Aphrahat on the Modes of Christ's Indwelling," *OCP* 74 (2008): 181–193.

[15] DelCogliano, "Aphrahat," 183.

[16] Tatian *Oration* XV, 4–5. *ATh* IX, 94. In Tatian purity appears to be the responsibility of the individual person, while in the *ATh* God can also produce the purity of the individual.

[17] This is not a claim against Aphrahat's "orthodoxy." While it seems clear to me that Aphrahat held to a binitarian theology, I do not find that to be problematic when considering him within the context

to describe Christ's indwelling: faith, baptism, prayer, and knowledge of God as creator.[18] With regard to baptism, Aphrahat notes that while Christ is not diminished in any way by his indwelling all Christians, individual people are able to receive only a portion of Christ.[19] DelCogliano says that the use of the word "'portions' is meant to convey a mystery achieved by the wisdom of the Father in which the one Christ can be simultaneously at the right hand of the Father and indwelling many believers…he is fully present both as he sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven and as he indwells believers who share in a 'portion' of him."[20] Thus, in Aphrahat, the *Acts of Thomas*, and Tatian there is an expressed doctrine of divine indwelling. This doctrine builds on the logic for a theology of the undiminished giver, although in some cases it is used only in reference to Christ and not to the Spirit as a distinct person.

While it is not probable that Ephrem used or implemented sources like the *Acts of Thomas* and Aphrahat, there is a strong possibility that Ephrem was familiar with Tatian's Diatessaron.[21] The *Commentary on the Diatessaron* that survives and is attributed to Ephrem is not the product of Ephrem himself.[22] Nevertheless, F.C. Burkitt's

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of pre-Nicene Syriac Christianity. Columba Stewart, *Working the Earth of the Heart: The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to AD 431* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 213, says that in Aphrahat, "it is Christ who is most frequently the subject of dwelling language."

[18] DelCogliano, "Aphrahat," 182.

[19] *Demonstration* 6.10.

[20] DelCogliano, "Aphrahat," 192.

[21] Sebastian Brock, "*Notulae Syriacae:* Some Miscellaneous Identifications," *Le Muséon* 108 (1995): 77, notes on the basis of a quotation from Aphrahat in the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* that the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* was not "from the pen of Ephrem himself" and it rather "reflects his teaching."

[22] As I noted in the introduction, Edmund Beck, "Ephräm und der Diatessaronkommentar im Abschnitt über die Wunder beim Tode Jesu am Kreuz," *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993): 119, and "Der syrische Diatessaronkommentar zu der unvergebbaren Sünde wider den Heiligen Geist übersetzt und erklärt," 37, doubted the authenticity of the *Commentary on the Diatessaron*.

analysis of the gospel quotations in Ephrem's writings suggests that Ephrem's primary gospel text was the Diatessaron, not the Old Syriac Gospels.[23] Even if Ephrem did not write the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* attributed to him, his biblical quotations show he was familiar with the gospel texts of the Diatessaron. Ephrem is an heir to Tatian in this sense.

Even though Ephrem does not show familiarity with Aphrahat, Aphrahat's use of the doctrine of the undiminished giver demonstrates that the concept was present in Syriac prior to and concurrent with Ephrem. Syriac Christianity was current with the debates of the fourth century. Emanuel Fiano argues that fourth century Syriac Christianity in Edessa took part in the theological disputes about the relationship between the Father and the Son. Fiano notes that the Syriac recension of the *Clementine Recognitions* III, 2–11 is the product of a broadly pro-Nicene pen.[24] This section of the *Recognitions* is an interpolation and the Latin recension is the product of heterousian theology. Fiano suggests that the Syriac recension was written between 360–385 and notes that while the Syriac does not oppose the heterousian ideas, it does alter the language so that *homoiousians* would not find the passage objectionable.[25] The Syriac recension says that God begets the Son without dividing and without diminishing. While not related to the Spirit, this affirmation of God's indivisibility and status as undiminished begetter/giver dated within Ephrem's life in Edessa. It provides a connection point for Syriac theology regarding the undiminished giver.

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[23] F.C. Burkitt, *Saint Ephrem's Quotations from the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), 55–57.

[24] Emmanuel Fiano, "From 'Why' to 'Why Not:' Clem. Recogn. III 2-11, Fourth-Century Trinitarian Debates, and the Syrian Christian-Jewish Continuum," *Adamantius* 20 (2014): 343-365.

[25] Fiano, "From 'Why,'" 346–349.

Ephrem's own theology of divine indwelling is connected to his understanding of Christ. As Columba Stewart says, "In his hymns *šrā* is applied most notably to the Incarnation, whether the emphasis be on Christ's dwelling in Mary's womb or on his taking possession of a human body."[26] Kathleen McVey suggests that Ephrem explains Christ's indwelling individuals through the example of Mary, noting how the birth of Christ ought to take place within the individual's heart and mind. McVey suggests that Ephrem implemented this trope perhaps to embolden female outspokenness.[27] While McVey is correct in her assertions about Ephrem's understanding of divine indwelling, she does not engage with Ephrem's trinitarian image, which I believe adds nuance to Ephrem's theology.

This section has shown that the theology of the undiminished giver was not isolated in the Greek and Latin Christian traditions. Athanasius, Didymus, Basil, and the Gregories all implemented the concept of the undiminished giver, and it stretched beyond the Greek and Latin speaking world, and into the Syriac idiom from an early stage with Tatian, *ATh*, and Aphrahat. I will now explore the pervasive nature of this theology in Aphrahat.

Undiminished Giver in Aphrahat

In this section I show how Aphrahat implemented the logic of the undiminished giver and used the example of the sun and fire to explain his logic. Aphrahat's use of the

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[26] Columba Stewart, *Working the Earth*, 213. Stewart compares Ephrem's use of two words for indwelling *šrā* and *'mar.* Stewart's data is correct, but, he uses the *Hymns on Epiphany,* a collection that I consider to be spurious.

[27] Kathleen McVey, "Ephrem the Syrian's Theology of Divine Indwelling and Aelia Pulcheria Augusta," *SP* 458–465.

undiminished giver and the example of the sun with its corresponding rays, serve as a background to Ephrem's implementation of both the logic and the example of the sun. However, it appears that Ephrem did not read or reference Aphrahat. It was common for early Christian authors to use the image of the sun as an analogy or example to explain aspects of God.[28]

Aphrahat discusses the undiminished giver within a context of bodily purity. The goal of being pure and the ascetical life is to have Christ dwell in the body. Aphrahat also notes that Christ is present in many places, but is not himself multiple persons. Christ is able to be in multiple places because he does not diminish. To show this truth, Aphrahat draws on the sun and fire as examples from the natural world.

Aphrahat's theology of the undiminished giver is evident in *Demonstration* 6, in which he encourages fellow ascetics to live a chaste life to receive the reward of Christ's nature. Aphrahat argues that honoring the Son will encourage the Son to raise up his followers to the Son's own natural condition. One honors the Son through maintaining the temple given to her, her body. Aphrahat says, "He seeks nothing from us, except that our temples please him, so that when the time is completed and he goes to his Father, he will thank him for us, because we have honoured him."[29]

As DelCogliano notes, the emphasis on maintaining a pure body or temple with the hope that Christ will dwell within it is not unique to Aphrahat, but is foundational to the ascetic impulse. This theme is present in Tatian and *ATh* with reference to divine

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[28] See, Edmund Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre im Bild von Sonne/Feuer, Licht und Wärme* CSCO vol. 425 (Louvain: Peeters, 1981), 1–24, for examples of the Greek and Latin use of the image of the sun and or fire with corresponding light and warmth.

[29] Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 6.10.

indwelling.[30] Aphrahat's insistence on the purity of the temple fits within the early Syriac trajectory and within his context as a *bar qyāmā*.[31]

Christ's presence in his disciples is manifest through the presence of the Spirit of Christ, but this manifestation does not mean that Christ himself is multiple people. Aphrahat says, "And when he came to his Father he sent us his Spirit and said to us, 'I am with you until the end of the age'…and he lives in many, while he is one."[32] Christ is still one, even though he is present in his many followers. Christ's presence is the Spirit which he sends to his followers.[33]

Aphrahat furthers his observation about Christ's presence to his followers and notes that this is the way that Christ watches over the faithful.

> For Christ sits at the right hand of his Father, but Christ dwells in people. He can be above and below, by the wisdom of his Father. And dwells in many while he is one. He watches over all of the faithful, one by one, because they are from him,

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[30] DelCogliano, "Aphrahat," 184.

[31] As I note in chapter 1, the sons and daughters of the covenant (*bnay qyāmā*) were the ascetical group that formed the start of Syrian asceticism. There was a strong emphasis on living single and pure. See Sebastian Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20, no. 1 (1973): 1–19. Sidney H. Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in *Asceticism,* eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1997), 220–245. Idem., "Monks, 'Singles', and the 'Sons of the Covenant,' Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology," in *ΕΥΛΟΓΗΜΑ: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, SJ* eds. E Carr, Stefano Parenti, and Abraham Thiermeyer (Rome: Centro Studi S. Anselmo, 1993), 141–160. Cf. Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 61 (1971): 80–101, for a discussion of how the ascetic holy man operated in the fourth century and onward.

[32] Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 6.10.

[33] On the basis of this Demonstration David Taylor, "The Syriac Tradition," in *The First Christian Theologians*, ed. G.R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 201–224, and Bernadette McNary-Zak, "The Indwelling Spirit of Christ and Social Transformation: The Case of a Late Antique Syriac Christian Community," *Mystics Quarterly* 31 (2005): 117, assert the orthodoxy of Aphrahat's Christology. J. Edward Walters, "Son of Man, Son of God: Aphrahat's Biblical Christology," in *The Old Testament as Authoritative Scripture in the Early Churches of the East* ed. Vahan S. Hovhanessian (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 9–18 also argues that Aphrahat's Christology is orthodox.

> **but he does not diminish,** just as it is written: 'I will divide him among many.' And while he is divided among many, he still sits at the right hand of his Father.[34]

Aphrahat says that because Christ is in all of his faithful ones, Christ is able to be present in and care for them. This process does not lessen who Christ is, Christ does not diminish, even though Christ is everywhere with all people.

To show how the Father and Christ remain one while at the same time being present in individual believers, Aphrahat recalls the way that light comes from the sun, and provides both warmth and light, while it is still called sun. In a related example, Aphrahat says that water is called water no matter how it is divided. In the same way, fire is always fire and dust is always dust. To show how Christ can be in multiple people yet still be one, Aphrahat draws on the image of the sun saying,

> For every person knows that the sun is fixed in the heavens, and its rays are distributed over the earth. The rays enter many doors and windows of houses, and while it the light of the sun falls and shines even one the palms of the hand, it is called 'the sun.' And while it falls in many places it is called thusly, while the substance (*qnomā*) of the sun is in the heavens.[35]

Aphrahat's uses name logic to show that the light of the sun is the same as the orb in the sky.

He continues this logic from the example of the sun and speaks of water and then of fire. He notes that though fire can be in many places and still be called "fire." He says:

> When you light a fire from fires in many places, the place where it comes from **is not diminished**, and the fire is [still] called by one name. It does not take on many names because you have divided it among many places. And when you take

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[34] Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 6.10 translation adapted from Adam Letho, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), 187–188.

[35] Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 6.11 translation adapted from Adam Letho, *Demonstrations*, 188.

> dust from the earth and throw it to many places, the dust is not diminished at all, nor are you able to call it by many names. In the same way, God and his Christ, though they are one, live in many people. In their substance (*qnomā*) they are in heaven, yet **they are not diminished** at all when they live in many [people], just as the sun is not diminished at all when its power is loosed upon the earth. How much greater, then, is the power of God, since it is by the power of God that the sun exists.[36]

The Father and the Son, though in heaven, are also present in the individual believer. This presence is evident because the Spirit of Christ has been sent and Jesus himself said he would be with his followers to the end of the world.[37]

To summarize this section, Aphrahat uses the logic of the undiminished giver to show that Christ dwells in his followers by sending his Spirit to them. The Spirit of Christ dwells in Christ's followers and does not lessen or diminish Christ. Christ dwells both at the right hand of God and in his followers. Aphrahat uses the image of the sun and its rays to show how Christ can be in multiple places and still not diminish. The image of the sun and its light and warmth is a key example used to support trinitarian logic for Ephrem.

Ephrem and the Natural World's Role in Theology

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[36] Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 6.11 trans. Adam Letho, *Demonstrations*, 188–189.
ܡܢ ܐܪܥܐ ܘܙܪܩ ܠܣܓܝ̈ܐ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܡܥܛ ܥܦܪܐ ܟܠ ܩܠܝܠ ܘܠܐ ܡܫܬܟܚ ܠܟ ܕܬܩܪܝ ܠܗ ܒܫܡ̈ܗ̈ ܣܓܝ̈ܐ ܗܟܢܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܘܡܫܝܚܗ ܐܦ ܕܚܕ ܗܘ ܒܣܓܝ̈ܐ ܒܣܓܝ̈ܐ ܡܬܚܙܝ ܒܩܢܘܡܗ̈ ܒܫܡܝܐ ܗܘ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܡܥܛ ܒܣܓܝ̈ܐ ܕܡܬܚܙܐ ܒܗ̈ ܐܦ ܟܕ ܫܡܫܐ ܠܐ ܡܬܡܥܛ ܟܕ ܡܫܬܕܪ ܥܠ ܐܪܥܐ ܟܡ ܝܬܝܪ ܚܝܠܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܢ ܚܝܠܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܗܘ ܕܫܡܫܐ ܩܐܡ̈ ❖
Aphrahat also uses an analogy of dust to describe God as the undiminished giver. Ephrem in *SdF* 1.165–325 offers an extended reflection on the fecundity of the earth as a type of God's giving to the world. In this reflection Ephrem does not reference undiminished giving directly, however, Ephrem does affirm the abundance of the gifts of God through the earth.

[37] Aphrahat takes this observation and applies it to when the Lord apportioned Moses' spirit to 70 elders in Israel (Numbers 11:16–17), "Moses did not lack anything, nor was his spirit aware that anything had been taken from it." God's Spirit granted to Moses did not diminish and Moses was unaware of any loss of God's Spirit when the Spirit went to the seventy elders. Columba Stewart, *Working the Earth*, 213, discusses Aphrahat's discussion of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Elijah and Elisha (*Dem*. 6.13) noting that Aphrahat connects the concept to baptism.

Before turning to Ephrem's trinitarian image, I return to Ephrem's perception of the natural world and its role in theology.[38] Ephrem believes that the Bible and the natural world form the bipartite volumes of God's self-revelation to humanity. The proper human response to this divine revelation is reverent wonder and awe, expressed in silence or in praise. Ephrem believes this is the appropriate response because God's revelatory act reaches beyond the chasm that separates the infinite God from finite humanity. God does this in order to make knowledge about God understandable. While it expected that Ephrem would use the Scriptures for his theology, it is less assumed that Ephrem would find types and symbols of theological truths in the natural world.[39] These symbols are not fixed and permanent with a single application. While fire is a symbol for divinity, it also symbolizes purification and the angels. Yet, in fire Ephrem also sees an example of how the received truths of God are true and communicable.[40]

Ephrem's epistemology of revelation begins with the two books of the natural world and Scripture. In *H. Pard* 5.2 Ephrem says, "Moses wrote in his book // about the creation of the natural world (*kyānā*), // so that both the Scripture and nature might testify about the Creator. // Nature in its usefulness, Scripture in the reading of it. // Witnesses reaching every place, // able at all times and in every hour // to confute the denier who defrauds the creator."[41] The two pillars of revelation are the natural world and the

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[38] This topic plays an important role in Ephrem's theology and is referenced in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

[39] Ephrem's use of Scripture is varied. For instance, in his commentary on Genesis he offers simple explanation of the text, while in his *Hymns on Paradise* he gives an expansive and imaginative interpretation of paradise that is evocative of the Garden of Eden.

[40] Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 53–84, discusses Ephrem's use of symbols and their multiple meanings in terms of divine condescension and human ascension.

Scriptures; God is revealed to the world in these sources. The unknowable God is made evident in these two books because the two coalesce in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the Word in nature who sets the world to right.

The natural world proclaims the mystery of the incarnation for Ephrem. In one of his hymns *On Nativity*, Ephrem speaks about the incarnation and highlights the role of the Holy Spirit, saying "Through the worm, the Spirit spoke a parable, for it begets without copulation; // the type that the Holy Spirit formed receives its meaning today."[42] Ephrem, speaking about the incarnation, notes that the Spirit proclaims this generation in the natural phenomena of worm reproduction.[43] This image of the Son is imprinted in the creation and was fashioned by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's work is thus found in the creation; the Holy Spirit creates, forms, and fashions the womb of Mary to provide the world the birth of the Son. The Spirit works in the act of revelation is to provide the theological meaning of the symbols.

Ephrem believes that the created, natural world, grants insight into the life of the Trinity. This does not mean that the natural world translates the mysteries of the divine essence, but nature does provide explanations at the level of human understanding. This observation is true regarding the incarnation, as well as in Ephrem's understanding of the Trinity in his image of fire/sun, light, and warmth.

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[41] *H. Pard.* 5.2.
ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ ܒܣܦܪܐ ܟܬܒ ܡܘܫܐ // ܕܣܗܕܘܢ ܕܠܒܪܘܝܐ ܟܝܢܐ ܐܦ ܣܦܪܐ // ܟܝܢܐ ܒܡܫܡܫܢܘܬܗ ܟܬܒܐ ܒܡܩܪܝܢܘܬܗ //
ܣܗ̈ܕܐ ܕܡܬܡܛܝܢ ܠܟܠ ܐܬܪ // ܥܡܝܢ ܒܟܠ ܙܒܢ ܐܡܝܢ ܒܟܠ ܫ̈ܥܝܢ // ܡܟܣܝܢ ܠܟܦܘܪܐ ܕܐܛܠܡ ܠܒܪܘܝܐ
Cf., *HCH* 28.11, in which Ephrem describes how the natural world and the Scriptures sow seeds of praise to God in the land of the heart.

[42] Nat. 1.10.
ܒܬܘܠܥܐ ܗܘ ܡܬܠܗ ܗܘܬ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܠܐ ܙܘܘܓܐ ܗܘ // ܠܛܘܦܣܐ ܕܨܪܬ ܪܘܚ ܩܘܕܫܐ ܦܘܫܩܗ ܗܘܐ ܝܘܡܢܐ

[43] Cf. *HdF* 41.1.

Ephrem is cautious when speaking about how God can be described by humans with accuracy. As discussed above, Ephrem depicts the ontological division between God and humanity as a chasm. The distance of the chasm, forged by the difference between the Creator and the created, is too great for humanity to cross. Ephrem says, "Because our mind has grown dim, it is not able // To examine with a clear eye // The Father, Son, nor even the Holy Spirit."[44] The fact that humanity is unable to understand and investigate God means, for Ephrem, that theology is best communicated through symbols or mysteries.

Ephrem's Trinitarian Image

In this section I turn to Ephrem's most prominent trinitarian image, that of the sun/fire, together with the corresponding light, and warmth.[45] Ephrem's trinitarian image affirms that the Holy Spirit is united with the Father and the Son in undiminished giving. The unity of the Spirit is buttressed against the distinctions that the Father, Son, and Spirit maintain, showing that Ephrem affirms the unity and diversity of the godhead. I divide *HdF* 40 into two sections, focusing on the trinitarian image in the first half of the hymn, then on the Holy Spirit in the second half. After discussing *HdF* 40, I turn to *HdF*

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[44] *HdF* 15.10.

ܕܥܩܠ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܚܕ ܕܡܬܚܙ ܟܕ // ܕܠܐ ܥܝܢ ܕܚܕ ܒܬ ܕܒܛܝܪܐ // ܕܝ ܒܪ ܘܪܘܚ ܩܕܫ ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܠܡ ܡܬܚܙܝܐ
Cf. *SdF* 1. 85–165, where Ephrem notes that even the dust of the ground itself is too marvelous for human beings to understand.

[45] Ellen Muehlberger, "Ephrem, *Hymns on the Faith*," *The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings*, vol. 1 ed. Andrew Radde-Gallwitz (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2017), 216, calls this image "an analogy for the Trinity." Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre im Bild von Sonne/Feuer, Licht und Wärme.* CSCO, vol. 425 (Louvain: Peeters, 1981), 1, describes this as "symbolischen Bildern." T. Bou Mansour, *La pensée*, 201, describes this as an *image*. Ephrem does not say what kind of image, analogy, or symbol the sun/fire is. In *HdF* 40.10 Ephrem describes the image of fire as a type of the mystery (*'râzâ*) of the Holy Spirit. In *HdF* 75.11, 15 Ephrem says that three "symbols" (*'râzê*) are in the sun. I have elected to call the sun/fire in these hymns an image.

74 in which Ephrem focuses on the Holy Spirit. He articulates how the Holy Spirit, represented as warmth in the image, is affirmed as the undiminished giver. Ephrem's trinitarian image thus affirms Ephrem's pro-Nicene sympathies.

Sun/Fire, Light, and Warmth HdF 40.1–7

In his study of Ephrem's image of sun/fire, light, and warmth, Edmund Beck argues that the major difference between Ephrem's trinitarian theology and the theologies of his Greek contemporaries is a philosophical mindset.[46] Beck notes that Ephrem would not have been predisposed to philosophical modes of inquiry, so Ephrem's main image for the Trinity is that of the sun/fire, warmth, and light. Ephrem is not concerned, according to Beck, with describing the mystery of the Trinity in detail; rather, Ephrem's goal is to let the metaphor for the mystery speak for itself.[47] Beck's assessment of Ephrem in comparison to his Greek counterparts is inadequate because Beck calls Ephrem's lack of clarity as "unexplained antinomy."[48] What lies behind this assertion is a

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[46] Edmund Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre,* 119, speaking about Ephrem in comparison to Greek treatments of the Trinity says, "Das besagt deutlich genug eine Ablehnung der philosophischen Deutungsversuche der griechischen Theologen."

[47] Because of the prominence of the sun cult in the fourth century, it is surprising that Ephrem does not engage the cult in a direct manner. Despite using the sun as an image for God, Ephrem avers from discussing cultic sun worship that was prominent in fourth century Mesopotamia. Julian the Apostate reinstituted the pagan cults and had a special affinity for the worship of Helios, see W. C. Wright, *Julian* I, 413. Cf. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 146–174. Julian even went so far as to declare that Edessa was sacred to Helios ἐξ αἰῶνος, W. C. Wright, *Julian* I, 413. In addition, J.B. Segal, *Edessa the Blessed City*, 111, notes that Julian did pass through Edessa. Jürgen Tubach, *Im Schatten des Sonnengottes: der Sonnenkulk in Edessa, Ḥarrān un Ḥatrā am Vorabend der christlichen Mission* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 83, says that there is no reference to the Helios cult within Ephrem's work: "Im Ephraems umfangreichem Werk sucht man vergebens konkrete Schilderungen über das mesopotamische Heidentum." The closest Ephrem comes is in his references to the astrology of Bardaisan and Mani, but these are not related to the cult of Helios.

[48] Edmund Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 31, calls this "einer unerklärten Antinomie." Here Beck compares Basil's distinction of order and sequence (τάξις and ἀκολουθία) and says it would have been foreign to Ephrem. Beck then suggests that Ephrem's lack of precision with his trinitarian image is antinomy.

specific understanding and belief of what an explained antinomy would be. It appears that Beck expected a more detailed discussion of how this image relates to the doctrine of the Trinity. None of the Cappadocians would have thought that their theology of the Holy Spirit explained the mystery of the Trinity. The fact that Ephrem writes in a different mode or genre does not mean that he is less logical than his contemporaries. Ephrem's image speaks for itself, as Beck rightly points out, and the image shows a pro-Nicene understanding of the Trinity.

Ephrem's image comes from the natural world and he transitions from the sun to fire as the first part of the image.[49] Ephrem equated fire with divinity and he parses this metaphor out to describe the Trinity in the 40th *HdF*. The 40th *HdF* is a trinitarian hymn comparing light and fire as signs of the triune existence of God. Ephrem discusses the sun, with its light, and heat as being equal and unified. In addition, Ephrem alludes to the Arian controversy in the first strophe saying that the sun's shining is not younger than the sun itself. Ephrem uses the language of mingling and mixture in order to describe how the different aspects of light are unified and distinct. In using the metaphor of light Ephrem is alluding to the Trinity. The Father is compared to the sun, the Son is compared to the light emitted from the sun, and the Holy Spirit is described as the warmth or heat that comes from the sun. Ephrem argues that these attributes are both unified and distinct.

Ephrem begins the 40th *HdF* with an image drawn from the natural world as an image of the Trinity. Ephrem manipulates his original image of the sun, converting it to fire, and in so doing creates two metaphors to show the unity and distinction of the

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[49] In *PR* I 51, 20 Ephrem refers to the sun as a kind of fire, saying "The sun also is a fire." In addition, Beck points out, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 35, Ephrem explains that both the sun and fire have a defined limit and a *qnomā*.

Father, Son, and Spirit. In addition, Ephrem shows familiarity with a version of the Arian formula: "there was when he was not."[50] He begins the hymn by saying that God, just like the sun, is beyond the capacity for human thought. Ephrem says:

> The sun is our lamp, and there is not one who comprehends it. // Just as [this is the case] for a human being, how much more for [comprehending] God! // For the shining of the sun is not younger than itself, // And there is no time when it was not. // Its light is second and its heart is third, // They are not its remnants, nor are they the same as it.[51]

As Ephrem provides the foundation of his trinitarian image, that of the sun, he notes that just as the sun is incomprehensible to people, so also God is even more beyond human understanding. This line of reasoning bears a marked similarity to Basil's defense of the Holy Spirit in *Contra Eunomium* 3.6. Basil articulates that humans are incapable of understanding the substances of created things, and that this is even more true of the uncreated Holy Spirit.[52] He even notes the trinitarian order of sun, light, and heat by saying that the second and third are not less than the first.

The order or taxis of the names Father, Son, and Spirit could have a context of subordination. For instance, Justin and Origen use the taxis as a signification of

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[50] Athanasius, *Orationes Contra Arianos* I.5–6, is the source of the Arian dictum. Athanasius is quoting Arius's *Thalia.* Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 99, notes that Arius is not a reliable source for the true words of Arius himself. Cf. R.C.P. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 10–14.

[51] *HdF* 40.1.

// ܡܢ ܟܠܝ ܐܝܟ ܟܐ ܚܢ ܟܬܝܒ ܡܫܬ // ܐܡܠܟ ܒܗܝܡ ܟܒܝܪ ܟܐ ܒܪ ܟܬ // ܠ ܦܚܝܬ ܒܗܡ ܟܠܐ ܐܝܟ ܟܐ ܚܝ ܡܢ ܟܬܝܒ
// ܡܢ ܟܠܐ ܐܝܟ ܟܐ ܡܢ ܐܝܟ ܟܐ // ܟܒܠܒܗ ܡܢ ܡܢ ܐܝܟ ܟܐ // ܐܡ ܒܢܝ ܟܢ ܠ ܒܗܡ ܟܠܐ //

While Wickes translates *mâštwen 'ameh* "the same as it," I have chosen to follow his translation of the verb *šwā* because I believe it provides appropriate multivalence to the term for the hymn. Another suitable translation would be "equal to it." While Beck, *Trinitätslehre*, 32, notes that after this first strophe the question of subordination is "in limbo" (in der Schwebe), from the context of the whole hymn it is clear that Ephrem is not trying to subordinate the light and warmth to the sun, but is trying to show their equality.

[52] Mark DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*, 138–138, articulates how Basil argues that humans are incapable of knowing the substances of created things. Basil uses this logic to say that because people cannot know the substance of created things, it is impossible to know the substance of the uncreated God.

subordination of the Son to the Father.[53] The trinitarian order in Ephrem's image is Sun, then Light, then Warmth. If Ephrem were subordinating the Spirit he would indicate that the Warmth is third in glory and honor. By saying that the third is not less than the first or second, Ephrem affirms the place of the Spirit as equal to the Father and Son. Beck suggests that Ephrem's emphasis in passages like *HdF* 23.13, in which Ephrem encourages praise in response to the trinitarian taxis of names, indicates that Ephrem thought that all persons of the Trinity are worthy of equal praise and not subordinate to each other.[54]

Ephrem expands upon the image of the sun in the second strophe. He notes that the different characteristics of the sun, its light, and heat are mixed and mingled together, both united and distinct.

> Look at the sun in the sky, which seems to be one. // But bend down and look and see its shining is second. // Test, touch, and examine its heat which is third. // They are alike and they are not alike one to the other. // The second is mingled with it, even though separated from it. // And the third is mixed—separated and still mingled and mixed.[55]

In these first two strophes, Ephrem shows how the solitary sun with its light and heat appears to be three. The sun is mingled with its light, and the warmth of the sun is mixed with both the sun and its light. This unity does not diminish distinction between the

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[53] Justin, *Apology* I.13; Origen, *Peri Archon* I.3,5.

[54] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 30–31. Cf. *HdF* 59.5, where Ephrem affirms that the names Father, Son, and Spirit are ordered in the baptismal formula.

[55] *HdF* 40.2.

ܚܙܐ // ܟܕܢܐ ܡܬܚܫܒ ܚܕ ܟܘܟܒܐ ܒܫܡܝܐ // ܘܠܬܬܐ ܐܬܒܘܢ ܘܫܡܫ ܐܢܘܢ ܚܕ // ܘܠܬܬܐ ܕܢܝ ܘܢܫܬܟܚ ܘܢܬܒܘܢ // ܘܠܬܬܐ ܕܢܝ ܘܢܫܬܟܚ ܘܢܬܒܘܢ // ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘ ܠܗ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘ ܠܗ // ܘܠܬܬܐ ܕܢܝ ܘܢܫܬܟܚ ܘܢܬܒܘܢ // ܘܠܬܬܐ ܕܢܝ ܘܢܫܬܟܚ ܘܢܬܒܘܢ

Because Ephrem emphasizes sensory imagery in this strophe by encouraging people to look and see T. Bou Mansour, *La pensée*, 207, suggests that Ephrem thinks "les sens permettait de mieux approcher le mystère des creatures qu'une vue trop intellectualiste et raisonnante."

three.[56] Ephrem articulates that God is unknowable but that the natural world provides an example for how people can understand God's unity and distinction.

Ephrem continues to explain the unity and distinction of the divine persons by changing the order of the image and adding the concept of fire:

> Fire and sun are solitary natures. // Three stories are mingled within them threefold // Substance (*qnomā*), then heat, and, light the third // And they dwell one in the other without jealousy. // Mixed without confusion, mingled and not bound // Gathered together without compulsion, and set free without wandering.[57]

In this strophe Ephrem changes the order of sun, light, heat, and instead says substance, heat, light. Beck suggests that Ephrem's knowledge of the four Stoic elements influenced his apparent mis-ordering.[58] If Beck's assumption that Ephrem's familiarity with Stoic elements is evident in this passage, then Ephrem's use of mixture language at the end of the hymn could also be the result of Ephrem's interaction with Stoicism.[59] The addition that Ephrem makes, that the persons are not bound and that they are free, indicates an autonomy of the persons.

Ephrem now transitions to what Beck understands to be the heart of the entire poem:[60]

> Thus the tyrants are openly silenced, // Behold! one is three and three are one. // They are mingled, but not fixed // They are distinct, but not cut off. // This is a marvel that silences us completely. // A person, as well, is fixed in a threefold

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[56] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 32, sees antinomy in this idea. The antimony is the unity and separation. I am not confident that this concept is "antinomy."

[57] *HdF* 40.3.
ܢܘܪܐ ܘܐܦ ܫܡܫܐ ܟܝ̈ܢܐ ܝܚܝ̈ܕܝܐ // ܬܠܬܐ ܫܪ̈ܒܢ ܒܗܘܢ ܡܙܝܓܢ ܬܠܝܬܐܝܬ // ܩܢܘܡܐ ܐܦ ܫܘܚܢܐ ܘܢܘܗܪܐ ܬܠܝܬܝܐ // ܚܕ ܒܚܕ܆
ܫܪܝܢ ܘܐܟܘܬ ܕܠܐ ܚܣܡ // ܚܠܝܛܝܢ ܘܠܐ ܒܠܝܠܝܢ ܡܙܝܓܝܢ ܘܠܐ ܐܣܝܪܝܢ // ܟܢܝܫܝܢ ܘܠܐ ܐܠܝܨܝܢ ܐܦ ܫܪܝܢ ܘܠܐ ܦܥܝܢ

[58] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre,* 36.

[59] Ephrem's interaction with Stoic mixture theory will be discussed later in this chapter.

[60] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 38, suggests that the phrase "the three are one and the one is three" is the most detailed Ephrem gets about the image. Mansour, *La pensée*, 208, notes that Beck overuses the concept of antinomy and paradox.

way, // And in the resurrection will rise, when perfectly completed.[61]

Ephrem highlights that both the sun and fire are metaphors for how to understand God. Their nature (*kyānā*) is solitary or single (*iḥidāyē*), yet within them three things dwell. Beck remarks that the use of "nature" (*kyānā*) connotes the concept of substance (*qnomā*), while the term "solitary" indicates the unity of substance.[62] Beck's observation is furthered by Ute Possekel, who notes that *kyānā* has three different meanings in Ephrem's corpus: individual or creature, inner nature, or an element.[63]

Possekel highlights that Ephrem's use of *kyānā* betrays some knowledge of Greek:

> Ephrem's use of the word *kyânâ* shows Greek influence in two respects. First, the very fact that he frequently employs the abstract concept of *kyânâ* can be understood as an indication of Hellenic influence on his terminology. Second, the meanings which he gives to the Syriac word *kyânâ* correspond to the ways in which the Greek word *physis* (φύσις) is used in Hellenic philosophical literature.[64]

In *HdF* 40, Ephrem uses the word "three" to describe what is inside the solitary fire or sun. He defines the three as "substance" (*qnomā*), "heat," and "light." These substances mingle and mix without denying the individuality of the others. Ephrem sees an analogy

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[61] *HdF* 40.4.

The word for "tyrants" (ܪܝܚܐ) appears to be misspelled in Beck's base manuscript. Both Assemani and Vat. 111 have ܪܘܝܐ. In *HdF* 36 Ephrem expresses the unity of the Father and the Son as well as the unity of the Trinity, noting that light is not able to be divided. Ephrem also says this about "being" (ܟܝܢܐ), his word for the unique divine essence.

[62] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre,* 35. Beck does not believe that Ephrem is consistent in his use of trinitarian terminology. Beck thinks that Ephrem vacillates on how to use the technical theological vocabulary. T. Bou Mansour, *La pensée*, 159–187, contests this point. The challenge in interpreting Ephrem is determining his linguistic lexicon. Because the origins of Syriac Christianity are obscure, and because there is little Syriac literature prior to Ephrem, the linguistic depth in his use of technical terminology is not readily comprehensible.

[63] Possekel, *Evidence*, 60.

[64] Possekel, *Evidence*, 62.

to the resurrection of humanity in this threefold division. The proper response to this divine revelation, according to Ephrem, is silence.

Ephrem continues his discussion about the sun's nature and notes that it progenerates in a special way.

> The sun, while one, is a solitary nature (*kyānā*)// Three are mingled in it, distinct, without division. // And each one is wholely complete in itself, in one of them all [three] are completed. // Its glory is one, but still not one. // Its nature is marvelous, for it begets singly, // And is gathered together, and divided threefold.[65]

Ephrem includes the Spirit in his trinitarian theology by noting the threefold nature of the divine nature. All three are worthy of honor, and the glory of the sun is threefold in the same way that the splendor of God is three, mingled and divided.[66]

Ephrem now changes the symbol that he has been using; instead of the sun he speaks of fire.[67] The fluidity Ephrem uses to jump between these images shows that he connected the two ideas in his mind. Both images come from the natural world and express truth about who God is. The fact that Ephrem switches between fire and sun in his symbolic language could mean that he thought of the sun itself as a kind of fire. Ephrem says,

> And if someone dares to think that fire // Is not itself three, who will go astray with him, // And cling to his stupidity, and follow his stubborness // and so deny the three that are seen, // Who, though equal, are separate? One is glorious and

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[65] *HdF* 40.5.

ܟ ܐܝܬ // ܒܚܕ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܬܠܬ ܐܝܬ // ܕܠܐ ܡܢ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܒܚܕ // ܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܬܠܬ ܕܐܬ ܒܗ ܟܠ ܚܕ // ܟܠ ܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܡܫܬܠܡ // ܘܒܟܠ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܗܢ ܬܠܬ ܐܫܬܠܡ // ܫܒܚܗ ܚܕ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܘܠܐ ܥܕ ܚܕ // ܟܝܢܗ ܡܦܠܐ ܘܡܬܟܢܫ ܘܡܬܦܠܓ ܬܠܬ

Beck, *Trinitätslehre*, 41–42, interprets the word "glory" (*tešbuḥtā*) as referring to the unity of the image of the Sun. Mansour, 206–207, thinks that Beck makes "glory" Christological and notes that such an interpretation would be incorrect. It appears to me that Mansour is mistaken in his reading of Beck.

[66] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 41, notes connections with Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* 1:18 regarding how the persons of the Trinity complete each other.

[67] Michel Barnes, *The Power of God*, 30 note 28, provides a useful and brief survey of how the ancient Greek philosophers understood fire in their religious context. In addition, Barnes's treatment of power language relies on fire as an example of how to understand power. See especially pp. 21–53.

terrible, // Another hidden and strong, and [yet] another happy and tranquil.[68]

Ephrem again emphasizes the equality of the three persons in this trinitarian image. The distinctions between the three persons are that the Father is glorious and dreadful, the Spirit hidden and powerful, with the Son bright and gentle.

If Ephrem is referencing the Holy Spirit in saying "another hidden and powerful," then he has changed the order of his trinitarian image. Instead of going from Father, to Son, to Holy Spirit, Ephrem, now goes from Father, to Holy Spirit, to Son. While Ephrem has changed the trinitarian order, I do not think that Ephrem would consider this to be a problem.[69] The image does not function as a true name in Ephrem's thinking. Instead, this image is how Ephrem attempts to explain the doctrine of the Trinity.

Ephrem continues his discussion about the different roles played by each person of the Trinity in strophe seven. Ephrem appears to reverse the order he gives in the previous strophe and uses the standard trinitarian taxis.

> And that first one gathers all of itself with itself. // After it is another, who comes according to its own will, // And the third is poured out lavishly. // An authoritative power is within the fire. // And while they are do not command neither are they commanded by one another. // They agree with each other, by means of the love of order.[70]

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[68] *HdF* 40.6.

ܒܚܝܠܐ // ܡܫܠܝܚܐ ܕܠܥܠܡ ܡܫܠܝܚܐ ܚܝܠܐ // ܘ ܬܠܬܝܐ ܐܬ ܒܫܘܒܚܐ ܡܫܠ // ܪܝܫܐ ܚܕ ܐܚܪܢ ܐܝܬ ܒܪ ܠܗ ܒ
ܠܡܚܝܐ ܒܝ ܥܡܝܩ ܒܢܝ ܟܚ ܟܝܢ // ܘܒܙܒܢ ܕܥܒ ܒܗ ܥܡ ܚܝܠ ܕܥܒ ܚܕ // ܒܫܘܒܚܐ ܟܬܝܒ

Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 45, thinks that Ephrem is inconsistent in how he understands the concept of the verb "to be equal" (*šwā*). In the first strophe, Ephrem says that the ray and the warmth are not *šwā* to the sun. But in strophe 6, Ephrem says that although the three "are equal (*šwā*) they are distinct." Beck asserts that this contradiction shows how flexible Ephrem's images and symbols are. I think that Ephrem is consistent here and that the best way to see that is by broadening our understanding of *šwā* to include the idea of "same." While *šwā* is best translated as equal, a helpful English equivalent to the concept present here is sameness. Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 225, chooses to translate *šwā* in strophe 1 as "same," while Muehlberger, "Ephrem," 217, translates it as "equal to it."

[69] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 45–46 notes the change in order. Mansour, *La pensée*, 212–213, follows Beck in this change in trinitarian order.

[70] *HdF* 40.7.

Beck recognizes that the notion of "the third" being "poured out abundantly" sounds reminiscent of the Holy Spirit. Yet, Beck suggests that Ephrem maintains the same order as in strophe six. Beck noted that according to the Gospel of John the "Spirit blows *where it wills*," and so the idea that the Spirit proceeds of her own will is not unprecedented. In addition, Beck thinks that the third person who is "poured out abundantly" could be a reference to the Son. He notes that the verb for "pour out" (*špa'*) is not the same as the verb used for the Holy Spirit being poured out in Acts 2:17 and Joel 2:28 (*a'šūd*). Moreover, Beck highlights the fact that in the *SDN* 35, Ephrem uses *špa'* to describe the light that was poured out on Paul on the road to Damascus.[71]

Beck's assessment of the order of persons in strophe seven does not convince me. The argument for why the Son is "poured out" assumes that hearers and readers would be sensitive to a subtle verb change. It seems that the more natural interpretation of procession according to the will is the Son and that the one who is poured out abundantly is the Holy Spirit. If Ephrem is changing the trinitarian order of the image, I think it serves to highlight the status of the Spirit as equal with the Son.

Ephrem notes that the second part of the image proceeds "according to its will," and what Ephrem intends for this to mean in the godhead is not clear. He seems to suggest that each person of the Trinity has an individual will, but that no person is commanded by another. Beck suggests that Ephrem's statement that the persons are not commanded by each other but are completed by each other in love and order, indicates a

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ܗܟ ܐܡ ܪܫܝ // ܒܪܚܡܐ ܕܐܒܐ ܪܚܡ ܠܝ ܐܡ // ܡܢ ܟܝ ܐܒܐ ܪܚܡ ܡܝܬ ܠܒܪܗ // ,ܡܬܪܚܡ ܒܪ ܡܠܐ ܪܚܡ ܠܝ ܐܡ
ܪܚܡܢܐ ܪܚܡ ܠܚܠܩ ܠܐ ܠܐ // ܫ ܟ ܫ ܐܬܦܠܓ ܪܚܡ ܐܦ ܠܐ ܐ // ܪܚܡ ܡܝܬ

[71] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 48.

transformation and change in Ephrem's thought.[72] In *SdF* 4.177–180 Ephrem says that only the Father commands. From this statement, Beck believes that Ephrem's thinking evolved, and in this evolution denied the potential subordination that was found in what he perceives as Ephrem's earlier thought.[73] The problems with Beck's approach are rooted in the uncertainty that surrounds the dating of Ephrem's writings.[74] There is, still, a difference in what the two texts (*SdF* 4 and *HdF* 40) indicate about the nature of commands within the Trinity. If Ephrem does experience a change in his thought, and if the *SdF* pre-date the *HdF,* then one could suggest that Ephrem's thinking is conforming to the broadly pro-Nicene trajectory as the Arian crisis continues.

To sum up this section, Ephrem's image for the Trinity shows that the Father, Son, and Spirit are equal but distinct. Their equality is evident in the image of the sun/fire, in which substance, light, and heat are all of the same divinity. Ephrem ignores the trinitarian taxis, not out of heterodox leanings, but out of a desire to show the unity of the distinct persons.

The Mystery of the Holy Spirit HdF 40.8–12

The second half of *HdF* 40 is devoted to a discussion about the Holy Spirit. Beck notes that Ephrem's description of the Holy Spirit diverges from other patristic authors

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[72] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 50–55. Beck asserts that Ephrem's preference for the antinomic statement of "the three are one, the one three," is the guiding principle for understanding the divine will. While each divine person has a distinct will, their distinct wills are one. Ephrem's affirmation of the singular divine will can be seen in *HdF* 40.4; 77.20ff; *HCH* 32.15; *Eccl.* 27.9.

[73] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 50.

[74] Blake Hartung, "The Authorship and Dating of the Syriac Corpus attributed to Ephrem of Nisibis: A Reassessment," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 22, no. 2 (2018): 296–321.

like Gregory of Nyssa and Justin Martyr.[75] In this last portion of the hymn, Ephrem describes the Holy Spirit by pointing out the important connections that can be made from the metaphor of fire. The nature of fire is marvelous and is a mystery or type (*rāzā*) of the Holy Spirit. Ephrem affirms the inseparable operations of the Trinity and suggests that the Holy Spirit's gift of warmth to the world is undiminished, extending to all people. The warmth of the Holy Spirit cannot diminish because it is always connected to the fire of God. The Holy Spirit's status as giver is contingent upon the Holy Spirit being one with and connected to the fire who is God.

Ephrem returns to his theology of names, which I discuss in chapter 2, and he notes that there are three names evident in the image of fire. Each name is unique, standing on its own, but each is still connected with the other two.

> For three names are seen within the fire, // And each one stands individually by its own authority, // And each appears simple in its own activity, // Individual strengths are mingled together. // Fire marvelously, heat separately, // And light gloriously each one is lasting and harmonious.[76]

In this passage, one sees the inseparable operations of the Trinity. Each person acts on his or her own, but their action is mingled together in unity with the other two. Here again Ephrem rearranges the order of fire, light and heat, to fire, heat, and light. The confusion of the order indicates that the actions of the Second and Third person in the Trinity act, at times, in a similar manner. The Holy Spirit's role is set out in ambiguous terms.

Not only do the persons of the Trinity act inseparably, they also are undiminished

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[75] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 57.

[76] *HdF* 40.8.

// ܒܬܠܬܐ ܫܡܗ̈ܬ ܡܬܚܙ̈ܝܢ ܒܢܘܪܐ // ܘܟܠ ܚܕ ܩܐܡ ܒܫܘܠܛܢ ܕܝܠܗ // ܘܟܠ ܚܕ ܡܬܚܙܐ ܦܫܝܛ ܒܥܒܕܗ // ܓܒ̈ܪ̈ܐ ܡܫܬܪ̈ܒ̈ܢ ܒܚܕ̈ܕ̈ܐ // ܢܘܪܐ ܕܡܬܕܡ ܘܚܡܐ ܒܦܪܫ̈ܢ // ܘܢܘܗܪܐ ܫܦܝܪ ܟܠ ܚܕ ܩܐܡ ܘܡܫܬܘܝ //

in giving. Ephrem affirms that fire produces without losing what it is, that fire provides heat without becoming cold itself. The heat itself does not become something other than the fire, the heat is always fire.

> And if fire's nature is a marvel // Because it begets, and does not diminish; it is even and does not grow cold; // While its heat is separate, it is not cut off from it; // Though it passes through everything, it is not envious; // It flutters throughout bread and is mingled inside water, // and dwells in all things while in it all things dwells.[77]

The undiminished gift of the fire comes through the warmth of the Holy Spirit.[78] This heat connects all people with the fire of God. In the same way that fire mingles with boiling water and bakes bread, so too in the sacraments does the Holy Spirit pervade the elements and the persons. The warmth spreads even into the sacramental bread and water, dwelling in everything and becoming the source for all things to dwell.

> The ubiquitous presence of the Spirit finds a type and symbol in the sacraments.
>
> It is a mystery of the Spirit, a type of the Holy Spirit: // The Spirit is mixed with water of forgiveness, // And mingled in bread that is might be an offering. // And while it seems that all of it is in all of them, // It's fullness is distant, for it cannot depict // The trinitarian mysteries, which can never be depicted.[79]

Just like the fire mentioned in strophe nine, the Spirit is present in the sacraments of the church. The Spirit's presence is mixed and mingled, yet distinct from the bread and the

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[77] *HdF* 40.9.

ܐܬܐ // ܕܒܗ ܡܬܚܙܝ ܠܟ ܕܒܪܘܡ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܒ // ܐܦ ܟܕ ܢܘܪܐ ܡܫܬܟܚ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕ ܐܝ ܠܟ
ܡܠ ܢܝܚ ܒܟ ܒܟ ܒܟ ܟܠ ܢܝܚ // ܒܟܠ ܟܠ ܒܟ ܟܠ ܢܝܚ // ܟܕ ܐܬ ܟܠ ܢܝܚ ܒܟ ܟܠ ܒܟ ܟܠ ܢܝܚ

[78] In *HdF* 84.11, Ephrem shows how God is superior to all things and how light serves as a good example of God's ability to produce. Ephrem then says that "light begets without suffering loss," which is what God alone is able to do.

[79] *HdF* 40.10.

// ܟܬܝܒ ܪܘܡ ܟܠ ܐ ܟܬ // ܟܒ ܠ ܪܘܡ ܟܬ ܟܠ ܐ ܟܬ // ܟܒ ܢ ܢܝܚ ܒ ܟ ܟ ܢ ܢ
ܒ ܟ ܐ ܝ ܟ ܟ ܟ ܢ ܢ // ܐ ܝ ܟ ܟ ܟ ܟ ܢ ܐ ܟ ܟ // ܟ ܠ ܟ ܟ ܟ ܟ ܟ ܟ

water. Even though Ephrem attempts to provide a type of the trinitarian mystery, this image is unable to depict with precision the transcendent God.

Despite spending the entirety of the hymn noting the comparison of the image of sun/fire, light, and warmth with the Trinity, Ephrem does not believe that this image is adequate for the task of explaining God. In the end, Ephrem notes that all such inquiry cannot fully depict or explain the mystery of the Trinity.

> And if this investigation of this fire overwhelms us // How is it one? How is it three? // How are those things that dwelling within it three? // How is its heat separate and not cut off? // A nature that we have received lovingly, triply, // Yet do not have along with it, divisive debating.
>
> How much more is it just that we receive simply // These Three in love without investigation? // Their nature did not follow after us, to be like us, // For they are like each other in all manners, // The natures of creatures are separated and not alike. // How much more separate from all is the nature that is above all? [80]

Ephrem ends this hymn by noting that the divine nature is beyond human comprehension. The questions surrounding details are met with a response encouraging one to love God's revelation of God's self to the world. Ephrem's response to the difficulties of fourth century polemics is to suggest that the teaching of the church should be received in love without questioning.

Ephrem discusses the importance of "simply receiving" the doctrine of the Trinity.[81] This concept informs Ephrem's understanding of ecclesial conflict and how

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[80] *HdF* 40.11–12.

// ܒܥܐ ܠܡܕܥ ܠܡܐ ܡܫܬܠܐ ܚܝܪܐ // ܕܐܟ ܡ ܡܫܬܠܐ ܚܝܪܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܢܫ ܚܝܪܐ // ܠ ܡܚܠܦܝ ܡܐ ܚܝܠ ܡ ܕܝ ܠܟ
ܒܪܚܝܬ ܡܕܝ ܠ ܒܪܟ ܡܠܐ // ܒܪܫܬܠܐ ܟܚܝܫ ,ܡܫܬܠ ܐܡ ܚܝܬ // ܡܒܥ ܡܠܐ ܡܚܝܐ ܒܝܬ ܚܝܪܐ
ܠܡܐ // ܠ ܟܚܝܢ ܠܡܚܝ ܟܫܟ ܠܒܐ ܡܠܐ // ܕܐܟ ܡܠ ܟܚܝܫ ܒܪܚܝܬ ܠܡܒܥ // ܟܫܬܠܐ ܠܡܐ ܠ ܢܢ ܒܝܬ ܚܟܚ
ܠܡܐ // ܚܝܬ ܠ ܢܢ ܒܝܬ ܟܚ ܒܝܬ ܚܟܚ // ܚܟܚ ܡܠ ܟܚܝܫ ܒܪܚܝܬ ܚܝܬ // ܚܡܚܠܡ ܚܟܚ ܠܡܐ

[81] Throughout the *HdF* (40.8,12; 43.9; 47.6; 56.1), Ephrem encourages a response of silence to divine truths. He views the conflicts of the fourth century as unnecessary noise and chatter. I believe Ephrem tries to leave room in the church for those who hold Arian theological positions. Ephrem creates this space with silence. The proper response to the truths of God is silence. Cf. Paul Russell, "Ephrem the Syrian on the Utility of Language and the Place of Silence," *JECS* 8 (2000): 21–37.

Ephrem would have resolved the disputes of the fourth century. Ephrem believes that the proper response to divine revelation is silence. Divine revelation comes to humanity in the forms of nature and Scripture. The church preserves the revelation of Scripture and through her practices of baptism and Eucharist teaches the faithful about God. With differing factions fighting over correct theological terminology, Ephrem prefers to trust the church, and he wants those working against the church to pause in silence and worship.[82]

Ephrem's theology of the Holy Spirit is rooted in sacramental language and describes the Spirit as divine and a member of the godhead. The logic for this is scriptural, but not performed through proof texts. Instead, Ephrem's use of Scripture focuses on allusions and metaphors, signs and types that he finds in the natural world. This is not to say that Ephrem ignores the Bible or that he does not exegete Scripture, only that in his hymns his emphasis on Scripture is pictorial and typological. When Ephrem speaks of the Spirit he will at times write with double meanings.

Beck suggests that Ephrem's understanding of "nature" differs from the Greek Christian understanding found in Basil and Athanasius. In Beck's mind the Platonic understanding of nature "states the essential qualities (of people etc.), which are grasped in the concept to the absolute unity of the idea,"[83] whereas the Stoic understanding

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[82] Ephrem's remarks in *HdF* 52.15 are a good example of his desire for unity. "O our Lord, make peace in my days in your churches. // Mingle and unite, Lord, the schismatic factions. // Reconcile and shepherd, too, the quarreling parties. // From all the churches, may there come one Church of truth. // May her righteous children be gathered within her womb, // Giving thanks for your grace. Praises to {your reconciliation}!" Translation from Wickes, *Hymns on Faith*, 272.

[83] Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, 67, "Die platonische *physis* besagt die wesenhaften Eigenschaften (des Menschen u.s.w.), die im Begriff erfaßt zur absoluten Einheit der Idee werden. Im ephrämischen kyânâ dagegen bleibt die stoische Vorstellung von der höchsten Realität der Einzeldinge wirksam, auch dort, wo es unter dem Einfluß der griechischen *physis* mehr das Innere der Dinge, ihr Wie, gegenüber dem Daß der bloßen Existenz zum Ausdruck bringen will."

wishes to express the "how" of interior things while also maintaining the "why." Beck asserts that Basil and Athanasius are more Platonic, while Ephrem tends to follow the Stoics. This, however, is not a fair assertion. As John Rist shows, one must take caution when applying philosophical tendencies to different Christian authors.[84] With Basil, it is important to note at what stage of his career he exhibited this (Neo)-Platonic influence. In addition, applying one philosophical influence to Basil seems to be a misrepresentation of Basil's ideas, because he was conversant in multiple philosophical schools. That Basil utilizes philosophical ideas, does not make Basil a philosopher first. In fact, Basil's usage of philosophy is in service of his theology.

Ephrem believes that within both fire and the sun substance, heat, and light are present. Ephrem explicitly equates these with the Father, Son, and Spirit in *HdF* 73, and expands upon his metaphor for the Holy Spirit. There Ephrem says, "When the ray departs // From being with its source, it is still not separate // from its begetter. // It now leaves its heat, // Like our Lord left the Holy Spirit // To be with his disciples."[85] Just like the sun's rays leave heat on the earth so does the Son leave the presence and warmth of the Holy Spirit on earth and in the church. This is evident in creation and confirmed in God's revelation to humanity. Even though Ephrem's theology is often polemical and part of the pro-Nicene trajectory, he is still concerned with the unity of the church. Ephrem says, "See the images within the creation and do not become divided // about the

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[84] John Rist, "Basil's 'Neoplatonism': Its Background and Nature," in *Basil of Caesarea Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, Part 1 ed. Paul Jonathan Fedwick (Toronto: Pontifiical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1981), 137–220.

[85] *HdF* 73.18–19.

ܟܕ ܡܬܚ ܡܢ ܡܕܒܪ ܢܘܪ ܗܘ // ܡܢ ܡܐܒܝܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܦܠܓ ܗܘ // ܡܢ ܡܘܠܕܗ ܗܘ // ܗܫܐ ܫܒܩ ܠܗ ܠܚܡܝܡܘ // ܟܡܐ ܕܡܪܢ ܫܒܩ ܠܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ // ܠܗܘܐ ܥܡ ܬܠܡܝܕܘ //

Trinity, Lest you perish."[86] While Ephrem affirms the pro-Nicene position, he is still preoccupied with the unity of the faithful.[87] The fragmentation in the church caused by the debates and investigations into the nature of God has caused, in Ephrem's eyes, a division that needs to be repaired.

The Holy Spirit as Undiminished Giver HdF 74

Ephrem devotes *HdF* 74 to the Holy Spirit and says that the Holy Spirit is present to everyone like the warmth of the sun. Each person is able to receive the "power of its heat" (74.5) as they are able to bear it. The strength of the heat is complete (74.3) for all, both as a group and for the individual. The warmth of the Holy Spirit is omnipresent, yet the Spirit is not divided from the Father and the Son; the Spirit is not severed off from the Godhead. The Spirit, like fire, is able to produce and not decrease, so that the Spirit is present in the sacramental bread and wine and in the sacramental waters without diminishing.

This *madrāšā* emphasizes the way in which the Holy Spirit is connected with the Father and the Son, while at the same time is present in the world. The presence of the Spirit in multiple spaces does not limit or lessen the power that is given to people. Ephrem says, "Who can investigate its heat? // And while it is divided, it is not cut off, // Just like the Holy Spirit."[88] The Holy Spirit is not separated from the Father in the same

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[86] *HdF* 73.20.

ܕܢܟܐ ܟܠܗ // ܟܐܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܦܠܓ ܐܠܐ // ܟܐܢܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ,ܣ

[87] Tina Shepardon, "Christian Division in Ancient Edessa Ephrem the Syrian's *Carmina Nisibena* XXVII–XXVIII," *Journal of The Assyrian Academic Society* 12 (1999): 29–41, argues that Ephrem is often concerned with the unity of the church. The goal of his theology is to glorify God and to see that the church does this in together. I believe Ephrem's desire for Christian union undergirds his emphasis on receiving the truth and remaining silent when confronted with the goodness of God and of Christian teaching.

way that the warmth of the sun is not separated from the sun. In addition, this warmth connects the created world with the sun and keeps all things warm. Ephrem appears to utilize some version of the Stoic concept of *krasis* or blending. The Holy Spirit is distinct from and united with the Father and the Son. The unity does not hinder the distinct persons. Ephrem continues, "The strength of its heat dwells // On all things and all of it with all things, // even with one, all of it."[89]

Not only is the Holy Spirit in constant connection with the Father, the Spirit is also connected with the Son. The ray of the sun and its warmth are united and mingled together. In Ephrem's understanding of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Son, the two are not separated. All persons of the Trinity share in the whole power of God. The connection Ephrem sees is exhibited in his description of the heat's relationship to the sun and its rays: "It is not cut off from the ray // That is mixed with it, nor from the sun // That is mingled with it. // While it stretches to creatures, // Each one carries the power of its heat, // just as it is able."[90] The warmth that comes from the Holy Spirit is sent to all and all receive the warmth as much as they are able to bear it.

In the conclusion of his work on Ephrem's trinitarian theology, Edmund Beck asserts that Ephrem's goals in his application of trinitarian metaphors is different from

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[88] *HdF* 74.2.

ܟܬܝܒ ܒܝܬ ܗܘ // ܕܦܪܫ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠܗܝܢ ܕܓ // ܘܡܫܬܚܠܛ ܥܡ ܟܠ

Mansour, *La pensée*, 210 notes that the fact that the heat is spread is a defining characteristic of the Holy Spirit: "Le «partage» est cette activité qui caractérise la capacité de la chaleur à se répandre dans plusieurs réalités, sans s'y dissoudre."

[89] *HdF* 74.3.

ܟܠ ܒܗ ܒܟܠ // ܟܠ ܟܠ ܒܟ ܚܕ ܟܠ ܟܠ // ܘܡܫܬܚܠܛ ܥܡ ܟܠ

[90] *HdF* 74.4–5.

ܟܠ ܒܗ ܒܗ ܒܗ // ܟܬܝܒ ܟܠ ܟܠܥܒܕ ܓܕ // ܘܡ ܟܠܝܢ // ܟܬܒ ܥܡ ܟܠ ܘܡ ܟܠ // ܟܡܠ ܥܡ ܟܦܪܫ ܟܠ
ܟܝܢ ܟܡ ܒܗ // ܘܡܫ

the Greek theologians. In fact, Beck goes so far as to say that Ephrem's use of antinomy and unexplained metaphors for the Trinity signifies a rejection of philosophical interpretation. While it is true that Ephrem does not elucidate and explain the persons of the Trinity, and while there are questions left unanswered by Ephrem's method, it does seem a stretch to say that Ephrem rejects philosophical interpretation. Ephrem is limited by his medium. He does not provide a dense philosophical and theological treatise within the confines of Syriac meter and verse. It is too much to say that Ephrem rejects philosophical interpretation simply because he does not use it in poetic verse.

Ephrem notes that there are limits to his image of the Trinity. In *HdF* 6, Ephrem uses the image of the sun and its rays to note that this depiction of God is incomplete. While humans can see the rays of the sun, no one has seen the hidden one, but through his child the hidden one is seen. Ephrem uses this image to interpret the creation account in Genesis, noting that God spoke the words of creation as divine commands to the son. The Father spoke the creation and the Son brought it to completion. The imagery of the sun and its rays applies here to the Father's relationship to the Son. Ephrem notes that the Son is the revelation of the Father and that this revelation is necessary because the Father is unknowable.

Ephrem's trinitarian image of the sun and fire with corresponding light and heat serves to show how his theology affirmed the Spirit as one with the Father and Son. Ephrem is not consistent about the order in which he speaks about light and heat. This could be understood to mean that Ephrem thought the Son and Spirit were less than the Father, but that reading goes against Ephrem's explanation of the image. Changing the order of the heat and the light must then be read as showing the interchangeable work of

both the Son and the Spirit. Fire and the sun provide Ephrem with an image of the mystery of the Holy Spirit. Ephrem affirms that the Holy Spirit is God in the same way that the Son is God. Just as a ray of light is still the sun, so too is the heat and warmth felt from that light. Ephrem's emphasis on the heat appears to be innovative, but also runs up against the Sabellian heresy.

Ephrem and the Stoics: Mixture and Fire

In this section I suggest that Ephrem's use of mixture language bears similarity to the Stoic concept of blending or mixture.[91] Yet Ephrem's concept of mixture is different enough from the Stoics to help him maintain the unity and distinction of Trinity, while preserving him from Sabellian modalism. First, I discuss Sabellian modalism as evident from Epiphanius's description. I then turn to Ephrem's understanding of mixture and how it relates to the Stoic concept of blending. I show that Ephrem's use of mixture, whether or not Stoic in its implementation, nevertheless guards against a modalist understanding of the Trinity.

Ephrem's use of the image of the sun and fire bears a similarity to the way in which Epiphanius describes the Sabellian heresy. Epiphanius notes that the Sabellians think that the Father, Son, and Spirit are all the same; saying that they are three names for a single hypostasis.[92] Epiphanius says that with regards to the sun, the Sabellians taught that the sun has one hypostasis and three operations.[93] In this schema the sun's three

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[91] Possekel, *Evidence*, 116–120, offers an explanation of how Ephrem uses Stoic logic of mixture to refute the cosmogony of Bardaisan. Ephrem assumes that κρᾶσις δι'ὅλων and says that the multiple *'ityē* in Bardaisan's cosmological undergo a transformation.

[92] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 2.42. Δογματίζει γὰρ οὗτος καὶ οἱ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ Σαβελλιανοὶ τὸν αὐτὸνεἶναι πατέρα, τὸν αὐτὸν εἶναι υἱὸν, τὸν αὐτὸν εἶναι ἅγιον πνεῦμα, ὡς εἶναι ἐν μιᾷ ὑποστάσει τρεῖς ὀνομασίας.

operations were its shape, warming, and illumination. The Sabellians, Epiphanius says, equated the warming with the Holy Spirit, while the Son was the illumination, with the Father representing the orb. The problem of the Sabellian application of this image was that each of the parts of the sun (shape, warmth, and illumination) were modes of being. The unity of the godhead was preserved to the point that there was no distinction.

Ephrem use of mixture language betrays a familiarity with Stoicism.[94] In Stoic thought there are three types of union:[95] first is juxtaposition (παράθεσις), in which two bodies are placed beside each other. This did not qualify as a mixture in the thought of Stoics and Aristotle. Second is fusion (σύγχυσις), which means that the combination of two bodies becomes something new. Last is blending (κρᾶσις), in which the multiple bodies blended into a new whole maintain distinction and can be drawn out of the new whole.[96] Ronald Heine describes blending, saying "two substances mutually coextend

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[93] Ibid., τρεῖς δὲ ἔχοντι τὰς ἐνεργείας.

[94] Ephrem shows a remarkable familiarity and similarity with many philosophical ideas and concepts that were common in his era. For instance, his trinitarian image of the sun/fire, light, and warmth is reminiscent of Stoic cosmology. The Stoic idea of the conflagration of the world through fire does not appear present in Ephrem's thinking, but Ephrem does discuss how the entire world is warmed and animated through the sun's/fire's power. The animation of the world through the power of heat is similar to what Cicero describes in *De Natura Deorum* 2.23-25, 28-30.

[95] Chrysippus, as quoted by Alexander of Aphrodisias, SVF 2.473, describes the theory: "The whole of substance is unified by a breath (πνεύματός) which pervades it all, and by which the universe is sustained and stabilized and made interactive with itself." Translated by A.A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers:* vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 290.

[96] J.M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 158–159, says about Stoic mixture:

> According to Galen the thesis that both 'substances' and 'qualities' are capable of total mixture (δι'ὅλων κεράννυσθαι) was that of Zeno himself. And if qualities are thus susceptible of this kind of material mixing, and are specifically separated in Zeno's sentence from substances, it is hard to think that Zeno did not distinguish between them…Two particulars can be compounded into a new unit by total mixture, but their οὐσία is one in any case; it is one existing whole. It was only the view of Posidonius, who, as so frequently, misunderstood the original Stoic doctrine, that οὐσία could undergo qualitative chance (ἀλλοίωσις). This mistake presumably arose because Posidonius failed to grasp the implications of the fact that having an οὐσία merely means being a material object. *Qua* matter, matter *cannot* change; it *exists* as it is and no other mode of existence is possible.

through one another, and completely participate in one another, but each retains its characteristics so that they can again be separated."[97] Heine argues that Sabellian modalism of the third century used a theory of Stoic blending to say that the spirit of the Father was mixed with the flesh of the Son.[98] This would mean that the Son, in flesh, did not have the substance of the Father. Therefore, the Father did not suffer on the cross.

Columba Stewart argues that Ephrem's use of mixture language is different from the Stoic usage and that Ephrem has a certain amount of freedom apart from the Stoic philosophers.[99] Stewart asserts that "the prevalence of mixing metaphors in Syriac texts cannot be attributed to a Stoic vocabulary."[100] For Stewart, it is not that Syriac usage maintains no similarities to Stoic thought, rather it is that the full freight of meaning in Syriac is more expansive than the Stoic version. Edmund Beck argues that, "The Syriac root (*ḥlṭ*) first has the meaning of the Greek *krasis*, but then means a most intimate union even without abolition and absorption of the individuality of the united."[101] The Syriac usage maintains the individuality of the united aspects. In the Stoic framework, the particulars of the individual remained even after the union, and the individual could be drawn out. The difference between the two is the manner of the individuality found within the mixture.

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[97] Ronald Heine, "The Christology of Callistus," *JTS* 49 (1998) 75–76.

[98] Heine, "Callistus," 74–78.

[99] Stewart, *Working the Earth*, 187–203.

[100] Stewart, *Working the Earth*, 189.

[101] Beck, *De Fid,*. 74 p. 90 n. 7: "Die syrische Wurzel (*ḥlṭ*) hat zunächst die Bedeutung des griechischen krasis, bedeutet aber dann eine innigste Vereinigung auch ohne Aufhebung u. Schwächung der Individualität der Geeinten."

Stewart's argument about the larger lexical meaning for Syriac mixture suggests that in Ephrem's use of mixture language he is not bounded by Stoic terminology. Stewart says, "Although mixing language tended in Greek Christian writers to remain in the realms of anthropology and Christology, in the Syriac world its use was broader and not, at least before the fifth century, so vigorously conditioned by Stoic natural philosophy."[102] Stewart's point is not that Ephrem is unaware of or devoid of Stoic philosophy, but that Ephrem expands upon Stoic ideas within his Syriac context.

In Ephrem's trinitarian image, mixture and mingling become the ways in which the Holy Spirit is spread throughout the world, while remaining connected to the Father and to individuals. This connection is how Ephrem is able to articulate a nascent doctrine of the undiminished giver and show that the Holy Spirit is true God. The Holy Spirit provides heat to all without losing her connection to the source of that heat. Mixture language also establishes the connection between the Holy Spirit and humanity.

In speaking about the Syriac contribution to mixture language, Stewart suggests that the difference between Ephrem's use of mixture language and the Greek Christian use of it is a reliance on Stoic terminology. Ephrem's lack of strict Stoic terminology grants him the freedom to describe God in what Stewart calls "the grand synthesis." This leads Stewart to say, "Ephrem's perspective, especially in his hymns, is quite different. His discussion of the Incarnation is rarely abstract. He does not postulate 'divinity' and 'humanity' and then explain their conjunction in Christ…God's intention was 'to show us himself and to unite his Son with us, and to mix his Spirit with us, and to show his love to us."[103] According to Stewart, Ephrem's focus in speaking of mixture and mingling is not

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[102] Stewart, *Working the Earth*, 187.

to describe the composite aspects that are mixed or mingled, instead it is to show the unity of the mixture. Stewart says, "For Ephrem, the stress falls on the unity achieved through mixing, rather than upon the composite nature of a mixture."[104] While Stewart is correct in identifying Ephrem's emphasis on unity, Ephrem's trinitarian image also shows his continued interest in the composite parts of the unity.

Anthony Briggman argues that Irenaeus and other early Christian interpreters utilized Stoic mixture theory to articulate the union of divinity and humanity in Christ.[105] Ephrem uses the concept of mixture to show the Son's human nature, as well as the gift of the Spirit to humanity: "It delighted him to become small, and bow down //So that he might show himself to us, and to mingle his Son with us, // And to mix his Spirit with us, and show his love to us."[106] The end product of the mixture is the display of God's love to humanity. God made himself small in sending both his Spirit and his Son to mix with humanity. The Son mixed in the person of Jesus, the Spirit mixed by indwelling individual Christians.

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[103] Stewart, *Working the Earth*, 191–192. Here Stewart quotes from *HCH* 32.9.

[104] Stewart, *Working the Earth*, 192.

[105] Anthony Briggman, "Irenaeus' Christology of Mixture," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 64 (2013): 516–555. Jacob Neusner, "Physics In an odd Idiom: The Stoic Theory of Mixtures in the Applied Reason of the Mishnah," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 52 (1989): 419–429, argues that Stoic mixture theory and physics is present in the Mishnah. He suggests that second century CE Jewish Rabbis's logic bears a marked similarity with Stoic physics, in specific relation to mixture. This similarity does not mean that these rabbis read the Torah as philosophers, instead it shows the congruence of thought between the Stoic philosophers and the rabbis. The permeation of Stoic thought and logic within Judaism and the thought of Irenaeus, shows that Stoic thought traveled far. It does not seem improbable that Ephrem also would have been exposed to Stoic ideas regarding mixture.

[106] *HdF* 41.6.

ܠ ܟܝܢ ܡܬܡܙ ܒ ܠܫܠ ܡܝܢ ܕ // ܒ ܠܚܕ ܡܢ ܠ ܟܝܢ ܡܥܪ // ܕܢܬܚܙ ܠܢ ܥܡ ܒܪ ܘܠܡܙܓ ܒܪ ܥܡ ܢ // ܘܠܡܙܓ ܪܘܚ ܥܡ ܢ ܘܢܚܙ ܪ

Looking at Ephrem's theology, which is prior to the Council of Constantinople 381, there is a temptation to find a fully developed trinitarian theology that uses distinct titles and vocabulary. This assumes that there was a technical vocabulary at the same time in the Latin and Greek traditions. The technical vocabulary of Basil and Athanasius was not set until after their deaths. In this way, Ephrem is consistent with the theology of Basil and Athanasius. Neither Basil nor Athanasius had a technical understanding of *hypostasis* over and against *physis*. Ephrem's ambiguity, or lack of clarity, regarding *kyānā* and *qnomā* is similar. The pro-Nicene development did have a regulated vocabulary with regard to nature, person, or substance until after the time of Ephrem's death. Any attempt to establish a consistent theological vocabulary in Ephrem is fraught with the tendency for anachronism.

Ephrem can be faulted for not using consistent terminology in part because he has not left enough theological treatises on the topics of the fourth century. Ephrem's prose works are primarily polemics against heterodox opponents who, while present in the rest of the Greco-Roman and Persian world, were not the driving force of theological debates of the fourth century. Still, Ephrem's theological terminology does not have the same semantic limits that his Greek and Latin counterparts do. The philological aspects of the fourth century debates, while undoubtedly important to Ephrem, were not his focus. Ephrem uses words whose theological, semantic limits were not set in Syriac until after his death.

What Ephrem does articulate is the three persons of the Trinity. He assumes that they are equal in glory and worship and affirms their presence in the sacramental practices of the church. The three are one and the one are three. Ephrem's reliance on

Jewish Christian traditions and on Greek philosophical traditions are the result of his cultural memory and part and parcel to his milieu. Ephrem betrays an awareness of philosophy but does not articulate his theology as a treatise or dialogue. Instead, Ephrem's mode of theology is poetry. Such a mode lends itself to vague expressions, which are made more obscure because of the paucity of Syriac information and sources from the first three centuries. The antinomies found in Ephrem's writings can find their natural resolution in the context of the fourth century.

Conclusion

Ephrem affirms that the Holy Spirit is the undiminished giver. In doing so, he affirms that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. The theology of the undiminished giver was common throughout Christian circles and by the late fourth century was used to affirm the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Ephrem's primary description of God in Trinity is through the image of sun/fire, light, and warmth. While this image is associated with Sabellian and modalist approaches to theology, Ephrem averts these heterodox understandings of the Trinity through his understanding of mixture theory. Because the Father, Son, and Spirit are mingled and mixed together, they are present and active in the life of the individual. Ephrem's theology of the undiminished giver highlights the presence of the Spirit to all people through the image of warmth. Just as the ray of the sun warms all of creation, so too does is the Spirit present to all followers of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have argued that Ephrem implements a high pneumatology in which he affirms that the Holy Spirit is a divine person and distinct member of the Triune God. Ephrem's theology about the Holy Spirit emerges from his Syriac context, is shaped by his reading of the Bible, is exemplified in his use of the natural world to express theological truth, and formed by his specific polemical interactions.

I suggest that Ephrem's pneumatology fits within the trajectory of the pro-Nicene movement, evincing a deep awareness of the theological shifts that took place in the fourth century. Thus, Ephrem's theology of the Holy Spirit maps onto the theological landscape of the fourth century, not as an aberration, but as a distinct voice engaging in the controversies, albeit from his own social context.

I began in chapter 1 with a discussion of the use of Spirit language in the pre-Nicene Syriac theological tradition. The Syriac milieu prior to Ephrem is full of ambiguity, the sources are obscure poems, grand narratives, and homilies from an indeterminate context. Regarding the Spirit in these texts, I noted the emphasis on feminine language for the Spirit, the language of the Spirit's hovering and bird imagery, as well as the liturgical expressions of the Spirit's work. Feminine langauge regarding the Spirit in Syriac prior to Nicaea does not emphasize a gendered God, but instead highlights the transcendant nature of God. Each of these themes show an indebtedness to Jewish pneumatology, but are nevertheless distinct Christian expressions of the Spirit. The relationship between the Christian and Jewish thoughts about the Spirit show a common milieu and common sources for depicitions of the Spirit. Throughout his writings Ephrem exhibits a strong correlation with and connection to these texts, even if

Ephrem does not quote from them. The pre-Nicene Syriac use of Spirit language is an early Christian departure from Jewish pneumatological reflections.

In chapter 2, I argue that Ephrem shows that he participated in the theological controversies of the fourth century by his use of name theology. In Ephrem's thought, names serve the purpose of connecting an idea to reality. The connection to reality is either true or borrowed. If a name is true, then there is insight into the character and essence of the thing named. If a name is borrowed, then the connection to reality is not about the character or essence of the object named, but is instead explaining something in more comprehensible terms. Ephrem applies this theology of names to the Father's relationship to the Son. In so doing Ephrem affirms that the Son is of the same unknowable substance as the Father. By affirming the Son's status as equal with the Father, Ephrem makes a claim against Arian and subordinationist positions that would claim the Son is less than the Father. Ephrem then expands upon this logic and includes the Holy Spirit in the same status as the Father and Son. The Holy Spirit is named with the Father and Son with a true name, Holy Spirit, and so is beyond human understanding and comprehension. In his defense of the Holy Spirit's status Ephrem affirms that the Spirit is beyond human comprehension in the same way that the Father and Son are beyond human understanding. The Spirit is referenced in concert with the Father and Son, in scripture and in the acts of the church like baptism.

By including the Holy Spirit in his theology of names Ephrem runs parallel with Basil's *Contra Eunomium*. Basil taught that names function to elicit ideas and conceptions about the character object referred to. These conceptions allow for contemplation about the nature of the referent to which the name refers. In the case of

God, Basil thought that these conceptions were the barrier to the essence of God. Instead of providing immediate access to God's substance or essence, names provided notions about God's character. These notions (ἔννοια) allow individuals to contemplate and reflect upon who God is. Thus, in arguing against the theology of Eunomius, Basil was able to say that the essence of God is not knowable in the names that have been revealed in the Bible.

In a similar manner, names in Ephrem's theology function as both barriers to the divine essence and as revelation of God's character. As barriers they prohibit an individual from thinking that God is within human capacity to understand. The human person is not able to contain God within his mind. Because of humanity's lack of capacity to understand God, God must cross the chasm of the difference in being in order to communicate with humanity. When names operate as revelation of God's character, names provide the fodder for individuals to contemplate who God is. With such a theology of names, Ephrem's logic works against the logic of Eunomius in a similar fashion to the way that Basil does. Both Basil and Ephrem view names as a limit to what humanity can know about God. And both view this limit as a place for contemplation on the character of God's actions in the world. Ephrem maintains points of contact between Basil in this type of logical move without resorting to the exegetical moves Basil makes. Ephrem was aware of Aetius and shows with his own logic of names a distaste for the way Aetius and Eunomius thought about the names of God.

The fact that Ephrem then includes the Holy Spirit in his name theology affirms that he thought of the Spirit as divine and co-equal with the Father and the Son. Because Ephrem affirms the Holy Spirit's place after focusing on the relationship between the

Father and the Son it is evident that Ephrem reflected on the Spirit's role later in his life. Ephrem's understanding of names relates to Basil's because both authors believe that names are barriers to God's essence, that humanity is incapable of comprehending God's substance, and that names offer a liminal space in which people can contemplate the goodness of God. In this regard Ephrem's theology of the Holy Spirit is closer to that of Basil than Athanasius or other fourth century contemporaries.

In chapter 3, I show how Ephrem continues to exhibit his connection with the pro-Nicene movement in his understanding that the Holy Spirit creates. The argument for the inseparable operations of the Trinity became a centerpiece of pro-Nicene trinitarian theology. The actions of the Father are inseparable from the actions of the Son and the Spirit. The same is true for the actions of the Son and the actions of the Spirit. A key exegetical to articulate this truth was Genesis 1:2b. Theologians likes the Basil viewed the word πνεῦμα (Spirit/wind) as a direct reference to the Holy Spirit. Basil even says that he gleaned this idea from a certain Syrian. It is clear that this exegetical insight does not come from Ephrem the Syrian.

Ephrem's interpretation of the creation account in Genesis claims that the Spirit is not referenced in Gen 1:2b, because the act of creation is not associated with the verse. If the *ruḥā* in Genesis was the Holy Spirit, then there would be creation that follows it. By asserting that the Holy Spirit creates Ephrem affirms that the Holy Spirit does what God alone does. Ephrem's theology of creation ex-nihilo is based on the fact that God creates the world out of nothing. In Ephrem's interpretation of Gen 1:2b the wind over the waters of creation is wind because that wind does not create. The Holy Spirit acts like the Father and the Son in the work of creation.

Ephrem's theology of the Spirit is conditioned by his immediate context, and at the same time, is engaged in issues that relate to the broader fourth century debates about the status of the Son and the Spirit. In his understanding of Genesis 1:2b, Ephrem demonstrates that his immediate social and religious context provides parameters to his exegesis. Despite engaging in the debates of the fourth century, Ephrem's primary polemical opponents were not the Arians. Instead, Ephrem interacted with the followers of Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani and his interactions with these groups shaped his response to theological questions.

Ephrem believed that these groups taught that the natural world was evil and the product of pre-existent matter or beings. In fact, Ephrem believed that within the cosmological myths of these groups that natural elements like water held the same status as God the creator. To add this perception, the ancient Mesopotamian cultic traditions surrounding Tiamat, Bēl, and Nebō, which were active in Edessa during Ephrem's lifetime, discuss the creation of the world in terms of primordial waters of violence and death. Within both Ephrem's polemical context, and his social context the creation of the world used language that spoke about the waters of creation as part of the creative act. I suggest that a second reason that Ephrem does not interpret Holy Spirit in Gen 1:2b is because of this context where Ephrem's polemical opponents and the cultic religions of his time spoke about the waters as a force alongside the creator.

Ephrem affirms that the Holy Spirit has the capacity to create, just like the Father and the Son, he also asserts that the Holy Spirit creates people anew in the sacraments. In chapter 4, I examine how Ephrem thinks about the process of recreation as a purification of individuals through the sacraments. Because only God can purify individuals, the Holy

Spirit, who purifies individuals is God. Ephrem describes the anointing oil as the friend of the Holy Spirit and connects the idea of forgiveness of sin with the action of the Spirit in the anointing. The Spirit marks an individual with the anointing oil and then seals them in the waters of baptism. The oil starts God's ongoing work of sanctification.

Ephrem affirms that baptism is in the three names of Father, Son, and Spirit, and he even suggests a triple immersion. Eunomian baptism practices emphasized a single baptism in the name of the Father, ignoring the names of the Son and the Spirit. Because of this, Eunomius's theology of baptism came under scrutiny from the pro-Nicene movemen. Ephrem affirmation of three names in baptism coincides with the pro-Nicene movement, and serves as a corrective to Eunomian practices.

Ephrem expands upon the baptism typology of Noah's ark by connecting the dove in the Noah narrative to the dove that comes down at Jesus' baptism. While not the only theologian to make this connection, Ephrem's extension of the dove to Jesus baptism continues even to the baptism of all Christians. The baptism is Jesus serves as a typology of Christian baptism and the dove, the Holy Spirit, comes down to dwell in individuals who are baptized. Ephrem's interpretation of Gen 8:8 is similar to both Tertullian and Cyril of Jerusalem. Ephrem uses the typology of Noah to show that God operates as Trinity throughout salvation history and continues to do so in the life of the church. In his exegesis of this text Ephrem shows continuity with Latin and Greek writers from the first five centuries.

Ephrem's theology is entrenched in the experience and liturgical practices of the church. The Son and the Holy Spirit not only work in the sacrament of baptism, but they are both present and active in the Eucharist as well. In the Eucharist the Spirit, mingled in

the bread and wine, acts as the fire of God's presence in the life of the individual. Ephrem understands the Spirit's presence in the sacraments as the power (*ḥaylā*) of God. God's presence purifies the participant in the sacarments like fire. The sacraments are the locus for the work of sanctification and through them the individual is transformed. Because Ephrem associates the Son and the Spirit with the sacraments, Ephrem asserts that both are working, along with the Father in these acts. For Ephrem, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit thus work inseparably in the sacraments.

In chapter 5, I discuss Ephrem's theology of the undiminished giver. In the fourth century the doctrine of the undiminished giver became a common way to argue for the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine is rooted in the philosophy of Plato, the theology of Philo, and continues into the common era through Christian theologians. Ephrem affirms the doctrine of the undiminished giver, and in so doing he asserts that the Holy Spirit is God in the same way that the Father and Son are God. The doctrine of the undiminished giver is found in the theology of Aphrahat, as well as in fourth century Greek and Latin theologians. The doctrine is used to affirm that God is present to all people without suffering any loss in God's existence. The natural extension of this idea is that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers indicates that the Spirit is God. This theological theme, present in the Greek and Latin theological tradition is also present in the Syriac tradition.

In his most prominent trinitarian image, the sun/fire with the corresponding light and heat, Ephrem says that the Spirit is present to everyone like the heat of the sun. This presence is everywhere without diminishing. The image of the sun/fire with light and heat was also used by the heterodox Sabellians who understood the Son and the Spirit as

modes of the Father. Ephrem avoids this heterodox idea through his use of mixture and mingling language. The three persons of the Trinity are mixed and mingled together, they are united and distinct, mingled but separate. Ephrem stresses the unity of the Trinity in a way that is both similar to and different from Stoic understandings of mixture. The unity is always coupled with distinction and so combined establishes Ephrem's theology against any form of modalism.

Throughout his theology of the Holy Spirit Ephrem displays an awareness of the theological movements and themes occurring concurrently with his life. He does this despite a facility with Greek or Latin and so leads one to question how he received these ideas. Ephrem utilizes the sources available to him, the Bible, the natural world, and the life of the church in order to show that the Holy Spirit is God. Ephrem's awareness of the theological controversies occurring in the Greek and Latin churches is not surprising, his engagement with the debates shows a concern for his local context, and a fidelity to the teachings of the church. Nevertheless, Ephrem's unique contributions to pneumatology are found in his lack of theological precision and his focus on imagery.

My dissertation has shown that Ephrem's theology, although distinct from his fourth century contemporaries, maps onto the pro-Nicene trajectory in the Greek and Latin traditions. The Spirit is identified and named alongside the Father and the Son. Because the names for God include the Holy Spirit Ephrem believes that the Spirit is of the same substance as the Father and the Son. Ephrem also affirms the inseparable operations of the Trinity, he asserts that the Son and the Spirit both participate in the work of creation and sanctification. Because Ephrem asserts that Holy Spirit is named in the sacrament of baptism his theology works against Eunomius and the Neo-Arian

agenda. From baptism, people receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Ephrem even asserts that the Holy Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is present to all people without suffering loss. The Holy Spirit is the undiminished presence of God present to all believers. While Ephrem's theology is not often in the same genre as his contemporaries, he offers insights into the controversies and debates of the fourth century. Ephrem's theology of the Spirit shows that the Spirit, as God, works like fire in the lives of individuals to purify them and to bring the presence and life of God.

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