

**Feminine Imagery of the Holy Spirit in the
Hymns of St. Ephrem the Syrian**

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Abstract

Three issues have had the greatest impact on the feminine imagery of the Holy Spirit in the hymns of the theologian Ephrem the Syrian. These are 1) the relations between Ephrem's Church and other contemporary religious groups in fourth-century Edessa, 2) the preference for celibacy in Syriac Christianity, and 3) the linguistic and metaphorical gender of the Holy Spirit.

The teachings of Marcion, Tatian, Bardaisan, Mani, and Arius which could have affected Ephrem's use of feminine imagery for the Holy Spirit are introduced. Images of the Divine Mother in pre-fifth-century Syriac writers are examined to provide the background of Ephrem's feminine imagery of the Holy Spirit. Syriac Christian attitudes to females and sexual relations are reviewed.

Ephrem's feminine imagery includes brides, wives, daughters, mothers, and subjects personified as females in other roles. His willingness to visualise males as females is noticeable. Ephrem's characterisations of biblical women as active, risk-taking, strong, spiritual individuals suggest that he affirmed women even though he was cautious about calling the Holy Spirit 'Mother'. Considering the way Ephrem favourably compares males and females as role models for the church, misogyny does not appear to have been a factor in his relations with women or in his use of feminine imagery.

The ambiguity of the grammatical gender of 'Spirit' and how grammar shapes metaphorical images are discussed. The role that androcentric translation practices have played in defeminising the Spirit and discounting the Divine Feminine is also examined. Ephrem's feminine imagery of the Holy Spirit, of God the 'Father' and of the 'Son' are examined, and the Holy Spirit's place in the Trinity is investigated.

It is concluded that, despite Ephrem's use of feminine, even motherly, images of the Holy Spirit, he never addressed the Spirit as Mother except for polemical purposes. He probably did this to prevent any syncretism between the worship of Atargatis and Christianity as he knew it. Ephrem's desire to align his church with the Greek-speaking church was also a factor in his choice of address for the Holy Spirit.

To the Glory of God

Declaration

I do hereby declare that I carried out the research necessary for this thesis and that I am the sole author. I have given credit to other scholarly endeavours whenever necessary.

Jane E. Richardson

13 November 1990

Prologue

As a twentieth-century Anglican Feminist living in Scotland, I am aware of the almost universal devaluing of women: their faith experiences, work within and outside the home, indeed their very personhood. In such a 'civilised' society as twentieth-century Europe, and such 'Christian' nations as those within the British Isles, why have women been so frequently discounted historically? There are many complex reasons for this problem. The minimisation of women is manifested by the fact that there are well-respected scholars who believe that the problems women seek to remedy in society and the church are imaginary, and thus finding solutions is unnecessary.

Women's participation in the early church was a subject of ridicule and required explanation from those who disagreed. Tatian, a second-century founder of an encratic movement, replied to Celsus's ridicule of Christian evangelisation among women and children¹ thus: 'You say that we talk rubbish at meetings of women and boys and girls, and you jeer at us because we do not go along with you'.² Women are still frequently discounted as is shown by the need for recent books like *Women: Invisible in Church and Theology*, *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, and *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition*.³

In the religious sphere, ambivalence to women expresses itself in hostility to the idea of the Motherhood of God. In Scotland, rejection of the title 'Mother' for God was demonstrated when, having commissioned a study of the subject in 1982,⁴ the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland refused to hear the report (1984). Similarly the exclusion of women and their experiences from the twelfth Lambeth Conference of bishops in the Anglican Communion (1988) motivated the writing of *Mirror to the Church: Reflections on Sexism*, a book by women about women and sexism within Christianity.⁵ Accepting the Motherhood of God goes beyond seeing the Holy Spirit as Mother or as Divine Feminine to recognising the wholeness of each of the Personae in the Trinity and in humanity. In seeking wholeness, the feminine, masculine, and transcendent aspects of God are affirmed, and the church has a fuller vision of God, itself, and society.

Understandings of God, interpretations of Scripture, and structures of the church established by ancient and modern 'Church Fathers' have been instrumental in controlling women throughout Christian history. A key to understanding at least one aspect of the hierarchically structured relationships between the sexes in current British churches lies in the early centuries of church history - specifically the imagery of the Holy Spirit and Her place in the Trinity in the hymns of St. Ephrem, a fourth-century theologian of the Syriac-speaking church in Edessa (modern Urfa, Turkey). Looking at a part of the church which expressed its theology in symbolism, and therefore with a multiplicity of images including feminine ones, enriches traditional views of God. The fact that the early Syriac church regarded the Holy Spirit as a feminine principle of the Trinity balances the Western tendency to consider all three 'Personae' as masculine. Frequently the masculinity of the Trinity is maintained even though most Christians recognise that God has no sex and is beyond gender.

The Mother is the most prevalent image of the the Holy Spirit in Ephrem's writings. Ephrem tends to portray the mother image in terms of parturition, breast-feeding, and midwifery, all of which are sexual images in that sexuality is an integral part of being human. Ephrem's portrayal of the feminine aspect of the Holy Spirit, especially as a Mother, shows how he, a celibate member of an intensely ascetic church, uses what could be called sexual imagery for the Holy Spirit and for other subjects.

I wish to study Ephrem's hymns in order to answer three questions about fourth-century Syriac Christianity: What role did differences in the grammatical gender in the Greek and Syriac languages play in altering the way we image the Holy Spirit? Did Ephrem's relationships with women or his attitude to them deter his portrayal of the Holy Spirit as Mother? Was minimising the motherly role of the Holy Spirit the initial step in Her defeminisation? A study of the feminine imagery of the Holy Spirit in the early church sheds light on the current debate on the Motherhood of God.

Footnotes

¹ Referred to by Robert M. Grant in his discussion of Tatian's response to Celsus, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), p. 114. For Origen's record and refutation of Celsus's derision, see 3. 55-57 in tr. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 165-7.

² 33. 1 in ed. and tr. Molly Whittaker, *Tatian: Oratio Ad Graecos and Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 60-1.

³ Eds. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary Collins, *Women: Invisible in Church and Theology*, Concilium 183 (June 1985); ed. Ann Loades, *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (London: SPCK, 1990); ed. Janet Martin Soskice, *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition* (London: Marshall Pickering, Collins Religious Division, 1990).

⁴ Ed. Alan Lewis, *The Motherhood of God*, The Report of the Woman's Guild/Panel on Doctrine Study Group (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1984).

⁵ Ed. Monica Furlong, *Mirror to the Church: Reflections on Sexism* (London: SPCK, 1988).

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Moral support came first and foremost from my husband, Dr. Jerry Lee Jensen. He has helped me to keep my studies in perspective, reminding me that there is more to life than the thesis! Special thanks are due to our families, the Cursillo Community, and the members of St. Luke's, Wester Hailes, St. Mary's, Dalmahoy, Womensharing and the Movement for Whole Ministry for their encouragement, prayers, interest, and willingness to question.

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A purely verbal analysis of Ephrem's imagery simply can not do justice to his creativity. His poetry calls such vivid images to mind that he could be called a literary artist. So it is appropriate for my text to be accompanied by a few artistic creations. The eight pictures deserve special mention. They are the result of the superb technical assistance given by Carol Ott Spilman of Santa Barbara, California. The artist is a graduate of the University of Southwestern Louisiana (Lafayette, Louisiana) and McNeese State University (Lake Charles, Louisiana). She was awarded a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California in 1989. The interpretations of each picture are mine. They are meant to highlight some aspect of the chapter that the picture precedes. The pictures are open to other interpretations.

The Syriac font also merits a word of thanks. It was originally designed by Conrad Gempf. Jerry, under my direction, modified the font to conform to the style used in the *CSCO* and then adapted it for laser printing. Thanks are also due to the Department of Petroleum Engineering at Heriot-Watt University, especially Mr. Andrew Kidd, for further technical assistance in computing matters.

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My interpretation of each picture follows immediately after the picture. All of the pictures are the work of Carol Ott Spilman.

Abbreviations

See the Bibliography for the complete reference.

Arm.	Armenian
c.	contra
C. Nis.	Carmina Nisibena
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Louvain, 1903-
Dem.	Demonstration (of Aphrahat)
EC	Evangelium Concordans (Diatessaron)
ECQ	Eastern Churches Quarterly, London, 1937-63
ECR	Eastern Churches Review, Oxford, 1967-
H.	Hymn (of Ephrem)
S.	Sermo (of Ephrem)
st.	stanza
Syr.	Syriac



Hovering Dove

Although the dove usually symbolises the Holy Spirit, it has also been used to signify Jesus. The small box in the picture could stand for either a cage or an opening between heaven and earth. There is rarely just one explanation for an image. This picture denotes the various factors which influenced Ephrem's use of feminine imagery and the potential ambiguity in interpreting his images.

Introduction

1. Overview of chapters

The three issues that had the greatest impact on the portrayal of the Holy Spirit as Feminine in the hymns (*madrashé*) of the fourth-century theologian Ephrem the Syrian¹ are the relations between Ephrem's Christian community (the Paluṭians) and contemporary religious groups, the preference for celibacy in Syriac Christianity, and the linguistic and metaphorical gender of the Holy Spirit. They unfortunately cannot be completely separated from one another. Thus beliefs and practices of the different groups and their interrelations affected the role celibacy was given in Syriac Christianity. Similarly the intergroup relations and Syriac Christianity's interest in celibacy contributed to the understanding of the Holy Spirit in the Syriac-speaking church before and after St. Ephrem lived.

The overlap between these three issues requires special consideration in the arrangement of materials in my chapters. Chapters one to three concern different aspects of the general milieu in which Ephrem wrote. Chapters four to seven present Ephrem's portrayal of non-divine characters with an emphasis on his use of feminine imagery. Chapters eight to ten are about the Holy Spirit as Feminine. My conclusions are in chapter eleven.

The general milieu can be divided into three parts: the charismatic religious leaders and their beliefs, literary excerpts on the Divine Feminine prior to Ephrem, and the roles of celibacy and marriage in Syriac Christianity. Chapter one describes the religious context of Edessa in the centuries before and during Ephrem's residence there. Early Christianity and its many forms are of primary interest because Ephrem was accepted as an 'orthodox' Christian after the conflicts of the fifth century. This chapter introduces the beliefs of Marcion, Tatian, Bardaisan, Paluṭ, Mani, and Arius,² and focuses on themes which could have affected the use of feminine imagery for the Holy Spirit in the Syriac churches.

Mother images of deities, particularly the Holy Spirit, in pre-fifth-century Syriac writers are examined in chapter two, except for a few excerpts in chapter three which relate directly to Syriac asceticism. Chapter two provides the background of Ephrem's feminine imagery, although that does not mean that Ephrem actually knew or read the material cited. This chapter helps to ascertain the relation, if any, between Ephrem's feminine imagery and the traditional practice of his church and other religious groups.

The ascetic character of Syriac Christianity is reviewed in chapter three. The writings of Tatian, Aphrahat, and Ephrem are informative of the attitudes to females and sexual relations in the early Syriac churches. However this chapter is not a compendium of the images of women in these writers: the cited passages have a direct bearing on how women and conjugal sex were treated.

Feminine imagery can be divided into those images which portray a mother and those which do not. The mother images can be explicit or implicit. Explicit images are those involving 1) the address 'mother' (Syriac ܡܪܝܡ, 'em), or 2) family relational terms (i.e., daughter), or 3) motherly functions (reproduction, breast-feeding). Implicit images rely on analogical descriptions of animate, but non-human, mothers such as a bird hovering over her young.

Ephrem portrays a wide range of subjects as female. I have classified the non-divine subjects as follows: chapter four - brides, wives, daughters, sisters, and subjects personified as females without being mothers (i.e., priests as midwives); chapter five - personifications of abstract characters as mothers and images of unnamed biblical mothers; chapter six - women Ephrem regarded as role models; and chapter seven - Ephrem's comparisons between males and females as role models and his assessment of humanity with respect to the Incarnation. Occasionally within one stanza, Ephrem compares a human or abstract concept with God in several ways which means it would be a suitable illustration for several chapters; I have placed such passages in the chapter appropriate to the major image of the stanza.

Chapters four and five present Ephrem's willingness to visualise males as female. In chapter six Ephrem's portrayals of biblical women show the range of women Ephrem recommended as role models. His characterisations of biblical women as active, risk-taking, strong, spiritual individuals suggest that he affirmed women even though he was cautious about calling the Holy Spirit 'Mother'. Ephrem's use of males and females as role models for the church in chapter seven indicates that misogyny was not a factor in his relations with women or in his use of feminine imagery.

Having looked at Ephrem's use of feminine imagery for non-divine subjects, chapters eight to ten focus on the Holy Spirit. Chapter eight examines the ambiguity of the grammatical gender of Spirit (*ruah*), ܪܘܚܐ or *ruha*, ܪܘܚܐ) and discusses how grammar shapes metaphorical images. The role that androcentric translation practices have played in defeminising the Spirit is also presented. The traditional personification of wisdom as a female helps to place the practice of using feminine imagery for the Holy Spirit in perspective.

Ephrem's feminine imagery of God the 'Father' and the 'Son' and his metaphorically feminine, masculine and neuter portrayals of the Holy Spirit are dealt with in chapter nine.³ It appears that Ephrem was concerned to distinguish the Holy Spirit from the Syrian Goddess Atargatis in order to maintain what he considered the correct belief of his church regarding the Holy Spirit's role in the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit's place in the Trinity is investigated in chapter ten. Usually Ephrem couples the Spirit with fire or simply names the Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian formula to conclude a hymn. The Holy Spirit is frequently in the shadow of the Father and the Son. Special care is taken to determine whether the perceived femininity of the Holy Spirit was a factor in subordinating Her to the Father and the Son. As a control element, Ephrem's treatment of 'Spirit' is compared with another feminine abstract noun, 'Word' (ܪܘܚܐ, *mellta*), when it stands for a male, the Logos (ὁ λόγος). It is important to determine 'whether and how the transference of

religious structures and thoughts to another linguistic group is affected by the change of linguistic structure involved in the use of a new language'.⁴

In chapter eleven, I conclude that despite Ephrem's use of motherly and other feminine images of the Holy Spirit, he never addressed the Spirit as Mother except for polemical purposes.⁵ He probably did this to prevent any syncretism between the cult of Atargatis and Christianity as he knew it. Ephrem's desire to align his church with the Greek-speaking church was also an element in his choice of address for the Holy Spirit.

2. Terminology and related issues

2.1 Syriac versus Syrian

Although Syriac is the name of a language, sometimes called the Eastern dialect of Aramaic or Christian Aramaic, it may also be used as an adjective to describe speakers of this language outside their original native land and their literature, etc. Syrian encompasses both Syriac speakers and the speakers and writers of Greek in Syria.⁶ Since I will be dealing primarily with the former, Syrian will rarely be used. Thus I use Syriac as an adjective for Syriac speakers and aspects of their lives, i.e., their churches, and so on.

2. 2 Religion, cult, orthodoxy, heresy

I have designated all faith communities as religions to avoid the perjorative label 'cult' and its damaging evaluation. A religion differs from a cult primarily in being considered acceptable by those in power. Similarly 'heresy' and 'orthodoxy' have anachronistically been applied to many forms of Christianity. Throughout I use the adjective 'proto-orthodox', or 'orthodox' in inverted commas to refer to the doctrines and practices accepted as orthodox by the churches in the West after the fifth century. However when a particular group of Christians, i.e., Marcionites or Paluṭians, is meant, this is specified. In the fourth century and earlier, the name 'Christian' was claimed by very diverse groups in the region of Edessa. The ancient

and modern geography is delineated on the map in Appendix A. In Ephrem's lifetime it would have been difficult to determine which of the Christian groups, if any, would prevail over the others.

2. 3 Androgyny, feminism, patriarchy, sexism, androcentrism

For the purposes of this study androgyny, feminism, patriarchy, sexism, and androcentrism are understood as follows. Androgyny means 'both male and female'⁷ as opposed to neither fully male nor female. Distinctions between the sexes, and the contributions each sex makes, are vital to life. Androgyny (inclusion of both sexes) balances the tendency in some men to reject their feminine side and to project that rejection onto women. It also enables women to integrate their masculine side and to utilise their full range of gifts. As females integrate the masculine mode of existence, and males their feminine mode, 'each becomes whole but not the same, alike but not identical'.⁸

The Judeo-Christian deity and the church are androgynous entities.⁹ Although God's masculine character has traditionally been emphasised, Gen. 1: 26-7 says that humans were created male and female in the image of God, which means that God has both aspects. Christ acknowledged His feminine aspect in comparing himself to a mother hen (Mt. 23: 37). The church is androgynous because it consists of women and men each of whom have masculine and feminine components to their make-up. The fact that men are in the church does not prevent it from being regarded primarily as female - the bride of Christ and the mother of the baptised.

Like androgyny, feminism basically concentrates on the inclusivity of humanity. There are two main approaches to the destructive consequences of living in a patriarchal world. The more extreme seeks the ascendancy of women and is a separatist movement with little, or no, inclusion of men. In the religious sphere, some of this group would eliminate all masculine images of God (Father) in favour of the feminine counterpart (Mother, Mother Goddess), while others would consider

patriarchal religion too evil to be redeemed - and therefore hopeless. Mary Daly and Carol Christ are representatives of the separatists. The other group, which could be called Christian reformists, attempts to define humanity inclusively, that is, made up of women and men, and of all social classes and races.¹⁰ The reformists believe that oppression destroys both the oppressed and the oppressors. So Christian reformist feminists are searching for new modes of being, which are neither hierarchical nor based on a false equality drawn from the norm of the dominant, or ruling, group.¹¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza represent this approach.

Feminist studies in religion are important because both the ancient and modern church Fathers' interpretations of God, Scripture, and the church have been instrumental in controlling women. The Bible is effective in maintaining power-structured relationships because it has been used as the basis for the proclamation that women should be subordinate to men. It is considered authoritative by the church, and therefore has hindered legal and social reforms which could improve the lives of women.¹²

In the last century, Elizabeth Cady Stanton postulated women's purpose within a biblically based Christian theology as follows:

Take the snake, the fruit-tree and the woman from the tableau, and we have no fall, no frowning Judge, no Inferno, no everlasting punishment - hence no need of a Savior. Thus the bottom falls out of the whole Christian theology. Here is the reason why in all the Biblical researches and higher criticisms, the scholars never touch the position of women.¹³

Nearly a century later, Daly made similar observations about the church's role in keeping females under male control. She claims that male domination has become entrenched in the church and society for three reasons. The church proclaims that women's subordination to men is the will of God, the church has used male symbolism for God except for occasional mystics or poets, and the church discounts real-life injustices and focuses on spiritual or abstract struggles instead.¹⁴ Therefore

as with the Bible, an androcentric use of theology has been instrumental in controlling women.

For the relationship between the church and women, history (or the lack thereof) is revealing. Here one discovers that information concerning women in the church frequently has been either unpreserved, ignored, or excluded. As feminists (regardless of sex) began to examine early church writings, sufficient material has been found to demonstrate the marginalisation of women and the Divine Feminine in the history of the church. Studies such as Morris's *Against Nature and God* and Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* present a more accurate picture of church history, which has always included women - irrespective of their status within the church.¹⁵ Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk* and Mollenkott's *The Divine Feminine* reclaim the feminine aspect of God.¹⁶

Within church structures, 'patriarchs' are the bishops of the Eastern Orthodox sees of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem and the Western see of Rome. 'Patriarchate' refers to a bishop's geographical jurisdiction and his term of office. 'Patriarchy', a slightly different form of the word, means 'a social organisation marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line'.¹⁷

With the rise of feminism in the nineteenth century, the male-centredness of patriarchy as societal and religious structures has been deemed to be destructive to women and men of all ages and the earth itself.¹⁸ Patriarchal rule, or control, is not simply economic and legal; it extends to all of life: social, historical, educational, anthropological (medical, sexual, psychological, etc.), religious traditions, and even language use.¹⁹ Sometimes men even control conversations by their silence!²⁰ With regard to female-male relationships, male control of societal institutions and language has meant men shape women's perceptions of themselves and other people. For

instance, whether or not women are considered lovable and acceptable to others, to themselves, and, some would say, to God is often controlled by men.

Sexism, a consequence of patriarchy, is an attitude which excludes or discounts females in order to elevate males and to maintain their domination of females. One characteristic of sexist language is use of the 'generic' he/man when other non-sexist options are available.²¹ The very existence of generic pronouns and the effect of language on society have been hotly debated within the field of sociolinguistics.

Gregersen represents one side of the debate. He interprets his data to show that sexist language does not influence individual self-images or interpersonal relationships. In studying cross-cultural curses and verbal abuse, Gregersen introduces the term 'sexual linguistics' for 'topics of sex and gender and their relations to linguistics' and 'dominance and deference as revealed by linguistic behaviour'.²² Although he incorporated information from 103 languages and defined the problem well, his own ambivalence to women (scholars and mothers) is demonstrated in the way he belittles nearly every woman mentioned and gives cause for treating his study with caution. He concludes with the comment 'it strikes me that the original proposal to abolish generic *man* is idiotic in the absence of any evidence that it is truly harmful - and so I worry'.²³ Unfortunately he uses his opinion and little else to refute studies which have drawn conclusions different from his.²⁴ So while he has adequately defined sexual linguistics and amassed abundant linguistic material, he seems to have overlooked or misinterpreted other studies to maintain his own position.

Some of the evidence on the other side of the debate includes Stanley who traced the development of 'generic' pronouns (he, him) from those which had previously referred exclusively to men.²⁵ The shift occurred in the nineteenth century to include women who were becoming educated. The male pronouns and some nouns (man/men, brothers) became generic simply because (male) grammarians began

defining and explaining them as such. It was the most expedient way of including women.

Miller and Swift broaden the scope of 'generic' words to include job titles, compound words, and various other constructions which, while they are claimed to be generic, rarely are. They offer examples to show the generic for what it is - false.²⁶ Spender expands the topic of generic words to male control of language and how it is used to disparage women. The linguist Geoffrey Leech, writing in 1968, classified language into gender categories labelled plus male (for males) and minus male (for females). He typifies the androcentric perspective of some scholars.²⁷

Having used 'generic' pronouns and related nouns for over a century, the wide-ranging effect of the so-called generic pronoun has been studied by various scholars. MacKay and Konishi have demonstrated the damage done to girls' self-esteem by sexist personifications in children's literature.²⁸ MacKay also sees the detrimental effects caused by the 'generic he' on females in the areas of motivation to achieve, perseverance, and level of aspiration; he sees the need for research to determine the effects of the use of prescriptive grammar on the emotions and feelings of both sexes.²⁹ Goldsmith draws attention to the stifling of much needed creativity to stimulate social change which results from the patriarchal control of language.³⁰

On a slightly different topic, Wolfe and Stanley correlate the development of modern linguistics and the search for information about Proto-Indo-European language and society.³¹ The patriarchal nature of Proto-Indo-European society has invariably been assumed by anthropologists, art historians, and historical linguists. Material culture to the contrary has been 'ignored or rationalized as anomalous - borrowings from indigenous non Indo-European languages or separate linguistic developments'.³² Historical linguists have decided that language is more useful in reconstructing a patriarchal culture than archaeological findings are. So archaeological discoveries, like the numerous goddess figures, and linguistic evidence which support a matriarchy have been discounted.

The evidence concerning the potentially harmful impact of sexist language on individuals is more convincing than the other side of the argument. Sexist language offers a means of maintaining male supremacy and female subordination. Sexism and sexist language affect theology and the Christian community by suppressing the feminine aspect of God and by restricting the ministries of women and men to those which fit established, yet stifling patterns.

Androcentrism is almost synonymous with sexism. Like many other words (egocentric, theocentric), it was coined by borrowing from another language a word which was already in use to some extent in English. 'Andro' is from the Greek ἀνῆρ (genitive ἀνδρός) meaning 'man, male' as in polyandry. 'Andro' was prefixed to 'centre' to refer to perspectives and practices which are male-centred. Androcentrism frequently results in using males as the norm of humanity to the exclusion of women.

Awareness of the potential benefits of androgynous and feminist modes of being and the harmful effects of sexism, patriarchy, and androcentrism have informed my study of the feminine imagery of the Holy Spirit in the hymns of Ephrem the Syrian. Most of the research that has been done on women and religion relates to Western Christianity. The conclusions are not necessarily valid for the Syriac-speaking church because it developed at a different pace and in other directions from the Greek-speaking church. The status of women or other powerless persons in the faith community determines whether a church's theology and understanding of interpersonal relationships as expressed in its imagery are destructive. Ephrem's use of feminine imagery is evaluated first in terms of the ancient material which is available on the subject. He usually uses feminine imagery to affirm women and to encourage spiritual growth in his church; but he also uses it to castigate the Jewish community.

2. 4 Gender, sexuality, marriage, celibacy, encratism

Attitudes to sexuality are at the heart of the issues of sexist language and hierarchical political and religious structures. This is because 'from the very beginning, patterns of interaction between the sexes have provided religion with its chief imagery and this in turn has had a profound effect on the way physical men and women have been able to view their respective existences'.³³ The relations of linguistic and metaphorical gender to biological sex have been of major interest because femininity and masculinity are matters of sexuality as much as of gender. 'Because we are embodied, we are sexual. . . . To see, hear, touch, yearn for, think about, speak to, or relate in whatever way to another is an embodied and therefore a sexual act.'³⁴ A fuller understanding of sexuality enables people to express and experience their humanity in ways which encourage community and diminish alienation.

Traditionally Christianity has restricted, or even decried, the sexual nature, especially that of women. The rejection of women because of their sexuality is attested to by the early practice of transvestism and the number of 'male' ascetics who were found to be females at their deaths or at some time during their lives.³⁵ To deny the sexual images in sucking a breast (even if it is Jesus Himself), or Ruth as a hot coal in Boaz's bed, or the Holy Spirit's giving birth is to departmentalise sexuality and spirituality to a damaging degree. For as Kraft remarks 'to repress spirituality fragments the whole person, and to repress sexuality in service of pure spirituality is also a violation of authentic personhood. . . . Spirituality without sexuality dehumanises us. Healthy spirituality incorporates primary sexuality.'³⁶ Examining Ephrem's feminine imagery entails accepting his powerful use of imagery which is sometimes sexual. At this point, I am not suggesting that Ephrem would agree with Kraft's opinion on spirituality and sexuality.

Whereas the Roman Catholic Church teaches that 'the primary purpose of marriage and sexual intercourse is to have children' and cautions against postponing

having children except for 'grave reasons,' many Protestant denominations believe that marriage and sex 'exist as much for marital unity and companionship as for having children'.³⁷ Attitudes to sexual intercourse within marriage have changed significantly over the centuries. But there were similar disagreements as to the value of conjugal relations in antiquity. Celibacy and marital continence in the Syriac-speaking church must be understood in the light of prevailing attitudes to marriage which allowed for sex solely for the purpose of procreation.

Celibacy is a state of living primarily alone or in community with others who are committed to a celibate existence. It can be chosen, for example by joining an order, or involuntary - with the death of one's spouse. Celibates do not (regularly) have genital sex or the support of one particular person, but they are committed to living a life of love to God and others.³⁸ Although monasticism was in its infancy during Ephrem's life, the early experience of celibate living may be similar enough to living in modern orders to support the statement: 'A cloistered monk can encounter culturally defined feminine influences in singing, praying to the Blessed Mother, and to a large degree in his selfless and centered mode of living'.³⁹ Clearly Kraft's assessment is not directly applicable to Ephrem's situation because the adoration of Mary was less developed and his culture would have understood femininity and masculinity in different ways from twentieth-century western society. Interestingly Kraft considers singing to be a 'culturally defined feminine' in modern Western society, yet many churches have traditionally had all male choirs. If the modern correlation between music and femininity could be applied to Ephrem, then his hymn writing could mean he was open to the feminine side of his make-up. At the least, some of Ephrem's feminine imagery may be accounted for by the possibility that he was more receptive to his feminine side than other theologians might have been.

Encratism is outright renunciation of marriage and children. Although it need not be misogynistic, women are likely to be treated as unduly sexual, and therefore,

evil.⁴⁰ Ephrem was not so extreme: he preferred virginity and celibacy, but tolerated marriage and children.

2. 5 Divine appellations and pronouns

On the one hand if we capitalise Father and Son, but not mother or daughter, this implies that post-fifth-century 'orthodoxy' and androcentric modes of thought and experience have priority over others.⁴¹ On the other hand, if we use lower case letters for divine appellations except for proper names, this minimises deities (God the 'Father' or 'Spirit') who do not have specific names.⁴² When discussing a wide range of deities, it would certainly be more convenient not to capitalise divine titles because it is difficult to capitalise consistently. I have decided to capitalise all names of religions (i.e., Zoroastrianism), groups within a given religion (Marcionites), and pronouns which refer to all deities (Gods and Goddesses) and their offspring. I have capitalised the first letter of the divine Spirit and Word to distinguish them from other spirits and words and most other words (Light, Power, etc.), when they are divine attributes. But remembering Ralph Waldo Emerson's adage 'a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds', I have used discretion as the case warranted.

I acknowledge the androgynous nature of God as Ephrem does, in some sense, based on his imagery of each Persona of the Holy Trinity. The traditional titles of Father and Son have been set off with inverted commas when the context warrants calling attention to God's androgyny. Although Ephrem employs a variety of appellations, when he calls God Father, I believe he means a heavenly version of the human father, not a motherly father, or some non-gender specific Divine.

With regard to sexism and theological language, both Ruether and Coakley argue against adopting a Trinity made up of an hierarchically ordered Father, Son, and Mother, i.e., two males and one female.⁴³ Since most women are still subordinate to men in many ways, Ruether and Coakley believe the Spirit would quickly be subordinated to the Father and the Son if She were considered primarily the Mother,

or feminine. While the Spirit's continued marginalisation is a distinct possibility, the argument dismisses the potentially beneficial effect a Trinity of Mother, Son, and Father could have on the church. Moltmann believes that the human community as a whole, made up of distinct individuals and their relationships, is 'the image of the Triune God on earth'.⁴⁴ Most of the deities examined during the course of this analysis seem to have been anthropomorphically male or female. So the corresponding pronouns will be used when a deity's sex is certain (e.g., Mithras).

While acknowledging the validity of the arguments by Stanley, Ruether, etc., I decided to use male pronouns for God the 'Father' and Jesus and the female pronoun for the Holy Spirit because, feminine imagery notwithstanding, Ephrem generally follows that convention. I have accepted Ephrem's practice so that the pronouns in my analysis correspond to those in my Syriac translations. Despite occasional masculine or neuter images, 'She' for the Holy Spirit is more expressive of the nuances in the Semitic milieu from which Christianity came. Since discrepancies between the original texts and their translations have been influential in defeminising the Holy Spirit, matching my translations with Ephrem's texts is vital. Thus when Ephrem does use a masculine form for the Spirit or Word, it is noticeable.

3. Model for analysing Ephrem's imagery

There is a tendency among some scholars to categorise certain images as aberrant, insignificant - or in the field of Religious Studies - as gnostic or heretical, simply because the deity is personified as a female.⁴⁵ An androgynous model is used to focus on Ephrem's imagery of the Holy Spirit because it counters this tendency. As a consequence of employing an androgynous model, all imagery of the Holy Spirit is examined. In this process it became clear that imagery of the Holy Spirit (regardless of metaphorical gender) is generally sparse when compared with the plentiful imagery of the 'Father' and the 'Son'.

4. Texts, translations, and transliterations

To minimise questions of the authenticity of the hymns investigated, this analysis is limited to the volumes edited by Beck in the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (CSCO)*. The texts which Beck regards as authentic are generally accepted by the scholarly community.⁴⁶ Also the *CSCO* is the most readily accessible source of Ephrem's Syriac hymns. All of Ephrem's Syriac writings have been read in order to isolate the passages which refer to the Holy Spirit and to analyse them from a feminist perspective.

English translations of all of the Syriac sources are my own. The *Sermons of our Lord 53 (CSCO 270)* and *H. against Heresies 55 (CSCO 169)* are appearing in English for the first time. Instead of the usual excerpts from *H. Her. 55*, the whole hymn is analysed in detail. Except for place names I transliterated Syriac and Hebrew phonetically even when another spelling might be more common. I have occasionally translated a genitive as an adjective, or an imperfect after a conjunction as an infinitive, in order to render the English more readable. The question of how much of a hymn to cite is problematic. Sometimes the feminine imagery is a small part of a stanza. But the context is important especially with the bridal imagery. So I have erred on the side of citing some irrelevant material rather than risk taking a phrase or line out of context.

Although I am not knowledgeable about Armenian or Coptic, I have found it helpful to refer to several passages from these languages. Reference to the passage in Ephrem's *Commentaire de L'Évangile Concordant, Version Arménienne* reveals Ephrem's comparison of the Holy Spirit to Eve and the translator's rejection of it. I quote Murray's translation of the Armenian commentary on the Diatessaron as it appears in his *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*. His translation agrees with Leloir's Latin translation. Consideration of Mani's hymns was necessary because of the number of polemics Ephrem writes against Mani. For Mani's *Psalm-Book* (preserved in Coptic), I have accepted Allberry's translations. Accents in the Greek passages given in this study have been omitted because it is possible to translate the Greek correctly without them.

Except for Ephrem's works, the full reference will be given the first time an item is referenced and the abbreviation thereafter. Ephrem's hymns will be referred to by the abbreviated title, hymn number, stanza number, and if necessary, the line within the stanza. For example, *H. Virg.* 5. 12. 3. stands for the fifth hymn in the collection entitled (in Beck's edition) *Hymnen de Virginitate*, the twelfth stanza, third line. When two or more nonsequential stanzas are cited from the same hymn, they are separated by a comma, e.g. *C. Nis.* 29. 1, 4.

Ephrem's literary corpus can be classified into four categories: prose, rhythmic prose, verse homilies, and hymns. Ephrem's poetry is entitled in one of three ways: *memre*, *sogyata*, and *madrash*. *Memre* are verse homilies. *Sogyata* are songs or canticles, similar to *madrash*. *Madrash* (singular) and *madrash* (plural) are derived from $\sqrt{\text{.מ.ד.ר.ש.}}$ ($\sqrt{\text{drš}}$) which means 'to expound, preach, search out'. *Madrash* corresponds to the Hebrew *midrash* and also means hymn. Since Ephrem wrote his *madrash* in verse and gave the melody to which they were to be sung, they are usually called hymns. He is most well known for his *madrash*, of which over 400 have been preserved.

In translating poetry there is an inevitable conflict between adequately representing the poetic form and original idioms and presenting the simple meaning of the text. While keeping the stanzaic format, I have translated Ephrem's hymns into prose. Even though Ephrem is most well known for his poetry, I did this as an aid to understanding Ephrem's theology which is sometimes rather complex.

5. Footnotes

- ¹ Ephrem was born in Nisibis in 306, moved to Edessa in 363, and died there in 373.
- ² Marcion was born, perhaps as early as 70, in Sinope, Pontus, went to Rome in 140, was excommunicated in 144, and died in 150. Tatian was born in 'Assyria' (undoubtedly Adiabene), studied in Rome, and returned to his native land after 172. Bardaisan (154-222), of Parthian parentage, was born and lived in Edessa, but took refuge in Armenia for awhile. Paluṭ lived from about the late second to the mid-third century in Edessa and was later considered 'orthodox'. Mani (216-76) was born of Parthian parents into the Jewish Christian Elkesaite community near Seleucia-Ctesiphon in Babylonia. He travelled widely throughout the Ancient Near East. Arius was born in Libya probably before 280, lived in Alexandria and Palestine, and died in 336.
- ³ Ephrem uses so much feminine imagery for non-divine and divine subjects alike, that I have chosen sufficient numbers and types of examples to demonstrate the points of each chapter. But I have not presented every feminine image, nor all the occurrences of ܘܒܒܐ ('*ubba*) when it means 'womb,' nor ܐܠܘܢ (*iled*) when it means 'giving birth'.
- ⁴ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 1. Barr deals with the interchange between Greek and Hebrew with respect to the Bible. But his comment applies equally well to other literature in translation.
- ⁵ See *H. Her.* 55 in chapter 9.
- ⁶ Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 4, n. 1.
- ⁷ Rita M. Gross, 'Androcentrism and Androgyny in the Methodology of History of Religions' in *Beyond Androcentrism: New Essays on Women and Religion*, ed. R. M. Gross (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 13; Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1982), p. x.
- ⁸ William F. Kraft, *Sexual Dimensions of the Celibate* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1979), p. 39.
- ⁹ On the androgyny of God and the church, see Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, 'A Christian Speculation on the Divine Intention for the Man-Woman Relationship' in *Sexual Archetypes, East and West*, ed. Bina Gupta (New York: Paragon House, 1987), p. 118-24. Barnhouse discusses twentieth-century Western churches; but her comments are pertinent to earlier periods too. Therefore in this context Church can mean any branch of Christendom within any period as long as both sexes were allowed to count themselves as Christians.
- ¹⁰ Mary Ann Tolbert, 'Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics' in *The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics*, ed. M. A. Tolbert, *Semeia* 28 (1983), p. 116. Tolbert discusses the separatists and Christian reformists.
- ¹¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), pp. 19-20.
- ¹² Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), p. 11. Fiorenza summarises the reasons Elizabeth Cady Stanton gave for organising the translations and commentaries of *The Woman's Bible*.
- ¹³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 'Letter to the Editor', *The Critic* (1896), cited by Fiorenza, p. 12.
- ¹⁴ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), pp. 19-20.

- 15 Joan Morris, *Against Nature and God: The History of Women with Clerical Ordination and the Jurisdiction of Bishops* (London: Mowbray, 1974); Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*.
- 16 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*; Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).
- 17 'Patriarchy' in *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam, 1971), p. 618.
- 18 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 59-61; Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 63-9.
- 19 Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970) (social); ed. Gross, *Beyond Androcentrism* (historical); ed. Pat Caplan *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* (London: Tavistock, 1987) (educational, anthropological); Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (religious traditions); Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987) (language).
- 20 Jack W. Sattel, 'Men, Inexpressiveness, and Power' in *Language, Gender and Society*, eds. Barrie Thorne, Cheri Kramarae, and Nancy Henley (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1983), pp. 122-3.
- 21 Edward H. Bendix, 'Linguistic Models as Political Symbols: Gender and the Generic "He" in English' in *Language, Sex, and Gender*, eds. Judith Orasanu, Mariam K. Slater, and Leonore Loeb Adler, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 327 (June 25, 1979), p. 35.
- 22 Edgar A. Gregersen, 'Sexual Linguistics' in *Language, Sex, and Gender*, eds. Judith Orasanu, Mariam K. Slater, and Leonore Loeb Adler, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 327 (June 25, 1979), p. 3.
- 23 Gregersen, p.13.
- 24 Gregersen, p. 7.
- 25 This paragraph summarises Julia P. Stanley, 'Sexist Grammar', *College English* 39, no. 7 (March 1978), pp. 800-3.
- 26 Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing for Writers, Editors and Speakers* (London: The Women's Press, 1984). See p. 12 for a classic example of a false generic. The writer, supposedly writing about humanity, changes from the generic to the exclusive man in mid-sentence: 'As for man, he is no different from the rest. His back aches, he ruptures easily, his women have difficulty in childbirth . . .' Casey and Miller point out that 'if *man* and *he* were truly generic, the parallel phrase would have been "he has difficulties in childbirth".'
- 27 Spender, p. 19. Leech's classification is just one of the examples in the section called 'Plus and minus male'.
- 28 Donald G. MacKay and Toshi Konishi, 'Personification and the Pronoun Problem' in *The Voices and Words of Women and Men*, ed. Cheri Kramarae (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980), pp. 149-63.
- 29 Donald G. MacKay, 'Prescriptive Grammar and the Pronoun Problem' in *Language, Gender and Society*, eds. Barrie Thorne, Cheri Kramarae, and Nancy Henley (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1983), p. 47.
- 30 Andrea E. Goldsmith, 'Notes on the Tyranny of Language Usage' in *The Voices and Words of Women and Men*, ed. Cheri Kramarae (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980), pp. 179-83.
- 31 Susan J. Wolfe and Julia Penelope Stanley, 'Linguistic Problems with Patriarchal Reconstructions of Indo-European Culture: A Little More Than Kin, A Little Less Than Kind' in *The Voices and Words of Women and Men*, ed. Cheri Kramarae (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980), pp. 227-37.

32 Wolfe and Stanley, p. 228.

33 Bina Gupta, 'Introduction' in *Sexual Archetypes, East and West*, ed. B. Gupta (New York: Paragon House, 1987), p. 3.

34 Kraft, pp. 23-4.

35 Khalifa Bennasser, 'Gender and Sanctity in Early Byzantine Monasticism: A Study of the Phenomenon of Female Ascetics in Male Monastic Habit with A Translation of the *Life of St. Matrona*' (Ph. D., Rutgers University, New York: 1984), pp ii, 3-14.

36 Kraft, p. 45. In view of Kraft's integration of embodiment and sexuality, this does not mean that genital sex is necessary for one's emotional, spiritual, or physical health.

37 Peter De Jong and William Smit, *Planning Your Family: How to Decide What's Best for You* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1987), p. 70.

38 Kraft, p. 19.

39 Kraft, p. 40.

40 Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church' in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. R. R. Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 150-83.

41 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, p. 20.

42 According to Nicolas Wyatt, 'Near Eastern Echoes of Āryan Tradition' in *Studi E Materiali Di Storia Delle Religioni* 55, No. 13, 1 (1989), pp. 24-5, YHWH may have originally been simply a local deity whose worship was nationalised as a result of King David's royal patronage. Therefore YHWH is not a suitable personal name for the Judeo-Christian God.

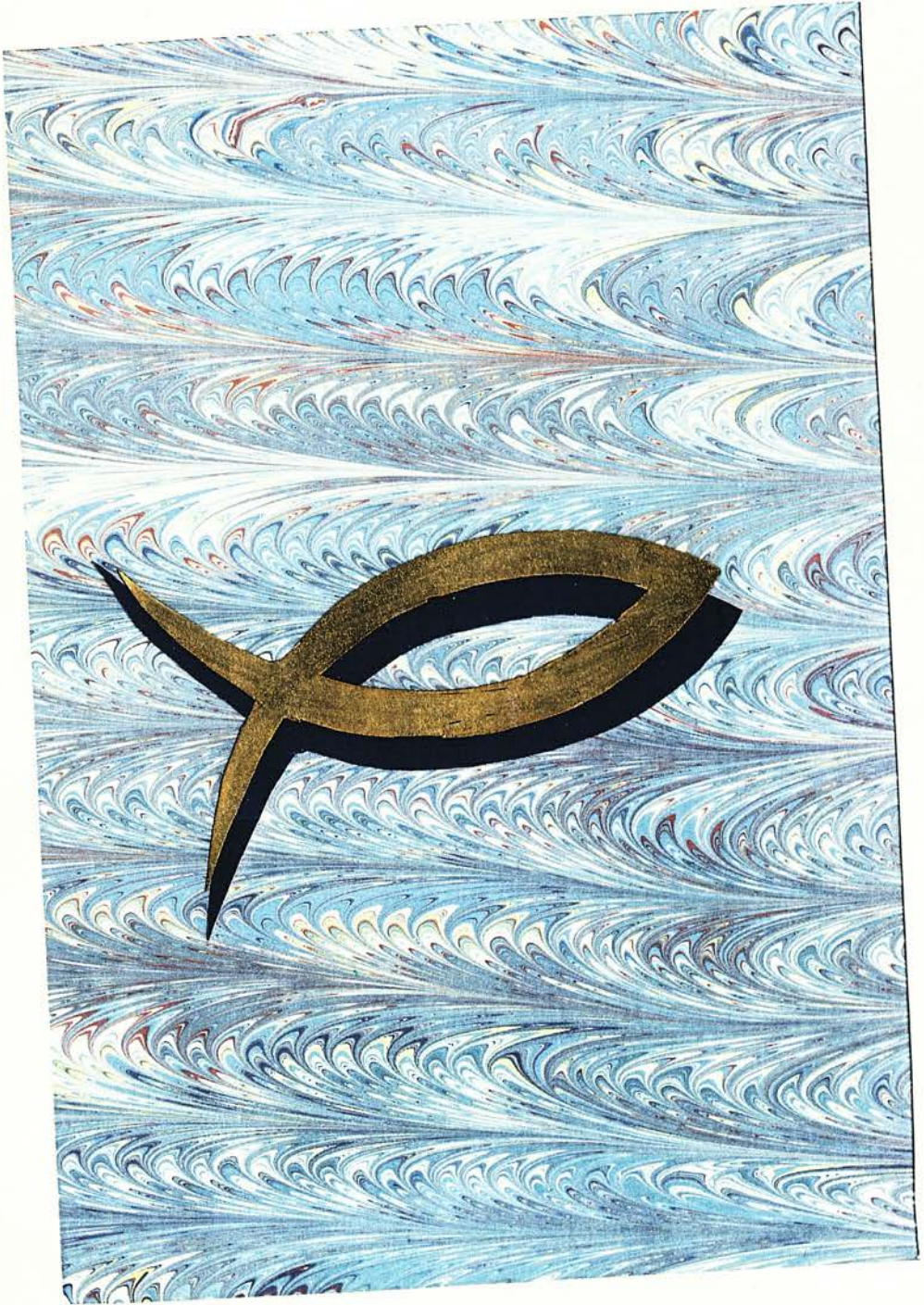
43 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 60-1; Sarah Coakley, "'Femininity" and the Holy Spirit?' in *Mirror to the Church: Reflections on Sexism*, ed. Monica Furlong (London: SPCK, 1988), pp. 131-2.

44 Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Jürgen Moltmann, *Humanity in God* (London: SCM Press, 1984), pp. 98-9.

45 Gross, p. 17.

46 S. P. Brock, 'A Brief Guide to the Main Editions and Translations of the Works of St. Ephrem', *The Harp: A Review of Syriac and Oriental Studies* 3, Nos. 1-2 (June 1990), p. 7; Murray, *Symbols*, p. 1.

Part One:
General Milieu



Fish

Before and early in the Christian era, Ichthys was known as the Son of Atargatis, the Syrian Goddess. Fish were sacred to Her, as the fish pool at Urfa (ancient Edessa) attests. Yet in time, the fish came to symbolise Christ, and ἰχθῦς (*ichthys*), the Greek word for fish, was interpreted as an acrostic to mean 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour'. Ichthys's original identity was forgotten, as was His Mother. As a symbol to introduce chapter one, the fish denotes the syncretism of religious traditions.

Chapter One: Influences on the Christianity of Ephrem

Determining Ephrem's heritage has largely been a distillation of divergent scholarly opinions. The fluidity of Christianity prior to and during the fourth century can not be overstated. This chapter could well have been entitled 'From a melting pot to a boiling pot' from the viewpoints of Edessa and of Ephrem's life.

A melting pot suggests a merging of disparate elements to produce some homogenous meld. Although Mesopotamia had its conflicts, the inhabitants seem to have been open to assimilation. Throughout Mesopotamian history,¹ some elements from each period died out, while others filtered through to later generations.

But a boiling pot may more aptly describe the increasingly volatile situation in which Edessa found itself in the first five centuries of the Christian era. Edessa was in the process of transition from a region which readily assimilated diverse traditions to one of religious conflict. The introduction of various strands of Christianity was responsible for some of the antagonism. In fact, under Rabbula, the fifth-century Bishop of Edessa, the tensions culminated in the destruction of property and the murder of Rabbula's opponents in the doctrinal debates.

Edessa's geographical position on the border between the Roman and Parthian empires meant that Edessa was dominated by the Hellenistic and Persian cultures.² Thus the religious and cultural climates which prevailed at this time near Edessa were quite diverse as will be seen in the doctrines of the early teachers of Christianity. None of the religions remained completely untouched by others.

1. 1 Earliest Syriac Christianity

Just as the environment in which Christianity was appearing was pluralistic, so Christianity itself was characterised by syncretism.³ Syriac Christianity inherited the threefold ritual of exorcism, baptism, and the hope of gaining life through a meal, i.e., the eucharist, from the Sumerian period of ancient Mesopotamia.⁴ Earliest Christianity was so ritually similar to Mithraism with its baptism, sign on the

forehead, and bread offering, that Justin and Tertullian, among others, were intent on showing 'that the proof of sacramental authenticity is not form but doctrine'.⁵ Through Tatian, Bardaisan, and perhaps others, Greek philosophy - mainly Middle Platonism - influenced the theological system of Syrian Christianity, thereby connecting the Syriac-speaking East with the Greek-speaking West.⁶ The Syriac Bible with its Hebrew and Greek parentage also exerted influence over the incipient church. The impact which the Hebrew and Greek Bibles made on Ephrem is discussed in section 1. 3.

Despite the uncertainty as to how Christianity came to Edessa, it is clear that the imperialism of Western Christianity was virtually unknown in the East as demonstrated by the lack of early polemics.⁷ After exposure to Greek rhetoric, Tatian wrote his *Oration Against the Greeks*, the first polemic of Syriac Christianity. Christianity of some form probably came to Edessa from Nisibis, a city between Adiabene and the kingdom of Edessa which is in the region of Osrhoene. It is likely that a missionary named Addai evangelised Adiabene at the end of the first, or early in the second century. In the course of time the church took over Jewish and Manichaean traditions and historical personages to validate its origin.⁸

According to Syriac tradition, Abgar, the incurably ill king of Edessa, sent a letter to Jesus asking for healing.⁹ Jesus wrote back that he would send a disciple to heal the sick and evangelise the region. After Jesus's ascension, the apostle Judas also called Thomas sent Thaddaeus to Edessa. Judas Thomas played a significant role in Syriac Christianity because he was believed to be Jesus's twin brother. While the correspondence with Jesus is as doubtful as his having had a twin, Thaddaeus's role in the account may have been based on Addai, the first missionary to the area.

Jesus and Judas Thomas, the alleged twins in early Syriac Christianity displaced the Heavenly Twins. Thus the Son of the Christian Trinity and his 'twin' took on some of the characteristics of the earlier Twins, such as healing, especially blindness, guarding the Truth, and blessing newly-weds.¹⁰

Social standing and acceptance or rejection of encratism frequently determined which faith a believer chose.¹¹ Before the fifth century Christianity was loosely structured and centered around charismatic leaders such as Marcion, Tatian, Bardaisan, Paluṭ, Mani, and Arius.¹² Marcion, Bardaisan, Mani, and Arius were the subjects of Ephrem's polemics. The teachers and their teachings will be presented in chronological order to give the background against which Ephrem wrote.

1. 2 Teachers who influenced Ephrem

1. 21 Marcion

Marcion was a convert from the Pontic Jewish community.¹³ Polemics against Marcion appear in all branches of Syriac Christianity because he rejected parts of the Bible and interpreted other passages rather differently from those in the proto-Christian church. To make matters worse, the Marcionites ridiculed 'orthodox' Christians by calling them 'Paluṭians'. Marcionite emphasis on baptism as a separation between humanity and the world of the creator-God may have been one reason why the Paluṭians transferred their focus from Jesus's baptism, and consequently the manifestation of the Holy Spirit therein, to his birth. Although the Marcionites considered themselves Christians, Marcion has been regarded as a gnostic.¹⁴ His rite of baptism was liturgically identical to 'orthodox' baptism; so there was a need to distinguish between the two. According to Marcionite belief, redemption actualised Paul's statement from Galatians 3: 28 that there is 'neither male nor female', thereby abolishing sexual distinctions in the redeemed community and supposedly the roles associated with one's sex. However Marcion's theory did not match the practice of his community. As late as the fifth century in Syria, Marcionite deaconesses could exorcise demons, lay hands on the sick, and baptise, but they could not be ordained to the priesthood.

1. 22 Tatian

Tatian returned to Adiabene as a Christian in 172 A. D. Since Adiabene was adjacent to the kingdom of Edessa, this is taken as evidence of Christianity in Edessa by the late second century. However Tatian never used the name 'Christian' or indeed, the title 'Christ' in his few surviving writings. The Christianity of Tatian is a philosophy, an educational discipline (*paideia*). The Assyrian-born Tatian was educated in Greek philosophy and rhetoric in Rome where he became a student of Justin 'the Martyr'.¹⁵ Thus Tatian was familiar with Justin's doctrine of the Logos which 'was based on a doctrine of Sophia developed within Hellenistic Judaism but not taken directly from Philo of Alexandria'.¹⁶ Nevertheless to Tatian, God was the transcendent source of the universe, the Logos was the first born whose purpose was to order creation, and the Spirit present in creation was either material or divine depending on a person's knowledge of God. Unlike his contemporary Bardaisan, Tatian ridicules astrological deities, declaring, 'I refuse to worship his work of creation, brought into being for our sake. It is for us that sun and moon have come into being; then how can I worship my servants?'¹⁷

According to Irenaeus and Jerome, Tatian established encratism. Tatian is most famous for writing the *Diatessaron* which unfortunately has been preserved only in Syriac fragments or translations. Ephrem's commentary on the *Diatessaron* is a major source for Tatian's *Gospel Harmony*. Besides the *Diatessaron*, Tatian is most well known for his *Oratio Ad Graecos*. Although Tatian's credentials as one of Justin's pupils were recognised in Western Christianity, his break with the Greek church and his interest in encratism ensured his rejection by his former church.¹⁸ Despite the use of Tatian's *Diatessaron* in the Syriac-speaking churches, his position in Syriac Christianity is unclear. The place of the *Diatessaron* in the Syriac church can be seen in that Ephrem wrote a commentary on it instead of a polemic. While Klijn considers Tatian to have been a major influence on the Syriac church, Murray and Whittaker note the lack of evidence available for evaluating the matter.¹⁹ There is a

similar divergence of opinion as to whether Tatian's writings were gnostic. Based on the paltry evidence in the *Oratio Ad Graecos*, Grant believed he was a gnostic; Whitaker doubts it.²⁰

Tatian used very little imagery for the Holy Spirit, and apparently no feminine imagery at all. Therefore he does not add directly to the subject of Ephrem's feminine imagery of the Spirit. But Tatian's treatment of females in *Oratio Ad Graecos* has echoes in some of Ephrem's hymns primarily because of the ascetic character of Syriac Christianity.

1. 23 Bardaisan

The second century Edessene philosopher Bardaisan assimilated the cultural influences in Edessa, namely Greek philosophical concepts, Christianity, eastern astrology, and the worship of the Syrian Goddess Atargatis as the Mother of life.²¹ Bardaisan had a following in Edessa as early as 175 A. D.

There is little consensus among scholars about Bardaisan's background, his exact religious persuasion, the meaning of some of his teachings especially his cosmology, or the authenticity of various works ascribed to him.²² Layton considers Bardaisan Christian.²³ Drijvers altered his earlier designation of 'Christian' to 'semi-Christian'.²⁴ Murray comments that Bardaisan was 'an eclectic thinker standing in an uncertain relationship to the Church'.²⁵ Others are not so tolerant. For instance Hölscher refers to him as 'the Gnostic Bardesanes'; Widengren calls Bardaisan a gnostic, even though he acknowledges that his *Dialogue on Fate* 'is without a trace of gnostic thought and little of his writings have been preserved.'²⁶ Segal accepts the opinions of unnamed scholars that Bardaisan's writings have Gnostic philosophical elements in them.²⁷ Rudolph regards Bardaisan 'as the author of an independent system of Eastern Gnosis.'²⁸

Although Bardaisan is one of Ephrem's major opponents, Ephrem seems to have been a reliable source of Bardaisan's doctrines.²⁹ Bardaisan's dualism opposed

God and Darkness (or Matter) and placed the primeval elements Light, Wind, Fire, and Water between them. Only Christ could remedy the situation; His Spirit enabled the soul to ascend to the 'bridal chamber'.³⁰ Ephrem strongly opposed Bardaisan's planetary worship, the sexual character of the worship of the Star (Venus), the alleged sexual relationship between the Mother and the Father, and his denial of bodily resurrection.³¹ Despite all of Ephrem's efforts to refute Bardaisan's teachings, Bardaisanism was still popular in Edessa as late as the fifth century.

1. 24 Paluṭ and Proto-Christianity

Paluṭ is the first leader of the Syriac church to have a Greek name.³² This is important because it suggests a shift in the Proto-Christian church from being essentially semitic in character to being more in tune with the interests of the Greek church. The westward orientation is demonstrated by the fact that Paluṭ gradually replaced Addai's immediate successor, Aggai, in the list of the early leaders of the Syriac church. Whereas Aggai may have depended too much on the East to be acceptable to the Greek church, such would not have been the case with Paluṭ, if his Greek name does in fact correspond to his actual predisposition. With respect to the growing East-West conflict, Paluṭ is notable for accepting the authority of the Antiochene church. He was ordained to the priesthood in Antioch between 180 and 221 A. D. by Serapion, the bishop of Antioch.³³ Little else is known about him.

1. 25 Mani

Mani was brought up in the Jewish-Christian Elkesaite community in Southern Mesopotamia. They believed in a masculine principle (Jesus) and a feminine principle (the Holy Spirit).³⁴ When Mani was young and again at the age of twenty-four,³⁵ he received a revelation from an angel. The descent of the Heavenly Twin (the Holy Spirit) signaled Mani's prophetic role.

Mani founded a dualistic religion in which Spirit, Light, Good, or Truth opposed Matter, Darkness, Evil, or Lie. By blending elements of the Christian,

Buddhist, and Iranian environments in which Manichaeism spread, Mani developed a religion which could be readily adapted to various audiences.³⁶ Despite their disparagement by other Christians, Mani's followers called themselves Christians. In the Manichaean understanding baptism was always followed by the eucharist because baptism was thought to liberate the individual from sin and so from illness. Holy unction was considered equally beneficial.³⁷

The Manichaean religious organisation consisted of the hearers who did not observe the three strict rules of behaviour, but accepted the guilt associated with working and delayed salvation in order to support the elect. The righteous or elect (the observant ones) were required to observe purity of the five senses, thought, and word, to avoid any action which could harm plant or animal life, and to practice total sexual abstinence, including renunciation of marriage. Within the elect, there were 12 apostles or 'teachers', 72 bishops or deacons, 360 'elders' or presbyters.³⁸ Most of the observant were in the lowest order, called simply 'elect'. Although women could achieve the rank of the elect, they were not allowed to proceed to higher office.

Manichaeism was brought from Mesopotamia to Syria and Palestine by a soldier in 274. Mani's *Psalm Book* may have been translated from Syriac into Coptic in the mid-fourth century.³⁹ The change in grammatical gender of the word 'Spirit' from feminine in Syriac to masculine in Coptic⁴⁰ contributes to the idea of the Holy Spirit as masculine.

1. 26 Arius

Isolating Arius's theological beliefs and his biographical details is fraught with difficulty because few texts have been preserved which give his own words. Most of the information about Arius comes from unreliable ecclesiastic opponents such as Athanasius.⁴¹ Williams describes the situation within Christianity thus:

The crisis of the fourth century was the most dramatic internal struggle the Christian Church had so far experienced; it generated the first credal statement to claim universal, unconditional assent, and it became

inextricably entangled with issues concerning the authority of political rulers in the affairs of the Church.⁴²

For some time before the Nicene Council credal statements were being circulated in the hope of finding one which could be accepted by a consensus of bishops. Acceptance of a statement was frequently based on the presence or absence of the term *homoousios* and other such expressions. There is evidence suggesting some bishops were at least as interested in having a creed which the Arians would reject as they were in the actual content. It is clear that 'Arians' did not consider themselves to be a distinct church. Instead they and others who also rejected Nicea believed they were mainstream Christians. To them Athanasius and his group were on the fringe of Christianity.

Arius did not found a sect. His main conflict with the church was over authority. Believing himself to be a properly qualified teacher, he relied on his own authority instead of yielding to the church. Arius typified Alexandrian teachings by 'his apophaticism, his interest in the mechanics of mediation between the eternal and the contingent, even his echoes of Judaic angelology and . . . in his use of the vocabulary of esoteric illumination, inspired *gnōsis* and charismatic teaching authority'.⁴³ Arianism was strongly supported in the fourth century mainly by the Eastern churches.

Although the nouns 'disputers, searchers, and investigators', could apply to various groups, they are the terms Ephrem most often uses to refer to the Arians.⁴⁴ Because of the number of hymns Ephrem wrote against the Arians, it seems that his primary concern was 'safeguarding the ineffable mystery of God's Being against Greek thinking as represented by contemporary Arianism - *adversus scrutatores!*'⁴⁵ Arius's influence on Ephrem may well be twofold. Arius gained such wide support in the Syrian churches that the proto-orthodox had to struggle to survive. Also Arius and his supporters played major roles in the christological controversy which was raging within the church during Ephrem's formative years. Ephrem would have been about twenty-two years old when the Council of Nicea was convened. However

Arius's belief in the Holy Spirit is similar to the Nicene Fathers: that the Spirit is the third of an hierarchically ordered Godhead. Since Arius did not portray the Holy Spirit as feminine, at least not in the few surviving authentic texts, neither he nor other 'Arians' had a direct impact on Ephrem's characterisation of the Holy Spirit as Mother in particular, nor on Ephrem's use of feminine imagery in general.

1. 3 Ephrem's writings and theological approach

Although biographical data for the early period is scant and contradictory, Ephrem seems to have been born in Nisibis in 306 where he wrote some of his work until the area was ceded to the Persians in 363. Then he moved to Edessa, the centre of northern Mesopotamia, where he ministered as a deacon and wrote copiously until his death in 373.⁴⁶

Since Bel, the Babylonian Lord of the planets, stars, and fertility, Nebo, the God of wisdom and human fate who was usually considered Bel's Son, Hadad, the Aramean Lord of the heavens, and Sams, the Sun God of the Arab desert tribes, were all male, they could have been confused with God the Father. But that does not seem to be of interest to Ephrem. Instead of discarding the images of these Gods and replacing them with different images of God the Father, their attributes seem to have been given to God in His role as creator of the universe. Ephrem's lack of concern about confusing God the Father with Sams the Sun God is demonstrated in *H. Faith* 73 where he uses the symbol of Sams, the sun, as a symbol for God the Father, the sun's ray for Jesus, and its warmth for the Holy Spirit.

Of the many religions which were practised in Edessa before Ephrem's time, the worship of Atargatis seems to be the one he reacted against most vigorously. Confusion between the Goddess of Syria-Palestine and the Holy Spirit was something that had to be combatted. Atargatis combined the attributes of Ashtart, Anat, Asherah, and Cybele, the Great Mother of Asia Minor; thus she was believed to control most aspects of life, especially fertility, war, and the sea. She was also regarded as the

Mother of the pantheon and is symbolised by the fish and sacred pools of water.⁴⁷ Ephrem particularly wanted to negate Bardaisan's influence because of the role Mesopotamian religions, especially worship of the Syrian Goddess, played in Bardaisanian Christianity. Perhaps as a result of Bardaisan's teachings on the Holy Spirit as the Mother of life, Ephrem himself never addresses the Spirit as Mother. Although Ephrem polemicised against others, he especially disliked Bardaisan as is evident in *C. Nis.* 46. 8. 4-6 where he remarked in the context of baptism:

ܘܚܘܪܐ ܕܘܢܐ ܕܡܢܝܢ ܕܡܪܥܘܢ ܕܡܪܥܘܢ
ܕܡܪܥܘܢ ܕܡܪܥܘܢ ܕܡܪܥܘܢ ܕܡܪܥܘܢ
ܕܡܪܥܘܢ ܕܡܪܥܘܢ ܕܡܪܥܘܢ ܕܡܪܥܘܢ⁴⁸

How hateful indeed are Mani, Marcion, and the blind Bardaisan who read, but do not see, that the whole human image will be restored in the resurrection.

Ephrem hated all three teachers, but only Bardaisan was called blind.

Whereas Western theological traditions are usually based on Greek philosophical and analytical methods, especially definitions, Syriac theology is expressed in symbolism.⁴⁹ By Ephrem's time there had been sufficient interchange between Greek and Semitic cultures, that neither a Greek nor a Syriac writer could have been totally isolated from outside influences. In fact Ephrem's writings reflect ancient Mesopotamian, Jewish, and Greek traditions.⁵⁰ Although Ephrem categorically rejected some Mesopotamian forms and particularly their religious concepts, he nevertheless used Mesopotamian literary forms such as the precedence dispute. The verbal battles Ephrem places in the 'mouths' of Marriage and Virginity or Death and Satan typify the precedence dispute which is a debate between two beings usually personifications of abstract ideas. As well Ephrem's wealth of poetic titles for Jesus is similar to ancient Sumerian and Accadian responsorial forms.⁵¹ So Ephrem opposed Mesopotamian religion as his polemics against the Bardaisanites demonstrate,⁵² but not its culture per se.

The faith, as Ephrem knew it, originated in an entirely Jewish type of Christianity.⁵³ The Old Testament and non-biblical Jewish traditions found in the Targumim⁵⁴ and the Midrashim⁵⁵ were the major Jewish influences on Ephrem. Occasionally Ephrem uses a midrashic style of interpreting parts of the Bible which suggests a marked understanding of the character of midrash. Ephrem's use of ܟܡܐ (*kma*), the Syriac version of the rabbinic *qal v-homer* (קל וחומר) argument, is further evidence of Jewish influence.⁵⁶

Two characteristics of the Hebrew Bible have been most significant. On the one hand the Bible occasionally applies feminine imagery to God such as the images of a midwife or a mother bird. On the other the Bible is a product of a patriarchal society, and as such, male oriented. It is difficult to determine what impact biblical sexism had on Ephrem in terms of his own culture and time. In spite of Ephrem's frequent use of feminine imagery and his sensitivity to women,⁵⁷ his writings sometimes seem biased toward males because the Bible is the major source of Ephrem's inspiration and quotations. Although the Syriac New Testament was translated from the Greek, these comments on feminine imagery of God and Biblical sexism in the Old Testament apply equally well to the New Testament.

Greek influence is grammatically evident in Ephrem's writings in two ways. Greek had become so commonplace that a number of loanwords appear in the Syriac New Testament.⁵⁸ Ephrem then uses Greek words,⁵⁹ some of which might have come from his New Testament or other such sources. Use of loanwords does not imply that Ephrem knew Greek.

Words which are grammatically neuter in Greek were usually treated as masculine in Syriac.⁶⁰ Therefore the fact that πνεῦμα (spirit, wind) is neuter in Greek may originally have been a factor in changing the grammatical gender of spirit from feminine to masculine in Syriac. The tendency to associate masculine parts of speech with the feminine Syriac noun *ruah*, *ruha* (ܪܘܚܐ, ܪܘܚܐ, spirit) is noticeable.

However, the translators, and later writers, changed the gender of spirit for dogmatic rather than grammatical reasons.

Ephrem's writings exhibit familiarity with various Greek elements.⁶¹ His ability to confront Greek philosophical concepts is especially apparent in the *Prose Refutations*.⁶² The Greek influence is not limited to Ephrem's polemics. For instance, *H. Virg.* 51 demonstrates the Middle Platonic understanding of light as God's presence and the philosophical concept that God reveals Himself according to a person's spiritual level.⁶³ *H. Virg.* 52 contains 'the Middle and Neo-Platonic and anti-Manichaeian themes of light and darkness as symbols of Christ and of Satan and death, respectively'.⁶⁴ The light and the eye are two themes which - though originally Platonic - are common in Ephrem's hymns, for example in *H. Nat.* 4. 106.⁶⁵ Ephrem's use of music imagery suggests Orphic origin: *H. Nat.* 3. 7 among others refers to the playing of a lyre.⁶⁶

Ephrem mixes linguistic, Biblical, natural, and sacramental symbols⁶⁷ as is evident in *H. Virg.* 5. 16.

ܐܘܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܐܘܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
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For oil became the key of the hidden treasury of symbols. It propounds for us likenesses of God who became human. All of creation gave Him all of the symbols which were hidden in it. The scriptures also gave their parallels, and they were explained through Him. And the writings [gave] all their types and the Law also its shades. The olive tree took off the beauty of the symbols upon it and gave [the beauty] to the Anointed One.

Ephrem's calling Jesus 'Anointed One' (ܐܘܝܠܐ, *mšīḥa*) in a hymn about the charism of unction (ܐܘܝܠܐ, *mešḥa*) demonstrates his use of linguistic symbols. His use of three different terms (*sefre*, *katbeh*, *namusah*) for the Bible⁶⁹ indicates the symbolic value the Bible held for him. The olive tree is a natural symbol. The oil is

sacramentally symbolic of anointing the sick even though this may not have yet been recognised as a 'Sacrament of the church'.

The most common images in Ephrem's writings are of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as fire, clothing (especially Jesus's 'putting on a body'), conception and giving birth, the eye, light, and the mirror. However he is such a creative and prolific writer, there are many others. Brock has described Ephrem's imagery in detail so there is no need to be exhaustive here.⁷⁰

Basing his views on the Bible and human experience, Ephrem expresses his theology in paradox and symbol, instead of by the definitions common to Greek philosophic traditions. Ephrem considers definitions to be blasphemous because they limit the Ineffable One. He believes the absolute initiative of God is revealed by the types and symbols in nature and the Bible, the 'names' or metaphors of God in the Bible, and the Incarnation. He moves quite freely between the collective and the individual and from historical to sacred time.⁷¹ While it seems that Ephrem knew little, if any, Greek, he nevertheless was conscious of theological issues discussed in the surrounding Greek-speaking church.

Although Ephrem polemicised against the teachings of Bardaisan, Marcion, Mani, Arius, and others who came under the labels 'investigators, disputers', the fact that Bardaisan mixed Christianity with the worship of the Syrian Goddess presented Ephrem with a dilemma. Like other Christians Ephrem based his faith on a Bible which sometimes uses feminine imagery for the Spirit of God, and the Syriac words for spirit were treated grammatically as feminine until the fifth century.⁷² Ephrem came up with an interesting compromise between his religious heritage which freely imagined the Spirit as a feminine principle and confusion with Atargatis: while he continued to use primarily feminine grammatical constructions and feminine imagery to describe the Holy Spirit, only once in his vast literary corpus does he address the Spirit as 'Mother' and then it is for polemical purposes.

1. 4 Summary

By Ephrem's time the Edessene church was becoming grounded in the Greek church. Although Christianity had spread sufficiently in the regions of Adiabene and Edessa that by the early fourth century it was beginning to rival other faiths, Ephrem's numerous polemics and his complaint against the Marcionites' calling his group Paluḡians demonstrate that his church was not yet dominant.⁷³

Since Ephrem was an outstanding witness to the conflict between what came to be known as orthodoxy and heresy after the fifth century, his socio-religious context reveals why he rejected addressing the Holy Spirit as 'Mother', a practice which was acceptable, if uncommon, in the early history of his church.



1. 5 Footnotes

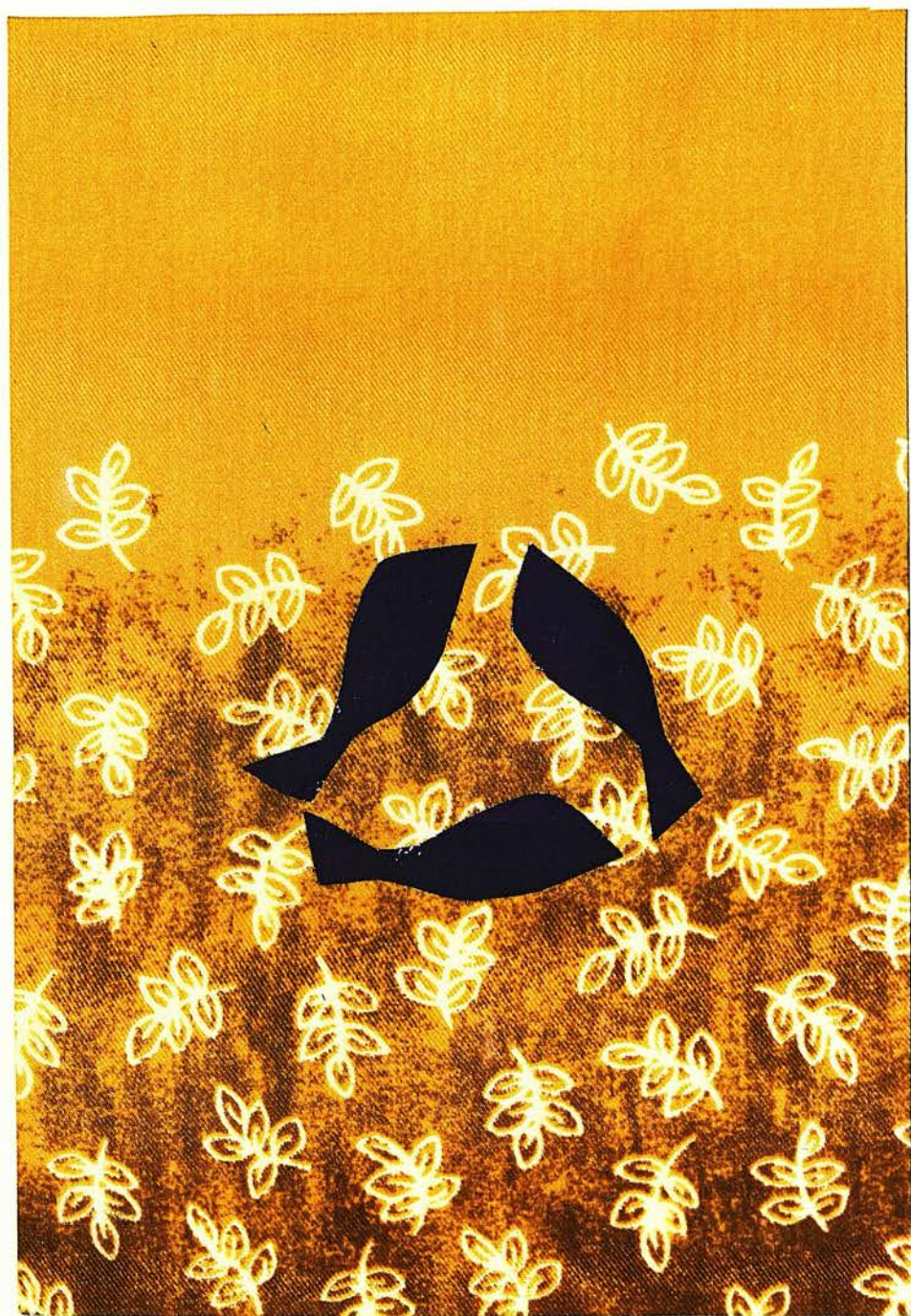
- ¹ Ed. James Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. viii. Mesopotamian history is divided into Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian periods and subdivisions thereof.
- ² Hans W. J. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), pp. 16-17.
- ³ Hans W. J. Drijvers, 'Persistence of Pagan Cults and Practices in Christian Syria' in *East of Antioch* (London: Variorum reprints, 1984), p. 38.
- ⁴ Geo Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism*, tr. Charles Kessler (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965), pp. 14-15.
- ⁵ R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Marcion: On the Restitution of Christianity* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984), p. 21.
- ⁶ Hans W. J. Drijvers, 'Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity' in *East of Antioch* (London: Variorum reprints, 1984), p. 174.
- ⁷ A. F. J. Klijn, *Edessa: die Stadt des Apostels Thomas* (Neukirchen: 1965), p. 95.
- ⁸ Hans W. J. Drijvers, 'East of Antioch: Forces and Structures in the Development of Early Syriac Theology' in *East of Antioch* (London: Variorum reprints, 1984), p. 18; J. B. Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 66, 69; Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 8-9.
- ⁹ Segal, pp. 62-7, and Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 4-5, to name just two sources of further information. The tradition was disseminated throughout Christendom by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* which was completed c. 324-5 A. D.
- ¹⁰ James Rendel Harris, *The Cult of the Heavenly Twins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), pp. 50, 105; James Rendel Harris, *The Dioscuri in the Christian Legends* (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1903), pp. 20-41 (p. 23 for the blessing of newlyweds).
- ¹¹ Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, pp. 127, 216.
- ¹² Hoffmann, p. 18; Grant, *Greek Apologists*, pp. 124, 185 (Tatian); Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, pp. 2, 12, 221; Segal, pp. 79-81 (Palut); Widengren, p. 120 (Mani); Rowan Williams, *Arius Heresy and Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987), pp. 31-2.
- ¹³ Hoffmann, pp. 17, 22, 29. This section is taken from Hoffmann unless otherwise specified.
- ¹⁴ Murray, *Symbols*, p. 74.
- ¹⁵ Whittaker, pp. ix-x, xv-xvii. This section is taken from Whittaker unless noted.
- ¹⁶ Grant, *Greek Apologists*, p. 61.
- ¹⁷ Whittaker, p. 9.
- ¹⁸ Klijn, *Edessa*, p. 94.
- ¹⁹ Klijn, *Edessa*, p. 94; Murray, *Symbols*, p. 7; Whittaker, p. x.
- ²⁰ Robert M. Grant, 'The Heresy of Tatian', *Journal of Theological Studies*, N. S. 5 (1954), pp. 62-8; Whittaker, p. xvii.
- ²¹ Klijn, *Edessa*, p. 84; Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, pp. 42, 193-4.
- ²² Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, pp. 1-59, surveys the scholarship on Bardaisan, dividing it into two periods: 1897-1932 and 1932-1966 (the book's publication).
- ²³ Bentley Layton, 'The School of Thomas' in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (London: SCM Press, 1987), p. 364.
- ²⁴ Drijvers, *Bardaisan* (1966), p. 26; *Cults and Beliefs* (1980), p. 180.
- ²⁵ Murray, *Symbols*, p. 155, n. 2.

- 26 Gustav Hölscher, *Syrische Verskunst, Leipziger Semitistische Studien 5* (Leipzig 1932), p. 1; Widengren, pp. 11-12.
- 27 Segal, p. 44.
- 28 Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1983), p. 329.
- 29 Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, p. 11; *Cults and Beliefs*, p. 36.
- 30 Rudolph, p. 328.
- 31 Eds. C. W. Mitchell, A. A. Bevan, and F. C. Burkitt, *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan 2* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1921), p. cxxix; Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, pp. 157-8.
- 32 See Segal, p. 81, for this section unless otherwise specified.
- 33 A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas, Nov. Test. Suppl. 5* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), p. 30; Murray, *Symbols*, p. 341, refers to Palu's 'consecration' in Antioch c. 200 A. D.
- 34 Murray, *Symbols*, p. 8. For more information on Mani, see Samuel C. N. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).
- 35 For Mani's revelations, see trs. Ron Cameron and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Cologne Mani Codex: 'Concerning the origin of his Body'* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 15-16, 57. According to Widengren, p. 26, the earlier revelation, when Mani was twelve years old (c. 228 A. D.), is recorded in an Arabic text, *The Fihrist*, which calls the angel *al-Taum*. This is obviously a translation of the Syriac word *tauma*, 'twin,' and corresponds to the Coptic *sais* in the Egyptian Manichaean records. Rudolph, p. 329, also refers to Mani's early and later revelations.
- 36 Rudolph, p. 335; Widengren, p. 43; ed. Tim Dowley, *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Carmel, New York: Guideposts, 1977), p. 48.
- 37 Widengren, p. 14.
- 38 Rudolph, p. 340.
- 39 Ed. C. R. C. Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book 2* (Stuttgart, 1938), pp. xix - xx
- 40 C. C. Walters, *An Elementary Coptic Grammar of the Sahidic Dialect* (Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, 1972), p. 22.
- 41 Williams, pp. 56-69, 82, 90-8, 110, 165-6. The material in this section comes from the pages listed except for the quotations which are footnoted individually.
- 42 Williams, p. 1.
- 43 Williams, p. 156.
- 44 Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 14-20. André De Halleux, 'Mar Éphrem: Théologien', *Parole de L'Orient* 4, Nos. 1-2 (1973), pp. 42-5. See *H. Virg.* 52. 6 for Ephrem's use of the names.
- 45 T. Jansma, 'Narsai and Ephraem: Some Observations on Narsai's Homilies on Creation and Ephraem's Hymns on Faith', *Parole de L'Orient* 1 (1970), p. 59.
- 46 Arthur Vööbus, *The History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient, 2, CSCO 197*, subs. 17 (Louvain: 1960), pp. 84-91. Vööbus says Ephrem was a deacon in Nisibis. Murray, *Symbols*, p. 30, agrees. Kathleen E. McVey, *Ephrem The Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), pp. 8, 28. McVey believes Ephrem did not act as a deacon until he was in Edessa.
- 47 For Atargatis's identity, see ed. and tr. R. A. Oden Jr., *Studies in Lucian's De Syria Dea* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 66, or Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, pp. 76-121. McVey, p. 24, remarks that in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Atargatis 'acquired the characteristics of Cybele, the Great Mother of Asia Minor'.

- 48 *CSCO* 240, p. 55.
- 49 Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (Rome: C. I. I. S., 1985), pp. 2, 118.
- 50 Brock, *Luminous Eye*, pp. 6-8, 117.
- 51 Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 28, 338-39.
- 52 The most obvious example is *H. Her.* 55 which is analysed in chapter 9.
- 53 Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 7-8.
- 54 'Targum', *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 15 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), p. 811. In rabbinic literature, the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible and parts thereof.
- 55 'Midrash', *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 11 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), p. 1507. Rabbinic literary collections of biblical interpretations especially of the non-legal parts of the Hebrew Bible.
- 56 McVey, p. 191. Hermann L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Atheneum, New York: Temple Book, 1983), p. 94, *qal v-ḥomer*, literally 'light to heavy', is an 'inference a minori ad maius, from the light (less important) to the heavy (more important) and vice versa'.
- 57 Sebastian Brock, 'The Holy Spirit as Feminine in Early Syriac Literature' in *After Eve: Women, Theology, and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice (London: Marshall Pickering, Collins Religious Division, 1990), p. 83, comments 'Ephrem happens to be a writer who is particularly fond of female imagery (even though he perhaps deliberately avoids any overt description of the Spirit as mother).'
- 58 Sebastian Brock, 'Greek Words in the Syriac Gospels (VET and PE)', *Le Museon* 80, Nos. 1-2, (1967), pp. 389-426.
- 59 See for example, *CSCO* 198, pp. 139-40. At the end of each volume, Beck lists the loanwords Ephrem used therein.
- 60 Theodor Nöldeke, *A Compendious Syriac Grammar*, tr. James A. Crichton (London: 1904), p. 60, ¶ 88.
- 61 For just a few examples, see the volumes edited by Edmund Beck, *Ephrāms Polemik gegen Mani und die Manichaer*, *CSCO* 391, Subs. 55 (1978), pp. 7-10, 33-9; *Ephrāms der Syrers: Psychologie und Erkenntnislehre*, *CSCO* 419, Subs. 58 (1980), pp. 1f; *Die Theologie des Hl. Ephraem in seinen Hymnen über den Glauben*, *Studia Anselmiana* 21 (1949), pp. 63-5. See also Tryggve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian* (Lund, Sweden: 1978), p. 26.
- 62 Eds. Mitchell, Bevan, and Burkitt, 2 vols. (1912, 1921). Vol. 2, pp. i-xxii (English), 1-50 (Syriac), "Against Bardaisan's 'Domnus'", is remarkable for its Platonic and Stoic influence.
- 63 McVey, p. 461.
- 64 McVey, p. 465.
- 65 On the light and the eye as Platonic themes, see *CSCO* 155, p. 193, n. 2.
- 66 McVey, p. 84, n. 115. A lyre (ܟܢܘܪܐ, *kenora*) 'was associated by Greek pagans with Orpheus, by Jews with David, and by Christians with both David and Jesus'.
- 67 McVey, p. 40, mentions Ephrem's use of the four kinds of symbols in general.
- 68 *CSCO* 223, pp. 20-1.
- 69 McVey, p. 286, n. 83, believes that Ephrem probably means each rabbinic division of Scripture as a reference to the whole Bible.
- 70 Brock, *Luminous Eye*, pp. 12-26, 132-3.
- 71 Georges Saber, 'La Typologie Sacramentaire et Baptismale de Saint Ephrem', *Parole de L'Orient* 4, Nos. 1-2 (1973), pp. 73-4.

⁷² Brock, 'The Holy Spirit as Feminine', pp. 74-5. During the fourth and fifth centuries the Holy Spirit gradually became grammatically masculine while other spirits remained feminine.

⁷³ *H. Her.* 22. 5. 1-7, *CSCO* 169, p. 79, where Ephrem complains 'Lo, everything slips out [ܘܠܗܐ, *plī*] of their hands and there is nothing to hold on to. They even call us Paluṭians, but we reject [ܘܠܗܐ, *plī*] them and cast [the name] away. Let a curse be on him who is called by Paluṭ's name instead of by the Messiah's name.' Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 341-42, believes the 'orthodox' were 'the strongest party in Roman Syria' by the time of Ephrem's death.



Trinity of Fish

Just as a fish can be used to symbolise Atargatis and Her Son and the Son of Christianity, there can be many different Trinities. For instance, depending on one's religious perspective, the Holy Trinity could mean the Virgin-Mother-Crone, the Father-Son-Holy Spirit, or the Father-Mother-Son. When investigating the Feminine aspect of God before Ephrem (chapter two), at times, it is difficult to distinguish a bisexual deity (the Mother-Father) from the Mother Goddess, or to determine whether the Mother is the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2: The Feminine Aspect of God before Ephrem

Having become familiar with the major personages and events in the development of Christianity prior to the fourth century, it is now time to examine the images of God used by Ephrem's predecessors giving special attention to the Divine Feminine. Passages which are most frequently cited by scholars researching the feminine aspect of God have been chosen so that the images can be examined in detail and the context from which a specific image comes can be considered. When a text concerns Goddesses and Gods, a comparison is made to determine what impact gender or sexual behaviour had on the writer. Excerpts which depict the Holy Spirit as Feminine are of primary interest. But images of the Divine Feminine are not limited to the Holy Spirit. This investigation helps to ascertain the prevalence of the mother image for the deity.

Whenever possible the writers and excerpts are arranged chronologically within groups according to whether they originated in the environs of Edessa, Alexandria, Athens, or Rome, despite the author's travels. Since the origin of *The Secret Book of John* has not been precisely determined, it is placed at the end.

2. 1 Edessa

2. 11 Odes of Solomon

The Odes of Solomon, early second-century writings, depict the Spirit as a nurturing Mother. There is debate over the original language of the Odes. Of the four manuscripts, Charlesworth believes the two Syriac ones are closer to the original than the Greek or Coptic texts.¹ Bauer believes the Odes were first written in Greek.² If they were written in both Syriac and Greek at about the same time, then they could reflect the way language influences concepts or vice versa.

Ode 28. 1 - 2 implicitly portrays the Holy Spirit as a Mother:

Like the wings of doves over their chicks with their chicks' beaks [turned] towards their beaks, so also are the wings of the Spirit over my heart. My heart is refreshed and leaps for joy, like the baby who leapt for joy in his mother's womb.³

The Ode does not call the Spirit 'Mother,' but makes analogies between two mothers and the Spirit. The first analogy is between a dove feeding her chicks and the Spirit whose wings cover the Odist's heart. Then the Odist's heart is refreshed and joyful like the baby in Elizabeth's womb. These analogies suggest that the Holy Spirit is a Mother who provides security and joy to Her young.

The nineteenth Ode is the most well-known for its feminine imagery of God:

A cup of milk was offered to me, and I drank it in the sweetness of the Lord's kindness. The Son is the cup, and the Father is He who was milked; and the Holy Spirit is She who milked Him. Because His breasts were full and it was undesirable that His milk should be ineffectually released, the Holy Spirit opened Her womb, and mixed the milk of the Father's two breasts. Then she gave the mixture to the world without their knowing.⁴

The Father is depicted with milk-filled breasts. But neither the Father nor the Spirit are portrayed precisely as breast-feeding mothers because they do not take the 'infant' to their breasts. Instead the Spirit milked the Father's breasts, mixed the milk thereof, and mysteriously gave it to people without their knowledge. The dual-purpose word '*ubba*' suggests an uncertainty as to precisely where the Spirit mixed the milk. Charlesworth translates 'the Holy Spirit opened Her bosom'. She could have opened Her womb as easily as Her bosom. The Odist seems to regard the Spirit as a feminine principle although Her role as a Mother is unclear. The Holy Spirit, not the Father, has the active role.

2. 12 Tatian

Tatian rejects Greek polytheism as do other early Christian apologists. Their refutations were based on Greek philosophical arguments against polytheism.⁵ In particular he attacks the following deities for the associated reasons: Zeus for having human passions, impregnating his daughter, and becoming a serpent for Persephone; Rhea-Cybele for requiring castration and becoming a tree; Aphrodite for enjoying sex; Athena for giving birth to Erichthonius; Athena for using the Gorgon's blood for military purposes and Asclepius for using it for cures; Artemis for being a sorcerer

and her twin Apollo for being a lyre-playing healer; Poseidon for going to sea, Ares to war; Dionysius for oppressing the Thebans; Kronos for killing tyrants; Aidoneus for kidnapping Kore; Demeter for mourning her daughter; Phaethon's sisters for becoming poplars; and Leto for becoming a quail; Antinous for having a shrine in the moon, and the twins for raping the daughters of Leucippus.⁶

In all, Tatian ridicules ten Gods for thirteen reasons and seven Goddesses for nine reasons.⁷ Taking the total number of reasons for each sex, thirty-eight percent (five-thirteenths) of the Gods' and thirty-three percent (three-ninths) of the Goddesses' actions were sexual in nature. Forty-three percent of the Goddesses and thirty percent of the Gods committed sexual offenses. Since the sample is small, a difference of thirteen percent (i.e., forty-three minus thirty) in sexually related activities is not significant. From this analysis, one could conclude that Tatian is as perturbed by the behaviour of the Gods as of the Goddesses.

2. 13 Bardaisan

Although the entire hymn from which the following examples are taken will be analysed in chapter 9, two excerpts are given here to place Bardaisan's use of the mother image in the context of early writers who pictured God as Mother. According to Ephrem in *H. Her.* 55. 1, the Bardaisanites claim:

Something emanated and descended from that Father of life, and the Mother, in the mystical [shape] of a fish, conceived and brought Him forth, and He was called the Son of life, Holy Jesus.⁸

This passage is remarkable, not only because the Holy Spirit is a Mother who gives birth to the Son, but also because the fish is a symbol for Atargatis.⁹ The Holy Spirit gives birth to Daughters as well as the Son, as st. 3 shows:

The Holy Spirit brough forth two Daughters [and said to Her firstborn], 'After You I will have [another] Daughter, You [will have] a Sister'.¹⁰

These twin Daughters are probably the earth and water which are mentioned in st. 4.¹¹ Sometimes the Mother and Father Bardaisan refers to are the moon and sun in his

cosmological system; other times they are the Father and the Holy Spirit of Christianity.

2. 14 The Gospel of Thomas and the Acts of Thomas

Still other examples of the Holy Spirit as Mother can be found in the *The Gospel of Thomas* and in *The Acts of Thomas*. Their chief relevance to this study is that they are usually supposed to have been written in the region of Northern Mesopotamia, possibly Edessa, with Syriac as the original language.¹² If so they would have been the products of Syrian Christianity. However *The Gospel of Thomas* has been preserved in Greek fragments and a Coptic text. Greek and Syriac versions of *The Acts of Thomas* and the hymn about the search for the pearl contained in the *Acts* have survived, but with slightly different titles. They are called *The Acts of Thomas* in Greek and *The Acts of Judas Thomas* in Syriac. The hymn has been entitled 'the Hymn of the Pearl' or 'the Hymn of the Soul' by modern scholars.¹³

The Gospel of Thomas may have originated as early as 50 - 70 A.D. or no later than 200 A. D.¹⁴ *The Acts of Thomas* are considered to date from c. 200 - 225 A. D.¹⁵ The fact that the 'Hymn of the Pearl' was preserved with *The Acts of Thomas* raises questions about the origin and date of the hymn. While it is generally accepted that the 'Hymn of the Pearl' is independent of *The Acts of Thomas*, the hymn could have been a non-Christian model for the later Thomas literature or a popular folktale of the Thomas traditions.

These writings are not classically gnostic.¹⁶ Admittedly the definition of 'Gnostic' is quite nebulous, frequently deriving from association with a Gnostic library, or use by Gnostics. Noting that association and use do not automatically make a document Gnostic, Davies and Layton consider *The Gospel of Thomas* to be basically Christian.¹⁷ Gaertner, Turner and Montefiore, and Wilson label Thomas's Gospel Gnostic, although Gaertner acknowledges that it is 'far from typically

Gnostic'.¹⁸ As to the 'Hymn of the Pearl', Bornkamm has written that it 'is among the most beautiful documents of Gnosticism which have come down to us'.¹⁹ Robinson and Nöldeke are of a similar opinion.²⁰ *The Acts of Judas Thomas* are considered Gnostic by Bornkamm and Georgi, but not so by Klijn.²¹ Brock comments that the *Acts* are on 'the fringes of orthodoxy'.²²

Regardless of their original language and place of origin, these writings depict the Holy Spirit as a Mother. *The Gospel of Thomas* contrasts biological and heavenly parents, concentrating on the mothers:

He who does not hate his [father] and his mother in my way will not be able to be my [disciple] and he who does [not] love his father and his mother in my way, will not be able to be my [disciple], for my mother [according to the flesh gave me death (conjecture: Quispel)], but [my] true [mother] gave me life.²³

The comparison between the true Mother, or Holy Spirit, and Mary is dependent on the accuracy of Quispel's conjecture. His addition of 'according to the flesh gave me death' seems appropriate because 'my mother' and the lacuna precede the contrasting conjunction 'but' and the 'true' one who gave life. Whereas the earthly mother gives death and the celestial Mother life, in this excerpt, neither father gives anything. Yet Jesus's followers must hate their biological fathers just as they do their mothers and love their heavenly Father and Mother.

Just as the example of the Holy Spirit as Mother in *The Gospel of Thomas* depends on correctly interpreting 'mother', the same is true of the image in the 'Hymn of the Pearl': 'from your father, the King of Kings, and your mother who rules the East'.²⁴ Murray quite rightly states that the Mother in this passage 'is doubtless the Mother Spirit'.²⁵ It is interesting that the terms 'Father' and 'Parents' are both used several times, whereas 'Mother' appears only once.

In *The Acts of Thomas*, the Mother-Spirit is invoked during the epiclesis, for instance, ¶142, in association with holy unction:

Come, holy name of Christ *that is above every name* [Phil. 2: 9];
Come, power of the Most High and perfect compassion;
Come, thou highest gift;

Come, compassionate mother;
 Come, fellowship of the male;
 Come, thou [fem.] that dost reveal the hidden mysteries;
 Come, mother of the seven houses, that thy rest may be in the eighth
 house;
 Come, elder <messenger S> of the five members, understanding,
 thought, prudence, consideration, reasoning,
 Communicate with these young men!
 Come, Holy Spirit, and purify their reins and their heart
 And give them the added seal in the name of the Father and Son and
 Holy Spirit.²⁶

The Holy Spirit is described as a compassionate Mother, fellowship of the male,
 revealer of hidden mysteries, Mother of seven houses whose rest is in the eighth
 house (the highest heaven), a purifier, and the one who gives the seal in the name of
 the Trinity. These images depict the Spirit as a Mother who is both powerful and
 approachable. The Syriac version of this epiclesis already shows the work of a
 redactor who removed the reference to the compassionate Mother.²⁷

A slightly different epiclesis (§50) occurs later in the *Acts* in conjunction with
 the Eucharist:

<Come, gift of the Most High; S>
 Come, perfect compassion;
 Come, fellowship of the male;
 <Come, Holy Spirit; S>
 Come, thou that dost know the mysteries of the Chosen;
 Come, thou that hast part in all the combats of the noble Athlete;
 <Come, treasure of glory; S>
 Come, darling of the compassion of the Most High; S>
 Come, silence
 That dost reveal the great deeds of the whole greatness;
 Come, thou that dost show forth the hidden things
 And make the ineffable manifest;
 Holy Dove
 That bearest twin young;
 Come, hidden Mother;
 Come, thou that art manifest in thy deeds and dost furnish joy
 And rest for all that are joined with thee;
 Come and partake with us in this Eucharist
 Which we celebrate in thy name,
 And in the love-feast
 In which we are gathered together at thy call.²⁸

The Holy Spirit is called the gift of the Most High, perfect compassion, fellowship of
 the male, knower of mysteries, participant in the Athlete's combats, treasure of glory,
 darling of the compassion of the Most High, silence, revealer of great deeds, hidden

things, and the ineffable, holy dove, bearer of twins, hidden Mother, one who is visible through Her actions, giver of joy and rest. The range of attributes is vast. The Spirit is clearly identified as the Mother in the Greek text and even gives birth to twins. While the holy dove refers to Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River (Mt. 3: 13-17; Mk. 1: 9-11; Lk. 3: 21-22), the twins can not be readily explained.²⁹ The Eucharist is celebrated in the Holy Spirit's name and the worshippers are gathered at Her call.

2. 15 The Macarian Homilies

The Macarian homilies were, at first, thought to be the work of Macarius of Egypt (300-390). But they now seem more likely to be the work of Symeon of Mesopotamia.³⁰ Though the homilies were written in Greek, they were soon translated into Syriac.³¹ They equate the Spirit with a Mother, as can be seen in Hom. 27 and Hom. 28. 4:

Yet the grace of the Spirit, the Mother of the saints, rejoices,³²

the Son . . . did not see the true Father in heaven nor the good, kind Mother, the grace of the Spirit, nor the sweet, desirable Brother, the Lord.³³

In Hom. 27 the grace of the Spirit is described as the Mother of the saints. Conversely in Hom. 28. 4 the Mother Herself is described as the grace of the Spirit. Therefore the two are synonymous. Murray cites Hom. 28. 4 as an example of the Spirit as Mother.³⁴ Yet these examples could be interpreted to mean the Mother is the grace which comes from the Spirit, instead of the Spirit Herself. Significantly the failure to see the Father, Mother, and Brother occurs after the Fall of humanity.

Though the identity of the Spirit as Mother is imprecise in Homs. 27 and 28. 4, there can be no doubt that the Spirit is the Mother in Hom. 54. 4. 5:

Children, it is very good and suitable for you to leave all that is transitory and to come to God: for you are seeking a heavenly Father instead of an earthly father, and you have the good Spirit of God for a Mother instead of a mortal mother, and the heavenly Jerusalem . . .³⁵

The writer affirms leaving one's parents to seek God by contrasting earthly and heavenly parents. Whereas one must seek the Father, he or she already has the Mother. Thus the Mother seems closer to Her children, while the Father appears somewhat distant. Although the Mother is called the good Spirit, She is the Spirit of God and so stands in relation to God (the Father) - not on Her own.

These are the only times the Spirit is actually called Mother in the Macarian Homilies. Like Hom. 54. 4. 5 which advocates choosing the Divine Mother and Father over one's human parents, Hom. 4. 15 interprets Gen. 2: 24 to support celibacy.

I tell you, indeed, that even the much-loved brethren, whom such a soul has under its eye, if they hinder it from that love, it turns from them, in a sense. For that is its life and rest, the mystical, ineffable fellowship of the heavenly King. If the fellowship of an earthly affection severs from father, mother, brethren, and all things come to be outside in the estimation of such a pair, and though they still love them, they love them with a more outside love, while the man's whole attitude is determined by the relation to his spouse - *For this cause*, it says, *shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife and they twain shall be one flesh* - if, I say, the fleshly love thus disengages from all other love, how much more shall those who have been allowed to enter in truth into the fellowship of that Holy Spirit, that heavenly and beloved Spirit, be disengaged from all worldly love, and everything else appear a matter of indifference, because they have been overcome by a heavenly longing, and are altogether in unison with the mood of it.³⁶

This passage concerns the soul's fellowship with the Heavenly King and the Holy Spirit. It promotes leaving earthly parents for union with God by using human marriage as a model of the love between the Spirit and humanity. A couple's inward looking relationship is used as an example of the love relationship between a soul and the Holy Spirit. Thus the value of marriage is recognised in the cause of endorsing celibacy.

While Hom. 30. 2 does not call the Holy Spirit 'Mother', it applies birthing imagery to Her:

So, if any of them will not come to such a birth, to be born of the womb of the Spirit of the Godhead, Christ is submitted to great grief.³⁷

The Holy Spirit is portrayed as a Mother because She is able to give birth from Her womb. Refusing second birth, and therefore being born from the Spirit's womb, causes Christ 'great grief'. On one hand there is a hint of emotional manipulation - if you do not do this, Christ will grieve. On the other the relationship between being born from the Spirit and Christ's suffering indicates the mutuality between the two and the importance of baptism which is symbolically the Spirit's womb.

2. 16 The Gospel of Philip

The Valentinian *Gospel of Philip* is preserved in a Coptic manuscript probably written in the second half of the third century.³⁸ The Gospel very likely has a Syrian background. 'The sacraments exhibited in *The Gospel of Philip* are similar to those used by Christians in the Great Church for the initiation of candidates. Thus the Gnostics who wrote and used the present text had not departed radically from orthodox sacramental practice; yet the interpretation provided for the sacraments clearly remains Gnostic.'³⁹

The writer refers to a Divine Mother several times. The first example is from ¶3, 'When we were Hebrews we were orphans with (only) our mother, but when we became Christians we got father and mother'.⁴⁰ This passage indicates that the God of the Hebrews is a Mother; perhaps the Shekina is meant. Either the masculine characterisation of God in the Old Testament is overlooked or 'He' is so remote that He seems completely absent. Despite how God (the Divine Masculine) is seen, the Hebrews as well as the Christians have the same Mother.

In ¶30, the Lord answered a disciple's request by saying, 'Ask your mother, and she will give (it) to you from out of the alien realm'.⁴¹ The Lord expects the Mother Spirit to give the disciple something from the alien realm. Since this thing is alien, it must not be Jesus's. The Spirit is not a one-dimensional character in *The Gospel of Philip*, but can be both nurturing and destructive.⁴²

Probably the most well known passage from *The Gospel of Philip* is this rather provocative statement about the Spirit as a feminine principle (§14): 'Some said that Mary conceived by the holy spirit: they are mistaken, they do not realize what they say. When did a female ever conceive by a female?'⁴³ The writer clearly regarded the Holy Spirit as a female - a point which he believes disproves the possibility that Mary conceived as a result of being overshadowed by the Holy Spirit.

2. 17 Mani

While the twins do not seem too important in Bardaisan's teachings or in *The Acts of Thomas* (epiclesis §50), twin 'brothers', namely Mani and the (primarily masculine) Holy Spirit, play a vital role in Manichaeism. The Spirit, not the Mother of Life, is the Father's consort in the Kingdom of Light and the One who revealed Mani's prophetic role. The Holy Spirit is usually distinct from the Mother of Life. Although Zurvan was originally a bisexual deity who acted as a Father and a Mother during creation, Mani separated the Mother of Life from the Father by designating Her as an evocation of the Father of Greatness. When speaking of the emanations or hypostases of the Father in the Kingdom of Light, Mani expressly avoided words, like generation, which might have sexual connotations.

According to the eighth century Nestorian Bishop of Kashkar, Theodore bar Konai, the Good Principle was called the Four-Faced Father of Greatness because He possessed four majesties - Divinity, Light, Power, and Wisdom. Theodore relates an account concerning the battle between the two Kingdoms. The inhabitants of the Kingdom of Darkness were divided into sexes and were ruled by lust and desire. When the Kingdom of Light was under attack from the demons of Darkness, the Father of Greatness called the Mother of Life to resist the invaders. She did this by calling forth the Primeval Man, Urmensch (Ohrmazd), who in turn called on his five sons to help.⁴⁴ The Father of Greatness in this account is remote and depends on His emanation, the Mother of Life, and six males to defend the Kingdom of Life.

The 'Psalms of Heracleides' demonstrate that the Mother, who may have been Zurvan's feminine aspect, is not usually the Spirit:

Amen, true Wisdom (σοφία), that teaches souls.
 Amen, holy Spirit, that gives life also to Spirits.
 Amen, beloved Son, that gave himself to death for us (?).
 Amen, gentle Father, that embraces us in his Love (ἀγάπη).
 Amen, merciful Mother, that gives her milk to us.
 The Father, the Son, the holy Spirit, - this is the perfect Church.⁴⁵

Clearly the Spirit is not the Mother, nor is the Mother part of the all male Trinity. In writings which identify the Spirit with the Mother, the Spirit's life-giving action is usually the physical acts of giving birth or breast-feeding which, in this case, would be the domain of the Mother who 'gives her milk to us'. But here giving life is spiritualised and so taken away from the Mother and awarded to the male Spirit.

'Psalms to Jesus' ¶269 contrasts human and spiritual parents:

I left my parents of the flesh (σάρξ) because of my true parents. Do not [forsake me]. I left my brothers of the body (σῶμα) because of my brothers of the Spirit.⁴⁶

The spiritual parents would be a Mother and a Father by analogy to human parents. The fact that the speaker left his siblings because of his 'brothers of the Spirit' suggests that the Spirit may a third party, instead of one of the Parents. Since the Mother and the Spirit are separate characters in the Ps. of Heracleides, the Mother here may not be the Holy Spirit. The 'Psalm to Jesus' ¶269 is reminiscent of *The Gospel of Thomas* ¶101.⁴⁷

Another psalm to Jesus presents the dichotomy of using feminine imagery for a deity while reviling a woman:

When I say 'The son was begotten (?)', shall I find the Father also at his side? My Lord.
 Shall I lay waste a kingdom that I may furnish a woman's womb? My Lord.
 Thy holy womb is the Luminaries (φωστῆρ) that conceive thee.⁴⁸

Allberry questions the Coptic word which he translates as 'begotten', a male function. Finding the Father at the son's side calls to mind a mother lying in bed with her newborn infant at her breast. The second question castigates the woman by

comparing pregnancy to destruction of a kingdom and dehumanises the woman by treating her as a vessel to be furnished. After such a misogynistic statement, the references in the last line to 'Thy holy womb' and conception by luminaries are jarring. Although Mani's personal relations with women do not seem particularly hostile, the Manichees considered divinity to be incompatible with human birth and so rejected Jesus's being born of Mary.⁴⁹

2. 18 Aphrahat

The concepts of Aphrahat, the 'Persian Sage', who was later accepted as orthodox, are essentially Semitic. Aphrahat wrote his demonstrations in 337, 344, and 345.⁵⁰ In Dem. 18. 10 on Gen. 2: 24, 'a man shall leave his father and his mother', Aphrahat asks

Who is it who leaves father and mother to take a wife? The meaning is this: as long as a man has not taken a wife, he loves and honours God his Father and the Holy Spirit his Mother, and he has no other love. But when a man takes a wife, he leaves his Father and his Mother.⁵¹

This passage is frequently cited as evidence that the Spirit was regarded as a Mother by the early Syriac church.⁵² Yet this is the only time in Aphrahat's twenty-three demonstrations that he calls the Holy Spirit 'Mother.' Although Philo's interpretation of Gen. 2: 24 would not have influenced Aphrahat directly, the transfer of Philo's personification of Wisdom as a mother to the Holy Spirit may account for the mother image of the Spirit in Aphrahat's commentary on this verse.

2. 2 Alexandria

2. 21 Philo

Writing in Alexandria about three hundred years earlier than Aphrahat, the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo (d. 40-50 A. D.) commented on Gen. 2: 24 thus:

'For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and the twain shall be one flesh' (Gen. 2: 24). For the sake of sense-perception the Mind, when it has become her slave, abandons both God the Father of the universe, and God's excellence and wisdom, the Mother of all things, and cleaves to and becomes one with sense-perception so that the two become one flesh

and one experience. Observe that it is not the woman that cleaves to the man, but conversely the man to the woman, Mind to Sense-perception. For when that which is superior, namely Mind, becomes one with that which is inferior, namely Sense-perception, it resolves itself into the order of flesh which is inferior, into sense-perception, the moving cause of the passions. But if Sense the inferior follow Mind the superior, there will be flesh no more, but both of them will be Mind.⁵³

The Mother is God's Excellence and Wisdom. Like Aphrahat, Philo compares human parents with heavenly parents and equates a man's leaving one set of parents with his leaving the other. Unlike Aphrahat, Philo looks at the 'conjugal' union from both sides: what happens when the man cleaves to the woman and vice versa. He goes to great lengths to make the point that when the superior husband (Mind) cleaves to the inferior wife (Sense-perception), the union does not elevate the female but rather degrades the male. However when the reverse occurs, the female is submerged into the male and both are uplifted.

2. 22 The Gospel of the Hebrews

Only fragments of *The Gospel of the Hebrews* have survived. An early second-century document, probably of Egyptian origin, the Gospel seems to have been used by Greek-speaking Jewish-Christians. Vielhauer comments that treating the Holy Spirit as female is a Jewish, or Semitic, practice with parallels in *The Gospel of Thomas*.⁵⁴ *The Gospel of the Hebrews* addresses the Spirit saying: 'Even so did my mother, the Holy Spirit, take me by one of my hairs and carry me away on to the great mountain Tabor'.⁵⁵ The Holy Spirit is like a bird carrying her chick to safety.

2. 23 Clement of Alexandria

Clement was born in Athens c. 150, settled in Alexandria in 180, and died in Antioch c. 215 A. D. His writings exhibit Stoic and Platonic elements.⁵⁶ He presents androgynous images of the Father and the Word. In 1. 6. 42-3 he remarks

The Word is everything to His little ones, both father and mother, educator and nurse. . . . This is our nourishment, the milk flowing from the Father by which alone we little ones are fed. I mean that He, the 'well-beloved,' the Word, our provider, has saved mankind by shedding His blood for us. Therefore, we fly trustfully to the 'care-

banishing breast' of God the Father; the breast that is the Word, who is the only one who can truly bestow on us the milk of love.⁵⁷

Clement calls the Word Father and Mother. These are just two of the four roles named to make the point that the Word is 'everything' to His dependents. Being everything encompasses male and female roles.

The Father is depicted as a Mother breast-feeding Her babies. Clement gets carried away with the imagery. He portrays the Word as the Mother's milk and as Her very breast. The image of the Motherly Father is rather passive because the Word is the only one who can give the milk of love. In terms of the Divine Feminine, this passage is significant because a father of the proto-orthodox church described two of the Personae of the Trinity in both male and female terms. The Holy Spirit is, however, noticeably absent.

2. 3 Athens: Aristides

Since Aristides's Apology is typical of second-century proto-Christian apologists, it serves as a standard against which to evaluate Tatian's Oration in terms of hostility to sex or females. Aristides vigorously attacked polytheism. His primary concern was that the Greek Gods and Goddesses were such despicable role models. After a general summary of the follies of the pantheon, Aristides specifies his reasons for ridiculing Greek deities.⁵⁸ They are Kronos for having children sacrificed to Him, for taking Rhea as His wife and having many sons by Her, for going insane and eating His children (except for Zeus), and for being powerless to stop Zeus from castrating Him; Zeus for changing into different forms in order to commit adultery and for having twenty-one children by eight females; Hephaestus for being lame and a brass worker; Hermes for being greedy, a thief, a magician, maimed, an athlete, and an oracle; Asclepius for being a physician and making medicines, and for being unable to prevent His death; Ares for being a warrior, jealous, a sheep rustler and thief, an armaments collector, an adulterer, and for not being able to protect Himself from the angry husband; Dionysius for being drunk, for kidnapping women, for going insane,

and for his inability to prevent His own death; Herakles for being a hater of hateful things, for being a tyrant, a warrior, a slayer of the wicked, for going mad and killing His children; Apollo for being jealous, mercurial, and for seeking rewards from men; Artemis for being a huntress, for carrying a bow and arrows, and for wandering around on the mountains with Her dogs; Aphrodite for Her promiscuity with Gods and men, and for mourning the death of Her lover whom She could not rescue; Tammuz for being a hunter, an adulterer, and for being helpless when He was attacked and killed by a boar; Rhea for being the Mother of the Gods, for being unfaithful with men and unable to save Her lover; and Kore for being too weak to stop Pluto from kidnapping Her.

Aristides rebuked ten Gods for forty-six reasons and four Goddesses for ten reasons. In terms of the proportions of reasons for ridicule for each sex, thirteen of forty-six (twenty-eight percent) of the Gods' and three-tenths (thirty percent) of the Goddesses' actions were sexual in nature. Sixty percent of the Gods and fifty percent of the Goddesses committed sexual acts. The nearly equal proportions (i.e., 28 percent versus 30 percent and 50 percent versus 60 percent) suggest that Aristides was not fixated on sex, nor was he particularly antagonistic to females. He does not discourage sex within human marriage in his apology. His most often repeated complaint is that Greek men engage in sex with their mothers, their sisters, and males because of their Gods' examples. To a lesser extent, Aristides also argues against Egyptian polytheism, Barbarian beliefs, and Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

2. 4 Rome

2. 41 Gaius Marius Victorinus

The fourth century Roman theologian Gaius Marius Victorinus understood the Word and the Holy Spirit as 'one and the same motion' and identified the Word as life and the Spirit as Knowledge and Intelligence. Victorinus then goes on to say:

Since there is strength, it was necessary that Intelligence was moved to Knowledge of itself. The Son who is the Logos - that is, Life - was

born through the generative power of the Fatherly Intelligence, that which is everything is like an eternal spring. One would not be mistaken if one were to understand that the Holy Spirit is Jesus's Mother above and below.⁵⁹

Victorinus is particularly interested in the Spirit as the Intelligence and Knowledge of God. He avoids the connotations of sexual intercourse between the Father and Mother by saying Jesus 'was born through the generative power of the Fatherly Intelligence.' Therefore the Logos resulted from a union of the Father and Intelligence before the Spirit was identified as Jesus's Mother. Victorinus uses the title 'Mother' for the Holy Spirit and accepts Her as Jesus's Mother - above and below.

2. 42 Augustine

Since the Latin Church Father Augustine (d. 430 A. D.) is still considered to be one of the foremost theologians who developed a doctrine of the Trinity,⁶⁰ his views on the Holy Spirit as a feminine principle are useful for comparative purposes. In *The Holy Trinity*, written between 400 and 416, Augustine maintains that the names 'Spirit' and 'Holy' can be used for each of the three Divine Persons and that the Holy Spirit is equal to and proceeds from both the Father and the Son. While Augustine makes it clear that the Father is not to be called 'Son' nor the Son 'Father', the Father and Son may be called 'Holy' and 'Spirit' because both are 'Holy' and 'Spirit'. However the Holy Spirit may in no way be called 'Son' or 'Father', but rather 'Gift' and 'Love'. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of the Father and of the Son and the means by which they love each other.

Augustine symbolises the Holy Trinity with twenty-two different trinities. Yet he rejects the notion that a husband, his wife, and their child might represent the Holy Trinity: 'For I omit such a thing as to regard the Holy Spirit as the mother of the Son of God and the spouse of the Father; for it will perhaps be answered that these things offend us in carnal matters by arousing thoughts of corporeal conceptions and births'.⁶¹ For some reason, the image of God as Father is quite acceptable to

Augustine. He ignores any sexual connotations. However the thought of a Divine Mother and Father is too evocative of human sexual relations for Augustine.

2. 5 Uncertain origin: *The Secret Book According to John*

There are several versions of *The Secret Book According to John*, also known as *The Apocryphon of John*. The parts known by Irenaeus would have been written prior to 180 A. D. Otherwise on the basis of the manuscript evidence, the book probably originated before 350 A. D.⁶² *The Secret Book* was composed in Greek, but its place of origin is uncertain.⁶³ Despite the ambiguity in the definitions of 'Gnostic', *The Secret Book* seems to be classically Gnostic.

Here are two passages with a Mother-Father:

It is I who am [the father]; It is I who am the mother; It is I who am the son⁶⁴

She (the Barbelo) became the mother (μήτρα) of the all, for she existed before them all, the metropator (μητροπάτωρ), the first man, the holy spirit (πνεῦμα), the three-fold man, the three-fold power, the three-fold name, the male-female and the eternal aeon (αἰών) among the invisible ones.⁶⁵

The first passage depicts a Trinity which consists of Mother, Father, and Son: the very trinity that Augustine, writing later in another place, rejected. However the Mother may not be the Holy Spirit in either excerpt. Whereas the first excerpt refers to the Mother, the Father, and the Son without mentioning the Spirit, the second distinguished between the Mother-Father, the Holy Spirit, and various other titles. While 'Son' is not actually one of the titles, He may be implied in 'the first man,' or the third one in the three-fold titles. The second passage presents yet another image of God as Mother-Father and the possibility that the Mother and the Holy Spirit are distinct beings.

2. 6 Summary

This chapter has been a brief survey of early literature of Syrian origin along with a few Egyptian, Athenian, and Roman texts. The feminine images of the Divine

in the passages above can be classified into four categories (see Appendix C). The most prevalent images are of the Holy Spirit as Mother (1). Images with a distinct Mother and a Father, where the Mother is not the Spirit, and portrayals of a bisexual deity (the Mother-Father) are fairly common (2). There are two examples in which the Spirit is personified as a Female, but not a Mother (3). The Holy Spirit is treated as Masculine by two teachers (4).

The Holy Spirit is definitely portrayed as a Mother in Ode of Solomon 28. 1-2, the Bardaisanites's claim in *H. Her.* 55, *The Gospel of Thomas* ¶101, the 'Hymn of the Pearl' and the two epicleses in *The Acts of Thomas*, the Macarian Homiles, the *Gospel of Philip* (¶3; 30), Aphrahat, *The Gospel of the Hebrews* ¶3, and Gaius Marius Victorinus.

This group can be subdivided into images in which the Mother Spirit appears without the Father and those where the Mother and Father are together. The Spirit is called 'Mother' in *The Gospel of the Hebrews* ¶3 and, like a bird, carries the speaker to Mt. Tabor. While the Holy Spirit is not addressed as 'Mother' in Ode 28. 1-2, the Odist depicts the Spirit as a mother by comparing Her to a bird feeding her chicks and to Elizabeth when she was pregnant with John. The image of the Holy Spirit is of a Mother who provides security for Her young.

Macarian Hom. 27 calls the Holy Spirit the Mother of the saints; Hom. 30. 2 portrays the Holy Spirit as a Mother by referring to the Spirit's womb in the context of baptism. In *The Gospel of Philip* ¶30, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as Mother when speaking to a disciple. The Mother gives the disciple the alien thing he desired. Epiclesis ¶50 in *The Acts of Thomas* presents the Holy Spirit as a powerful and compassionate Mother.

There are more passages describing the Holy Spirit as Mother, or Parent, with God the Father as a couple than those depicting the Mother Spirit acting without the Father. As in epiclesis ¶50, the Mother Spirit in epiclesis ¶142 in *The Acts of Thomas* is portrayed as strong and merciful. The Father appears only in the

Trinitarian formula in ¶142. He is called the Most High in both invocations, and is there in name only.

In the 'Hymn of the Pearl,' a letter is sent to the prince 'from your father, the King of Kings, and your mother, who rules the East.' The literary characters symbolise the Divine Parents. As one 'who rules the East,' the mother seems to have a position of authority.

The Gospel of Thomas ¶101, Aphrahat, and the Macarian Hom. 54. 4 contrast heavenly and earthly parents. The Gospel concentrates on the mothers - the celestial Mother gives life, the human mother gives death. The fathers are included in the word 'parents,' but they do not do anything. Therefore the fathers seem distant from the speaker.

Aphrahat calls the Divine Parents 'Mother' and 'Father' because he is encouraging the believer to leave one set of parents for the other. The children in Hom. 54. 4 have a good Mother and are seeking a heavenly Father. This suggests that the Mother has a closer relationship to the children than the Father does.

Macarian Hom. 28. 4 concerns the heavenly Parents. It applies the attributes grace, good, and kind to the Mother and true to the Father. In *The Gospel of Philip* ¶3, the Hebrews and Christians have the same Mother. The Mother seems to have been the sole Parent of the Hebrews. Since the Christians gain a Father which the Hebrews supposedly did not have, the Mother must have also gained a partner of some sort. Consequently the Mother's position may be somewhat diminished.

Ephrem's *H. Her.* 55. 1, 3, 5 differs from the above in several respects. The Bardaisanites call the heavenly family the Mother of life, Father of life, and Son of life. Thus all three are described by the attribute life. The Father apparently ejaculated into the medium surrounding the Mother [space?], and She conceived the Son. Since the Mother conceived Jesus mystically in the shape of a fish, Her pregnancy technically occurred without sexual intercourse. There is almost no interaction between the Three in the few lines Ephrem recounts.

However the Mother Spirit spoke to Her newborn Daughter about the impending birth of Her twin Sister, and rocked one Daughter on Her knees and sang to Her. This a more human picture of mothering than the image in st. 1 about the Son's birth.

Gaius Marius Victorinus describes the Spirit as God's Intelligence, Knowledge, and regards Her as Jesus's Mother - above and below. He envisages the Logos's being born from the 'generative power of the Fatherly Intelligence.' Victorinus believes the Logos is a result of a union between the Father and the Spirit. But he is careful to describe the event in non-sexual terms.

The second category consists of images in which the Mother is not the Spirit. Occasionally the precise identity of the Mother is uncertain. These images can be classified into passages which present a Mother and Father as two separate characters or those with one bisexual deity. Philo contrasted human parents with the Mother of all things and the Father of the universe. He also called the Mother God's Excellence and Wisdom.

Aristides and Tatian castigated various Goddesses and Gods in the Greek pantheon. When the number of reasons each apologist rebuked the Goddesses and Gods are compared to each other and the causes are divided into sexual and non-sexual activities, the relative proportions indicate that neither apologist concentrated excessively on sexual behaviour or on divine gender. The apologies demonstrate the continued worship of male and female deities. Aristides and Tatian rejected polytheism, particularly because of the deities' overtly anthropomorphic characters. None of the images of the Goddesses (or Gods) are admirable because an apology is written to defend the writer's beliefs against others'.

Mani contrasted human parents with a Divine Mother and Father in 'Psalm to Jesus' ¶269. Usually the Spirit and the Mother are two distinct characters, or there is some question as to whether the Mother is actually the Spirit as in the Psalm of Heracleides. At times, the confusion between the Spirit and the Mother may come

from Mani's having incorporated the bisexual, four-faced, deity of Zurvanistic Zoroastrianism into his faith.

A bisexual deity appears in Ode of Solomon 19, Clement of Alexandria, and *The Secret Book According to John*. Ode 19 and Clement depict God the Father with milk-filled breasts. The Son (or Word) is the milk in both passages. But Clement also refers to the Word as the Father's breast itself. Although Clement excludes the Spirit altogether, it was probably not to marginalise the feminine aspect of the Holy Spirit. Since πνεῦμα is neuter in Greek, Clement would not have had grammatical reasons for considering the Spirit as Feminine. By the time of Clement's death (c. 215), the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the Holy Spirit's place therein were not fully developed.⁶⁶

Clement of Alexandria was the only writer to depict the Word as Mother and Father. He does this to emphasise that the Word 'is everything to His little ones'. To Clement, 'everything' means the Word fills male and female roles such as father and mother.

The Secret Book According to John describes a bisexual, multi-faceted deity. 'Holy Spirit' is included among the many titles of the Mother-Father. Since the Spirit can be the Father as easily as the Mother, this is an ambiguous image of the Holy Spirit. Whereas the images of the Holy Spirit in *The Secret Book* suggest that the Mother-Father was unified in His/Her involvement with creation, Zurvan's fatherly aspect was remote. Only Zurvan's motherly character was active in creating the world.

The Holy Spirit is definitely characterised as a Female without being particularly Motherly in Ode 19 and *The Gospel of Philip* ¶14. According to Ode 19, the Spirit performs three functions - milking the Father's breasts, mixing the milk, and distributing it to the generation. The passive Father and active Holy Spirit of Ode 19 is similar to the remote (passive) Father and the personal (active) Mother which Mani

incorporated into his teachings. *The Gospel of Philip* ¶14 uses the Spirit's being a female to disprove the virgin birth.

The masculine aspect of the Spirit is predominant in Augustine's and Mani's writings. The grammar of the languages in which their writings were transmitted may have been a factor in their treating the Spirit as Masculine. Augustine is not concerned just with the title 'Mother,' but with the image itself. He totally rejects the mother image for the Holy Spirit because 'Mother' (but not 'Father') suggests sexual relations between the two. Since the Holy Spirit was believed to be Mani's twin, the Spirit is usually masculine in Manichaeism. Unlike Augustine, Mani is not hostile to the image of a Divine Mother.

Orthodox belief and practice were in the process of being defined in the centuries during which most of these passages were written. So classifying the images along proto-orthodox and 'heretical' lines will not be attempted. Many Divine Mothers were worshipped in the Ancient Near East. Although identifying a particular Mother is, at times, difficult, the Mother was still the most prevalent image for the Holy Spirit in Syriac literature prior to and during Ephrem's life. But She was also personified as a Female with no motherly characteristics. Yet even in texts in which the Spirit was portrayed as a Mother, the address 'Mother' was infrequent.

2. 7 Footnotes

¹ Ed. and tr. James Hamilton Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 14.

² W. Bauer, 'The Odes of Solomon', tr. R. McL. Wilson in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha 2*, ed. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 809. Bauer assembles the various opinions on the origin of the Odes.

³ My translation. For Charlesworth's translation, see p. 108.

1. אִי הָיָה לִי רִאֲשִׁיתִי וְלִי רִאֲשִׁיתִי
 רִאֲשִׁיתִי הָיָה לִי רִאֲשִׁיתִי
 מִמֶּנִּי אֶת רִאֲשִׁיתִי לִי לִבִּי
 2. וְהַכֹּסֶם לִבִּי הָיָה
 אִי הָיָה לִי רִאֲשִׁיתִי כְּחֵסֶם הָאֵלִים

⁴ My translation. For Charlesworth's translation, see p. 82.

1. כֹּסֶם הָאֵלִים לִי רִאֲשִׁיתִי לִי
 אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים כְּחֵסֶם הָאֵלִים
 2. כִּי אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים
 אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים
 3. וְהַכֹּסֶם לִי רִאֲשִׁיתִי
 אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים
 4. אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים
 אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים
 5. אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים

Despite the feminine imagery and inconsistent grammatical treatment, the Spirit is never actually called 'Mother'. For another metaphorical image of the Holy Spirit as Feminine, see Ode 36. 3-5.

⁵ For a discussion of Greek philosophical theology, see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, tr. John Raffan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1985), pp. 311ff.

⁶ Whittaker, pp. 14-9.

⁷ The Dioscuri and Phaeton's sisters are each counted as one deity. Apollo and Artemis are counted separately because the sex of the deity is being correlated against their actions. See appendix B for a break-down of the deities and the numbers of offenses in Tatian's oration and Aristides's apology.

⁸ My translation. *CSCO* 169, p. 207:

וְהַכֹּסֶם לִי רִאֲשִׁיתִי
 אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים
 אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים אֵלֵי הָאֵלִים

⁹ Oden, p. 66.

¹⁰ My translation. *CSCO* 169, p. 207:

וְהַכֹּסֶם לִי רִאֲשִׁיתִי

¹¹ Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, p. 145.

¹² Layton, p. 361; H.-Ch. Puech, 'The Gospel of Thomas', tr. R. McL. Wilson in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* 1, ed. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 287.

¹³ Layton, p. 366, n. 1.

¹⁴ For the earlier date and Coptic source, see Stevan L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, tr. David R. Cartlidge (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), pp. 1, 3, 18-21. Layton, p. 377, accepts the later date.

¹⁵ Layton, p. 367.

¹⁶ Layton, pp. 360, 369.

¹⁷ Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, p. 3; Layton, p. 367.

¹⁸ Bertil Gaertner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Collins, 1961), pp. 22-3, 71; H. E. W. Turner and Hugh Montefiore, *Thomas and the Evangelists* (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 19; and R. McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Mowbray, 1960), pp. 43-4.

¹⁹ G. Bornkamm, 'The Acts of Thomas', tr. Dieter Georgi in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* 2, ed. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 433.

²⁰ Ed. J. Armitage Robinson, 'Hymn of the Soul', tr. Anthony Ashley Bevan in *Texts and Studies* 5, No. 3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899), p. 2, quotes Nöldeke as saying 'we have here an ancient Gnostic hymn relating to the soul'.

²¹ Bornkamm, tr. Georgi, pp. 428. Georgi, p. 442, rejects Klijn's opinion in a postscript. See A. F. J. Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*, p. 91.

²² Brock, 'Holy Spirit as Feminine', p. 79.

²³ ¶101 (49, 32 - 50, 1), Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, p. 170.

²⁴ My translation.

ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ

See ¶110. 41, Layton, p. 373; ed. Robinson, tr. Bevan, p. 19; and Murray, *Symbols*, p. 317 for their translations and comments.

²⁵ Murray, *Symbols*, p. 317.

²⁶ Bornkamm, tr. Georgi, pp. 456-7, based on the Greek text. <S> stands for additions in the Syriac here and in the next epiclesis.

²⁷ Murray, *Symbols*, p. 317, considers the Mother to be the Holy Spirit and gives the differences between the Syriac and Greek versions of the epiclesis. Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*, p. 77, presents a slightly confusing explanation of the differences between the Syriac and Greek epicleses.

²⁸ Bornkamm, tr. Georgi, p. 470. Klijn based his translation and commentary on Wright's edition of the Syriac which omits the Mother and her twins.

²⁹ Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*, pp. 58-9, suggests that the Spirit's twins may be the graces of water and the Holy Spirit which Cyril of Jerusalem thought were given at baptism, based on his comments on the Sg. S. 4: 12. While Cyril (d. 386) is later than the *Acts*, he may have been familiar with the explanation. Cyril's comment is interesting, but unhelpful. A Daughter Spirit could symbolise the water of baptism. But since the Holy Spirit Himself dwells in the newly baptised, a second Daughter Spirit to represent the Mother Spirit is superfluous. In *H. Her.* 55. 3 - 4 the Bardaisanites claim that the Holy Spirit gave birth to twin Daughters which are probably the earth and water.

ܪܘܝܢ ܐܘܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ

See also Murray, *Symbols*, p. 143.

⁵² Murray, *Symbols*, p. 143; Brock, 'Holy Spirit as Feminine', p. 80. Neither mention this as a one-time occurrence.

⁵³ Eds. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, *Allegorical Interpretations in Loeb Classical Library 1* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1929), pp. 254-7, ¶2. 49.

⁵⁴ P. Vielhauer, 'The Gospel of the Hebrews', tr. George Ogg in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha 1*, ed. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 160, 163.

⁵⁵ ¶3, Vielhauer, tr. Ogg, p. 164.

⁵⁶ Ed. Simon P. Wood, 'Christ the Educator' in *The Fathers of the Church 23* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1954), pp. ix, xv.

⁵⁷ Wood, pp. 40-1.

⁵⁸ Ed. J. Armitage Robinson, 'The Apology of Aristides', tr. Syriac J. Rendel Harris in *Texts and Studies 1*, No. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), pp. 11-17 (Syriac), 41-5 (English).

⁵⁹ My translation. ¶1. 58. 7-13, 'Adversus Arium' in eds. Paul Henry and Peter Hadot, *Opera 1, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 83* (Vindobonae: 1971), p. 157:

potentia cum sit, necesse fuit intellegentiam ad suimet ipsius cognoscentiam moveri - natus est filius, λογος qui sit, hoc est vita, virtute patrica generante intelligentia hoc quod est esse omnium quae sunt veluti aeternum fontem. Non falletur ergo, si quis subintellexerit sanctum spiritum matrem esse Iesu et supra et deorsum.

Donald L. Gelpi, *The Divine Mother: A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham, New York: University Press of America, 1984), pp. 217-8, comments on this passage using 'She' for the Spirit to correspond to his image of the Spirit as Mother.

⁶⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: Cox and Wyman Ltd., 1979), p. 83.

⁶¹ Ed. Stephen McKenna, *The Trinity, The Fathers of the Church 45* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1970), pp. 346-7.

⁶² Ed. Soren Giversen, *Apocryphon Johannis* (Copenhagen: Prostant Apud Munksgaard, 1963), pp. 39-40.

⁶³ Bentley Layton, 'The Secret Book according to John in the Long Version' in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (London: SCM Press, 1987), p. 24.

⁶⁴ ¶2. 13-15, Layton, p. 29. Giversen, p. 49, has 'I am [the father. I am] the mother. I am the son.' Layton and Giversen both translate μήτρα as 'mother' which is acceptable. However, according to W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 197, 252, μήτρα is actually 'womb'. Thus it does not have the range of meanings that the Syriac ܪܘܒܐ ('ubba) has, i.e. 'womb, bosom, cavity, gulf'.

⁶⁵ Layton, ¶5. 5-6, p. 31. Giversen, p. 55, uses 'she' for the Barbelo, but transliterates μητροπάτωρ as metropator instead of translating 'mother-father'.

⁶⁶ Berkhof, pp. 82-3.



Candle

Like a flame which can provide warmth, or destroy, or purify, depending on its intensity and proximity, celibacy has the potential for different results, depending on the individuals involved and their emphasis. Just two of the several possibilities are that celibacy may contribute to withdrawn, anti-social behaviour or attitudes (sometimes misogynistic), or it may offer the freedom to seek greater intimacy with God and availability for service to the community. The single candle is here to symbolise the single-mindedness and solitariness of celibacy, the state preferred by the Syriac church and by Ephrem.

Murray thoroughly discusses the ancient texts and modern scholarly hypotheses on the origins of Syriac asceticism.¹ Therefore only a few of the texts and scholarly opinions will be summarised in order to place Ephrem's views on virginity, celibacy, and marriage in their historical context.

Monasticism, though in an undeveloped form, best describes Syriac Christianity before the fifth century. The concepts of baptism as betrothal for the Christian and as a return to paradise, the baptismal life as 'the marriageless life of angels,' and Christ as the Bridegroom were of primary interest in this period. Seeing baptism both as an initiation into a marriageless life and as a betrothal to marriage seems paradoxical. However a divine Bridegroom renders consummation of the marriage physically impossible. Thus the betrothed, whether female or male, remains in a perpetual state of committed anticipation which fits the Syriac churches' discouragement, if not outright renunciation, of marriage. The attitude to sex within marriage and to procreation varied somewhat, with the followers of Marcion, Tatian, and Mani on the side of renunciation, and Aphrahat and Ephrem on the side of toleration, but not completely approving. Bardaisan seems to be one of the few early Syriac teachers to accept copulation within marriage fully,² though his reasons are rather chauvinistic.

3. 1 Terms

Four terms encapsulate the application of Syriac Christian theological concepts to church life. The first two terms are ܒܬܘܠܬܐ, ܒܬܘܠܬܐ (*btula, btulta*, male and female virgin), ܒܬܘܠܘܬܐ (*btuluta*, virginity), and ܩܕܝܫܐ (*qaddiša*, consecrated/holy), ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ (*qaddišuta*, consecration/holiness), used as a synonym for 'chaste, pure'. 'Virgin' refers to one who has maintained his, or her, virginity regardless of marital status, while 'holy' means a married person whose virginity may

have been lost, but who abstains from sexual intercourse.³ 'Consecrated' is usually a technical term for celibate.

The next two terms, ܩܝܡܬܐ (*ihidaya*) and ܩܝܡܐ (*qyama*), have wider ranges of meanings. Since the Syriac word for celibates, *ihidaya*, was used to translate μονογενής ('only-begotten') in John 1: 18, Adam believes the ascetics, who were imitating Christ and sharing his sufferings, adopted the title for themselves.⁴ However, a better explanation for the meaning of *ihidaya* is 'singular, individual, unique; single-minded, not divided in heart, and single in the sense of unmarried, celibate'⁵ or simply 'single'.⁶ Becoming an *ihidaya* means reaching a state of spirituality in which differences between male and female are actually abolished.⁷

The preferable translation for *qyama* is 'covenant' because in the Peshitta, *qyama* is regularly used to translate the Hebrew בְּרִית (*b'rit*, covenant).⁸ The *bnay qyama* (members of the covenant) were those who took a vow of chastity, whether they were single or not.⁹ Adam interprets *bnay qyama* to mean the 'standing ones' so that the celibates, like the angels, are continually 'standing and watching' in God's service.¹⁰ There is insufficient evidence to support this interpretation. Nagel translates the term as 'sons of the Resurrection'.¹¹ While he notes that the Syriac word for resurrection is ܩܝܡܬܐ (*qyamtā*), the feminine of *qyama*, he maintains *qyama* can still be translated as 'Resurrection'. His reasons for choosing 'resurrection' instead of 'covenant' are unconvincing. Murray discusses the standing quality of *qyama*, then rightly concludes that 'covenant' is the best translation for *qyama*.¹²

3. 2 Celibacy

There are at least two opinions on the origins of Christian asceticism. Neither approach totally precludes the other. Some think asceticism was brought into Christianity from Greek philosophy, especially Stoicism or Platonism.¹³ From as early as the fifth century B. C. to the second century A. D., aversion to sex was

founded on faulty medical grounds. Greek physicians believed that ejaculation resulted in a dangerously debilitating loss of energy in the male. Since women did not emit semen, they experienced no such energy loss. 'The rigorist elevation of celibacy and abstinence above marriage, foreshadowed in the Stoa, attained its consummation in the Christian ideal of virginity'.¹⁴ Tatian's ideas were so heavily influenced by Platonism and Stoicism that any Syriac literature based on his ideas also exhibits aspects of these philosophies.¹⁵ Consequently Tatian intensified early Syriac Christian disparagement of sex. Other scholars believe hostility to sex was derived from Jewish apocalyptic elements such as those espoused by the Qumran community.¹⁶ The preference for celibacy also results in part from the eschatological nature of the Christian proclamation that the Kingdom of God was imminent.¹⁷

Just as translations of Syriac texts have been clouded by the ambiguity in the words used for marriage and sexual intercourse, so have investigations into the church's attitude to married couples who engaged in conjugal relations. Thus scholars disagree on the early Syriac church's position on marriage. Connally claimed the Syriac church preferred virginity but that it was possible to have sex within marriage and still be baptised.¹⁸ Burkitt declared that persons who engaged in sexual relations, even within marriage, were not allowed to be baptised as late as the mid-fourth century.¹⁹ Brock notes that although celibacy was 'essential' for baptism into the third century, it was only 'marginally' necessary by the fourth century.²⁰ Similarly Murray believes that celibacy was not completely eliminated as a requirement for baptism until the middle of the fourth century.²¹

Interest in celibacy was based on the Old Syriac version of Lk. 20: 35 - 6 which reads: 'Those who have become worthy to receive that world (i.e., the Kingdom) and that resurrection from the dead do not marry, nor can they die, for they have been made equal with the angels.'²² Celibacy was encouraged because Jesus was single and seemingly homeless. *The Acts of the Apostles, The Gospel of Thomas, Aphrahat, and Ephrem* all take Mt. 8: 20, 'Foxes have holes and birds have

necks, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head,' and similar verses, as a call to live an itinerant life.

Early Syriac Christians believed that in the Garden of Eden, God created humanity without sexual distinctions. *The Gospel of Thomas* interpreted Gen. 2: 24, 'the two shall become one', in support of celibacy.²³ This interpretation may have filtered into Syriac Christianity from Philo who gave the following account of what happened when the woman first saw the man, 'Love supervenes, brings together and fits into one the divided halves, as it were, of a single living creature . . .'²⁴ Philo's discussion of the union of the two halves into one creature ends with the conclusion that love (sexual relations) was the initial step towards sin and mortality. It seems preferable for the sexes to remain as unattached halves rather than to become one flesh.

Although Drijvers comments that celibacy was not based on 'hatred of the body as such, but served a higher aim, the return to man's original state',²⁵ misogyny among some of the influential church leaders may also account for the Syriac church's emphasis on celibacy. According to Murray the Syriac church's interest in celibacy was derived from likening the baptismal service to a call to holy war which required sexual abstinence. The new Christian was called to fight spiritual warfare.²⁶

3. 3 Sex within marriage

Since none of the four concepts which are central to Syriac Christianity are conducive to marriage and love-making, it is useful to consider the terms for marriage and sexual intercourse. There are two terms which can be used for marriage or copulation. The first word, ܙܘܘܓܐ (*zuwaga*), comes from ܙܘܘܓܐ (*zawga*) denoting 'to join together, unite in marriage'.²⁷ It is used especially for sexual intercourse.

The second word, ܫܘܘܬܘܬܐ (*šawtaputa*) from ܫܘܬܘܬܐ (*šawtep*), usually means 'fellowship, communion, partnership'. But it can also be 'intercourse, marriage'.²⁸ The integral relationship between spirituality and sexuality is apparent in

ܠܚܘܒܘܬܐ because it expresses the intimacy both between God and the church especially during Holy Communion and between a man and a woman during sex.²⁹ The use of ܠܚܘܒܘܬܐ in both marital and eucharistic contexts implies that the Syriac church had the potential for integrating spirituality and sexuality.

It is misleading and sometimes inaccurate to translate ܠܘܘܐ as sex and ܠܚܘܒܘܬܐ as marriage exclusively because each word has both meanings. Since marital continence was practised by some couples during this period, a writer may not regard conjugal relations and children as acceptable parts of marriage. However if children are affirmed in conjunction with either term, it must be inferred that the writer accepts marital sex, at least for procreation.

Marriage can be a euphemism for sexual relations. The translator's word choice reveals his or her perspective. Glossing over the sexual connotations of the original diminishes the impact of what the author might have said. For example, Morris translated *H. Faith* 82. 4. 3-4 as 'without marriage intercourse was Thy pure generation'.³⁰ This translation leaves open the possibility that Mary could have been an unwed mother as the rabbis believed. Ephrem's point is that she conceived without sexual intercourse. In 1983, Brock was able to be more direct when translating the same line, 'Your chaste birth needed no intercourse'.³¹ Examining how the terms ܠܘܘܐ and ܠܚܘܒܘܬܐ were used indicates how conjugal relations were regarded.

3. 31 In Tatian and Aphrahat

According to Clement of Alexandria, Tatian interprets 1 Cor. 7: 5 ('Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control') to reject marriage entirely.

At any rate he [Tatian] writes word for word in 'On perfection according to the Saviour': 'Agreement [on abstinence] goes suitably with prayer, but partnership in corruption weakens intercession. At least he [Paul] makes the concession in such a way as to put to shame and act as a restraint. For by conceding that they might come together because of Satan and lack of self-control he made it clear that anyone

who would conform was going to serve two masters; through agreement he would serve God, but through want of agreement he would serve licence and fornication and the devil.' He says this by way of commentary on the apostle.³²

Clement attributes the equation of sex with corruption to Tatian, who believed that sex, even within marriage, prevented prayer. Tatian interpreted 1 Cor. 7: 5 as an exhortation for married couples to abstain altogether. In Tatian's eyes marital sex was equivalent to having licence, fornication, and the devil as one's masters.

Aphrahat discusses marriage or sexual relations in Dem. 18. 8. He uses ܠܗܘܘܢܐ throughout the section. First he remarks 'Far be it from us that we should attribute anything blameworthy to marriage which God has placed in the world, for it is written, "God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good".'³³ Since Syriac Christians believed that God created humanity without sexual distinctions, Aphrahat could be using Gen. 1: 31 to evaluate continent marriage. But vs. 31 is after God's creation of male and female (vs. 27), so Aphrahat's use of ܠܗܘܘܢܐ allows for the possibility that God created sexual intercourse and saw that it was very good.

Although there may be some question as to what kind of relationship Aphrahat meant in the last passage, he affirms marriage a little later in the section when he says, 'He created sexual union, temporal birth, and it is very good; but virginity is better than it.'³⁴ Since he qualifies ܠܗܘܘܢܐ with 'temporal birth,' he is declaring that sexual intercourse itself is very good - but he makes his preference for virginity explicit.

Aphrahat's reason for choosing virginity over marriage is that it is closer to the angelic life which he advocates: 'Love virginity, the heavenly portion, the communion of the watchers of heaven. For there is nothing like it and the Messiah dwells in those who are like this.'³⁵ After declaring that God created marriage and saw that it was very good, Aphrahat pronounced that sexual union was also very good. But he then emphasises that virginity is preferable by calling it 'the heavenly portion,' 'the communion of the watchers of heaven,' and finally, by asserting that nothing is like it.

3. 32 In Ephrem

In *H. Virg.* 1. 6 Ephrem complains against groups who encouraged celibacy to the detriment of the believers who were not able to handle it:

ܟܒܫܐ ܠܩܘܠܐ ܡܢ ܥܒܕ ܕܗ ܘܡܫܟܐ ܟܦܫܐ ܕܐܠܘܗܝܐ ...
 ܟܘܚܡܝܐ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܗܘܐ ܕܘܡܫܟܐ ܒܥܠܝܐ ܟܦܫܐ ܕܦܩܘܐ ܕܡܫܠܝܐ³⁶
 The Evil One enticed the weak away from sexual relations in the name
 of discipleship. . . . Ashamed to assume the state of marriage, they
 fell into the trap of sin.

Zuwaga means sexual intercourse the first time Ephrem uses it and marriage (with conjugal relations) the second time. He is interested in preventing weak disciples from falling into the sin of having pre-marital sex. He echoes 1 Cor. 7: 9, 'it is better to marry than to burn'. Paul's and Ephrem's tolerance of marriage for the weak is liberal compared to encratic attitudes. But Ephrem's implication is that only the weak marry. So he is hardly an advocate of marriage.

H. Nat. 7 presents Ephrem's attitude to celibacy and women. Stanza 13, in particular, suggests Ephrem's pastoral concern for women in pain:

ܕܡܝܐ ܠܦܫܘܬܐ ܘܡܝܐ ܘܡܝܐ ܘܡܝܐ
 ܫܒܒܐ ܕܐܪܘܚܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ
 ܕܠܐ ܘܡܫܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܡܝܐ
 ܗܘܐ ܘܡܫܟܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ
 ܒܠܢܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ³⁷
 The infertile women hovered over and held Him. They embraced
 [Him] and said, 'Blessed Fruit [conceived] without intercourse, bless
 our wombs during intercourse. Take pity on our infertility,
 Miraculous Child of virginity.'

Ephrem affirms chaste women and girls (st. 9), grieving mothers (st. 12), and he is sensitive and nurturing to infertile women (st. 13). He described them as focusing their attention on the Infant Jesus by their physical proximity, their countenances, and their caresses. Ephrem's preference for celibacy does not prevent his portraying the women asking Jesus for children. Their asking for blessing specifically during sexual intercourse (*zuwaga*) is quite bold. In isolation, this stanza could be interpreted to

imply that Ephrem did not consider women capable of celibacy because of their yearning for children. However after st. 9 in which Ephrem admires chaste women and girls, st. 13 indicates that he does not promote celibacy without regard to the feelings of infertile women.

Ephrem defended marriage and children in *H. Virg.* 5. 14:

38
 It [oil] comforts infertile women like Sarah and Rebekah and Rachel.
 The same [oil] also strengthens fertile women like Leah, Zilpah and
 Bilhah, because to it [oil], sexual union is pure. For it is planted in the
 world like a vineshoot and children are like fruit hanging from it.

Šawtaputa has been translated as sexual union because the context of the stanza is infertility and fertility. The purity of sexual intercourse is the reason the oil strengthens fertile women. Sexual relations must be inferred because the oil regards *šawtaputa* as a living vine. Just as healthy vines are, by nature, productive, so marriage can be.

H. Nat. 28. 1, 3, 4 present the relative value of virginity and conjugal relations:

1. תהילת חסידא דכחמל
 א כח סתהא און, יחקה
 תונו דכח ית גחמאל
 אכח אפס יל וורק
 גחמל לר ארזכ מסג
 אספס אכח אפ תזר אגחמל
 סתה דאמא כחלית און אהג
 אה דג כחמל
 3. לה דג חסבא אהא
 אפ לר דתגא און וורק
 חקנן דתזכ אפ חליל
 דסגחא ת וורק³⁹
 אהא אכח יד דכח תחמל און

כה גמולו מן המעלה
 בלתי כה גמולו מן המעלה
 גמולו כה גמולו
 גמולו כה גמולו 4.
 גמולו כה גמולו
 גמולו כה גמולו
 גמולו כה גמולו
 גמולו כה גמולו
 גמולו כה גמולו
 גמולו כה גמולו
 גמולו כה גמולו
 גמולו כה גמולו

1. If the animals which were in the precious shelter of the ark were chaste, how much [more] would Mary in whom Emmanuel dwelt turn against sexual intercourse. You will magnified and sanctified you [Mary]. All the more has Your Lord adorned you. The animals of Noah were tied up, but you [chose] by your will.

3. But marriage is not defiled, nor is intercourse impure. Chastity's wings are greater and lighter than [the wings of] intercourse. Marriage, while pure, is lower [than chastity]. Its house of refuge is modest darkness. Confidence belongs completely to modesty which reflects light.

4. Light shone forth upon your [the angels'] habitation and did not give a place for intercourse, for there were no doers of the secret [act]. The shadows of weakness and lust were dispersed by the Saviour's rays inside your [Mary's] dwelling [which is] full of glory. Spiritual woman, all of you has become spiritual since you have given birth to the spiritual man.

These stanzas give a mixed message. Ephrem says that marriage is not defiled, nor is intercourse impure. But the context leads to the conclusion that neither is admirable. Spirituality is ranked according to sexual experience. There are three grades of spirituality: animals, sexually active married couples, and celibates. Exercising one's will contributes to one's spiritual condition. Animals are the lowest level. They can be chaste, but only if they are physically restrained from copulating. Ephrem credits the animals on the ark for their involuntary chastity. Since Mary turned against sexual intercourse (*zuwaga*), Ephrem must believe being pregnant with Jesus and having sex are incompatible. His contrasting the animals' inability to choose with Mary's wilful choice indicates the importance of the will.

Ephrem uses both *šawtaputa* and *zuwaga* in the first two lines of st. 3. Since the words are almost synonymous, Ephrem could be referring to two slightly different relationships: marriage without sex and sex within marriage.

If, in st. 3, *šawtaputa* means continent marriage and *zuwaga* means sexual intercourse, then both sexually active couples and couples who abstain are less esteemed than celibates because chastity is greater and lighter (better) than sexual intercourse and higher than marriage. However it is improbable that Ephrem would treat marital abstinence in the same way as conjugal relations considering his preference for virginity and celibacy. So it is more likely that he uses different words for variety and to stress that marital sex is truly acceptable. He may be addressing an audience which already believed that marriage and sex were defiled and impure because he says they are not, instead of evaluating them positively - marriage is blessed, intercourse pure.

Although marriage is pure, it is lower than chastity and relegated to a refuge of modest darkness, or a hiding place. Ephrem used words for modest and modesty, *ⲛⲁⲕⲡⲁ* (*nakpa*) and *ⲛⲁⲕⲡⲁⲧⲁ* (*nakputa*), which are often applied to celibates by later writers.⁴¹ His using chastity as a standard for evaluating spirituality indicates his ambivalence towards marriage and the sex act.

Total confidence belongs only to modesty which reflects light. The fact that total confidence is dependent upon light-reflecting modesty alludes to a contrast between darkness and light. If modesty does indeed reflect light, then paradoxically modest darkness would, in some sense, reflect light (purity) onto marriage and the sex act. Yet by ranking celibacy above marriage and conjugal relations, Ephrem shies away from affirming sex even within marriage.

St. 4 substantiates Ephrem's preference for virginity and his implicit spurning of sex by describing the angelic domain as a place of light with no room for sexual intercourse (*zuwaga*). He seems to believe that a woman usually becomes pregnant as a result of weakness and lust and hints that Mary could have been subject to both

except that the light of her son dispersed such vices. Mary had to become wholly spiritual to give birth to the spiritual man. This attitude diminishes Mary's and Jesus's sexuality and therefore their humanity.

3. 4 Summary

Determining the Syriac church's attitude to sexual intercourse and marriage has been difficult because Syriac has two nearly synonymous words for the two relationships, continent marriage was practised to some degree during the period under discussion, and also because most of the texts were written by advocates of celibacy. In the pre-Christian and early Christian periods, aversion to sex was prevalent in several quarters, for example some of the Greek philosophical schools and Jewish apocalypticism. Elements of the prevailing attitudes seeped into Syriac Christianity. The urgency of Christian eschatology encouraged virginity as the ideal. Regardless of the precise origins of Syriac Christian asceticism, virginity and celibacy were definitely more highly esteemed than marriage because virginity was equated with the angelic life. Certain biblical verses (Lk. 20: 35-6; Mt. 8: 20; Gen. 2: 24, etc.) and passages from *The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Acts of Thomas*, and others, were interpreted to advocate celibacy. There is, however, evidence to support the claim that Aphrahat and Ephrem tolerated marriage and conjugal relations, at least for procreative purposes, unlike Tatian who adamantly rejected marital sex. Ephrem seems to tolerate marriage in order to distinguish his church from the extremes of encratism. His comments to infertile women result from his personal sensitivity rather than from any doctrinal reasons.

3. 5 Footnotes

¹ Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 11-8, 154-8.

² Referring to Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, p. 190, 226, Murray, *Symbols*, p. 155, n. 2, says 'Bardaisan (an eclectic thinker standing in an uncertain relation to the Church) is the only early Syriac writer with a good word to say for sexual intercourse, which he is said to have judged good for women, lessening the amount of sin in them'. Bardaisan's opinion may be a 'good word' about sex for a man, but perhaps not for a woman. His statement could free couples to enjoy each other sexually. But Bardaisan sees women as ontologically sinful. Therefore, despite the reason, if a woman refuses to have sex, she is choosing to remain in a sinful state. Thus a woman refusing sex becomes a sinner rejecting 'healing' which could make her more vulnerable to rape with the rapist her 'saviour'.

³ Arthur Vööbus, *The History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient 1*, CSCO 184, subs. 14 (Louvain: 1958), pp. 72, 104.

⁴ Alfred Adam, 'Grundbegriffe des Mönchtums in Sprachlicher Sicht', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 65 (1953/54), pp. 218-19.

⁵ Brock, *Luminous Eye*, p. 112.

⁶ McVey, p. xi.

⁷ Hans W. J. Drijvers, 'Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-speaking Christianity' in *East of Antioch* (London: Variorum reprints, 1984), p. 170.

⁸ Brock, *Luminous Eye*, p. 110.

⁹ Vööbus, *History 1*, p. 99.

¹⁰ Adam, pp. 209-39.

¹¹ Peter Nagel, *Die Motivierung der Askese in der alten Kirche und der Ursprung des Mönchtums, Texte und Untersuchungen* 95 (Berlin: 1966), pp. 41-44. Brock disagrees with Nagel's interpretation in 'Early Syrian Asceticism', *Numen* 20 (1973), p. 8.

¹² Murray, *Symbols*, p. 15.

¹³ Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for Heaven: The Catholic Church and Sexuality*, tr. John Brownjohn (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1990), pp. 1-4; Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 247-9.

¹⁴ Ranke-Heinemann, pp. 1-4. The Stoa was a school of philosophy which existed from c. 300 B. C. - 250 A. D.

¹⁵ Drijvers, 'East of Antioch: Forces and Structures in the Development of Early Syriac Theology', p. 17.

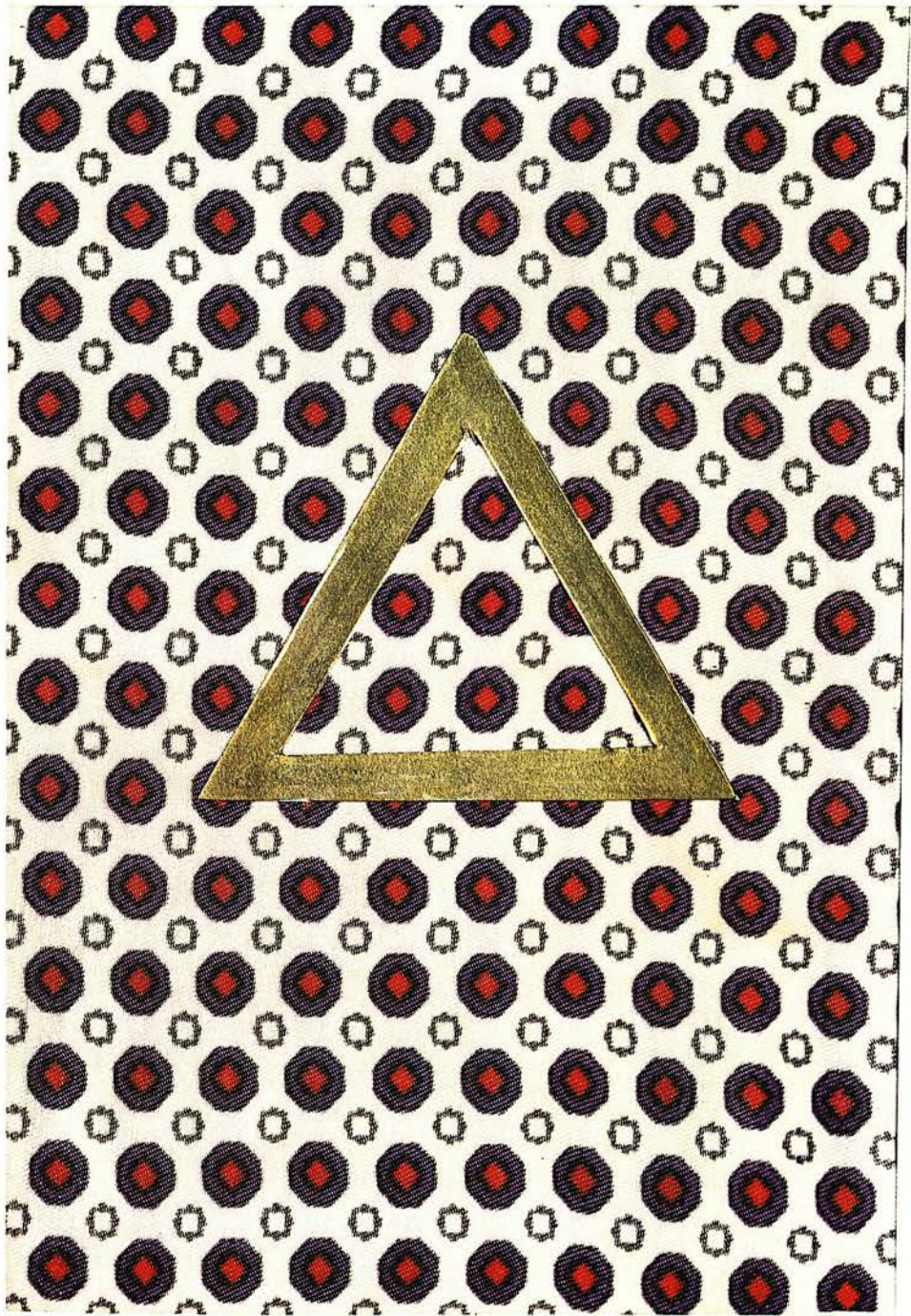
¹⁶ Murray, *Symbols*, p. 17. Steven D. Fraade, 'Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism' in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Green (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 253-88, explains the problems in defining asceticism and reveals previous scholarly biases in designating certain religious systems as ascetic. After examining ascetic elements in pre-rabbinic Judaism, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, Philo, and the Essenes' writings, Fraade goes on to trace the ascetic tensions in Rabbinic Judaism which he claims never disappeared.

¹⁷ Erik Peterson, *Frühkirche, Judentum, und Gnosis. Studien und Untersuchungen* (Rome: 1959), pp. 219-20; A. P. Hayman, 'Jews and Christian Ascetics in Syria,' unpublished paper, p. 19. During a survey of various hypotheses, Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, p. 245, states that early Christian ambivalence to women was a result of 'the eschatological thought that developed in classical Christianity'.

¹⁸ R. H. Connolly, 'St. Ephraim and Encratism', *Journal of Theological Studies* 8 (1907), p. 46.

Part Two:

Ephrem's Use of Feminine Imagery
for Non-divine Subjects



Triangle

Throughout the Ancient Near East, three-way designs like the triangle were believed to symbolise the Divine Feminine who was manifested as Virgin, Mother, and Crone. Later the triangle was taken into Christianity as a symbol of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The triangle precedes the second part of the thesis because it came to be a symbol of woman. This was based on its use as a symbol of the Goddess' pelvis.

Sometimes Ephrem's metaphorical imagery is dependent on the grammatical gender of certain words in the sentence. But at other times he personifies abstract or human subjects in familial roles such as brides, wives, daughters, or sisters. He employs bridal imagery extensively. The image of a sister is rare. Ephrem also depicts females in roles which are unrelated to the family.

4. 1 Grammatical gender as a source of metaphorical gender

Some imagery is metaphorically gender specific solely because of the grammatical gender of the words in the sentence. One such case is *H. Nat.* 28. 8. 1-6:

ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ

How Error has erred: she gathered bitterness from sweet blossoms. In the same way she eats sweet fruit, and they are transformed by her to deadly gall. Error gathers poison for her lovers even from fragrant scripture.

Like most abstract nouns, Error (ܥܘܠܐ, *tu'yai*) is feminine. The impact of the feminine verbs associated with Error may well not have struck Ephrem's fourth-century readers the way it strikes one today. But Ephrem's reference to 'her lovers' indicates her female character. The juxtaposition of sweet flowers, fruit, and fragrant scripture to bitterness, deadly gall, and poison dramatises the evil nature of the 'female' Error.

H. Virg. 1. 7 offers evidence for the probability that grammatical gender could influence how a concept was seen metaphorically:

ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ

כוּלָּהּ הַיְּמִינִים הַיְּמִינִים הַיְּמִינִים
 לְמַעַן תִּשְׁמַרְתִּי אֶת-כְּנִסִּי
 כִּי אִם-יִשְׁמַרְתִּי אֶת-כְּנִסִּי
 אֲבַדְתִּי אֶת-כְּנִסִּי

O body, why do you persecute virginity which came down to our realm and dwells with us like a sojourner? If one pursues her and pulls her nest down, because she is not able to rebuild it, her wing quickly carries her to the height - this bird on high who grows old in one nest. But if she leaves, she abandons [the nest] for ever.

Virginity, a feminine noun, is personified first as a male sojourner. However the point is the sojourner's transience, not his sex. Virginity is then depicted as a mother bird. Ephrem consistently employs the feminine gender of the verbs and pronominal suffixes in the stanza. Since virginity is not something that can be regained, it is like a bird who leaves her nest once it has been destroyed, never to return to that nest again. McVey believes that Ephrem is saying one must choose either celibacy or marriage and follow through with the choice throughout one's life.³ However the only form of marriage which could be meant would be that in which the couple maintains continence because once virginity is lost, it can not be regained, and the bird figuratively abandons that nest (person) for ever. So Ephrem is actually advocating celibacy regardless of marital status lest the bird of virginity be chased away.

4. 2 Bridal imagery

Bridal imagery can be interpreted on two levels - the spiritual and the sexual. The sexual aspect of the bride's and groom's relationship has invariably been suppressed within Christianity. Sexual images have traditionally stimulated strong responses. Ephrem, being an exceptionally creative poet and ascetic, seems to have utilised sexually provocative images for spiritual purposes. His bridal imagery is replete with sexual innuendo even though the baptised are becoming like angels - androgynes who do not engage in sex. That Ephrem, writing in the fourth-century East, employed images which can, in the twentieth-century West, be interpreted sexually does not mean that Ephrem or his hearers would have understood them thus.

Ephrem interprets the wedding at Cana to be symbolic of the marriage between the Heavenly Bridegroom and the church as a bride. Although other stanzas in *H. Virg.* 33 contain bridal imagery, st. 1 is sufficient to demonstrate Ephrem's portrayals of the bridal couple:

ܡܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܥܢܐ ܕܥܢܐ
 ,ܡܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܥܢܐ ܕܥܢܐ
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 ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܥܢܐ ܕܥܢܐ

Let Cana thank You because You brightened her wedding banquet. The bridegroom's crown exalted You because You exalted it. The bride's crown belonged to Your victory. Allegories are expounded and drawn in her mirror because You depicted Your church in the bride. In her companions, Your guests are figured. And in her magnificence, You depicted Your coming.

Cana, personified as a female, and the bridegroom's crown rejoice because Jesus chose a wedding as a symbol for the relationship between Himself and the church. The bride's crown belongs to Jesus because He was victorious. The mirror reflects allegories of the relationship between the Heavenly Bridegroom and the church as a bride at their wedding banquet. Since Ephrem says 'allegories are expounded and drawn,' no one explanation of Jesus's relationship with the church is sufficient. The bridegroom subtly symbolises the Heavenly Bridegroom. The guests at the wedding in Cana symbolise the guests at the marriage of Jesus and the church. The bride's magnificence symbolises Jesus's coming.

The usual images of Jesus as a Groom and the church as a bride may be too simplistic. Although Ephrem used the bridegroom to symbolise Jesus, he still compared Jesus's advent to the bride's appearance on her wedding day. There are two words for 'coming, arrival, advent' in Syriac: ܡܫܝܚܐ (*metita*), a feminine noun and ܡܫܝܚܐ (*metya*), a masculine one. Since Ephrem used the masculine word for Jesus's coming, the grammatical gender of 'coming' would not have

effected his imagery. Ephrem may understand the unity of the wedding with both bride and groom symbolising aspects of the Heavenly Bridegroom who desires a relationship with a bride-church which consists of both sexes.

H. Virg. 19. 2. 1 contrasts the synagogue with the church as a bride:

ܩܘܒܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ⁵

Blessed are you, bride and crowned one, the Bridegroom whom Zion hated entered you.

Since the verb ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ('*al*') usually means 'to come into a woman' when it is used with the preposition ܕ (*I*) as it is here,⁶ the image of the Bridegroom entering the bride is distinctly sexual. In receiving Jesus, the church is exalted by being crowned. Ephrem sometimes disparages Zion or the synagogue for refusing to accept the church's belief that Jesus is the Messiah. In this line, Zion rejected the Bridegroom, not the reverse.

H. Virg. 45. 4 - 7 contrasts images of Nineveh as a mother and Israel as a bride:

ܩܘܒܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ 4.
ܩܘܒܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
ܩܘܒܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ 5.
ܩܘܒܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
ܩܘܒܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ 6.
ܩܘܒܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
ܩܘܒܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ 7.
ܩܘܒܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ⁷

4. I led the vine out of Egypt as a bride. She bore sins instead of blossoms.

5. Nineveh bore fasts like clusters [of grapes] and [she bore] all alms like bunches [of berries].

6. Her children put on sackcloth instead of clusters arrayed in leaves.

7. And instead of watering which makes fruit thrive, milk was withheld from her children's mouths.⁸

Ephrem compares the Israelites with the Ninevites. The Israelites were unworthy as a bride because they produced sins instead of fruit. Nineveh is portrayed as a mother

instead of as a bride. Her children, the Ninevites, fasted, repented, and were fruitful. The extreme nature of the fasts becomes apparent when Ephrem says they refused water 'which makes fruit thrive'. Their fruit is spiritual, not earthly (human).

According to *H. Faith* 20. 6-7 prayer is a female betrothed virgin and faith is a bride:

6. כַּחֲמוֹתַי אֲנִי מִן־הַבְּתוּלֹתַי, כַּחֲמוֹתַי אֲנִי מִן־הַבְּתוּלֹתַי
 אֲנִי מִן־הַבְּתוּלֹתַי, אֲנִי מִן־הַבְּתוּלֹתַי
 אֲנִי מִן־הַבְּתוּלֹתַי, אֲנִי מִן־הַבְּתוּלֹתַי
 אֲנִי מִן־הַבְּתוּלֹתַי, אֲנִי מִן־הַבְּתוּלֹתַי
 7. תְּחִיבָהּ כִּי־תֵלֵךְ, לֹא־תֵלֵךְ אֲנִי
 לֹא־תֵלֵךְ אֲנִי, לֹא־תֵלֵךְ אֲנִי
 לֹא־תֵלֵךְ אֲנִי, לֹא־תֵלֵךְ אֲנִי
 לֹא־תֵלֵךְ אֲנִי, לֹא־תֵלֵךְ אֲנִי

6. The unsullied request is a virgin of the bridal chamber. And if she passes the mouth's gate, she is like a wanderer. Truth is the [mouth's] chamber and love his crown. Stillness and silence [are] the eunuchs at her gate.

7. She is the betrothed of the King's Daughter. May she not go out to become contemptible. Faith is a bride to be seen in the streets. She shall be carried upon the voice from the mouth to the chamber of the ear.

Sts. 6-7 relate the unsullied request (prayer) and faith. They are almost synonymous. There is, after all, little difference between a betrothed virgin and a bride. Silent prayer is surrounded by truth, love, stillness, and silence. If she leaves the mouth, she is like a wanderer. Nevertheless prayer is betrothed to the King's Daughter or Son, depending on which manuscript is read. Beck has 'daughter' in his Syriac text with 'son' as a variant.¹¹ There could be two reasons for the change from daughter to son. The grammatically feminine gender of request (ܚܘܒܘܬܐ, *ba'uta*) influenced the metaphorical gender of the betrothed. Since celibate males were believed to be betrothed to Jesus, sex was not an issue in the bridal imagery. Thus a feminine abstract, prayer, could be betrothed to a king's daughter as easily as to his son.

In the bridal context, prayer's Betrothed is Jesus. This in itself does not mean the Betrothed would originally have been a Son because Jesus's having been

incarnated as a man did not prevent Ephrem from applying feminine imagery to Him (see chapter 9). The two basic premises taken together appear to have mattered enough to a later scribe that the manuscript was changed from daughter to son.

Advocating silent prayer, Ephrem hopes the prayer which has wandered outside the mouth will not become contemptible. However faith is a bride which is to be seen on the streets and should be witnessed aloud.

Stanzas 1, 3, 5, 8-9, 12 in *H. Virg.* 24 offer a panoply of bridal imagery:

1. פִּלְגֵי כְּתוּבָהּ דְּעֵרָא דְּפָרָא
 דְּכְתוּבָהּ דְּבַרְגָּא דְּמֵרָא
 כְּסֻפְרָא דְּחֵבֵי סִינָא
 דְּמֵרָא דְּבַרְגָּא דְּמֵרָא
 לְמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא, לְמֵרָא
 מֵרָא דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא, לְמֵרָא
 דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא
 לְמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא
3. פִּלְגֵי כְּתוּבָהּ דְּעֵרָא
 דְּמֵרָא דְּבַרְגָּא
 מֵרָא דְּמֵרָא, דְּמֵרָא
 דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא
 לְמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא, לְמֵרָא
 דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא
 לְמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא
5. פִּלְגֵי כְּתוּבָהּ דְּעֵרָא
 דְּמֵרָא דְּבַרְגָּא
 מֵרָא דְּמֵרָא, מֵרָא
 כְּתוּבָהּ דְּעֵרָא, מֵרָא
 דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא
 לְמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא, לְמֵרָא
 דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא
 לְמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא
8. פִּלְגֵי כְּתוּבָהּ דְּעֵרָא
 דְּמֵרָא דְּבַרְגָּא, מֵרָא
 מֵרָא דְּמֵרָא, לְמֵרָא
 דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא דְּמֵרָא

- אבנך בלם כסיה לרא
 לבת לעצמך דאדעוהו רבא פלס
 בכונהא לרביה דרעהיא
 שיהו בכה, לב דמזוזת ומזוז לב
 אלהא תלה לב
 לבתו ער לך, רב דהיה 9.
 איהו עבדך ער
 אלהא כושרת דוהא כושר
 דאדעוהו, כיה דגלגל רביה, 12.
 לבתך דאדעוהו, דאדעוהו מ
 פקע מיהו כיה עולת
 רביה כושרת איהו ער
 תלה כושרת איהו ער
 לבת לרב, דעוהו, לרב
 דיהו איהו ער לך מ
 רביה לעולת רביה מ
 אדעוהו רביה לך 13

1. Blessed are you, virgin, with whom the fair name of virginity grows old. Chastity built a nest in your branches; may your womb be a nest for her dwelling. May the power of grace protect your temple. May the voice of the Mighty One restrain your enemy that you will be a good motivation for spectators for ever and ever.

3. Blessed are you, heavenly sparrow whose nest was on the cross of light. You did not want to build a nest on earth lest the serpent enter and destroy your eggs. Blessed are your wings that were able to fly. May you come with the holy eagles that took flight and soared from the earth below to the bridal chamber of delights.

5. Blessed are you, O betrothed, espoused to the Living One, You who do not yearn for a mortal man. Foolish is the bride who is proud of the ephemeral crown which will not exist tomorrow. Blessed is your heart, captivated by the love of that beauty which is depicted in your mind. You have exchanged the transitory bridal chamber for the bridal chamber whose blessings are unceasing.

8. Blessed are you, peaceful woman, you stood and considered humanity as [if] on high. You saw the world, weary and distressed and utterly burdened with a wearisome yoke. Blessed is your beauty - free and not labouring in servitude to [your] Betrothed. You chose a Bridegroom whose splendour would adorn you and whose dew would refresh you.

9. Blessed also is that dove who scorned splendid cedars and cypresses. She took shelter in the love of the blessed Olive Tree which was the King's Son, your Betrothed.

12. Blessed are you who abstained, for the beginning of this life is joyous, the end [is] gloomy. It begins joyfully as an adventure; it ends mournfully as a deception. Blessed is your heart that hated the world which, though dwelling [in it, it is as if], it has passed away and is no more. Beauty blossoms for the foolish woman and makes her proud, but it ceases and saddens her.

H. Virg. 24 describes the joys of virginity (and chastity) and the burden of human marriage. Virginity and chastity are almost synonymous in st. 1. Ephrem's use of chastity includes those who were living chaste lives, although they were not virgins. St. 1 depicts virginity and chastity as birds and the virgin as a nest. Whereas *H. Virg.* 1. 7 focuses on the irreversible calamity of giving up virginity, here Ephrem calls on God to protect the virgin and to restrain the enemy desire so that she will be a model of chastity.

St. 3 affirms the bird for choosing to build her nest on the cross of light. This ensures God's protection of the sparrow, a small bird vulnerable to predators. Ephrem describes why the sparrow built her nest on the cross: the serpent could come in and destroy her eggs otherwise. This is especially vivid because the nest is in the virgin's womb (st. 1). Therefore the serpent symbolises a male who might impregnate the virgin. The life of chastity has strengthened the sparrow so much that she is able to soar with the eagles to the bridal chamber of delights.

In sts. 5, 8-9 Ephrem contrasts a human bridegroom with the Heavenly Bridegroom. The bride in st. 5 is blessed because, being betrothed to the Living One, she does not want a husband. Ephrem belittles the bride who chooses a mortal man instead of Jesus. The bride's choice of a husband has eternal consequences. She is exchanging a bridal chamber with sexual pleasures which ends in death for an everlasting bridal chamber of delights (st. 3) without sex.

In st. 8 Ephrem credits the chaste woman with insight and vision by equating her choice with being raised up to the heights to consider the human plight. Ephrem saw what would have been even more obvious to a woman looking for a way out - the drudgery and oppression of human marriage and living in the world. His one-sided

view of the world and marriage would have quelled any temptation to unchastity. Ephrem elevates both the woman who has chosen chastity and her choice.

St. 9 returns to the bird imagery. This time the bird, a dove, nests in trees, which stand for different kinds of men. The dove, probably virginity as in *H. Virg.* 2. 8, chose the Olive Tree. The Olive Tree is personified as a human in that the dove rested in the tree's love instead of in its branches. Ephrem identifies the Olive Tree as the King's Son, the Betrothed. Thus the cedars and the cypresses symbolise other men.¹⁴

Ephrem continues the theme of the bitter life versus the spiritual life in st. 12. He vigorously cautions against the joys of youth and sex which turn to gloom and deception with age. Detachment from the world brings blessing. Ephrem ends st. 12 with an echo of Prov. 31: 30, 'charm is deceitful and beauty empty; the woman who is wise is the one to praise.'

The Holy Spirit has a vital role in *Sog.* 6. Stanzas 1-3, 7, 9-10, 12-14, 21 concern the rewards of baptism and portray rather provocative images of Jesus the Bridegroom and the church as bride.

1. אפיא לבתעבה, איה אפי אלפי
 אפיא ונתבה, כותבה תלרר
 2. כותבה תלרר מלמה, סכת,
 תי נידה נסיה כנה דזא סתה
 3. כנה דלר פי איה סבלה,
 סעכסר דכח אדס נה לבחמה,
 7. ונה דוכמה לבחמה, סכת,
 כח, שנה דסיה כנה לזא סתה
 9. לבח שנה איה סבלה,
 אודסיה תי כנה דלר ניליבה,
 10. נהר דגנח כח תלר שנה
 פחש לה, איה סתל לה, לזי
 12. לזדס כח פזר אפס כחמה
 לה, דה נסיה לה, כנה נהרה
 13. נה דלר נסיה כנהבה, איה

גארא בן בלמ קואיא גארא כח

14. קואיא קואיא קואיא קואיא

15. קואיא קואיא קואיא קואיא

1. Your garments glisten like snow, my brothers. And your brilliance is [as] beautiful as the likeness of angels.
2. Beloved, in the likeness of angels, you have come up from the Jordan river in the armour of the Holy Spirit.
3. My brothers you have received the bridal chamber that does not fail. And today you have put on the glory of humanity.¹⁶
7. My beloved, you put on the armour of victory in the hour when the priest invoked the Holy Spirit.
9. You have received the good things of Heaven, my brothers. Beware of the Evil One lest he ravage you.
10. The day when He dawns, the Heavenly King will open His door for you and invite you to enter Eden.
12. He cast out the [first] human in sorrow because of the fruit. But He makes you joyful in the bridal chamber of rejoicing.
13. Who would not rejoice in your bridal chamber, my brothers? For the Father with His Son and the Spirit rejoice in you.
14. The Father shall be a wall of strength to you, and the Son a Redeemer, and the Spirit a guard.

The first stanza sets the stage: the bride (Ephrem's brothers) is brilliant and the wedding apparel as white as snow. After receiving the new birth, baptism, the faithful become like angels and receive the armour of the Holy Spirit so that they can be taken into the bridal chamber (st. 2). The spiritual armour seems to be a chastity belt of sorts. Ephrem's repetition of 'the likeness of angels' reminds the reader of his church's preference for celibacy.

The theological meaning of the 'bridal chamber that does not fail' in st. 3 is that the baptised have been cleansed of their sins and are receiving new life. The practical meaning of the phrase in a less ascetic environment would be that consummation of the marriage would result in new life: the bride would get pregnant. Having experienced intimacy with the Bridegroom, the bride has been glorified.

The invocation of the Spirit awards yet more armour (st. 7). The armour of the Holy Spirit of st. 2 is the armour of victory of st. 7. In a bridal context within an ascetic church, the victory is that of spirit over body, especially sexual desire.

Ephrem warns his brothers against the onslaughts by the devil (st. 9). The reward for fidelity in the bridal relationship is that the Fall will be reversed because the

Heavenly King will invite the faithful into the bridal chamber. Ephrem describes Eden as 'the bridal chamber of rejoicing' where the Bridegroom will make the bride joyful. It is a rousing place, if not sexually, for the Trinity are there rejoicing with the bride (st. 13). The idea of the Spirit's armour as a chastity belt is not so far-fetched. The Holy Trinity surrounds the bride-church on all sides. The Father is a wall; the Spirit is a guard; and the Son is a redeemer, perhaps standing beside her to pay her dowry.¹⁷

Sog. 5 relates an extraordinary exchange between John the Baptist and Jesus before His baptism by John.

4. חלחא תחיהא אלה טהא גנה טהא דלמ טיהא
 טיהא טענה תלה ותוכא תכסא ות' כטלמא
 11. חלה לניהא אנה תהא דלכנה כאתמא, טו טהא מ
 אה איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 12. חלה ליה ג' חנה תהא דיהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 חנה תלה ליה איהא תהא דיהא איהא איהא איהא
 16. מ' איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 דיהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 23. חלה איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 25. חלה איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 28. חלה איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 34. חלה איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 40. חלה איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 41. חלה איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 42. חלה איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 43. חלה איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא
 איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא איהא

46. זמית בנה הוה, סתו סתוהו דנאסו, תו תסתהו
 אה אנהו, דנלסו, למלו דאכא תו דתסתהו
47. זנד אה תו, אהו תלהו אה לנהו דנאכו חו
 חו. יפא דלכא תלה דל בנלו אנהו נסו
48. ללו מנה סתוהו תו סתו סתו סתו ללו סתו
 תו סתו סתוהו סתו סתו סתו סתו
49. אהו דתסתהו סתו ללו סתו דאכא תו תסתהו
 דתו סתו, דתו סתו סתו סתו סתו סתו
50. אהו סתו תו סתו סתו סתו סתו סתו
 אהו, לנשו סתו סתו סתו סתו סתו¹⁸

4. The bride was engaged but did not know who the Bridegroom on whom she gazed was. The guests were assembled; the desert filled, and our Lord was hidden among them.

11. How can one openly grasp fire that burns in his hands? O Fire have mercy on me, and do not ask me to come near You, because it is hard for me.

12. I have revealed My will to you. What do you question? Draw near, baptise Me, and you shall not be burned. The bridechamber is ready; do not keep Me away from the wedding banquet that has been prepared.

16. Lo, I am to be baptised in their sight to reconcile humanity who was under wrath, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me that I am His Son and He is well pleased in Me.

23. I have prepared the way as I was sent. I have promised the bride as I was commanded. May Your epiphany be spread over the world now that You have come and do not let me baptise You.

25. Son of the Father, why should I baptise You? For lo, You are in Your Father and Your Father in You. You give holiness to priests. Why do You ask for common water?

28. The bride whom you promised Me waits for Me to go down, be baptised, and sanctify her. Friend of the Bridegroom do not restrain Me from the washing that awaits Me.

34. I am the flaming fire. Yet I became a baby in the virginal womb of the virgin for humanity's sake. And now I am to be baptised in the Jordan.

40. It is suitable for you to baptise Me so none may err and say about Me 'Why was the Levite afraid to baptise [Him] unless He were foreign to the Father's house?'

41. How, then, shall I complete the prayer over the Jordan when You are baptised? On whom shall I call as priest when the Father and the Spirit are seen over You?

42. The prayer is to be sealed by silence. Come, put only your hand on Me. And the Father shall speak in the priest's place that which is suitable concerning His Son.

43. Lo, all of the invited guests stand [waiting]. The Bridegroom's guests, lo, they bear witness that day by day I said among them, 'I am the voice and not the Word.'

46. Time marches on, and the marriage guests look to Me to see what will happen. Come, baptise Me, so they may give praise to the Father's voice when it is heard.

47. I obey, my Lord, according to Your word. Come to baptism as Your love constrains You. The dust worships what he has attained, that he should put his hand on Him who fashioned him.

48. The [celestial] ranks were silent as they stood, and the Bridegroom went down into the Jordan. The Holy One was baptised and immediately came up, and His light shone forth on the world.

49. The doors of the highest were opened above, and the Father's voice was heard, 'This is my Beloved in whom I am well pleased.' Come and worship Him all you peoples.

50. They who saw were amazed as they stood [there], at the Spirit who came down and bore witness to Him. Praise to Your manifestation that brightens all, You in whose revelation the worlds are lightened.

In this hymn John is as persistent about not baptising Jesus as Jesus is insistent that John should baptise Him. John disagrees with Jesus for a variety of reasons - mainly John's fear (st. 11) or his unworthiness (sts. 23, 47) and Jesus's holiness (st. 25). Jesus does not convince John to baptise Him until the forty-seventh stanza (out of fifty)! Ephrem considered the church to be Jesus's betrothed even before He began His ministry, thereby transforming His baptism into the wedding of the bride church (sts. 4, 12, 28, 34, 43, 48).

Jesus's baptism was one of the major manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the Gospels, with Mary's conception and Pentecost being the others of most significance. So it comes as a surprise that four stanzas about Jesus's baptism refer to the Father and the Son without the Spirit (sts. 16, 25, 42, 46). The fire, a common symbol of the Spirit, symbolises Jesus in sts. 11-12, 34. In st. 41 John asks Jesus how to complete the prayer when the Father and the Spirit are seen after Jesus's baptism. Ephrem includes an unbiblical visual manifestation of the Father, and omits the biblical reference to the dove. As impressive as the dove would have been at Jesus's baptism, st. 50 omits the dove, leaving open the manner in which the silent Spirit witnessed to Jesus.

The only bride in *H. Virg.* 11. is the bird in st. 15. But the images of domination and submission which appear in st. 15 are continued in sts. 16-17. Sts. 18-20 offer the rewards for suffering in silence:

15. מן ארץ חיה בראשית ימיך

- חַפְּתֵי אֶרֶץ כְּאֵרְבֵּי מִיָּדָהּ וְכִי תִפְּטֹר
 אֶרֶץ כְּאֵרֶץ כִּי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר
 מִן אֶרֶץ כִּי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר 16.
 וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר
 וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר 17.
 וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר
 וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר 18.
 וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר
 וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר 19.
 וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר
 וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר 20.
 וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר וְכִי תִפְּטֹר¹⁹

15. So also when the bird beats the air with her wings as with her arms, the back [of the air] is subjected to her, and like a bride she is carried on high by the power [of the air].

16. So also the farmer by means of iron rends and cleaves the earth, but she is not angered by her suffering. She opens her treasures and even her womb by her sufferings.

17. The sheep in his shame strips off his garment and cloak and gives it all to his shearers, like the Lamb who divided His garments for His crucifiers.

18. The symbol of the lamb is great: he is quiet in his life and sings in his death. His tambourine²⁰ [sounds] for festivities and the strings of his lyre [resound] for melodies and songs.

19. The teaching is so old that its age is not known. It dwells in youth although it [teaching] is scorned along with it [youth]. It [teaching] becomes small [and] makes itself great to greatly exalt it [youth].

20. Lo all these things teach by their symbols: for they open the treasure of their riches by their sufferings, and the suffering of the Son of the Gracious One is the key of His treasures.

Through the sequence of events in these stanzas Ephrem encourages acceptance of suffering and, to some extent, self-inflicted victimisation. He overlooks the aggression and concentrates on the victims' rewards. St. 15 gives an example of

beneficial domination and submission; both dominatrix and victim are active. St. 16 moves to active aggression and masochism with a known aggressor and victim. St. 17 presents self-inflicted humiliation with passive executioners. St. 18 continues the theme of suffering, with no victors. A reward for being victimised is implied. Sts. 19-20 describe the rewards for suffering cheerfully.

Whereas in st. 15 the one dominating (bird) is grammatically and metaphorically feminine and the victim (air) is treated grammatically as feminine, in st. 16 the male farmer dominates the female earth. In st. 15 the dominating bird becomes like the bride of the air and is carried aloft by 'her'. Domination helps the bird and in no way damages the air. Thus this is an image of harmless domination.

But in st. 16 the farmer is described more like a rapist of mother earth. Yet the suffering earth is not angered. She is 'helped' to give birth in that the suffering enables her to open her womb and yield forth her fruit. From the clause 'but she is not angered by her suffering', one might expect the earth to be angry; but she is not even though the farmer's actions cause her suffering. At least Ephrem allows mother earth the dignity of opening her own treasury and womb instead of having the farmer harvest the crop.

In st. 17 both the sheep and the Lamb willingly yield themselves to the executioners. Being stripped is a humiliation which Jesus experienced. But Jesus's being stripped seems to have been sufficiently disturbing that only Mt. (27: 28) mentions it specifically. In Mk. 15: 16-20 and Lk. 22: 11-12 the purple robe was put on Jesus without mentioning the stripping. Jesus was then returned to Pilate according to Luke. In Mark the soldiers removed the robe and 'dressed him in his own clothes' (vs. 20), thus alluding to Jesus's having been stripped. The Gospels do not say that Jesus resisted being humiliated nor did He strip off his own clothes and hand them over like the sheep in this stanza. Ephrem intensifies the sheep's humiliation by adding 'in his shame'. He does not say how Jesus happened to be without His clothes. Ephrem omits the soldiers' gambling for Jesus's robe at His

crucifixion and has Him dividing 'His garments for His crucifiers'. Neither the shearers nor the crucifiers are given an active part in the incident. They seem to be just standing around waiting for the victims to hand over their clothes.

After a stanza in which a sheep has given himself up to the shearers, the celebration in st. 18 reinforces a model of silent suffering and cheerful sacrifice. The lamb's (and the Lamb's) death was a festal occasion. In fact the lamb's skin and sinews were made into musical instruments to entertain the guests.

In st. 19 Ephrem draws on the age of the teaching to add authority to the model of self-sacrifice. Both the ancient teaching and the current follower are scorned. The teaching makes itself small in order to exalt (reward) the follower.

St. 20 reminds the scorned follower of the rewards for suffering. Suffering leads to riches as exemplified by the death of the 'Gracious One'.

4. 3 Images of wives

A wife and the church personified as a betrothed woman are the subjects of C.

Nis. 6. 13-16.

13. כן דגלתי לך, כי אתה שלי, ואתה נשואי לי, ואתה נשואי לי, ואתה נשואי לי
 14. כי אתה נשואי לי, ואתה נשואי לי, ואתה נשואי לי, ואתה נשואי לי
 15. כי אתה נשואי לי, ואתה נשואי לי, ואתה נשואי לי, ואתה נשואי לי
 16. כי אתה נשואי לי, ואתה נשואי לי, ואתה נשואי לי, ואתה נשואי לי

13. Be jealous over me because I am Yours, and I am betrothed to You my Lord. The apostle who betrothed me to You told me that You are jealous. The jealousy of their husbands is a bulwark to chaste [wives].

14. Samson stirred up the seas because he was terribly jealous over his wife, even though she was defiled and divided against him. Guard Your church for she has no one besides You.

15. Anyone who is not jealous over his betrothed neglects her. Jealousy is able to make known the love which is inside. You are called the Jealous One so that You might show me Your love.

16. This is the nature of a wife: weak and impulsive. It is jealousy [that] keeps her under fear every hour. You have been named among the Jealous so that You might make known Your concern.

Ephrem portrayed the church of Nisibis as both a man and woman betrothed to Jesus. He used the masculine form *ܡܟܝܪܐ* (*mkira*), which is from *ܡܟܪܐ* (*mkar*, 'to purchase, obtain'), for himself when beseeching Jesus to be jealous over His betrothed (st. 13). Thus the first person betrothed to the Bridegroom is another man. However Ephrem also speaks through the female character of the church, even asking Jesus to be jealous over 'her'. St. 13 concludes with an affirmation of the jealousy of husbands; it is a support to chaste wives.

Ephrem recounts Samson's jealousy over Delilah to make the point that Jesus's jealousy over the church shows His love for her (st. 14). He believes that if Samson was so jealous over a deceptive woman, then the church's fidelity would warrant Jesus's consideration. Ephrem refers to Delilah as Samson's *ܐܬܬܐ* (*atta*) 'woman' or 'wife'.²² There is little difference between this word and the terms for female betrothed (*ܡܟܝܪܐ*, *mkirta*) and bride (*ܟܠܠܐ*, *kallta*).²³ Although they have quite distinct connotations, each is used to designate some aspect of a female's relationship to the bridegroom/Bridegroom.

St. 15 enlarges the last line of st. 13 by equating a man's lack of jealousy with neglect of his fiancée and his jealousy over her with love. Since Ephrem uses *ܡܟܝܪܐ* (*mkirta*), the betrothed is definitely female. He interpreted Ex. 20: 5, Dt. 5: 9, or similar passages, to mean that Jesus was called the Jealous One to show His love for Ephrem and for the church. In comparing Jesus to a jealous husband, Ephrem implies that a husband's jealousy is good.

St. 16 indicates a disconcerting attitude to marriage. Ephrem uses אִתָּא ('atta, 'woman, wife') for the object of the male's jealousy. Since it is the same word he used for Delilah in her relationship to Samson, he seems to mean wife. In the bridal context of the previous three stanzas, there is no reason to interpret st. 16 as if Ephrem is claiming that the nature of a woman in general is weak and impulsive.²⁴ The husband is so jealous that the wife is living 'under fear every hour' - all the time. This intensity of jealousy would seem to reflect the husband's insecurity, not his love. But to Ephrem, jealousy, even to this extent, is clearly a sign of love. He emphasises the relation between jealousy and love by repeating his belief that Jesus was called Jealous to show His concern, or love, for the church.

H. Virg. 37. 2. 4-7 contrasts the place of the church and Zion as God's wives:

כלתו אהב כחל כסמא אהב
 גזמא דזינא לזמא
 לא נחב למ אהב חסא גזמא
 לסר תסא אהב למ גזמא²⁵

In His mercy all of Him has been mixed into all of us, and since He greatly loves His church, He did not give her the manna of her rival. He has living bread for her to eat.

The church's rival refers to a co-wife in a polygamous society, which in this case, is Israel.²⁶ Ephrem seems to accept polygamy and even endorses inequitable treatment of the first wife. In the wilderness God sent the Israelites bread from heaven (Ex. 16: 4ff.). But Ephrem believes it was not good enough for the wife which Jesus loved greatly. The implication is that God never loved the bride Israel as much as He does the church.

H. Virg. 25. 17-18 contrast the sinfulness of Solomon's having many wives to the purity of Jesus's numerous virgins.

17.
 זמא דזינא חלכא לזמא זמא
 זמא דזינא חלכא לזמא זמא
 זמא דזינא חלכא לזמא זמא
 זמא דזינא חלכא לזמא זמא

ܘܘܢ ܟܘܠܗܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ ܟܘܠܗܘܢ
 ܩܠܘܢ ܘܥܠܘܢ ܕܘܟܠܗܘܢ
 ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ 28

The festival of the detestable idol was pleasing to him [Julian], for on its holy day women and men rave [like dogs], female virgins fornicate, and wives run riot, spit out [and] speak shameful words. He desired filthy festivals and despised the blessed holy days of chastity and the Pasch of honor.

The verb Ephrem uses to describe the women's and men's behaviour at the festival is ܩܘܪܝܢܐ (*pqirin*) which means 'to be mad [as a dog], to be rabid, to rave'.²⁹ So Ephrem expressed his contempt for Julian's religion by using a verb associated with a dog, and a mad dog at that.

He seems especially appalled at the women's behaviour during the festival. In st. 6 both women and men behave like animals. Male virgins and husbands may be included among the raving men. But Ephrem specifies that female virgins fornicate and wives run riot, spit out and speak shameful words. Their offenses are primarily sexual. 'Shame' (ܒܗܬܐܬܐ, *behtata*) is frequently used to allude to sexual behaviour. So speaking shameful words may well relate to sexually-oriented speech. Ephrem seems more troubled by the wives' running riot and talking dirty than he was by the virgins who were fornicating or by the raving men.

4. 4 Images of daughters

4. 41 Synagogue or church

H. Nat. 15. 2 relates Mary's thoughts about other women who are called daughters.

ܕܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ 30

All the chaste daughters of the Hebrews and virgin daughters of rulers are astonished at me. A poor daughter is envied because of You. A

weak daughter is an object of jealousy because of You. Who gave You to me?

Ephrem recognises there are chaste women among the Hebrews and the rulers have virginal daughters. Therefore Mary was not alone in her purity. Mary became the object of envy and jealousy because she gave birth to Jesus. Mary's questioning the paternity of her son implicitly confirms her virginal conception.

In *H. Nat.* 26 Ephrem personifies days to relate incidences in Jesus's life with certain biblical events. Stanza 11 closes with the actions of the daughter Zion:

אֵת הַיּוֹם אֲנִי לִבְרִית
 אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית
 אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית
 אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית
 אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית
 אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית
 אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית
 אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית אֲנִי לִבְרִית

Let the eighth day which circumcised the Hebrews confess That One who commanded that namesake Joshua³² to circumcise with flint the people whose body was circumcised but whose heart did not believe from within. Lo, on the eighth day as a baby, the Circumciser of all came to circumcision. Although Abraham's mark [was] on His flesh, the blind daughter of Zion has disfigured it.

On one level Ephrem is attacking the hardness of heart of the Jewish people for refusing to accept spiritual circumcision. But Ephrem also presents a dramatic sexual image. Jesus is called the Circumciser of all, meaning the one who circumcises the heart which includes women as opposed to the circumcision of the penis which involves men only.³³ Playing on paradox, as Ephrem so often does, the one who circumcises hearts received penile circumcision. Ephrem suggests that Jesus should have been protected by having Abraham's mark on his body. He was, after all, part of the Jewish community. Not only did the mark not protect Jesus, Ephrem portrays the daughter of Zion as disfiguring the mark of Jesus's circumcision. The last sentence is a strong attack on the daughter - she is both blind and violent.

In *H. Epi.* 11. 1 the church is portrayed as a daughter and as a mother.

אהא, ביהא דאעא חאלל
 דמתלב, נכתב, ניה
 דמא תמיהא דמתלב, בלשמה
 נמיהא לבתב, כרשמה
 34, יע לבב, דאבא כמא, יע
 עמהא לנחיתב,
 35 קמא לבב, אהזמה

Give thanks, O daughter, that your crowns have been multiplied. For your temples and your children rejoice. Lo the dedications of your temples [are] in serving. The dedication of your children [is] in the anointing. Blessed are you that Glory . . . in them at the same time that they dwell in you. The Spirit has descended upon your children.

Ephrem presents the church as a royal daughter whose crowns are her children. Since the Spirit descended upon the church's children, the church is depicted as a mother. Ephrem may not have called the church 'mother' because the Holy Spirit was sometimes seen as a Mother. The *skinta* (ܫܝܢܬܐ) is the Divine Presence, or Glory, which dwells in the daughter church's children.

According to *H. Virg.* 21. 9 Asenath is a type of the church:

ביהא דאעא, ביהא חאלל
 דאעא דאעא דאעא
 אעא אעא אעא
 דאעא אעא אעא
 אעא אעא אעא
 אעא אעא אעא
 אעא אעא אעא
 אעא אעא אעא
 36 אעא אעא

You are the son of Asenath, the daughter of a pagan priest. She is a symbol of the Gentiles' church. She loved Joseph, and the holy church in truth loved Joseph's son. She had many children by the Crucified One, and on every one the cross is engraved. Crosses are crowded into her by Ephrem's symbol - by the birth from water.

Ephrem compares Joseph with Jesus and Joseph's wife, Asenath, with the Gentiles' church because Asenath was the daughter of a pagan priest. Her love for Joseph foreshadowed the church's love for Jesus. Unlike Asenath who had only two children (Ephraim and Manasseh), the church had many children by her Beloved.

Blessed are you if you will be a daughter to Mary whose eye despised all persons. She turned her face away from everything and gazed on one beauty alone. Blessed is her love that was intoxicated, not sober, so that she sat at His feet to gaze at Him. Let yourself also imagine the Messiah in your heart, and love Him in your mind.

Ephrem encourages the faithful to be detached from life in order to contemplate Jesus alone. He lauds Mary because her love was intoxicated, not sober (ܢܚܝܦ, *nakef*). ܢܚܝܦ usually means 'modest, chaste'.⁴¹ Modesty, or chastity, is the standard in relation to other people and experiences. But the restrictive nature of these qualities is not appropriate for Jesus with whom one can abandon herself (himself) as if inebriated. Ephrem concludes with the statement: 'Let yourself also imagine the Messiah in your heart, and love Him in your mind,' which indicates the all pervasive nature of contemplation; it involves the heart and the mind.

4. 42 Lot's daughters

While in *H. Nat.* 9 Tamar and Ruth are lauded for violating sexual mores so Jesus would be born, Lot's daughters are disparaged for doing something similar. A comparison of Ephrem's treatment of Lot's daughters and Tamar and Ruth suggest that the end justifies the means. Overturning sexual customs is acceptable if it brings about Jesus's birth.

In *H. Virg.* 1. 11 Ephrem bases his admonition to a celibate woman on the account of Lot's daughters:

ܐܘܨܝܢܐ ܕܢܚܝܦܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ⁴²

May you fear the desire of wine which seized Lot in old age. Wine performed difficult things so that by it women stole conception. How much more will it perform this easy thing: that by it men steal virginity. The young women seized the treasure of the old man; you keep your treasury from the young [men].

Ephrem compares people of both sexes to make the point that drinking wine can lead to sexual intercourse. Lot's experience of getting his daughters pregnant as a result of their getting him drunk is compared to what might happen if a celibate woman drinks wine. According to Ephrem, Lot is the victim of wine, and his daughters are thieves. But in fourth-century Edessa, Ephrem is more concerned that a woman might be victimised by young men than that she might seduce them. To Ephrem engaging in sex is stealing virginity or conception. Lot's daughters stole conception from him; young men may steal her virginity from a virgin.

On the surface st. 11 seems balanced. Both sexes can be victims or thieves. But the circumstances surrounding the events are rather different. In this stanza Ephrem overlooks the reason that Lot and his daughters were drinking.

In addressing a woman, it is appropriate that Ephrem gives her responsibility for maintaining her own purity.⁴³ Yet his treatment of the elderly Lot suggests that the men who lead a virgin astray may not be blamed much. After all he blamed the wine and the daughters, not Lot. Ephrem employs a common euphemism for sexual intercourse.⁴⁴ Lot's sperm are his treasure and a virgin's vagina is her treasury.

Ephrem's compassion comes through in *H. Virg.* 38. 12 - 14, 17 in which he excuses the actions of Lot and his daughters:

12. תה מלך כלום דגמא דא.כ.ה. לן כלום כ.ה.א.
 סכא זמב סכא אפי סכא סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי
 13. א.ה. סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי
 סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי
 14. סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי
 סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי
 17. סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי סכא אפי⁴⁵

12. From all these things, they guessed that all of creation had been destroyed. The old man was alarmed, like an old man [would be], and the innocent girls, like innocents [would be too].⁴⁶

13. But if the old man was terrified, how much more afraid would youth be? He saw his daughters were alarmed and that his wife had become a pillar [of salt].

14. The old man and his daughters thought that wine would comfort [them] and make them forget the terrors that surrounded them from all sides. . . .

17. Wine comforts old age; conception consoles youth.

St. 12 vividly describes the alarm that Lot and his daughters would have felt after Sodom's destruction. Both Lot and the daughters were terrified. The young women would have been more afraid than a mature man (st. 13). Lot is the subject of st. 13. He saw his daughters were alarmed and his wife had been turned into salt. Whether the daughters witnessed their mother's death is unclear. All three relied on wine for comfort and to forget the catastrophe (st. 14). In view of the fact that Lot and his daughters all relied on alcohol for comfort in st. 14, Ephrem's comments in st. 17 are curious. It is as if the aged are so alienated or self-centred that they turn to a bottle for solace. The word 'youth' is feminine and so means young women. Youth needs another person and conception to be consoled.

4. 43 Jephthah's daughter

H. Virg. 2. 11 provides a rather provocative image of a female:

כַּחַם הַיַּיִן הַזֶּה מְחַיֵּה אֶת הַיָּדָוּת
 לֵב חַיִּים אֲחֵלֵּף בְּיָדָא
 לְיָדָא הַיָּדָוּת אֶת הַיַּיִן
 הַזֶּה מְחַיֵּה אֶת הַיָּדָוּת
 מִן הַיָּדָוּת וְכִי הָיָה
 לֵב חַיִּים אֲחֵלֵּף בְּיָדָא⁴⁷

Jephthah's daughter willed to die to fulfill her father's vow. Do not annul by your eyes the vow of virginity that your mouth has vowed. Jephthah poured out his daughter's blood, but your Bridegroom shed His blood for your love. Lo, therefore that Only-Begotten blood bought that blood by which your gate is sealed.

Ephrem values Jephthah's vow as much as the women's vows of virginity. Instead of condemning Jephthah's vow, Ephrem presents the daughter's voluntary death as a type for virgins. The daughter took her father's vow seriously enough to give up her life to fulfill his vow. Ephrem contrasts Jephthah with Jesus who manifests true love. Whereas Jephthah shed his daughter's blood, Jesus poured out His own blood for the

Zion and Jerusalem, her sister in Judah.

The term 'sister' is used to relate Zion and Jerusalem. In these two examples the practice of treating abstract nouns as grammatically feminine may have effected Ephrem's personifications of fever as Sheol's sister and Jerusalem as Zion's sister.

H. Virg. 34. 2. 2-3 and st. 3 exemplify the practice of personifying abstract concepts as females:

ܘܒܝܬܐ ܕܠܬܘܠܐ ܘܗܘܐ ܬܠܘܠܐ
ܘܒܝܬܘܗܘܢ ܕܠܘܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

Young women stretch out their crowns to kings, and in images a maiden portrays Victory.

Victory, an abstract feminine noun, is depicted as a maiden and is related to young women who offer their crowns to kings.

ܘܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ
ܘܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ
ܘܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ
ܘܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ
ܘܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ
ܘܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ
ܘܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ

A great wonder has met me if I will be able to tell it: that the young woman who was lying dead in front of You and the woman You healed behind You [are] a type. Lo, they offer crowns from behind You and in front of You. The two allegories that crown You are the two Testaments that adorn You, the Old and the New that praise You.

Ephrem presents a young dead woman and an ill woman as types of the Old and New Testaments. While it is possible to interpret these analogies symbolically, the fact that 'testament' (*dyateke*) is feminine could have stimulated the idea.

In *H. Nat.* 18. 5. 1-3 Ephrem gives a feminine noun, year (ܫܬܐ, *šata*), a feminine title:

ܘܢܘܨܐ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ
ܘܢܘܨܐ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ
ܘܢܘܨܐ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ ܕܡܘܢ

In the first year, mistress of treasures and full of graces, let the Cherubim who bore the Son in glory give thanks with us.

The personification of the first year as a female relies on the title 'mistress'. The year is a mistress of wealth and talent. The verb ܐܢܢܐ (*t'en*) means 'to bear, carry', and 'to conceive, bear a child.' Here it describes the Cherubim carrying Jesus on their wings. It is almost an image of mother birds carrying their young.

In *H. Nat.* 27. 13 Ephrem applies feminine imagery to *yud*, the tenth letter of the Syriac alphabet, and the first letter in Jesus's name:

ܘܕ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ
ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ
ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ

ܘܕ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ⁵⁷

'*Yud*,' the [first] letter of [the name] Jesus, our king, is the Queen of all numbers. [All] reckonings depend on her completion as in Jesus, lo, all meanings are blended.

Each of the Syriac letters are given a numeric value as are the Hebrew letters. The female personification of *yud* depends on its being called 'queen'. The queen of numbers encompasses all mathematical calculations just as Jesus encompasses all meanings.

In *H. Faith* 10. 5-6 Ephrem identifies himself with a woman and with John:

5. ܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ
ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ,
ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ
ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ
6. ܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ,
ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ
ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ ܕܘܕܐ⁵⁸

5. For if John who was great called out, 'I am not worthy [to unfasten] the straps of Your sandals, O Lord', [then] like the sinful woman, I must take refuge in the shadow of Your garment, that I might be loosened from [sin].

6. And like that [woman] who was afraid and was comforted because she was healed, heal my fearful trepidation, and I will be comforted by You. Let me pass from Your garment to Your body, that I may speak of it according to my strength.

Ephrem interprets John's exclamation to mean that he, being more unworthy than John, could only approach Jesus by touching the hem of His garment. Therefore the woman of Mt. 9: 20-2 is a more appropriate model for him than is John. Ephrem's calling the woman sinful expresses the belief that sin was the reason she had been suffering from dysmenorrhoeic for twelve years. He recognises that it took courage for the woman to approach Jesus, and Ephrem wants to shelter in the shadow of Jesus's garment to be freed from his own sin. He expects to be healed and comforted just like the woman was. He concludes with a request - that he will move from sheltering in Jesus's garment to His body. Ephrem desires intimacy with Jesus so he will be able to witness to Him better.

4. 6 Summary

Ephrem applies feminine imagery to a diverse range of non-divine subjects. Four conclusions can be drawn from this analysis of Ephrem's images of brides, wives, daughters, and others personified as females. Firstly grammatical gender effects metaphorical gender when it serves Ephrem's purposes. Error and virginity are just two of the abstract concepts whose metaphorical images are dependent on their grammatical gender. But in *H. Virg.* 33. 1 Ephrem mixes the grammatical and metaphorical genders by using a bride's magnificence to symbolise Jesus's coming (*metya*, a masculine word).

Secondly Ephrem may avoid the image of a wife because of his church's preference for celibacy. Of the familial roles for females, the wife is the most ambiguous. The terms betrothed and bride would denote virginity; but use of the term wife may indicate sexual experience, or, at least, suggest sexual relations. The wife's sexual behaviour is obvious in Ephrem's contrast between Solomon's wives and Jesus's betrothed virgins and in his description of the wives's behaviour at Julian's festival. A husband's jealousy over his wife as an expression of his love is the issue in *C. Nis.* 6. 13-16. When Ephrem depicts the church and synagogue as co-wives,

the former is lauded for her purity and fertility while the latter is belittled for her sterility or disparaged for infidelity. Except for the church as wife, the word ܐܬܬܐ ('atta) in its restricted sense as 'wife' seems to connote adultery or promiscuity.

Thirdly Ephrem separates spirituality from sexuality. In his bridal imagery, Ephrem employs sexual images in order to illustrate the intimacy between Christ and the church. But he de-sexualises the images, even when describing the bride entering the bridal chamber and the Bridegroom entering the bride. The synagogue, the Israelites, the church, faith, and a celibate woman are some of the subjects Ephrem portrays as brides. Whereas he casts the synagogue and the Israelites as unfaithful wives, the others, particularly the church, are faithful and pure.

Like the bride, the daughter would usually be a virgin unless 'daughter' is being used for women in general. Ephrem seems especially interested in daughters. He devotes the most space to Lot's and Jephthah's nameless daughters. In one passage he uses Lot and his daughters as models against drinking and the possible consequence - sex. In another he excuses all three because of their fear under the circumstances. To Ephrem the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter foreshadows Christ's death on the Cross. He characterises the daughter as active and courageous. Like Jesus, she willingly dies because of her love for her father. The church is portrayed as a daughter several times. One daughter, the church in Antioch, was especially daring in the face of Julian's persecutions. Asenath was a type of the church because she loved her husband; she typified the Gentile church because she was the daughter of Midianite priests.

Ephrem personified victory, the year, and the letter *yud* as females and symbolised the Old and New Testaments by a dead and an ill women respectively. He also described fever as Sheol's sister and Zion as Jerusalem's sister. The image of the sister is the least developed. Ephrem identified with the church personified as a bride and requested that Jesus be jealous for His bride. Acknowledging the courage it took

for the menstruating woman to touch the hem of Jesus's garment, Ephrem took her as a model for his relationship with Jesus.

Fourthly Ephrem's use of feminine imagery, even for himself, indicates that it was acceptable and meaningful. He usually depicts the females he approves of as active, faithful, and courageous while those he disapproves of are ridiculed or even vilified.

4. 7 Footnotes

¹ *CSCO* 186, p. 143.

² *CSCO* 223, p. 3.

³ McVey, p. 263, n. 11.

⁴ *CSCO* 223, pp. 119-20.

⁵ *CSCO* 223, p. 64.

⁶ J. Payne Smith, p. 412.

⁷ *CSCO* 223, p. 149.

⁸ ܡܘܢ (*pum*, mouth) is singular, but is translated 'mouths' because it is modified by a plural 'children'.

⁹ *CSCO* 154, p. 75. The text has ܐܠܝܐ (*'elya*) which does not make sense. ܐܠܝܐ (*galya*) is a variant.

¹⁰ *CSCO* 154, p. 75.

¹¹ *CSCO* 154, p. 75, n. 2.

¹² The rest of the stanza is uncertain.

¹³ *CSCO* 223, pp. 84-8.

¹⁴ McVey, p. 367, n. 31, comments that ܐܪܝܘܢ (*'arze*, cedars), with different vocalisation becomes ܐܪܝܘܢ (*raze*, mysteries). While this is true, the comparison with men seems more likely.

¹⁵ *CSCO* 186, p. 225-7.

¹⁶ Literally Adam's house. Since Adam is usually best translated as 'humanity', the house of Adam stresses 'humanity'.

¹⁷ Ruth 4: 4-10. As redeemer (ܐܘܝܠ, *goel*) in a bridal context, Boaz 'bought' (ܩܢܐ, *qanah*) Ruth.

¹⁸ *CSCO* 186, pp. 217-24.

¹⁹ *CSCO* 223, p. 37.

²⁰ Following Beck's translation, *CSCO* 224, p. 38. See also J. Payne Smith, pp. 446-7. The Syriac noun ܐܠܓܐ can be two quite different words depending on the vowels. If it is read as *pelgah*, it can be half, part, or loins (thigh perhaps), as in McVey's translation, p. 309, 'His loins are for festivities and the strings of his lyre for melodies and songs'. Although technically correct, 'loins' is unsatisfactory for two reasons: 1) it is unclear how the loins were used for festivities (for food, for musical or other instruments, etc.), and 2) the first phrase of the sentence concerns the lamb's body while the second phrase is about a musical instrument made from the lamb's sinews. However if ܐܠܓܐ is read as *palgah*, it is tambourine, or as Beck has it, drum. The lamb's skin could be used to cover a drum or tambourine and the strings of the lyre could be made from his sinews. Ephrem is probably referring to two types of musical instruments which were made from the lamb's thigh. With no additions, the second sentence of st. 18 would have two parallel phrases 'his tambourine for festivities' and 'the strings of his lyre for melodies and songs'. In *Pirkê De Rabbi Eliezer*, tr. Gerald Friedlander (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co, Ltd, 1916), pp. 228-30, the parts of the ram Abraham sacrificed in place of Isaac were used in various ways: its skin became a leather girdle, its sinews were made into harp strings, and each horn was blown to herald a momentous event.

²¹ *CSCO* 218, p. 22.

²² *'atta* can be either the general word for 'woman' or, in its restricted sense, 'wife'.

- 23 See Murray, *Symbols*, p. 132 for a discussion of the words for bride, groom, and betrothed.
- 24 Tr. J. T. Sarsfield Stopford, 'The Hymns of Nisibis' in ed. J. Gwynn, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 13, Series 2 (Oxford: 1898), p. 175. In st. 13 Stopford inserted wives in brackets because of the bridal context, referred to Samson's wife in st. 14, and to a man's spouse in st. 15. Yet in st. 16 he switched to the general word 'woman', even though Ephrem is still discussing the husband-wife relationship.
- 25 *CSCO* 223, p. 133.
- 26 McVey, p. 425, n. 598.
- 27 *CSCO* 223, pp. 93-4. The last line of st. 17 is missing.
- 28 *CSCO* 174, pp. 76-7.
- 29 J. Payne Smith, p. 456.
- 30 *CSCO* 186, p. 82.
- 31 *CSCO* 186, p. 136.
- 32 In Syriac, the names Joshua and Jesus are the same.
- 33 Rom. 2: 28-9 and Col. 2: 11 make the point that circumcision is a spiritual matter because Jesus circumcises the heart.
- 34 This line is unclear. ,ܫܪܝ (šari) is the Pael of ܫܪܐ (šra) and means 'to begin' (J. Payne Smith, p. 596). ܫܪܝ, 'to reside, dwell', might be better. But Beck does not give a variant for the reading.
- 35 *CSCO* 186, p. 185.
- 36 *CSCO* 223, p. 73.
- 37 *CSCO* 174, p. 85.
- 38 The Syriac has 'his' victory. Ephrem's thoughts may have moved from the daughter Church and female martyrs to Theodore in st. 2 who proved that all of the Church's members were ready to be martyred and, therefore, crowned.
- 39 McVey, p. 250.
- 40 *CSCO* 223, p. 86.
- 41 J. Payne Smith, p. 340.
- 42 *CSCO* 223, p. 4.
- 43 In *Sog.* 6. 9, Ephrem cautions men against falling prey to the devil. But he does not explicitly refer to sexual offenses.
- 44 In modern Western parlance, a male's genitals are sometimes called 'the family jewels'.
- 45 *CSCO* 223, pp. 136-7. The end of st. 14 and the first line of st. 17 are missing.
- 46 McVey, p. 429, translates the last phrase as 'and the foolish girls, being girls'. In J. Payne Smith, p. 557, ܫܘܒܪܝܬܝܢ (šavrete) are 'girls under five years old, or those who are childish, innocent, simple, stupid, silly'. Their age is being contrasted with their father's maturity. According to McVey's translation, both the old man and the girls were frightened. But McVey does not belittle Lot. There is no reason for her to translate ܫܘܒܪܝܬܝܢ as 'foolish girls' when 'girls' or 'innocents' would do.
- 47 *CSCO* 223, p. 7.
- 48 Ephrem, like many ancient and modern men, does not seem to know that women do not always bleed.
- 49 *CSCO* 363, p. 16.

⁵⁰ In the account of the Binding of Isaac, *Pirké De Rabbi Eliezer*, tr. Friedlander, p. 227, remarks that Abraham was 'like a high priest' bringing his meal and drink offering to accompany the burnt offering.

⁵¹ *CSCO* 223, p. 134.

⁵² *CSCO* 240, p. 27.

⁵³ *CSCO* 240, p. 107.

⁵⁴ *CSCO* 223, p. 123. McVey, p. 412, n. 526 says Ephrem 'refers to the portrayal of Nike, frequent on coins and other imperial art'.

⁵⁵ *CSCO* 223, pp. 123-4.

⁵⁶ *CSCO* 186, p. 92. Based on 1 Sam. 4: 4, Ezek. 1: 5 - 21.

⁵⁷ *CSCO* 186, p. 139.

⁵⁸ *CSCO* 154, pp. 49 - 50. See also Robert Murray, 'A Hymn of St. Ephrem to Christ on the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit, and the Sacraments', *ECR* 3, No. 2 (Autumn 1970), p. 143.

Ephrem's most common image for abstract or human subjects is a mother. Although he did not develop a formal ecclesiology in which the church was given the role of mother,¹ he portrays the church and baptism as mothers. His mother images can be either explicit (functional) or implicit (descriptive). Giving birth and womb imagery constitute Ephrem's primary use of a mother image. He describes all kinds of vessels as wombs regardless of whether they are physical or abstract containers. However some of the womb images are so weak that they barely connote motherhood.²

5. 1 Abstract mother images

5. 11 Church or synagogue

In *C. Nis.* 14. 1 the church of Nisibis is a mother.

ܟܠܗܘܢ ܐܘܡܢܐ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܘܢܝܫܒܝܫ
ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ
ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ

The three shepherds had many pastors. The one mother who [was] in the city had daughters everywhere. Since anger ravaged her buildings, peace will build her churches.

Ephrem personifies the church as a female by calling her 'mother' and referring to other churches as daughters. The shepherds are probably bishops of the church of Nisibis. The bishops were often regarded as the church's bridegroom standing in for Christ.⁴ The pastors could be either clergy or other disciples. The church of Nisibis is the mother to daughter churches outside the city wall. Although the church buildings were destroyed in the invasion, the congregations will grow because of the peace (of Christ). Therefore the mother remains fertile despite her persecutions.

H. Virg. 15. 6. 7-8 portrays the flock which stands for the church as a mother:

ܕܘܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ
ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ
ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܫ
The flock [church] in her love, lo, gave birth to all sorts of virgins and celibates.

Flock, אַנא ('ana), is a collective noun, usually treated as feminine.⁶ To Ephrem the church gives birth as an act of love. The church's giving birth implies that the church is seen as a Mother. The abbreviated mother image here is similar to *H. Epi.* 8. 15 where the Holy Spirit also gives birth to different sorts of Christians - virgins, prefects, celibates, and intercessors (see chapter 9). Ephrem's preference for celibacy is manifested by the mother church's children - virgins and celibates.

H. Virg. 35. 13. 4-7 contrasts Zion with the church:

אַנא לְזִיּוֹן אֵינֶה עֲרֵבָה
 כְּעֵבֶר אֲנִי הָיִיתִי
 אֲנִי הָיִיתִי עֲרֵבָה
 אֲנִי הָיִיתִי עֲרֵבָה

Zion has her sterility, but your church has her fertility by the trumpet of Your Peace that is sounded by her, and Moses's kithara that is played by her, and David's harp that is plucked by her.

The image of the church as a mother is not as important as the fact that she is fertile, while Zion is not. Zion and the church have sterility and fertility respectively as if they were possessions. Whereas Zion had two instruments, the church has a third, the trumpet of Jesus's Peace. Playing Moses' kithara and David's harp does not make Zion fruitful. It is as if the church is becoming fruitful because it stole Zion's instruments.

In *C. Nis.* 29. 1 Ephrem depicts Jerusalem and the church as mothers:

אֲנִי הָיִיתִי עֲרֵבָה
 אֲנִי הָיִיתִי עֲרֵבָה
 אֲנִי הָיִיתִי עֲרֵבָה

Our Lord was weeping tears for Jerusalem, the mother of the crucifiers, whose children were united within her. Have mercy on your church whose children are divided within her.

While Jerusalem is called mother, the notion of the church as a mother is conveyed by calling the church members 'children'. Ephrem interprets Jesus's weeping for Jerusalem to be because her children, i.e. the synagogue, were united against Him.

The irony is that the crucifiers were united while the church was in disarray. By asking for Jesus's mercy Ephrem implicitly asks Jesus to weep for the church too.

H. Nat. 24. 16 depicts Bethlehem and the church as wombs:

ג'לג' ג'ר' כ'ס'ר' ר'א ס'כ'ה ל'מ ל'כ'ו ל'ח'ל'כ'
 ו'פ'ם א'מ'ר'ת'ו ל'ג' ג'ר'ת'א א'כ'ה, א'מ'ר' כ'ס'ר'כ'ו
 ל' מ'מ'א ג'ל' ל'ח'ל'מ'ה, א'כ'ה, ג'ל'א ג'ר'ת'א מ'מ'א ג'ל'מ'ה, ו'פ'ם
 ג'מ'כ'א ו'מ'ר'ת'א ג'כ'ה ל'ש'ר ג'מ'כ'א מ'מ' ג'ג'ל'ה ס'מ'ה
 א'ח'ז'ת' א'מ'ר'ת'ו ל'ג'ו'ת' כ'ר'י ג'א'פ'י, ל'ג'ל'ח'ה⁹

For the people refused [to bring] offerings and they did not draw near to the King's Son. His ambassador [star] went out to the peoples and brought them with their offering. But it did not bring all of them because Bethlehem's small womb was not sufficient for them, so that the womb of the holy church opened wide and held her children. Blessed is He who made the barren one fruitful.

Ephrem generalised the difference between the Jewish people and the Gentiles by focusing on Bethlehem. He is implicitly contrasting Herod's reaction to the birth of the King's Son with the Persian sages's response. Ephrem symbolises the Jewish people as Herod and the Gentiles as the magi. Ephrem overlooked the shepherds who followed the star to Bethlehem to offer their sheep, perhaps because they were Jewish and relatively poor.

Bethlehem and the church are depicted as mothers by the use of womb imagery. Bethlehem was unable to have many children because her womb was small. However the church has a large womb and can hold all of her children inside. The church opened her womb to make up for Bethlehem's deficiency.

5. 12 Baptism as a mother

H. Epi. 13. 1-2 describe baptism as a mother.

ג'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו 1.
 א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו
 כ'ר'י ג'א'פ'י ל' א'מ'ר'ת'ו
 כ'ר'י ג'א'פ'י ל' א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו 2.
 א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו א'מ'ר'ת'ו
 ל'מ'ר'ת'ו, א'מ'ר'ת'ו¹⁰

26. תלמות, דאדם ל, שתי תלמי יתגלה אצבו למה
אצבו כתיב אצבו למה תלמי אצבו לך תפסו

32. תלמי כתיבו, תפסו תלמי אצבו תלמי תפסו

אצבו תלמי לך אצבו תפסו תלמי תלמי תלמי¹²

26. Humanity looks to Me to make a new birth for them. I will search out a way in the waters for them, and if I am not baptised, [new birth] is impossible.

32. The waters are sanctified by My baptism, and they shall receive fire and the Spirit from Me. And if I am not baptised, they are not perfected to bring forth children which shall not die.

These stanzas are Jesus's response to John the Baptist who is reluctant to baptise Him. Baptism is not referred to directly as a mother, but as new birth. Humanity as a whole are looking to Jesus for new birth. Although Jesus is certain that new birth comes with baptism, He must search out how in the baptismal waters.

The waters are sanctified by Jesus's baptism itself. They become mothers able to bring forth children because Jesus gave them fire and the Spirit. Fire and the Spirit are transferred from Jesus to the baptismal waters to the baptised which gives them eternal life.

H. Virg. 7. 5, 7-8 have a number of mothering images.

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8. תלמי תלמי תלמי תלמי תלמי תלמי

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תלמי תלמי תלמי תלמי תלמי תלמי

אֵל לְבַיִת הַמֶּלֶךְ הַמְּבֻרָךְ הַזֶּה הַיּוֹמָה הַזֶּה הַזֶּה הַזֶּה הַזֶּה
 אֵל לְבַיִת הַמֶּלֶךְ הַמְּבֻרָךְ הַזֶּה הַיּוֹמָה הַזֶּה הַזֶּה הַזֶּה הַזֶּה¹³

5. A royal portrait is painted with visible pigments, and the hidden portrait of our hidden King is painted with visible oil on those who have been signed. Baptism which labours to bring them forth in her womb, fashions a new portrait from the image of the first human who was corrupted, and she gives birth to them with three labour pains - the three glorious names of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

7. Bodies full of stains are anointed for absolution by the oil of distinction, and they are whitened without being beaten. They go down in sin as foul ones, they go up pure like children, for baptism becomes another womb for them. Her giving birth rejuvenates the old, as the river rejuvenated Naaman. O womb that gives birth daily without pains to royal children.

8. The priesthood serves this womb as she gives birth; Anointing [and] endeavour preceded her, the Holy Spirit hovers over her streams. A crown of levites surrounds her, the Chief of priests acts [as] her servant. The angels rejoice in the lost that were found by her. O to the womb, which when she gave birth, the altar suckled and nourished [the infants]. O to the children who, instead of milk, eat perfect Bread immediately!

In st. 5 Ephrem compares the portraits of the King and the first human in terms of the seen and the unseen. Like the paint which is used in painting a royal portrait, the oil used to anoint (sign) those who are baptised is visible. The visible oil marks the portrait of the unseen King on to the baptised. Ephrem describes baptism as a mother which gives birth to the baptised with three labour pains.

After a stanza about the Holy Spirit branding her sheep with oil in baptism, st. 7 returns to the theme of baptism as mother. The bodies to be baptised are like soiled laundry. They are cleaned in the gentle cycle - without being beaten. Baptism transforms the sinful adults into spiritual children because she is another womb. St. 7 adds rejuvenation as a benefit of baptism which is evident from the previous transformation. Unlike stanza 5, mother baptism gives birth without pains in st. 7. Her children are royal because the royal portrait has been painted on to them.

In st. 8 baptism again performs the motherly function of childbirth. The altar feeds the 'babies'. Ephrem's imagery is interesting for several reasons. The levites and the chief of the priests (i.e., the high priest) call to mind the synagogue. But

Ephrem is probably referring to Jesus as the High Priest. The levites (ܠܘܝܝܬܝܘܬܐ, *levaye*) could be deacons.¹⁴

Ephrem characterises the male religious hierarchy in what might seem like an unusual way, namely as servants in childbirth, i.e., midwives, to newly baptised Christians.¹⁵ The feminine gender of 'priesthood' (ܟܗܢܘܬܐ, *kahnuta*) may have influenced Ephrem's imagery. McVey translates ܡܪܒܐ (*marba*) as 'to be educated', which it can be.¹⁶ But nourishment is a more likely result of suckling. The Holy Spirit hovers over the baptism perhaps as a mother bird hovering over her young.¹⁷

5. 2 Males personified as mothers

Ephrem applies motherly imagery not only to various vessels, but also to himself and other men. This is remarkable when considered in the light of the traditional rigid separation of the sexes. Ephrem's willingness to apply feminine imagery to himself can be seen in *H. Church* 30. 1:

ܘܥܘܕ ܡܢ ܡܪܒܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ
 ܡܢ ܡܪܒܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ
 ܕܡܪܒܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ
 ܕܡܪܒܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ¹⁸

O Lord, my mind is sterile of giving birth to new things. Give fruit and give birth to my mind as [you gave] to Hannah, so that the utterance of the child that will come forth from my mouth may be offered to you as was that sterile woman's son.

Ephrem's lack of creativity provokes his prayer. He compares his mind to Hannah's womb, and his thoughts or words to bearing fruit and to giving birth. Since God made Hannah physically fruitful, God can make Ephrem mentally fruitful. Ephrem portrays himself and Hannah as self-sacrificing mothers. He will give his 'child' up to God just as Hannah placed Samuel in God's service.

The mother image in *C. Nis.* 14. 11 is similar to the one in *H. Church* 30. 1.

ܐܘܪܘܫܝܡܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ
 ܕܡܪܒܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ
 ܕܡܪܒܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ¹⁹

Oh my tongue! Stop and quieten the continuous stories of the cross, for [my] mind has suddenly conceived, and lo, labour pains afflict it. It conceived these among the last [born], but they want to be the firstborn.

Ephrem describes his mind as a mother. The image is dramatic because his mind experiences labour pains. The cross has so many stories attached to it that Ephrem is overwhelmed by them. The thoughts that came to his mind last desired to be born first. His mental conception of ideas striving to be born first is reminiscent of Rebecca's pregnancy in which the twins struggled in her womb.

Ephrem also applies motherly imagery to men besides himself, for example in *C. Nis.* 14. 16.

סגורא כפעהא נחא מלכא ללמחא
 נחא קוללהא נחא נחא נחא נחא
 20 חללהא כנחיהא נחא נחא נחא

The first [shepherd] by simple things gave milk to his infants. The second by fine things gave [soft] food to his young children. The third by mature things gave [solid] food²¹ to his fully grown [children].

St. 1 (see 5. 15 above) mentioned the three shepherds; they are three of the bishops of the church of Nisibis. Ephrem alludes to 1 Cor. 3: 2, 'I fed you with milk, not solid food'. Whereas Paul has only two categories of spirituality (babes and spiritual men), Ephrem allows for an intermediate state - young children. Since feeding the children, especially giving milk to infants, was traditionally the mother's role, the three bishops are depicted as mothers. Ephrem describes each of the bishops as providing a particular kind of mothering, depending on the children's (or church's) state of development. The first 'mother' cared for the church in its infancy, the second 'mother' gave the church food which was appropriate for young children. The third 'mother' gave food which was suitable for adults.

אֲבָרְכְךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 לְבָרְכֶךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 בְּיָמֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Blessed are you, woman, who, when you saw the Son seated, did not hesitate. Doubtless His seat was contemptible and despised, but you were not worried as a mortal woman [might be]. Blessed are you for you saw in your mind the glorious judgment-seat and you saw places for your beloved [sons]. The mothers who join their sons to our Saviour become like you.

Ephrem uses the mother of James and John as a model for other mothers. He interprets her political motivation for requesting that her sons be given places next to Jesus to mean she was joining her sons to the Saviour for spiritual reasons. Ephrem praises her because she was not afraid to walk up to Jesus in order to make her request. She was perceptive enough to realise He was the Messiah and was not misled by His poverty.

5. 33 Jonah's mother

The first nine stanzas of *H. Virg.* 42 describe Jonah's rejecting God's call to go to Nineveh and the Ninevites' reactions to his preaching. The hymn continues thus:

10. אֲבָרְכְךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 בְּיָמֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 11. אֲבָרְכְךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 בְּיָמֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 12. אֲבָרְכְךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 בְּיָמֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 13. אֲבָרְכְךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 בְּיָמֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 14. אֲבָרְכְךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 בְּיָמֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 15. אֲבָרְכְךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 בְּיָמֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 16. אֲבָרְכְךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 בְּיָמֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 17. אֲבָרְכְךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 בְּיָמֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

- 18. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 וכו כלתו אפי קיט קיט
- 19. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 20. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 21. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 22. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 23. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 24. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 25. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 26. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 27. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 28. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 29. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 30. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 31. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 32. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
- 33. מן אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט
 אפי קיט קיט מן אפי קיט

10. By the labourpains of his sayings he impelled the community of Nineveh to bring forth voices of glory.

11. Instead of a living creature the prophet brought forth the barren one [Nineveh] who brought forth fruit of glory.

12. Also a fish in the sea swallowed him. Instead of females he [the fish] conceived and brought him forth.
13. In the sea he [the fish] conceived him; he brought him forth onto the land. He handed him over to the land [which] suckles all.
14. He was conceived and born according to nature, again he was conceived and born unnaturally.
15. A woman conceived according to custom, and in addition she brought forth according to nature.
16. A fish conceived him unnaturally, and in addition he did not bring him forth according to custom.
17. When a woman endowed with speech conceived him, lo he dwelt in her as a speechless one.
18. But again when a speechless fish conceived him, inside him [the fish] had an advocate endowed with speech.
19. When a woman on land conceived him, he did not perceive her prayers.
20. But when the fish in the sea had conceived him, the fish did not perceive his prayers!
21. But when he was conceived within a human woman, he resembled a speechless creature.
22. A creature conceived him in the womb of the sea; that silent one became endowed with speech.
23. Within one endowed with speech he was quiet; within a silent one he was endowed with speech.
24. The womb on land brought forth in months. The womb in the sea brought him forth in days.
25. When his mother conceived him, he grew; she swore a vow for her infant.
26. When the fish conceived him in the sea, the infant in the womb swore a vow.
27. Who has seen an infant in the womb who swore a vow upon his birth?
28. Who has seen a child who became a fetus? Who has seen a fetus delivered from the [mother's] mouth?
29. The servant bore the symbols of his Lord in his conception and his birth and in his resurrection.
30. Who has seen a priest in a fish who offered prayer to his God?

31. The fish became a pure temple for him, and the mouth of Jonah [became] sweet incense.

32. The smell of incense rose up from within the abyss to the High One who sits in the highest heaven.

33. His Saviour came down; He became the key of the mouth. Silence delivered the herald of words [from the mouth].

Ephrem applies birthing imagery to two grammatically masculine words, fish (ܢܘܢ, *nuna*) and sea (ܝܡܐ, *yama*), to demonstrate that God's purposes are beyond nature. When Jonah obeyed God and preached to the Ninevites, Jonah experienced labourpains which induced the Ninevites to give birth to voices of glory (st. 10). ܐܕܐ (*led*), the verb in st. 11 and 12, refers to both the male's reproductive role, 'to beget', and the female's 'to give birth'. Yet instead of a living creature, Jonah brought forth a city (st. 11) and then a fish brought forth Jonah (st. 12). Ephrem intentionally reverses the reproductive roles of females with the male fish - 'Instead of females, he [the fish] conceived and brought him forth' (st. 12).

Besides these two 'mothers', Ephrem includes a nameless woman, Jonah's mother, in *H. Virg.* 42. His interest in the reversal of nature continues throughout the hymn, so ܐܕܐ has been translated as 'to bring forth' regardless of the sex of the 'mother'. Except for Jonah's human mother, the only personification with a feminine basis is the land, (ܐܪܥܐ, *'ar'a*, a feminine noun), which acts as a midwife-mother who receives the newborn Jonah from the fish and then suckles him (st. 13).

St. 14 presents a paradox - Jonah was conceived and born naturally, and re-conceived and re-born unnaturally. Ephrem then gives five pairs (sts. 15-16, 17-18, 19-20, 21-22, 25-26) each of which contains a stanza about Jonah's human mother followed by a stanza about the fish as mother. The pairs describe some aspect of Jonah's gestation. Ephrem points out that Jonah's mother conceived and gave birth naturally (st. 15) and the fish unnaturally (st. 16), his mother could speak, her baby could not (st. 17, reiterated in st. 21); the mother fish was speechless, the 'fetus' Jonah could speak (st. 18, repeated in st. 22), Jonah's mother prayed without Jonah's awareness of it (st.19); Jonah prayed without the fish's awareness (st. 20), Jonah's

mother swore a vow for him (st. 25); Jonah swore a vow in the fish's womb (st. 26). Sts. 23 and 24 break the pattern of a whole stanza for each mother into a contrast between Jonah's mother and the fish within one stanza. St. 23 returns to the speechless fish and the speaking 'fetus'. Jonah's mother and the fish are referred to solely as wombs to stress the different lengths of gestation in st. 24.

St. 27 refers back to the vows in sts. 25-26 and st. 28 puzzles over the conceptions in sts. 15-16. St. 29 explains the purpose of the many paradoxes. Jonah's story foreshadows Jesus's conception, birth, and resurrection. Jonah's conception in the fish is similar to Jesus's because the fish (a male) and Mary conceived without the aid of a partner. Both mothers' gave birth without loss of their virginity, if a fish can be said to be a virgin. Jonah's birth from the fish's mouth also returned him to life, or resurrection.

Ephrem overlooks Jonah's disobedience, the reason he was in the fish, to portray Jonah as a priest (st.30), the fish as a temple (st. 31) instead of a prison, and Jonah's prayers as sweet incense (sts. 31-32) instead of cries of desperation. In answer to Jonah's prayer, Jesus came to open the fish's mouth to release Jonah (st. 33).

5. 4 Summary

Ephrem characterises a sufficient number of subjects as mothers to suggest that the image of the mother, especially her reproductive role, is a powerful one for him. But his imagery sometimes seems lifeless because it is not based on real mothering. He removes the sexual nature inherent in being a human mother by concentrating on the spiritual aspect.

The images of the church and the synagogue as mothers are the most developed. Although Ephrem displays sensitivity to infertile women, he uses infertility as a sign of the synagogue's infidelity to the Heavenly Bridegroom while he symbolises the church's fidelity by her fertility. Ephrem applies motherly imagery to

the church's congregation, to its hierarchy, and to a sacrament - baptism²⁵. He describes the church giving birth to virgins and celibates. Ephrem laments the divisions among the church's children. His characterisations of three bishops as mothers feeding their children are significant because they demonstrate his willingness to portray men besides himself as mothers.

Ephrem's most common use of motherly imagery is for baptism. He occasionally portrays baptism as giving birth, but is ambivalent about human motherhood. At times he discounts a mother in order to elevate baptism as mother. Development of the concept of the church as mother may have been delayed because the Syriac church limited the role of mother to baptism.²⁶

Ephrem characterises his mind, and kings and priests as mothers by using womb imagery. He deliberately applies birthing imagery to the male fish in the Jonah account to show God's power over nature. Ephrem also plays on the paradoxes between the fish as a mother carrying an adult 'baby' and Jonah's mother who carried a fetus.

The Canaanite woman and the mother of James and John are regarded as models for others because of their boldness. The former conquered the Unconquerable One and the latter perceived that Jesus was the Messiah and gave her sons to Him.

5. 5 Footnotes

- ¹ Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 143 - 4.
- ² Prime examples of weak maternal metaphors are cities such as Bethlehem-Ephrata *H. Nat.* 2. 8. 1; 24. 18. 4-5; 25. 11. 1-2 and Schechem *H. Virg.* 17. 4. 5; 18. 9. 7-8.
- ³ *CSCO* 218, p. 37.
- ⁴ Murray, *Symbols*, p. 158.
- ⁵ *CSCO* 223, p. 53.
- ⁶ J. Payne Smith, p. 419.
- ⁷ *CSCO* 223, p. 130.
- ⁸ *CSCO* 218, p. 64.
- ⁹ *CSCO* 186, p. 125.
- ¹⁰ *CSCO* 186, pp. 189. ,ܡܳܐܪܳܫܳܘܳܠ (lahu) is based on a variant, n. 2.
- ¹¹ *CSCO* 186, pp. 170-1.
- ¹² *CSCO* 186, p. 221.
- ¹³ *CSCO* 223, p. 26. McVey, p. 295, and Brock, *Harp of the Spirit*, p. 48-9, have also translated this hymn.
- ¹⁴ Brock, *Harp of the Spirit*, p. 46. Males and females could be in this group. For information about deaconesses, see Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald, 'The Characteristics and Nature of the Order of the Deaconess' in *Women and the Priesthood*, ed. Thomas Hopko (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Press, 1983), pp. 80-2. Assisting in the baptisms of women was a major role for deaconesses. It is unknown whether Ephrem was familiar with any deaconesses.
- ¹⁵ See Gal. 4: 19 in which Paul describes himself as being in labour.
- ¹⁶ McVey, p. 295.
- ¹⁷ See 9. 2 for 'hovering' as a connotation of a mother bird.
- ¹⁸ *CSCO* 198, pp. 72-3.
- ¹⁹ *CSCO* 218, p. 38.
- ²⁰ *CSCO* 218, p. 39.
- ²¹ 'Soft' and 'solid' are inserted because Ephrem uses different words (ܪܳܡܳܘܳܠ, *r'uma* and ܪܳܘܳܟܳܠܳܐ, *'awkla*) both of which mean 'food'. The point is that young children and adults eat different food.
- ²² *CSCO* 223, p. 96.
- ²³ *CSCO* 223, pp. 97-8.
- ²⁴ *CSCO* 223, pp. 143-5.
- ²⁵ Although the sacraments themselves are not portrayed as mothers, *H. Faith* 51. 7; 77. 20 (Baptism), *H. Faith* 10. 16 (the Eucharist), and *C. Nis.* 19. 2 (Holy Orders) have images of the Holy Spirit as a mother bird hovering.
- ²⁶ Murray, *Symbols*, p. 143, believes the tendency to regard the Holy Spirit as Mother in the early period may have been a factor in the Syriac church's tardiness in developing the image of the church as mother. It is also possible that the images of the Holy Spirit as Mother and the church's focus on baptism as mother jointly contributed to the Syriac church's relatively late understanding of the church itself as mother.

דגלך תכלה, משהו תשנה,
 דגלך משהו לרשך, גבך אשך
 דגלך משהו, אשך משהו,
 כלך משהו משהו, לבך,
 לרשך, אשך משהו, לבך
 אשך, דגלך, משהו משהו
 כלך לבך, משהו משהו,

5. לבך, דגלך, אשך, גבך
 לבך, לבך, לבך, לבך,
 משהו, משהו, משהו, משהו,
 לבך, משהו משהו משהו
 לבך לבך, לבך, לבך, משהו,
 לבך, לבך, לבך, לבך, משהו
 אשך משהו משהו, גבך משהו משהו
 משהו, לבך לבך

6. משהו משהו משהו משהו
 משהו משהו משהו
 משהו משהו משהו משהו
 משהו משהו משהו, משהו
 לבך משהו משהו משהו
 משהו משהו משהו משהו משהו
 משהו משהו משהו משהו משהו
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7. משהו משהו משהו משהו
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אל תשב מרמא לך לך
 דאפי דאנשא מן לחיה תשאכ
 מן, בך דאנא לן דאנא, ממדא
 אפ מכ אפ ממ אשא כלל
 אפ מ, כשאמ
 20. אנו משה דנך ממדא
 ונא תלך דעבא דאנא
 אפ מן, שבה בל שר
 דבכו ונא תשא נא
 דאנא מן שכור לך דנך
 אפ מן, ממדא לך כלל
 אפי ונא בך דנך כחם ברכ
 דכח אשא, אנו
 21. דאנא כשאמ דאנא תשא
 כשאמ בך לן דאנא אפ לן
 נכח מן אשא דאנא, למד
 בלל מלל אפ דתשא מן
 אפ שכור דאפי דאנא, אשא,
 בלל מלל נכח מן אשא,
 תשא מן שבה דאנא דאנא
 דכח כל תשא¹

1. Our Lord laboured and went like a farmer to water the seed that Moses sowed. He went straight to the well, went out, and gave hidden, living water for the sake of revelation. Blessed is Moses, who with the book he wrote, sowed the symbols of the Messiah. Although they were small, the seeds of the house of Moses were matured by [the Lord's] watering and were reaped by His disciples.

2. Blessed are you, drawer of ordinary water, who turned out [to be] a drawer of living water. You found the treasure, another Fount, from whom a flood of mercies flows. The spring had dried up, but it broke through to you and gave you water. He had become poor, but He asked [for a drink] to enrich you. You left your pitcher, but you filled your thoughts [from the Fount] and gave [living] water to your people.

3. Blessed are you to whom He gave living water, and you did not thirst again, as you said. For he called the truth 'living water,' since all who hear it will not thirst again. Blessed are you who learned the truth and did not thirst; for there is one Messiah and there are no others. Your husbands, lo, were many, [but] your Messiahs are not many, for there is one Only-Begotten.

4. Blessed are you, woman, because you saw that your husbands were dead, and your reproaches were many. Other men were afraid to take you in marriage, lest they die like their companions. You made [a

contract with] a pretended and bribed husband. He overcame your reproach but he did not approach your body. The contract and the oaths that you made secretly He revealed to you, and you put your faith in Him.

5. Blessed are you, who are slandered even by our people, although you were not reviled by your people. We have called you a prostitute. But if you were, your detestable reputation would have been perceived by Him. Blessed is your discernment for you debated with your Lord. Your disputation shows that your heart was not despised. If you had been a prostitute, your silence would have brought tears to Him who gives life to all.

6. For she answered and spoke as a trained one, controversially but chastely, 'Our fathers worshipped on this mountain.' Since the heads of [her] people [were] of the house of Abraham, she did not need to ask about her offenses, for her love was bound with the just. Since He revealed to her one thing, she thought about Him that He would teach her truth without strife.

7. She answered again, saying prudently, 'Lord I see that you are a prophet.' If, indeed, our Lord revealed her shame to her, it would be right for her [to receive] compassion in judgment like the sinful woman who sought forgiveness with her head bowed and also her mouth closed. But she was modest yet her head was held high and her voice authoritative.

8. She said, 'I have no husband,' to tell Him the truth and to test Him in two ways: what she did have and what she did not [now] have - to see if He would be able to comprehend her secrets. Our Lord revealed both of them and amazed her, for she did have a husband but she did not [now] have [one]. She was astonished and persuaded; she was amazed and believed, and she professed and worshipped Him.

9. Obey, my tongue, cease your labor and run in silence to meet your rest. Who calls you to become freely the verbal defender for the reviled woman? You have not been slandered out of evil, O woman; our Lord will forgive even those who slandered you. Scripture will comfort you, and we too will console you [according to] the measure of our weakness.

10. Since our Lord did not allow even one of His own [disciples] to stay with Him, if you were a prostitute, this Holy One would not have given cause for calumny. He took three of His disciples and entered into [the room] of Jairus's daughter who was dead. All of the city was persuaded by your dignity. Praises to He who set you free.

11. . . . The scriptures blushed to explain in what manner and how much the unclean have slandered [you]. He alone labored with you and sanctified you to be like his glorious Father, who alone fashioned woman and sanctified her, and led her to Adam.

12. Therefore when she concealed [her] secret mystery and heard the saying about living water, she proved [Him] with this sign, 'If he reveals to me the existing marriage contract, then He is God.' Our Lord revealed to her this secret of hers and gave her water, and she did

not thirst for worldly water. She left the mortal man and did not seek his protection, for the Living One betrothed and took her as a wife.

13. She spoke fairly and our Lord confirmed concerning that man that he was not her husband. But He revealed that he existed, and if he had been lascivious, [Jesus] would not have been able to conceal [it] completely because He was trusted and proclaimed by her. Therefore she to whom He said 'he exists', witnesses that he was old or poor and lived under her protection as she [lived] under his.

20. Tamar trusted that the king whose symbol she stole would arise from Judah. Also this woman among the Samaritans expected that perhaps the Messiah would arise from her. Tamar's hope was not extinguished, this woman's expectation was not vain, as from her, therefore, our Lord arose in this city, for He was revealed there by her.

21. Because she in her desire said, 'The Messiah will come', He revealed to her with love, 'I am He'. She believed He was a prophet before; a little later [she believed] also that He was the Messiah. O Wise One, who appeared as a thirsty man, [and] a little later was called a prophet, [and then] she understood He is the Messiah; she is a type of our humanity that He leads in every step.

Ephrem employs agricultural imagery throughout the hymn. He begins by describing Jesus, Moses, and the disciples as farmers. Moses sowed the seed, Jesus watered it, and the disciples harvested the produce (st. 1). In st. 2 Ephrem continues the theme of Jesus's irrigating the crop by focusing on the Samaritan woman who came to draw water from a well and returned with Living Water from the Fount.

Ephrem equates the truth with the Living Water which the one Messiah gives. By mentioning the women's many husbands at this point, Ephrem implies that mortal husbands, regardless of the number, can not compare with the Heavenly Bridegroom (st. 3).

How changes in customs concerning marriage affect biblical interpretations can be seen in st. 4. Since marriages are rarely arranged now and the Levirate laws are inoperable in the West, commentators usually account for the five husbands by prostitution or allegorically by polytheism. But Ephrem wrote at a time when marriages were arranged, and he had some understanding of Levirate laws (st. 19). His knowledge of ancient marriage customs and the ascetic character of his church enabled him to interpret the exchange between Jesus and the woman at the well (Jn. 4: 1-42) quite differently. Ephrem decided that the woman had suffered the tragic deaths

of 'many' successive husbands (st. 4).² To avoid reproach she married again. But she lived with the man without having sex. By creating this background Ephrem can support the Syriac church's discouragement of sex within marriage.

St. 5 acknowledges that some people slandered the woman by calling her a prostitute. So Ephrem confirms the longevity of that interpretation. But her own people did not slander her after she was 'married' a sixth time. Ephrem's aversion to sex and prostitutes is manifested by his inability to believe Jesus would even speak to the woman if she had been a prostitute. He portrays the Samaritan woman as being perceptive in her debate with the Lord. The last line may indicate the sense of alienation that prostitutes felt because of the social customs under which they lived. It is clear that Ephrem believes no prostitute would converse with Jesus. Thus the Samaritan woman showed that she was not despised because she did debate with Jesus.

In st. 6 Ephrem develops her character as a trained disputant. She argues controversially, yet chastely. The fact that she needed to remain chaste even while debating theological points when no one was around except her opponent suggests the limitations placed on women. Ephrem says she realised that Jesus would teach her more. He values her Samaritan heritage. Because of it she was not concerned about receiving forgiveness of her sins. It may not be as much a matter of genealogy, as of love. Ephrem associates her with the just because of her love.

The woman recognised that Jesus was a prophet. Her being able to answer prudently demonstrates her wisdom. Ephrem seems almost willing to believe she was a prostitute. But the disapproval expressed in st. 5 is tempered in st. 7: he considers the woman deserving of compassion and forgiveness. Ephrem compares her to another sinful woman, probably the woman at Bethany. Whereas she never looked up or spoke a word, the Samaritan woman held her head high, spoke authoritatively, and still maintained her modesty. Ephrem depicts a woman as being a wise teacher.

The Samaritan woman devised a test for Jesus to see if He would be able to reveal her secrets: she had many husbands and her current marriage was a façade (sts. 8 and 12). She told Jesus part of the truth and He revealed the whole truth. Ephrem is emphatic about the effect Jesus's revelation had on her. Her astonishment led to her being persuaded, just as her amazement encouraged her belief. She then professed Jesus which resulted in her worshipping Him (st. 8).

By st. 9 Ephrem was getting weary, yet he continued defending the Samaritan woman. He excuses those who slandered her saying they did not do so out of evil. Ignorance or misunderstanding may be the reason. Ephrem comments that the Lord will forgive the slanderers. His compassion for the woman comes through because he offers her not only the comfort of the Bible, but also volunteers the support of his church.

Ephrem is concerned with the propriety of Jesus's speaking to the woman alone (st. 10). Despite her deserving justice (st. 7), Ephrem returns to the idea that Jesus would not have spoken to her if she were truly a prostitute. Since He took three disciples into the bedroom where Jairus's daughter had died, He would not have been alone even at a public well with a prostitute. Ephrem credits the city's conversion to the Samaritan woman's dignity.

Even the scriptures were embarrassed at the injustice done to the woman by the slanderers (st. 11). Jesus wanted to be alone with the woman so that He could sanctify, or 're-create,' her as His 'Father' had created Eve. This is a quaint interpretation. Jesus wanted to be like His Father. Unlike the 'Father,' Jesus did not give the woman to a man. He betrothed and married her Himself (st. 12).

Whereas in st. 8 the woman tested Jesus just to see if He could reveal her secrets, in st. 12 after passing the test, Jesus leads her to leave her 'husband' for Him. Ephrem makes Jesus's relationship with the Samaritan explicit. The Living One betrothed and married her. Ephrem uses two verbs - *ܡܟܪ ܫܩܠܗ* (*mkar šaqlah*). The first verb, *ܡܟܪ*, is 'to betroth'. The second verb, *ܫܩܠ* when associated with a

woman, means 'to take a wife, to marry'.³ The Samaritan woman left one celibate husband for another.

St. 13 reveals the impact which trust has on a relationship. Jesus would not have been able to hide the truth from her about her 'husband' because she trusted and proclaimed Him. Ephrem ensures that the woman had maintained chastity within her marriage by saying that her current husband had accepted the arrangement because he was so old or poor he needed her protection as much as she needed his name. The implication is that a younger successful (virile) man would never enter into such a marriage. Since Ephrem does not mention what happened to the man after the city's conversion, the image of the Samaritan woman becomes somewhat harsh. She no longer needed the man, so she left him even though he may have still needed her.

Having recounted how Tamar deceptively overcame the curse of being childless (st. 19), Ephrem uses Tamar as model for the Samaritan woman (st. 20). Both Tamar and the Samaritan woman believed the Messiah would arise from them. Ephrem discounts Tamar by having her credit the rise of the future Messiah to Judah alone. But the Samaritan woman thought the Messiah would arise from her. Neither woman was disappointed. Their deceit proved to be worthwhile. Jesus descended from Tamar and Judah and arose in the city because of the Samaritan woman's preaching.

St. 21 summarises the exchange between Jesus and the woman with great tenderness. She spoke out of her desire to see the Messiah. Jesus revealed His identity with love. Ephrem records the steps in the relationship. Jesus appeared first as a thirsty man, then the Samaritan called Him a prophet, and finally she understood that He was the Messiah. Ephrem sees the Samaritan woman as a type of our humanity because she arrived at her conclusion step by step. He interprets the biblical account to show that the woman is educated, faithful, knowledgeable, and perceptive. Although Ephrem mentions the salvation of her city (st. 20), in *H. Virg.* 22 he concentrates on the Samaritan woman's personal belief.

H. Virg. 23. 1-2, 4-7 concentrates on the Samaritan woman as a preacher of the Gospel.

1.
 אַלְכַבְרָא אַחַדְהָא דִּלְךָ חַתָּה הָאֵם
 מְ, קָאָרְאָהָבְרָא בְּלֵא דְאֵבְרָאָהָבְרָא
 קָאָרְאָהָבְרָא מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל
 חַלְלָא מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל
 אַבְכַבְרָא אַחַדְהָא דִּלְךָ חַתָּה ...
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, לְחַבְרָא מְסַבְבָּל
 אַבְכַבְרָא אַחַדְהָא דִּלְךָ חַתָּה
 מְסַבְבָּל לְחַבְרָא

2.
 אַלְכַבְרָא אַחַדְהָא דִּלְךָ חַתָּה
 לֵא אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 קָאָרְאָהָבְרָא מְסַבְבָּל אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 דִּלְךָ חַתָּה מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל
 דְאֵבְרָאָהָבְרָא מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 וְיָדֵיךָ חַתָּה לְךָ אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 חַתָּה אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל

4.
 אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל דִּלְךָ חַתָּה
 מְסַבְבָּל אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל

5.
 אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל דִּלְךָ חַתָּה
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל

6.
 אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל דִּלְךָ חַתָּה
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל
 מְסַבְבָּל מְסַבְבָּל, אַחַדְהָא מְסַבְבָּל

you [seeds] to sow. Into a city that was as dead as Sheol you entered and revived your dead [city].

Ephrem praises the Samaritan woman for speaking out about who she had met (st. 1). He refers to Jesus as the Treasure who filled the woman's needs because he loved her. Although her neighbours had ostracised her so much that she pretended to take a husband just to have peace, the Samaritan woman was still zealous to share her discovery with them.

Ephrem extols the Samaritan woman for letting Jesus the Hunter catch her easily, unlike Zion's daughter. He relates teaching to being caught by the Hunter. The woman was caught by a small sign. But Jesus performed other miracles to reinforce the woman's witness (st. 2).

Ephrem equates the Samaritan woman's preaching the Gospel with giving birth to the Messiah (st. 4). Mary brought forth the Infant Messiah. The woman brought forth the adult Messiah by her words. She is credited with bringing light to those in darkness.

Ephrem also compares Mary's and the Samaritan woman's conception of Jesus (st. 5). Both conceived through their hearing (ܡܫܡܳܐܬܳܐ, *mašm'ata*). Not only did the women conceive through their ears, the Samaritan woman also drank Living Water through her ears. Ephrem began this stanza by referring to Mary as the thirsty land and the Samaritan woman as thirsty. He continued the agricultural imagery by having Mary plant Jesus in the manger while the Samaritan woman planted Him in the ears of His hearers.

The woman's conversation with Jesus reflected her heart's desire to see the Messiah (st. 6). She truly believed He was coming. Her waiting and chastity were rewarded by Jesus Himself. In saying 'her prophecy was fulfilled,' Ephrem grants her the stature of a prophetess.

Remembering that Jesus forbade the apostles to 'go among the Gentiles or to enter any town of the Samaritans' [Mt. 10: 5], Ephrem believes that God saved the city through woman's preaching (st. 7). Again he relates speech to birthing imagery.

The woman's receptivity to Jesus is evident in that Jesus the Granary of life opened her mouth, confirmed her testimony, and gave her the seeds to sow. But the woman then went into her dead city and revived it.

6. 2 Anna the prophetess

H. Virg. 24. 10 expresses Ephrem's appreciation of Anna. These points are expanded in *H. Supp.* 13. 11, 15-16:

ܕܘܨܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
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 ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ

Blessed also is that Anna who hated her house and loved the temple of her Lord. Her eye gazed intently at the hidden beauty for eighty years but was not satisfied. Blessed is her gaze that she focused it on the One. Foolish women who roam about are reproved by her [example]. But you, honourable woman, be chaste and preserve your beauty from all for the Lord of all.

Anna is a model for foolish, inattentive women.⁶ She was detached from the world, preferring the temple to her own house. She spent eighty years contemplating the Lord. Ephrem instructs the woman to whom the hymn is addressed to follow Anna's example of chastity. She is to save her beauty for Jesus.

While *H. Supp.* 13. 11-15 contain bridal imagery, the stanzas are placed in this chapter because Anna exemplifies the contemplative, celibate life.

11. ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
 12. ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ

when He grows up, He will speak for Himself. The silent Infant could sing in all languages (st. 15).

In st. 16 Anna was called a 'treasure of perception' because Jesus met her. Although an infant, Jesus was also ancient. Anna was the first person Jesus betrothed. Ephrem interprets the difference in their ages to mean Jesus valued old age. Anna was a mirror from which children could learn dignity.

6. 3 Shamona

H. Supp. 13 is one of the most extensive hymns to be written in honour of women. Throughout the 33 stanzas Ephrem portrays women as being actively and dynamically involved in their faith and models worthy of following.¹²

1. אהב כל קר שרמו
 ארמא דעברא נתיספ אפי שבלא דעברא נותי
 מרגיאה דעברא שתלי מסבא דעברא נירמוג
 קמא דעברא מסוטי
2. מרגיאה ממה אפי אפיא כטיכמו אפי גכאכיא
 אשחא דאהב אהיבא ותיבא יא משה אכינו
 דאהבא קא כמסא
3. קמא ארמא כמסא אפיא כהינו טיכמו
 ליה אפי קא כמסא אפיא אפי כמא קמא
 אפיא אפי ללחא
4. נמסא דמסא דלדומו קמא ממה טבלא דמסא
 כה טבלא לטבלא סרגא וכו טבלא דמסא ניה
 לטבלא דלדא מרגיאה
5. אפי ל מו אפי מו שבו ל מו ממה אפיא לטבלא
 אכילא לטבלא דמסא דמסא כמסא
 ל מכה כמסא
6. שבלא אפי קא מכה משה אפי כמא קמא
 כמא קמא דמסא דמסא מל מל קמא
 אפי מל דמא קמא קמא
7. דמא למ מל ארמא דעברא ללחא מלחא
 דמסא משה קא לדינו מלחא מל לטבלא
 מל מכה קמא מכה

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Again about the sons of Shamona

1. The mother of seven victories [is] like the week of seven days¹⁴ and the seven branched candlestick and wisdom with its seven pillars¹⁵ and a spirit of seven operations.¹⁶

2. She was adorned like a bird with her beloveds as if [they were] feathers. She who will again be adorned was hated for she plucked and cast off her feathers. For she will put forth wings in resurrection.

3. The mother will fly in resurrection and her beloveds will fly after her. She brought them forth from the womb and buried them in fire and drew them to the kingdom.

4. The pains of their deaths were more grievous than the pains of their birth. Between [both] pains, she stood. The pains of she who loved the Lord were greater than the pains of birth and of death.¹⁷

5. And not even one [of her sons] had she left to her that he might be a staff for her old age. She broke the staff of her old age. She who was victorious in the sixth [son] was not conquered in the seventh.

6. She carried them from her womb and cast them in the fire. By fire and spirit which inspired her that these might be bodily like angels of fire and spirit.¹⁸

7. The mother of seven who emptied herself of her children [is] a judgement for our foolish virgins. Foolish ones, lo they are adorned [like] the daughters of pagans instead of with lamps.¹⁹

8. In this [state of] confusion of those who spin and weave for others,²⁰ these [foolish virgins] stopped simply. The oil in their vessels ran out. Darkness took hold of their lamps.

17. O to the last champion, the son of the honourable Shamona. A tyrant comes and sets him [the son] between torments and pleasures. He sets him between misery and good.

32. In persecution females also fell in the contest and were crowned.²¹ For it was the time of steadfastness. In these [women] truth was victorious. But in us the lie is victorious.

33. Among the enemies of virginity, they preserved virginity. They wrested two crowns and emerged [victorious]: [one crown] for persecution and [one for] virginity. But one [woman] prevails over these [present women].²²

The end of 'the sons of our Shamona'

The way in which Ephrem depicts Shamona, the mother of seven sons, whose story is related in 2 Macc. 7, indicates Ephrem's high esteem for a mother. Thus this hymn counters any tendency to regard Ephrem's refusal to call the Spirit 'Mother' as misogynistic or anti-mother. It seems that Shamona's seven sons were unmarried, or at least their wives and children were not mentioned. Thus Shamona and her sons are suitable models for Ephrem's church which still preferred celibacy. Although the woman's name was not recorded in the book of the Maccabees, she was known to Aphrahat and Ephrem as Shamona. The similarities between Shamona and the Mother Spirit are significant especially since Ephrem rejects addressing the Spirit as Mother.

Ephrem may have repeated the number seven in the first stanza simply because Shamona had seven sons.²³ He compares Shamona to a number of biblical symbols of wholeness, or completeness, such as a week of seven days, the seven-branched candlestick in the temple, wisdom with its seven pillars, and a spirit of seven operations.²⁴

Stanzas 2, 3, and 6 depict Shamona as a mother bird. Although she was actually martyred after the murders of her seven sons, Ephrem reverses the sequence so that the mother leads her sons to their resurrection. He reveres her example of encouraging her sons to remain obedient even unto death. Shamona is the active agent in their martyrdom: she gave birth, buried them, and drew them to the kingdom. St. 6

returns to her role in their births, deaths, and resurrection. Similarly the Holy Spirit is the active agent in new birth and resurrection.

The thought of even one of her sons assimilating was more painful to her than their births or witnessing their deaths (st. 4). Such was Shamona's love of and faithfulness to God. Since the Holy Spirit also gave up her Son to death, perhaps Shamona is an embodiment of divine love.

In st. 5 Ephrem uses a vivid image 'Youths as a staff of old age'. Shamona is again active; she is breaking all the staffs of her old age. Throughout the biblical period the lot of a widow without a son to care for her could be dire. Yet Shamona is concerned for her life with God even when faced with the brutal deaths of her sons and herself. In st. 7 Shamona is the standard by which the foolish virgins are judged. They thought of themselves, not of their groom [i.e., Christ], a theme which is continued in st. 8.

Sts. 17-27 relate the martyrdom of Shamona's youngest son. Antiochus's self-centeredness is repeatedly contrasted with the seventh son's fidelity to God's law. This section begins by introducing the son as 'the son of the honourable Shamona'. 'Like mother, like son' is the implication. Stanzas 18-28 were omitted because the opening line of stanza 17 is the only reference to Shamona in the eleven stanzas. But the references made about her strength of character in sts. 2-7 undergird the youngest son's decision. St. 28 brings Jesus's redemption back to the present.

In sts. 32-3 Ephrem notes the admirable way women have acquitted themselves in times of persecution. St. 32 mentions the deplorable state of Ephrem's church in which people are easily deceived. In his opinion, Shamona outshines all the other women martyrs, courageous though they might have been.

6. 4 Martha and Sarah

Ephrem greatly admires Martha. His portrayals of Martha and her siblings will be discussed in the next chapter. In *H. Virg.* 26. 3 Ephrem compares Martha with Sarah.

ברכו אתה מרתה, כי אהבה נתת
 ופתחת את פיך, כי אהבה נתת
 ופתחת את פיך, כי אהבה נתת
 ופתחת את פיך, כי אהבה נתת
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Blessed are you, Martha, for love gave you the confidence which opened your mouth. Eve's mouth was closed by the fruit while she was hidden among the trees. Blessed is your mouth which sounded with love at the table at which God reclined. You are greater than Sarah who served the servants, for you [served] the Lord of all.

Ephrem's interpretations of the biblical passages concerning Jesus's visit to Martha's house and the men's visit to Abraham and Sarah at Mamre are based on selective reading. He omits several parts of the original accounts. Since he wants to laud Martha's hospitality, it seems plausible to compare Martha to another woman. Although the Shunamite seems an obvious choice, Ephrem chooses Sarah. He neglects the ambiguity about the visitor's identity and God's rebuke of Sarah to present her as a woman who served servants, perhaps God's though Ephrem does not say. Gen. 18 makes it clear that Sarah obeyed Abraham and he was actually the hospitable host. Ephrem also overlooks Martha's complaint to Jesus about Mary and His rebuke of her. Lk. 10 does not depict Martha as a particularly gracious hostess.

Nevertheless Ephrem values Sarah's hospitality. She is surpassed by Martha only because Martha's guest was the Lord of all. But Ephrem does not entirely ignore Martha's complaint. He contrasts Martha's confident conversation with Eve's embarrassed silence in the garden. Whereas Martha's love gave her the confidence to

speak up, Eve was silenced because she ate the forbidden fruit. Ephrem regards Martha as serving the table and speaking in love.

6. 5 The Queen of Sheba

Ephrem regards the Queen of Sheba as a type of the church in *EC* 11. 4:

אַלְמַלְכָּה דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא
 אֲמַרְתָּ לְיֵשׁוּעַ בְּיָמֵי מַלְכֵי מִלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא
 דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא
 לְמַלְכֵי מִלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא
 דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא
 דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא דְּמַלְכֻתָּא

And the Queen of the South will condemn it [Jesus's generation] for she is a type of the church. For as she came to Solomon, so the church [has come] to our Lord, and as she condemns it, so also [does] the church. For if she, who yearned to see wisdom which has passed away and a king who has perished, judges the Synagogue, how much more [does] the church who [yearns] for the King who does not pass away and for Wisdom which does not err? *For if we suffer with Him, we will also be glorified with Him.*

Ephrem draws an analogy between the Queen of the South and the church and therefore between Solomon and Jesus. He interprets Mt. 12: 42 so that the Queen of the South symbolises the church because she yearned for Solomon and his wisdom just as the church desired Jesus and His wisdom. He justifies the church's condemnation of the Synagogue by portraying the Queen as condemning the generation which rejected Jesus. Ephrem concludes by referring to Rom. 8: 17 which advocates participating in Jesus's suffering. With this verse Ephrem relates the church to the King who will not pass away.

The nameless Queen goes to King Solomon for his wisdom. The biblical account depicts the Queen favourably partly to elevate Solomon. While the type of the church is a woman of good character, intelligent, and inquisitive, a man known for his harem as much as for his wisdom foreshadows Christ.

6. 6 Tamar and Ruth

In *H. Nat.* 9. 7-16, Ephrem extols two virtuous women for being sexually aggressive before they were married in order to bring about Jesus's future birth.

7. תללה נע מימי אמי,
 כהו גבא איהו ית
 גבא דאיהו דאיהו דאיהו
 גבא דאיהו דאיהו דאיהו,
 דעבד גבא כן איהו
 נעבד איהו נעבד
8. גבא דאיהו דאיהו
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13. נעבד גבא דאיהו
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 נעבד גבא דאיהו
 נעבד גבא דאיהו

13. Honourable women became contemptible for You [who] make all modest. She stole among the highways You [who] prepare the way to the house of the kingdom. Because she stole life, the sword was unable to kill her.

14. Ruth fell down in the threshing floor for a man for Your sake. Her love made her bold for Your sake who teaches persistence to all penitents. Her ears despised all the voices for the sake of Your voice.

15. The throbbing coal went up and fell down in Boaz's bed. She saw the High Priest who was hidden in his loins: [she was] fire for His incense. She ran and was a heifer for Boaz. She would bring forth You, the fatted calf.³⁰

16. She went begging for her love of You. She gathered straw. You paid her quickly the reward of her wretchedness. [She reaped] the roots of kings instead of ears [of corn] and the sheaf of life which descended from her instead of straw.

Ephrem lauds chaste women for chasing after men (st. 7). He includes Rahab, a former prostitute, in the stanza with Tamar and Ruth. Whereas Tamar and Ruth pursued a husband in order to bring about Jesus's birth, Rahab, who had been catching men for her livelihood, was caught by Jesus.

Ephrem portrays Tamar as an extraordinarily courageous woman. She had the courage to go out in darkness, uncleanness, and nudity so that she could steal Light, the Holy One, and the Precious One who transforms licentiousness into purity (st. 8). Tamar even withstood Satan's fiercest onslaughts. She was so determined that Satan was afraid. He who encouraged adultery tried to stop it to prevent Jesus's being born. Tamar went ahead knowing the threat to her life (st. 9).

In st. 10 Ephrem implies the end justifies the means. An action which was normally unacceptable became holy because it would bring about Jesus's birth. He recognises that Judah was at fault. Tamar pressed on with her plan because she thirsted for a drink from the Fount.

Ephrem catalogued Tamar's suffering and her devotion to Jesus. She had been widowed and was willing to prostitute herself to receive justice (st. 11). She suffered all of this because she desired, longed for, and loved Jesus. He rewarded her by sanctifying her prostitution.

Proclamation is the theme of st. 12. Ephrem proclaimed Ruth for choosing to leave her home so that she would be in a position to bring about Jesus's birth. The Lord proclaimed Tamar instead of condemning her loss.

Ephrem further extols the chaste women who chased men (st. 7) by calling them honourable women who became contemptible (st. 13). St. 12 mentioned the rewards for the chaste women. Jesus would share His wealth with Ruth and He praised Tamar. Ephrem dramatises their degradation even more. Although st. 13 concentrates on Tamar, Ephrem includes Ruth when he says 'Honourable women became contemptible for You'. Tamar lay in the road to steal the one who prepares the way to the kingdom. She was invincible because she was acting to bring about Jesus's birth. Ephrem diminishes the sexual character of Tamar's actions by focusing on her courage and their spiritual benefit.

Ephrem describes a rather erotic scene in st. 14. Ruth fell down in the threshing floor for a man. That is to say, she boldly lay down beside Boaz.³¹ Ephrem acknowledges that she was going to the threshing floor to seduce Boaz by saying 'her ears despised all the voices'. No one but Naomi knew her plan. So the voices she heard would have been those of social conscience. Ruth was able to do what she did because of her love for Jesus who taught persistence to all penitents. Ephrem credits Ruth's persistence and in no way condemns her actions.

At first Ephrem seems to advance the sexual nature of Ruth's actions (st. 15). He calls her a throbbing coal who lay down in Boaz's bed - not at its foot, she actually looked at Boaz's genitals, she was sexually aroused (fire), she was a heifer wanting to get pregnant. However Ephrem removes the sexual element by spiritualising it. Boaz's genitals are arousing because they contained the seed of the High Priest. Ruth's sexual excitement became fire for the High Priest's incense.

St. 15 described a woman lying in a man's bed hoping to get pregnant. Ephrem skipped from the seduction to Ruth's reward (st. 16) without mentioning the redemption procedure and marriage. She 'went begging' and gathered straw because

ከሕይወት ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ 205.

³⁴የሕይወት ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ

173. 2 He coaxed Mary Magdalene

177. to come [to see his resurrection]. And why did He show His resurrection to a woman first and not to men? Here he showed us a mystery

181. about His church and about she [who] brought Him forth. [At] the beginning of His coming to the world, a virgin was the first to receive Him and [at] His raising-to-life from the grave,

185. He showed His resurrection to a woman. At His beginning and at His end the name of she who brought Him forth cries out and draws near. Mary received Him by conceiving Him,

189. and saw an angel before her. And Mary received Him in life and saw angels at His grave. Again Mary resembles the church,

193. a virgin who bore first fruits through the good news. Mary saw Him on behalf of the church. Blessed is He who makes the church and Mary glad. Let us call the church herself Mary,

197. for she is worthy of two names. For Mary ran first to Simon, the foundation, and like the church, she brought him the good news.

201. And she told that man what she saw - that our Lord arose and was raised. It is right that she brought Simon the good news that the Son was raised.

205. For he was the rock and the foundation of the church of the Gentiles which were the chosen. Therefore Mary ran excitedly to give [him] the good news.

Mary Magdalene did not go to the grave of her own volition, but because Jesus coaxed her. The question of why Jesus first manifested Himself to a woman (singular) after His resurrection instead of to men (plural) indicates that the writer would have expected men to be the first witnesses of the resurrection (st. 177). He explains this unexpected turn of events by saying Jesus wanted to teach a mystery about the church and His mother. Alleviating a woman's grief does not seem to be a sufficient reason for this extraordinary situation.

Jesus's mother and Mary Magdalene are types of the church because both women were first in some aspect of their relationship with Jesus. Mary was the first on earth to receive Jesus when she conceived Him (st. 181). Therefore He first showed His resurrection to another Mary (st. 185). Although Magdalene received Him in life, she was not the first to receive Him. Mary's relationship with Jesus does not seem to warrant His appearing to her first. It is as if Jesus showed her His resurrection just because she had the same name as His mother.

אֵלֶּיךָ יְהוָה לֵב יִלְמָד
 לֹא יִלְמָד לֵב יִלְמָד
 אֵלֶּיךָ יְהוָה לֵב יִלְמָד
 לֹא יִלְמָד לֵב יִלְמָד 7.
 אֵלֶּיךָ יְהוָה לֵב יִלְמָד
 לֹא יִלְמָד לֵב יִלְמָד
 אֵלֶּיךָ יְהוָה לֵב יִלְמָד
 לֹא יִלְמָד לֵב יִלְמָד
 אֵלֶּיךָ יְהוָה לֵב יִלְמָד³⁷

1. Lord, no one knows what to call your mother: one could call her virgin, [but] her giving birth is established. or wife: [but] no man has had sex with her. And if your mother is incomprehensible, [understanding] You is hopeless.

2. For she alone is your mother. And she became your sister with all [women]. She was a mother for you. She was a sister for you. She is also your bride with chaste [women]. Lo you adorned her with everything, his mother's beauty.

3. For she was betrothed according to nature until You came; but after You came, O Holy One, she did not conceive according to nature, and she was a virgin when she brought you forth You chastely.

4. Mary received through You all the abilities of married women: conception within her without sexual intercourse, milk in her breasts not according to custom. You have immediately made the thirsty earth into a fountain of milk.

5. If she carried You, [it was because] Your great mountain lightened its burden. If she fed You, [it was] because You hungered. If she gave You a drink, [it was] because You willed to thirst. If she embraced You, the coal of mercy protected her bosom.³⁸

6. A wonder is Your mother: The Lord entered her [womb] and became a servant. He entered endowed with speech and He became silent within her. He entered her thundering and His voice was stilled. The Shepherd of all entered and became a lamb in her. He emerged bleating.

7. Your mother's womb overthrew the orders: The Establisher of all entered [as] a Rich One, He emerged poor. He entered her [as] an Exalted One, He emerged humble. He entered her [as] a Radiant One, and he emerged having put on a despised hue.

Ephrem concentrates on the many paradoxes in the relationship between Mary and Jesus. Giving birth did not affect her virginity. She was theoretically Joseph's wife, although they had not had sexual intercourse. Mary is the standard by which

knowledge of Jesus is judged. If understanding Mary is difficult, then comprehending Jesus is impossible (st. 1).

Only one woman was Jesus's mother. But she and all women are His sisters. Women must be chaste, like Mary, to be His brides. Jesus is called His mother's beauty. So even her beauty is attributed to her son (st. 2).

Mary was engaged as usual, but conceived, gave birth (st. 3), and her breasts produced milk (st. 4) extraordinarily. Milk production is a normal result of pregnancy. So in some sense the baby does cause the mother's breasts to lactate. But Ephrem diminishes Mary's humanity by crediting Jesus with transforming Mary from 'the thirsty earth into a fountain of milk'.

As a consequence of discounting Jesus's humanity, Ephrem further belittles Mary's motherhood in st. 5. She would not have been able to carry her baby unless He reduced His mountainous weight. She only fed Him or gave Him a drink because he was hungry or willed to be thirsty. Mothers do feed their children because they are hungry and give them drinks when thirsty. But Mary's feeding Jesus comes between her not being able to carry Him unless He lightened His load and His drinking because He willed to thirst. Mary could not even hold her baby without special protection from the coal of mercy. Thus Jesus's divinity is eclipsing His and Mary's humanity.

Ephrem considers Mary to be a wonder because her womb carried the servant Lord, the silent speaker, the voiceless thunder, the bleating lamb who was the Shepherd of all (st. 6). Jesus is really the wonder.

According to Ephrem, Mary's womb overthrew the natural order (st. 7). But again Jesus is the focus of attention. The Rich One became poor, the Exalted One humble, and the Radiant One despised. Spiritually these stanzas are impressive. Except for one (father), Jesus fills the roles which other males would normally fill: bridegroom, brother, son. In sts. 6-7 Mary is a valuable vessel, but hardly a fully human woman.

H. Nat. 17. 3 presents a rather different image of Mary as mother.

אפ מלך גשם עבֵיִא
 גרבו ונעל סלל עבֵיִא
 גנחל סל לחיֵיִא אגום
 גרבו לנחג גרלל אגום
 גלגמל סל גגג³⁹

Satan who drowned little boys so that Moses would perish, also kills boys [now] so that the Living One will die. Since he [Satan] has come to Judah, I [Mary] will flee to Egypt so he who seeks to hunt his Hunter will become weary and confused.

Whereas Mt. 2: 13-18 implies that Joseph initiated the flight into Egypt, in *H. Nat.* 17. 3 Mary takes the decision. Mary knew her history and that Satan was as determined to kill Jesus as he had been to kill Moses (though he failed). Mary devised a plan to tire out her baby Hunter's hunter. Here the Hunter is depicted as being dependent on His mother. She is portrayed as a wise, protective mother.

Although Joseph accompanied Mary and Jesus in the Lukan narrative (Lk. 2: 22-40), Ephrem overlooks him in *Sermons of our Lord* 53. This concerns the account of Mary's bringing Jesus to the temple for her purification after childbirth.

אחל גל סל ללל גבגל רל גרלל גלסל
 סג גבגל. ארל גרלל גללל גבגל לרלל
 סמללל גלללל גלללל סל, גללללל.
 גללללל גללללל גלללללללל, סג גלללל.
 ארללל סל, גלללל ללל גללללל. גללל
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 גלללללללללללללללללללללללללללללל
 סגלללללללללללללללללללללללללללללל

According to Ephrem, by Simeon's time these gifts were still deemed to be the same gifts God gave Moses and Aaron because the priests had followed the purity laws. So this hymn is about the transmission of the cultic, or institutional, priesthood, not some early equivalent of the priesthood of all believers. In the hymn, Simeon and the personified gifts of priesthood and prophecy recognised that Jesus already contained priesthood, prophecy (and monarchy). But the tradition of transmission required that when Simeon touched Jesus with his hands and prophesied His future, Simeon passed priesthood and prophecy on to Jesus. For Ephrem the exchange between Simeon and Jesus was important because it meant the gifts had gone full circle: from God to Moses and Aaron, through the Aaronic priesthood on to Simeon, and finally back to the Anointed One.

Yet Ephrem quickly stretches the circle back out into a line, but this time it is a fuller line. Following the line of transmission to its logical conclusion, he concludes that when Simeon returned the baby to Mary's arms, he gave her priesthood and prophecy too. For the first time then, the cultic priesthood was transmitted to a woman. In the sentence 'he gave her with Him priesthood', Simeon is the subject, Mary the indirect object, and priesthood is the direct object. The sentence about prophecy parallels the one about priesthood. The only difference is that the Δ ('I'), which designates the direct object, is prefixed to prophecy. Ephrem attaches the feminine objective pronominal suffix to the verb to indicate the indirect object. Although this is an unusual construction, it emphasises that Mary is the recipient of the gifts of priesthood and prophecy.

In coming to the temple to be purified after childbirth, Mary was obeying the Law. Thus it is worthwhile that the exchange between Simeon, Jesus, and Mary took place before her purification. It would seem that there was nothing about childbirth that prevented Simeon from giving priesthood and prophecy to Mary even though she was 'unclean' according to the accepted religious laws of the time.

to be proof of Jesus's divinity and Sheol's giving up the dead substantiates the resurrection.

Ephrem also portrays the grave as a womb (st. 8). He stresses that Mary got pregnant without having intercourse. Thus the sealed grave could give up its contents. Mary and the grave not only rejoiced at the resurrection, but shouted like trumpets to the deaf people who denied the resurrection.

St. 9 provides more evidence of the resurrection. Ephrem accepts Mary's virginal conception without question. Since that was slandered, then the resurrection is also open to slander. He believes that Mary's sealed womb and the secured stone prove Jesus's divinity.

Mary is treated as an object in these stanzas. While Sheol and the grave are personified as mothers by having wombs and bringing forth, they are compared to another container, Mary's womb, rather than to Mary as a fully human mother.

In *H. Nat.* 18 Ephrem devotes a stanza to each year of Jesus's life. Every year there are reasons for praising God. St. 13 offers a comparison between the earth and Mary as mothers:

ܟܘܠܟܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
 ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ⁴⁵

In the ninth year let the earth praise. When moistened, her barren womb soon gives birth. She saw Mary, the thirsty earth, whose Fruit which she gave was a great Sea.

Ephrem personifies the year as a female by virtue of the feminine gender of ܫܘܬܐ (*šata*). Why Ephrem would think of Mary as 'the thirsty earth', much less, contrast her with the barren earth, is puzzling. The spiritual interpretation is based on a reversal of the normal sequence of events. Whereas usually females need moisture of some kind (rain or ejaculate) to reproduce, 'the thirsty earth', Mary, is able to give birth to a great Sea without the 'moisture' of sex.⁴⁶ The fact that Mary is figuratively

called 'the thirsty earth' nine years after she gave birth to Jesus means that ordinary moisture is not what she needed, but rather living water which only Jesus could give. The earth rejoices because Jesus, the great Sea, can alleviate her drought and infertility.

In *H. Resur.* 1. 3. 1-2 Mary is the thirsty earth which Jesus waters.

47
 He dropped the dew and the rain of life on that Mary, the thirsty earth.

The dew and the rain of life that Jesus gave to Mary, the thirsty earth, seem to be two kinds of living water. Dew and rain could have sexual connotations. However they could also signify Jesus's wealth and generosity.

Ephrem sometimes refers to the mouth as giving birth to a word, as in *H. Nat.* 15. 5. 3-4:

48
 Since I [Mary] have learned a new way of conceiving through You, let my mouth learn a new way of giving birth to new glory through You.

Mary's mouth is depicted as a mother giving birth. Mary learned from Jesus how to conceive without sexual intercourse. Thus she wants her mouth to follow her womb's example by learning how to bring forth a glorious new 'child'.

In *H. Nat.* 15. 6 Ephrem compares the mouth to Mary's womb with the verbs of Gen. 1: 22, 28 ('be fruitful and multiply'):

49
 If difficult things are not difficult but easy for You, so that the womb conceived You without intercourse, and the womb brought you forth without sperm, it is easy for the mouth to be fruitful and to multiply Your great glory.

If difficult things are not difficult but easy for You, so that the womb conceived You without intercourse, and the womb brought you forth without sperm, it is easy for the mouth to be fruitful and to multiply Your great glory.

The mouth is depicted as a mother in comparison to Mary's conception and giving birth to Jesus. Speech compared to virginal conception and parturition are easy. Unlike Mary, who had only one baby, the mouth wants to be fruitful and multiply Jesus's glory.

The earth and Mary are the mothers in *Sog.* 1. 50:

אִימָהּ אֲרֵימָהּ אֲרֵימָהּ אֲרֵימָהּ, תִּלְדָּהּ תִּלְדָּהּ תִּלְדָּהּ
 מִן הַיָּדָה לְדָוִד מִן הַיָּדָה לְדָוִד

50 מִן הַיָּדָה לְדָוִד מִן הַיָּדָה לְדָוִד
 Two mothers who brought forth different children were manifested.
 One [earth] brought forth the human who filled her [with] curses. And
 Mary brought forth [a child] who filled creation [with] His blessing.

Mother earth and Mary are similar in that each brought forth a son. But their sons were quite different. The earth's offspring brought curses down upon his 'mother', whereas Mary's son gave blessings to all creation.

H. Nat. 2. 5. 1 - 2 compares Mary to Bathsheba:

אֲרֵימָהּ אֲרֵימָהּ אֲרֵימָהּ לְדָוִד מִן הַיָּדָה לְדָוִד
 51 וְלִשְׁלֹמֹן אֲרֵימָהּ אֲרֵימָהּ אֲרֵימָהּ

Let His mother worship Him; let her offer Him a crown. For
 Solomon's mother made him king and crowned him.

Bathsheba is a model for Mary. However Ephrem describes the two mothers differently. Since he uses a standard praise formula ('let ... offer a crown') for Mary, the phrase does not actually express an action on Mary's part. Whereas Bathsheba made her son king and crowned him, Mary worshipped her son. Thus Mary is less active than Bathsheba. Ephrem portrays Bathsheba as a powerful mother and Mary as a somewhat passive mother.

6. 8 Summary

Ephrem affirms women as long as they are celibate or widowed. He portrays the Samaritan woman as a wise trained disputant who spoke with authority. He carefully diminished her sexual experience by creating a pretend marriage for her. She was a type for humanity because she followed Jesus step by step to the conclusion

that He was the Messiah. Ephrem equates her preaching to her city with Mary's giving birth to the Messiah.

Anna the prophetess is another excellent role model because she chose to devote her life to celibacy and to serve God. Shamona symbolised wholeness because she actively encouraged her seven sons to be martyred instead of apostatising. She herself was martyred for her obedience to God. Ephrem reveres Martha and Sarah for their hospitality, even though this opinion is not substantiated by the biblical narratives.

Tamar and Ruth are the only two women Ephrem lauds for having sex. They were able to violate social customs because they were Jesus's foremothers. Ephrem interprets the blatant sexual relationships between Tamar and Judah and Ruth and Boaz spiritually.

Mary is praised for giving birth to Jesus and Mary Magdalene for being first at the tomb. But they became fused into one woman. Once Mary is depicted as being a wise, protective mother. She is also given the gifts of priesthood and prophecy. But otherwise Mary is little more than a vessel, like the earth, Sheol, and the mouth. In fact Ephrem frequently refers to her as 'the womb'. He rarely portrays Mary as being a fully human mother. Similarly Ephrem occasionally concentrates on Jesus's divinity to the detriment of his humanity. So there are times when Jesus does not seem to be a fully human baby. Ephrem interpreted both the presence and the absence of Mary's labour pains theologically.

6. 9 Footnotes

¹CSCO 223, pp. 74-81.

² See ed. L. Leloir, *St. Ephrem Commentaire De L'Évangile Concordant, Texte Syriaque*, Chester Beatty Monographs 8 (Dublin: Hodges Figgis & Co. Ltd., 1963), ¶12. 6. 18 for a similar account. In Jn. 4: 18 Jesus says she had had five husbands and now had another man who was not her husband. Ephrem's approach to the Samaritan woman is reminiscent of the marriage of Sarah to Tobias found in Tob. 3: 7-15; 6: 10-8: 9. Sarah had seven consecutive husbands die because each had sexual intercourse with her on their wedding night. Tobias lived because he put fish gall on the incense, prayed with Sarah before going to sleep, and did not consummate the marriage that night. Ranke-Heinemann, pp. 7-8, and McVey, p. 356, n. 300, refer to the account in Tobit.

³ J. Payne Smith, p. 593.

⁴CSCO 223, pp. 81-3.

⁵CSCO 223, p. 87.

⁶ See Robert Murray, "'A Marriage for All Eternity': The Consecration of a Syrian Bride of Christ", *ECR* 11, Nos. 1-2 (1989), 65-8, which comments on hymn 46 of the Armenian collection. The hymn parallels Virg. 24 in presenting the celibate life as a marriage to Christ and a virgin as a model for other women.

⁷CSCO 363, p. 17.

⁸ Lk. 2: 36.

⁹ ܫܘܒܐ 'to satisfy, be filled' may take an accusative, as in Ps. 88: 3 'For my soul is full of trouble', ܫܘܒܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܕܘܢܐܢܐ (seb'at nafs bište) *satiatur anima mea malis*, according to R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), col. 2508.

¹⁰CSCO 223, p. 87.

¹¹CSCO 223, p. 93.

¹² Stanzas 9-10 are about Jephthah's daughter, sts. 11-16 concern Anna, and sts. 29-31 are on Susanna and Joseph.

¹³ CSCO 363, pp. 15-7, 19. The mother of the seven sons is named Samona by Aphrahat in Dem. 5. 20 (ed. Parisot, 1. 1, col. 221).

¹⁴ Perhaps this allusion is to the choral dance of the seven days of creation in 4 Macc. 14: 7.

¹⁵ Pv. 9: 1

¹⁶ Isai. 11: 1ff in the Septuagint and Vulgate, but not in the Hebrew Bible or the Syriac Peshitta.

¹⁷ See 4 Macc. 15: 16, 24. The third person masculine plural verb ܙܟܘܐ (*zkau*), the Peal of ܙܟܐ (\sqrt{zka}), is literally 'overcome, prevail'.

¹⁸ Michael and Gabriel, see also *H. Faith* 55. 5.

¹⁹ The foolish virgins of Mt. 25: 4, 8, 9 spent time adorning themselves rather than getting oil for their lamps.

²⁰ Spinning and weaving is used both for working cloth and telling tales. In 2 Macc. 7 and 4 Macc. 8, 12, Antiochus tries to persuade Samona and her sons, especially the last, to reject the Law for him. Ephrem may be implying that the foolish virgins were following unacceptable practices of adorning themselves.

²¹ Since females are the subject of the sentence, a plural verb is required. The unpronounced final *yud* must have been dropped.

- 22 Line three is unintelligible because a preposition can not be followed by a verb. My translation follows Beck's German translation, *CSCO* 364, p. 25: diese (jetzigen Frauen) dagegen mit mühe nur einen.
- 23 Walker, *Dictionary*, p. 46. The number seven was considered sacred in antiquity because it was the sum of the number three, which symbolised femininity, and the number four, for masculinity.
- 24 *H. Virg.* 5. 3 refers to a seven-branched candlestick and a spirit of seven qualities. See Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 804, for a discussion of Wisdom with its seven pillars and the deities associated with them.
- 25 *CSCO* 223, p. 95.
- 26 Ed. Leloir, *Texte Syriaque*, p. 54. See Murray, *Symbols*, p. 137, for his translation which takes account of the Armenian passage in *CSCO* 137, pp. 143-4.
- 27 Translated without the *seyame* following Beck, *CSCO* 187, p. 57.
- 28 *CSCO* 186, pp. 65-6.
- 29 The reason for Ephrem's abrupt switch from Tamar to Ruth is unclear.
- 30 Literally the fatted bull.
- 31 English translations of Ruth 3: 4, 7, 8 have Ruth lying at Boaz's feet. The Hebrew רגליי (*reglav*) refers to the whole leg from the hip down to the feet. Naomi's instructions to Ruth in 3: 4 indicate Ruth is going to the threshing floor to arouse Boaz. 'He will tell you what to do' means sexually as well as legally. Boaz did not want Ruth to be found on the threshing floor with him to protect her honour (vs. 14). Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, tr. John Raffan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 159, relates the story of Demeter's conceiving Plutos, Wealth from copulating on the threshing floor at harvest. Even though Ephrem was probably unaware of the practices of Demeter's worshippers, seduction on the threshing floor would not have been unheard of.
- 32 See Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 147-8, for his translation and comments. There is some doubt about the authorship of the *Hymns of Holy Week*.
- 33 From a variant, *CSCO* 412, p. 72, n. 2.
- 34 *CSCO* 412, pp. 72-3.
- 35 *CSCO* 248, p. 59.
- 36 *CSCO* 223, p. 87.
- 37 *CSCO* 186, pp. 69-70.
- 38 Isai. 6. 6-7. 'ubba is translated as bosom because Mary is holding her baby in her arms.
- 39 *CSCO* 186, p. 87.
- 40 *CSCO* 270, p. 50.
- 41 *CSCO* 223, pp. 22-3. See also Peter Yousif, 'St. Ephrem on Symbols in Nature: Faith, the Trinity and the Cross (Hymns on Faith, No. 18)', *ECR* 10, Nos. 1-2 (1978), p. 57.
- 42 *CSCO* 240, p.16.
- 43 *CSCO* 186, p. 42.
- 44 *CSCO* 186, p. 68.
- 45 *CSCO* 186, p. 93.
- 46 Walker, *Dictionary*, pp. 337-8, 348, remarks that dew and rain were common symbols of sperm and maleness, for example S. of S. 5: 2 or Ps. 110: 3. Rain and dew symbolised divine semen especially throughout the Ancient Near and Far East.
- 47 *CSCO* 248, p. 78.

⁴⁸*CSCO* 186, p. 82.

⁴⁹*CSCO* 186, p. 82.

⁵⁰*CSCO* 186, p. 199.

⁵¹*CSCO* 186, p. 14. See 1 Kgs. 1. 11 - 40 for Solomon's private coronation.

Attitudes to women can best be determined by comparing their characterisation to males who are in similar positions or who have acted the same way. For instance how Ephrem portrays virgins of both sexes or a woman and a man who deceive someone reveals whether he employs one standard for men and another for women. Ephrem's interpretations of biblical passages indicate how the patriarchal nature of the Bible influenced his views of women. The examples can be classified according to the number of characters involved, namely one two or three primary characters or groups of females and males. After looking at how Ephrem characterised males and females, it is useful to consider these images in the light of Ephrem's views of the ultimate role model, Jesus, and the effect the Incarnation had on humanity.

7. 1 Two characters

H. Virg. 25. 9 equates Mary with John with respect to reflecting the image of the Saviour.

לך נז, דשם כחם ...
בו כשגדא נלכסן מום
אדקך לך שאל כום אלכדך
אפ מום כדקך לך שם מום
אם שם דלך נז, מן כש
בסן גל שם מום כשגדא
לכסן מום מום דאפ שם מן כש
ששן פום

For they saw You, Lord, in them . . . while they were observing each other. Your mother saw You in Your disciple; and he saw You in Your mother. O, the seers, who see You Lord in each other at every moment [as] in a mirror, are a type that we also might see You our Saviour in each other.

This stanza speaks to the subject of whether a woman, and mother, can reflect the icon of Christ. A man, John, is able to see his Lord in a woman, Mary, as easily as she can see her son and her Lord in a man. Mary's and John's abilities to see Christ in

each other are models for people to look for Jesus in each other. Mary and John were each able to see the Lord in the other and to reflect the Lord like a mirror because each was so centered on God that they could see Him 'at every moment'. Affirming Mary's full humanity helps the Church balance its relations with women. Later adoration of Mary does not compensate for discounting or abusing other women. Mary's conceiving, giving birth to, and mothering Jesus were results of her willing obedience to and love of God.

H. Nat. 6. 13 compares Anna the prophetess with Isaiah:

מְתַנֵּה אֵת מִשְׁכָּבָהּ כִּי
 כִּי אֵת הַיְהוָה מִתְחַלֵּם לֵב
 כִּי אֵת הַיְהוָה מִתְחַלֵּם לֵב
 מְתַנֵּה אֵת מִשְׁכָּבָהּ מְתַנֵּה אֵת
 מִתְחַלֵּם לֵב כִּי אֵת הַיְהוָה

Anna embraced Him; she put her mouth on His lips, and the Spirit rested on her lips like Isaiah whose mouth was quiet [until] a coal approached his lips and opened his mouth.

Lk. 2: 36-8 do not record Anna's embracing or kissing Jesus. Both Anna and Isaiah prophesy as a result of touching divinity. But Anna was the active one; she went to Jesus and, according to Ephrem, hugged and kissed him. Isaiah stayed in his place and the coal came to him.³

At Jesus's baptism John also had occasion to touch the fire of divinity. Whereas Anna fearlessly went up to hug and kiss Jesus and Isaiah waited passively (in awe) for the coal to come touch him, John the Baptist repeatedly refused to touch the fire out of fear (see *Sog.* 5. 11, 13, 21, 29, 31, 33, 39).

Susanna is mentioned in a commendation of Joseph in *H. Supp.* 13. 29-30:

אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה 29.
 אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה
 אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה
 אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה 30.
 אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה
 אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה אֵת הַיְהוָה

29. Young Joseph endured an experience full of losses. He fell [into] a trap [set] by youths [his brothers].⁵ They cunningly lay in wait for him. He cunningly escaped from it [trap].

30. Two old wolves forced one ewe in a garden.⁶ A lion's cub [Joseph] in the inner chamber saw a heifer and fled from her. He resisted his nature and overcame his hunger.

Stanzas 29 and 30 commemorate Joseph who maintained his virginity in the face of sexual harassment by his employer's wife. Ephrem diverges from the Joseph story to the account of Susanna who was falsely accused by the two judges (st. 30). The two judges abuse their power even more than Potiphar's wife did. The probability that Susanna would be condemned to death,⁷ while Joseph was sent to prison, demonstrates the greater threat which Susanna faced.

Ephrem creates a scene reminiscent of Isai. 11: 6 in which the lion, lamb, and other animals shall lie down together. Susanna is the lamb (a ewe) in the garden. This image also suggests her vulnerability. Joseph is depicted as a young lion who overcame his nature and did not eat a heifer (Potiphar's wife). Whereas Joseph restrained his sexual desires, the two judges allowed their inclinations to run rampant. Although Ephrem said little about Susanna, Joseph's predicament must have brought her to mind. Consequently Ephrem introduces a woman's experience when extolling a man

H. Nat. 2. 13-4 compare aspects of Mary's and Joseph's parentage of Jesus.

13. אֲבִיךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ

אֲבִיךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ

דֵּלִי וְעַבְדִּי מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ

מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ

אֲבִיךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ

מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ

דֵּלִי וְעַבְדִּי מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ

14. לֵבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ

מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ

דֵּלִי וְעַבְדִּי מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ

מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ מִלְּבַבְךָ

ܡܬܘܥ ܥܘܢ ܥܡܘܠܐ ܡܝܦܐ ܕܠܐ
 ܡܝܢ ܡܝܢ ܡܝܢ ܡܝܢ ܡܝܢ ܡܝܢ
 ܡܝܢ ܡܝܢ ܡܝܢ ܡܝܢ ܡܝܢ

13. The succession of kings is registered in the name of men instead of women. Joseph, a son of David, betrothed a daughter of David since the [future] youth could not be registered in his mother's name. Therefore [He was] a child to Joseph without [his] sperm. Also [He was] a child to His mother without a man. And He joined Himself to their line by the two of them, so that in [the line of] kings, the son of David is written.

14. It was not fitting that He should be born from Joseph's sperm nor that He should be conceived by Mary without Joseph. He was not registered in the name of Mary who gave birth to Him, and Joseph who registered [Him] did not register his own offspring. He was joined with his name without Joseph's body. Her son sprang forth without Mary's betrothed. He was Lord to David and Son.⁹

Neither Mary nor Joseph seem to be fully human parents because of the nature of their child. Since Mary had become pregnant without a man, Joseph would not have been needed except that custom required a legitimate child to be registered in the father's name. According to Syriac Gospel tradition, Mary was of the house of David. This was important so that Jesus's humanity was truly of the Davidic line. It was equally necessary for Joseph to be of the house of David so that Jesus was registered as a son of David. Thus the expectation of a Davidic Messiah was fulfilled. He joined Himself to the house of David by both Mary and Jesus (st. 13).

Ephrem interprets the circumstances surrounding Jesus's birth to mean that Mary and Joseph both had a vital role to play and they did what was fitting. It was unacceptable, to Ephrem, for Joseph to have had sexual intercourse with Mary or for him to be Jesus's biological father. Yet it was also not thought possible for Mary to conceive without Joseph, or some other man. Thus Ephrem repeats the paradox that Joseph registered a son who was his in name only, and Jesus was not registered in the name of the woman who had brought Him forth. He explains how Jesus joined Himself to the house of David - through Mary's body at birth and through Joseph's name when He was registered (st. 14).

Ephrem uses Moses and Zipporah as models of marital continence in *H. Nat.*

14. 19.

משה זיפורה
 חלץ את עצמו מן
 אשתו ופלט את
 הים לפני זונה
 זיפורה שמרה
 כבוד, בת כהן
 מדיאן, בת אברהם
 עברה זנות

Moses, who divided and separated himself from his wife, divided the sea before the prostitute. Zipporah preserved chastity, although she was the daughter of [Midianite] priests. The daughter of Abraham committed adultery with a calf.

Moses divided and separated himself from his wife. The two verbs emphasize Moses's abstinence from sex and foreshadow his dividing the sea. Ephrem personified Egypt as a prostitute. The Israelites had escaped from one prostitute, the Egyptian pantheon, only to commit adultery with another in the wilderness.¹¹ Although Ephrem stresses Moses's continence, Zipporah is the centre of attention. He affirms Zipporah because she remained chaste, even though as the daughter of Midianite priests, she would not have been expected to do so.

In *H. Nat.* 17. 8 Ephrem addresses a mother and a master:

אם יש לך בן, תביאנו
 אל אהבי, אם יש לך
 בת, תביאנו אל אהבי,
 אם יש לך עבד, תביאנו
 אל אהבי,

For she who has a child, let him come to be a brother to my Beloved. She who has a daughter or a kinswoman, let her come to be the betrothed of my Honourable One. And he who has a servant, free him to come to serve his Lord.

Ephrem asks a woman and a man to give someone to God. The woman is asked to let her son, or daughter, or even her kinswoman, go. She must give up control over her family members.

The man's loss is not equivalent to the woman's. The man is asked to free his servant. A man could love and depend on a servant. But except for rare cases, giving

up a servant would not have the same emotional impact as giving up a child. The man is asked only for his servant, not for any other relatives.

Whereas the son is going to become Jesus's brother, the daughter or kinswoman will become His bride. Thus a person's sex can influence his or her relationship with the Bridegroom. The servant continues to serve; he simply has a new master - the Lord.

Although Ephrem comments on Abraham and Jephthah, the passage in *C. Nis.* 63. 1-6 (with the refrain) is here to compare his treatment of the son and the daughter.

1. תנא דאברהם תנא דאברהם תנא דאברהם 1.
 דאברהם כו כו פא למ לטמא
 2. לפי דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם 2.
 דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם
 3. דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם 3.
 דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם
 4. דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם 4.
 דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם
 5. דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם 5.
 דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם
 6. דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם 6.
 דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם דאברהם

1. Who shall be equal to the reward of that Abraham at whom I wondered, when he tied up his only-begotten [son].
 ref. Praise to You, Voice that revives Sheol's dead and they ascend and become preachers of the Son, the reviver of all.
2. At that moment, I came out suddenly to see and to wonder that he had his knife drawn over his beloved.
3. I collected my many thoughts from every part [of my mind] and I gathered myself [together] and marvelled at him, at that celebrated man.
4. How indeed can you read his great story? You have dishonoured the reading of it by [stopping up] your ears.¹⁴
5. Jephthah's sword condemns him who mourns [the daughter's death]. His daughter is to him a mirror of life [from] the dead.
6. She gave herself to her father, so you entrust your lives to the Father of all at the moment of [your] end.

woman as to a man. Ephrem pairs Mary with her kinswoman, Elizabeth, when coupling prayer with good news, perhaps because the abstract nouns for prayer (ܩܠܘܬܐ, *qluta*) and good news (ܫܒܪܬܐ, *sbarta*) are both grammatically feminine.

St. 20 presents two trios. The first trio consists of Zechariah, Daniel, and Mary. The three are similar to each other because of their wills and their natures. This means that they are similar in ways they could not determine - their God-given natures - and also in matters that they could control - their wills.

But Ephrem replaces Zechariah with Elizabeth in the second trio. In the phrase 'the virgin and the barren woman and the faithful Daniel,' Mary and Elizabeth are matched with Daniel. Elizabeth is clearly the barren woman who brought forth the voice, John the Baptist, just as Mary brought forth the Word. Although Zechariah prophesied, Ephrem had just named Daniel. So he is equating Daniel's revelation of the word to Elizabeth's giving birth to John and Mary's giving birth to Jesus.

Martha, Mary and Lazarus are the subjects of *H. Virg.* 35. 9:

ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ
 ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ
 ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ... ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ...
 ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ
 ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ
 ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ ܩܠܘܬܐ

Let Martha thank You. Let her offer You a crown - and the sister who did not serve and the brother, the three of them. Together they have crowned You with one ... a crown of siblings, ... He lifted up [His] head ... Martha became famous by her service, Mary became famous by her love, and Lazarus because of his resurrection.

In the praise formula Ephrem names Martha first. Mary is slightly denigrated as 'the one who did not serve,' instead of complimented as 'the one who contemplated Jesus' or some such phrase. Neither she nor Lazarus are named when first mentioned. Lazarus is simply tacked on to his sisters.

ܡܢ ܕܢܘܨܝܢ ܕܥܡܢ ܕܥܡܢ
ܡܢ ܕܢܘܨܝܢ ܕܥܡܢ ܕܥܡܢ

16. Let us read, for it is not difficult for Abraham to persuade [us] about the daughter of Abraham [the Samaritan woman]. Sarah and Abram made a contract, a hidden secret that no one knew: 'Therefore say about me that I am [your] brother.' If the faithful Abraham and Sarah deceived when they were compelled, then she also deceived the spectators when compelled.

17. Just as when Sarah and Abram asserted this secret as if for our benefit, so the daughter of Abraham asserted [her secret]. She as well as that man [did so] for our increase. Although she had a husband, Sarah denied [it] but that woman made a husband for herself as a pretext. Come let us wonder at the diverse plots of respectable women.

18. And how even God . . . revealed about Sarah that she was the wife of a husband, so also the Son of the Most High revealed that this woman was without a husband. And how Sarah, . . . of the house of Abimelech believed on her account, so the Samaritans believed on account of her who received the One who gives life for all.

Ephrem turns to Abraham and Sarah to defend the Samaritan woman (st. 16). He excuses the faithful Abraham and Sarah for lying because they did it in self defense. He overlooks the fact that they lied instead of depending on God's protection. Although Abraham devised the scheme and his wife would have had little choice under the circumstances, Ephrem makes Sarah an equal partner in the lie.

Ephrem believed Abraham's and Sarah's secret benefitted his Church because it helped to explain the Samaritan woman's secret (st. 17). He credits the Samaritan woman's pseudo-husband with helping her to increase the Church. When Ephrem lauds the respectable women for their diverse plots, he excludes Abraham. While he may simply wish to develop the comparison between the two women, Sarah hardly devised the plot related in the biblical narrative.

Both God and Jesus are the Revealers of secrets (st. 18). From what remains of the line, the house of Abimelech believed because of Sarah, not Abraham or God. Similarly the Samaritans believed because of the woman who received the Life-Giver.

H. Nat. 1. 15 - 16 compares Adam, Mary, and the earth in their roles as mothers:

15. אדם לא נולד אלא בלתי ג'ו'א ג'ו'א ג'ו'א ל'ו'ו
 ב'ו'ו א'ו'ו כ'ו'ו א'ו'ו ג'ו'א ג'ו'א ב'ו'ו
 16. א'ו'ו ב'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו
 א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו²¹

15. He, the man who never was born, brought forth Eve, the mother; how much more trustworthy is Eve's daughter, who brought forth a child without a man.

16. The virgin earth brought forth that Adam, head of the earth; the Virgin today brought forth [the second] Adam, head of heaven.

Ephrem draws an analogy between three mothers - Adam, Mary, and the earth. He interprets the removal of Adam's rib from which God formed Eve to mean Adam gave birth to her. The verb used to describe Adam's role in producing Eve is *לד* (*led*) which normally means 'to beget' when used of a male. However Ephrem is directly comparing Adam to Mary 'who brought forth a child without a man'. Since natural processes had been reversed at the creation so a man could give birth to a woman, Ephrem thought it was even more believable that a woman could bring forth without a man (st. 15).

Adam was made out of dust taken from the earth. Thus mother earth and Adam brought forth in similar ways. Both contributed some of the substance of the new life. But neither physically carried the 'child' or gave birth. Adam's 'conception' of Eve and the earth's 'conception' of Adam obviously would have occurred without sex. Ephrem stresses the virginal conception of the earth and Mary by calling them virgins (st. 16). Adam's and the earth's 'conception' provide evidence that Mary herself could have conceived the second Adam without the aid of a man.

In a dispute between Satan and the personification of Death in *C. Nis.* 41, Death mentions two males and one female (st. 13. 3-6) when mocking the crucified Jesus:

א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו
 א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו
 א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו א'ו'ו

22 *יְהוָה יִרְאֵנוּ כְּלִילֵי חַיִּים וְיִשְׁמַע לָנוּ*

Oh Reviver of the dead to life, where [are] You? You will be a meal for me instead of sweet Lazarus. His taste, lo, is still in my mouth. Jairus's daughter came to see this Your crucifixion. The widow's son gazed at You.

Lazarus, Jairus's daughter, and the widow's son were all raised from the dead by Jesus. So Death mocks Jesus by reminding Him of them. Death thinks He could raise them; but He will not be able to raise Himself. Death intends to feast on Jesus since Jesus rescued Lazarus, an adult male, from the jaws of Death. Lazarus was sweet and tasty to Death, but otherwise he is completely passive. Although it is unclear from where the widow's son gazed at Jesus, nevertheless Ephrem through Death suggests he did witness Jesus's crucifixion. Jairus's daughter is the only one of the three witnesses to act. She came to see Jesus's crucifixion.

7. 3 Groups

H. Virg. 51. 1. 3-6 is about male and female creatures at creation.

וְיִשְׂמְחוּ בְּרֵאשִׁית הָאָרֶץ הַנְּטוּיָה

הַנְּטוּיָה וְהַנְּטוּיָה

וְהַנְּטוּיָה וְהַנְּטוּיָה

23 *וְהַנְּטוּיָה וְהַנְּטוּיָה*

And also the creatures of his earth, the new males exulted to see the new females: the flocks, the herds, and the droves that were created, doves with all the fowl, fish in their kinds.

Sexual distinctions are apparent in Ephrem's rendition of creation. The new males of land, sea, and air were thrilled to see the new females. Humans are omitted here perhaps to avoid interpreting the male creatures's excitement sexually. Ephrem does not mention how the females reacted to the males.

H. Nat. 8. 18. 1-3 presents brides and grooms jointly praising Jesus:

בְּרֵאשִׁית הָאָרֶץ הַנְּטוּיָה

24 *וְהַנְּטוּיָה וְהַנְּטוּיָה*

Bridegrooms with [their] brides shouted 'Blessed is the Infant whose mother was the bride of the Holy One'.

The bridegrooms and brides bless the baby in unison. The men identify with Heavenly Bridegroom and the women with Mary by calling her the bride of the Holy One. The betrothal between Mary and the Holy One serves as a model for marital continence.

H. Nat. 7. 10-11 expresses the sentiments of elderly women and men in Bethlehem.

10. איה, מתיבא דסוניה דגו.
 גו. כיה דגו. כיה דגו.
 תבכנה ליה דגו. דגו.
 כיה דגו. דגו.
 כיה דגו. דגו.
 11. סוניה דגו. כיה דגו.
 דגו. דגו.
 דגו. דגו.
 דגו. דגו.
 דגו. דגו.

10. The elderly women of David's village blessed David's daughter and said: 'Blessed is our birthplace for her streets are lit by the ray of Jesse. Today David's throne is established by You, David's son.'

11. The elderly men cried: 'Blessed is the Infant who restores Adam's youth. He was angry to see that he aged and wasted away, but the serpent who killed him shed [his skin] and became young. Blessed is the Infant for Adam and Eve were restored to youth by Him.

David is prominent in st. 10. The elderly women are in David's village which they bless; they bless his 'daughter' (Mary); and they refer to David's throne and his 'son' (Jesus). The women are cognisant of the good fortune that has come to their village and what Jesus's birth means nationally - the Davidic monarchy can be re-established.

While the women are concerned with their village and nation, the men are more interested in personal matters. They bless the Infant for restoring Adam's and Eve's youth. They recount how Adam felt as he aged and realised that the serpent could shed its skin and remain young. Twice the men bless the Infant for restoring

Adam's youth. They may identify with the debilitated Adam and hope for similar rejuvenation.

Ephrem includes children and adults of both sexes in *H. Resur.* 2. 2.

כּוּמְרֵי אִתְּוּתָא דְּמַלְּוָהּ , מַלְּוָהּ דְּמַלְּוָהּ ,
 בְּחַיְתָּא דְּחַיְתָּא אִתְּוּתָא דְּמַלְּוָהּ
 בְּחַיְתָּא דְּחַיְתָּא אִתְּוּתָא דְּמַלְּוָהּ
 בְּחַיְתָּא דְּחַיְתָּא אִתְּוּתָא דְּמַלְּוָהּ

²⁶ כּוּמְרֵי אִתְּוּתָא דְּמַלְּוָהּ , מַלְּוָהּ דְּמַלְּוָהּ ,

Lo the joyous festival which is totally mouths and tongues. Modest women and modest men are like trumpets and horns in it. Girls and boys are like harps and lyres in it. The (females's) voices interweave with the (males's) voices. And all of them rise up and reach to heaven. They give praise to the Lord. Blessed is He in whom the silent roar.

During the course of describing the celebration of the resurrection which falls in Nisan,²⁷ Ephrem pairs modest women with modest men and girls with boys. Women, men, girls, and boys are each symbolised by different instruments. Ephrem's use of specific instruments for each group indicates distinctions between the sexes and between the age groups. But since Ephrem uses one class of instrument for adults and another class for children, he is not treating females one way and males another. The adults are wind instruments; the children are stringed instruments. Each sex and age group have a part to play in the symphony of praise.

7. 4 Humanity and the Incarnation

H. Virg. 48. 16-18 concerns one of the results Jesus's becoming human had for the rest of humanity.

16. כּוּמְרֵי אִתְּוּתָא דְּמַלְּוָהּ , מַלְּוָהּ דְּמַלְּוָהּ ,

כּוּמְרֵי אִתְּוּתָא דְּמַלְּוָהּ , מַלְּוָהּ דְּמַלְּוָהּ ,

17. כּוּמְרֵי אִתְּוּתָא דְּמַלְּוָהּ , מַלְּוָהּ דְּמַלְּוָהּ ,

כּוּמְרֵי אִתְּוּתָא דְּמַלְּוָהּ , מַלְּוָהּ דְּמַלְּוָהּ ,

18. כּוּמְרֵי אִתְּוּתָא דְּמַלְּוָהּ , מַלְּוָהּ דְּמַלְּוָהּ ,

²⁸ כּוּמְרֵי אִתְּוּתָא דְּמַלְּוָהּ , מַלְּוָהּ דְּמַלְּוָהּ ,

16. But grace adorned its [humanity's] faults and God came to be human.

H. Nat. 8. 2 is yet another example of the mutuality between divinity and humanity.

שרש שבתא דגסי תלף
 אלתהא בר אשעהא
 מן תה זנתא מן תה זנתא
 חתה תלך אפי שנתה
 31 ממה גלתה אלת כו אשעה

Glory to the Wise One who united and blended divinity with humanity: one from the height and one from the depth. He mingled the natures like pigments and the image became a human God.

Again God commingles the divine and human natures. The chasm between the two is indicated by divinity's being from the height and humanity from the depth. But God mingled the pigments like an artist blending paints or a chemist mixing medicines and a human God came into being.

In *H. Virg.* 37. 9 Ephrem concentrates on Jesus's human body.

פיה דתה זנת אכסח למה דאתה
 דכאשרת מן כה פנתה
 תלנתה מה אשעה אכח זכ, כלשה
 דתלה לם זנתה דנתה אכח אפ דתה
 אה אשעה דזנתה תללה מה
 לפי מה דתה אפ דתה
 32 פיה אכסח דגו מה חסמה

The body from Mary refuted that one who said that the Heavenly One dwelled in her in another body. [His] body is complete. So how did it grow by [eating] our bread? It has sweat and spit and tears and blood also.³³ And if the body which ascended is pure, it [still] resembles our body because it died. Renounce [error] and profess that their [Jesus's human and our] nature is one.

To refute those who doubted Jesus's humanity, Ephrem asks how an already complete body could develop eating human food. He answers the question by describing Jesus's bodily characteristics vividly. His body had sweat, spit, tears, and blood just like any other human body would have. Even though Jesus's ascended body was pure, it died. Ephrem affirms that Jesus's body was fully human.

7. 5 Types

After comparing Ephrem's treatment of males and females in similar situations and considering what he believed the Incarnation meant for humanity, his attitude to each sex is still most fully revealed by his use of males and females as types. Many of the passages with a woman as a type have been discussed in previous chapters. Therefore a summary of these types is helpful. The Samaritan woman was a type of humanity (*H. Virg.* 22. 21). Jairus's daughter was a type of the Old Testament and a woman Jesus healed was a type of the New Testament (*H. Virg.* 34. 3). Asenath, Esther, Jesus's mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, the Queen of Sheba, and Rachel are among the women he believes typify the Church.³⁴ He almost always uses a woman as a type of the Church and only once portrayed a woman (Jephthah's daughter) as a Christ figure.

Ephrem's use of females as types of the Church has the corollary that males are types of the Heavenly Bridegroom. After relating the engagements of Eleazer (Isaac) to Rebecca, Jacob to Rachel, and Moses to Zipporah, each of which occurred at a well, Ephrem declares 'All these were types of our Lord who espoused His Church at His baptism in the Jordan.'³⁵ By analogy to the bridal couple, Isaac, Jacob and Moses are types of the Bridegroom while Rebecca, Rachel, and Zipporah typify the Church.

Bridegrooms are not the only males to typify Jesus because the Bridegroom is only one of His roles. This is demonstrated by the following excerpts. Sarah, Isaac, and Jesus are the characters in *H. Nat.* 8. 13.

ܘܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ³⁶

When Sarah sang to Isaac, [she sang] as to a servant who carried the likeness of the King, his Lord: the mark of the cross on his shoulders, also bonds and sufferings on his hands, the symbol of the nails.

Isaac typifies the suffering Christ because of the suffering he experienced when Abraham prepared to sacrifice him. Although Gen. 22: 6-9 do not give specific details, Ephrem believes that Abraham tied up Isaac's hands and, apparently, rope burns were left on his wrists as a symbol of the nail marks on Jesus's hands. The mark of the wood Isaac carried on his back, or was tied on top of, left a mark to symbolise the cross marks on Jesus's shoulders.

H. Nat. 10. 4 concerns Daniel, Lazarus, and Jesus.

ܘܠܟܘܢ ܐܢ ܗܘ ܐܘܪܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ
 ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ
 ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ
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 ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ
 ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ

Daniel and Lazarus were types for You. One in the cave that the peoples sealed and one in the grave that the people opened. Behold their signs and their seals reproved them.

Daniel was thrown into the lion's den and Lazarus died and was buried. Thus they were both trapped. Since they were freed by God, they are types of the risen Saviour. Their being enclosed and released are signs to disbelievers.

7. 6 Summary

With respect to biblical role models, males are usually evaluated in terms of their obedience to God, and females in terms of their relations with the men in their lives.³⁸ Although the Bible is Ephrem's major source of inspiration, he judges both sexes in terms of their relationship with the Heavenly Bridegroom. A woman's relationship with her husband or son could not be a standard for evaluation when marriage was not an ideal to attain.

Ephrem's characterisations of males and females are difficult to classify. However of the material analysed, there seem to be three groups: those in which Ephrem treats both sexes the same, those in which a female overshadows a male

character, and those in which a male overshadows a female. Occasionally an excerpt has elements of two groups.

The passages which exhibit similar evaluations of females and males are as follows. Ephrem equates Mary and John as models in which to see the Lord (*H. Virg.* 25. 9). Mary and Joseph each contribute something vital to Jesus (*H. Nat.* 2. 13-14). Gabriel spoke to Mary and Daniel while they were praying, Zechariah, Mary, and Daniel have similar wills and natures, and Elizabeth brought forth the voice, Mary brought forth the Word, and Daniel mentally brought forth God's revelation (*H. Nat.* 2. 17, 20). Adam, the earth, and Mary each brought forth a 'child' without having had sexual intercourse (*H. Nat.* 1. 15-16). The brides and grooms all praise the Infant and His mother, the bride of the Holy One (*H. Nat.* 8. 18. 1-3). In the celebration of the resurrection, modest women and modest men are symbolised by two types of wind instrument; girls and boys are symbolised by two types of stringed instrument. Their voices interweave in praise of God (*H. Resur.* 2. 2). Ephrem equates male and female actions/character primarily on the basis of individual fidelity and celibacy. He does not assume that one sex is naturally more able to be faithful or celibate.

At times Ephrem depicts situations in which the females outshine the males. Anna and Isaiah both prophesy; but Ephrem portrays Anna as the more active and giving of the two (*H. Nat.* 6. 13). Zipporah and Moses are models of continent marriage. But Zipporah is lauded because, as the daughter of Midianite priests, she was not expected to be chaste (*H. Nat.* 14. 19). Although Abraham is a central character in the stanzas comparing Isaac and Jephthah's daughter, when the son and the daughter are compared, she is the model Ephrem uses to encourage trusting one's life to God (*C. Nis.* 63. 1-6). Zacchaeus, Bar Timaeus, and Rahab were all inhabitants of Schehem and all praise God. Yet Rahab is the one who gives her rope to tie Jesus's crown onto his head (*H. Virg.* 35. 1). Ephrem treats Sarah as an equal partner in the lie that Abraham told to Abimelech. Sarah is credited with saving

Abimelech's household and the Samaritan woman with converting her city (*H. Virg.* 22. 16-18). After Jesus died, Death confronted Him with the resurrections of Lazarus, Jairus's daughter, and the widow's son. Whereas Lazarus was totally passive and the widow's son gazed at Jesus, Jairus's daughter came in order to see the crucifixion (*C. Nis.* 41. 13). The passage about Martha, Mary, and Lazarus has two parts. In the first part Martha is the primary character, Mary secondary, and Lazarus simply included because he was their brother. In the second part, all three become famous for different reasons - Martha for her service, Mary for her love, and Lazarus for being resurrected (*H. Virg.* 35. 9). When the mother and the master are each asked to give up a dependent, it is the mother who makes the greatest sacrifice (*H. Nat.* 17. 8). The elderly people of Bethlehem give thanks for Jesus's birth. The women are interested in the wider national implications; the men are concerned with Adam's being rejuvenated (*H. Nat.* 7. 10-11).

Daniel overshadows Susanna, though Ephrem's including her serves to reveal Ephrem's understanding of the mutual relationships between the sexes in the messianic age (*H. Supp.* 13. 29-30). The male creatures rejoiced at the creation of their female counterparts. They seem to surpass the females because Ephrem gives their reaction, but not the females's (*H. Virg.* 51. 1. 3-6).

The review of Ephrem's assessment of humanity with respect to divinity indicates that he believed there was a great chasm between humanity and divinity. Jesus bridged the gulf by becoming human. It is not always clear if Ephrem includes females in his consideration of divinity elevating humanity. There is definitely a hierarchy with divinity coming down to raise humanity. The most obvious way that males overshadow females are in Ephrem's use of males, especially bridegrooms, to typify Jesus and females to symbolise the church as bride. An unfortunate implication is that, like the Heavenly Bridegroom, the bridegroom in some way raises the bride.

7. 7 Footnotes

¹ *CSCO* 223, p. 91.

² *CSCO* 186, p. 53.

³ See Isai. 6: 6f.

⁴ *CSCO* 363, pp. 18-19.

⁵ Gen. 37: 18 - 35.

⁶ Vulgate Dan. 13: 1ff.; In the Apocrypha, Sus. 1: 5ff, for the story of the two judges who spied on Susanna when she was in her garden bathing, and then maliciously accused her of infidelity.

⁷ Sus. 1: 41.

⁸ *CSCO* 186, pp. 16-7.

⁹ *CSCO* 186, p. 17, has 𐎠𐎢𐎠 (‘aba, father), with 𐎠𐎢 (bra) ‘son’ as a variant in n. 70. See Mk. 12: 35-7; Mt. 22: 41-6; Lk. 20: 41-4.

¹⁰ *CSCO* 186, pp. 78-80.

¹¹ The Egyptian God Horus and the Semitic God El were symbolised by a calf and a bull respectively.

¹² *CSCO* 186, p. 88.

¹³ *CSCO* 240, p. 99.

¹⁴ The line ends with an idiom, literally ‘inside your ears’. The verb 𐎠𐎢 means reading, reciting, or calling out. Since Ephrem refers to ears, he probably is thinking of Abraham’s story being read out loud.

¹⁵ *CSCO* 223, p. 126.

¹⁶ Jos. 2: 1, Lk. 18: 35; 19: 1.

¹⁷ *CSCO* 186, pp. 17-8.

¹⁸ Here ‘elders’ is used as a term of respect, not age.

¹⁹ *CSCO* 223, pp. 128-9.

²⁰ *CSCO* 223, pp. 79-80.

²¹ *CSCO* 186, p. 3.

²² *CSCO* 240, pp. 35-6. For the raising of the widow’s son, see 1 Kgs. 17: 22-3 (the widow of Zarephath) and 2 Kgs. 4: 34-6 (the Shunamite).

²³ *CSCO* 223, p. 162.

²⁴ *CSCO* 186, p. 62.

²⁵ *CSCO* 186, pp. 57-8.

²⁶ *CSCO* 248, pp. 82-3.

²⁷ Brock, *Harp of the Spirit*, p. 73.

²⁸ *CSCO* 223, p. 157.

²⁹ *CSCO* 186, pp. 104 (refrain), 107.

³⁰ *H. Virg.* 37. 2 is also about the blending of His body with humanity.

³¹ *CSCO* 186, p. 59.

³² *CSCO* 223, p. 135.

³³ In *H. Virg.* 35. 6 Jesus has sweat and dust on His body.

³⁴ Asenath, as a type of the Church, *H. Virg.* 21. 9; Esther, *C. Nis.* 57. 27; the two Marys, *Holy Week* 7. 193 and *H. Crucif.* 4. 17, the Queen of Sheba, *EC* 11. 4; and Rachel, *C. Nis.* 32. 16.

³⁵ *Symbols*, p. 135, Murray’s translation of ¶3. 17, ed. L. Leloir, *Commentaire de L’Évangile Concordant, Version Arménienne*, *CSCO* 137, Arm. 1 (1954), p. 45.

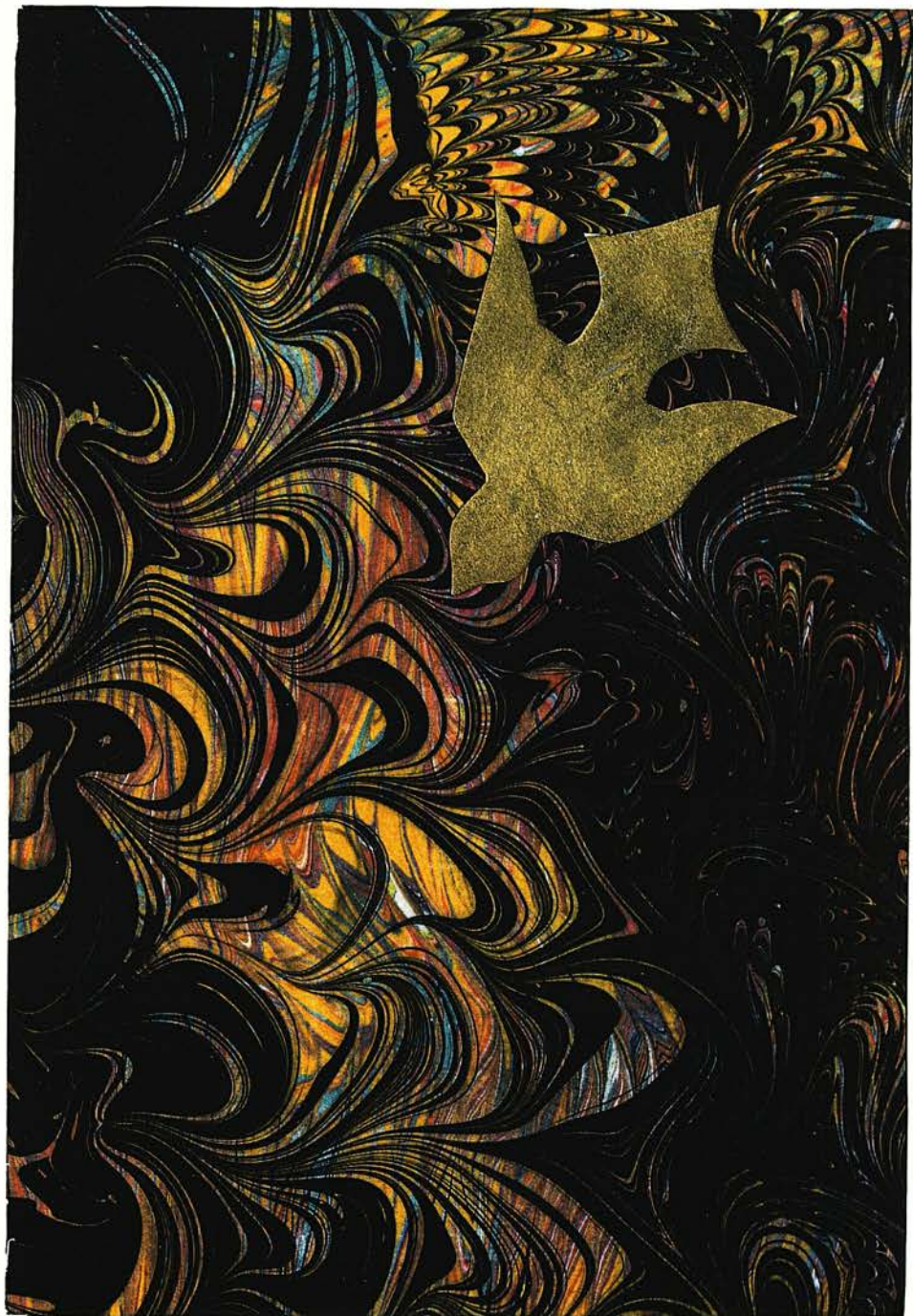
Leloir's Latin translation, *CSCO* 145, Arm. 2, (1955), p. 34, is 'Omnes igitur hi typi fuerunt Domini nostri, nam desponsavit ecclesiam suam in baptismo Iordanis.'

³⁶ *CSCO* 186, p. 61.

³⁷ *CSCO* 186, p. 67.

³⁸ Esther Fuchs, 'The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible', *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* 10, ed. Adella Yarbro Collins (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985), p. 119.

Part Three:
The Divine Feminine in Ephrem



Descending Dove

Whereas a dove brooding over eggs has traditionally been presumed to be the mother, it is difficult to determine the sex of a descending dove. Since the dove is a common symbol for the Holy Spirit, especially with respect to baptism, this picture signifies the ambiguities in the grammatical and metaphorical genders of the Spirit. The waves in the background symbolise the reactions to images of the Holy Spirit as Feminine which can be discerned in early Syriac literature and the translation practices of some modern scholars.

The gender of the Holy Spirit in Syriac literature depends on the grammatical usage associated with the word 'spirit' and on the imagery applied to the Spirit. Change is in evidence especially in the area of grammatical convention.

8. 1 Scholarly opinion on 'Spirit' in Syriac

Since speakers, or writers, communicate primarily through their use of language, the first step in examining the gender of the Holy Spirit is to ascertain the grammatical gender of the word 'spirit' (*ruah*, ܪܘܚܐ or *ruha*, ܪܘܚܐ) in Syriac. A survey of scholarly opinions on the subject yielded the following results. Nöldeke considers the grammatical gender of 'spirit' to be a noun of common gender, which he says is 'preponderatingly f., especially in the sense of "wind"'.¹ Charlesworth writes that 'in Syriac, Holy Spirit is usually masculine, in Aramaic usually feminine, and in Greek neuter'.² J. Payne Smith designates the gender as 'generally f. except when signifying the Holy Spirit',³ which is based on R. Payne Smith's 'sed plerumque f. nisi quum Spiritum Sanctum significat'.⁴ When commenting on Beck's practice of using masculine German pronouns for the Holy Spirit, Drijvers notes 'in the Syrian world of thought the Spirit always appears as a female figure'.⁵ Murray states that spirit is 'always construed as feminine in early Syriac, including the authentic works of Ephrem'.⁶ Similarly Brock remarks 'that in early Syriac literature the Holy Spirit, *ruha d-qudsha*, is treated grammatically as a feminine'.⁷ McVey comments that because spirit is feminine in Syriac, 'early Syriac Christian literature developed a rich feminine imagery for the Holy Spirit'.⁸

So Charlesworth believes that spirit is masculine, while J. and R. Payne Smith differentiate between spirits, regarding the Holy Spirit as masculine and other spirits as feminine. Nöldeke labels the word as both common and predominantly feminine. However Beck, Drijvers, Murray, Brock, and McVey all designate it as feminine. The range of opinions demonstrates that the grammatical gender of the Holy Spirit

was either ambiguous or in a state of flux. In all likelihood the Spirit's grammatical gender is being determined by the words associated with it. Probably all of the scholars named are aware of differences in the grammatical treatment of the Spirit. The Payne Smiths and Nöldeke may have labeled the gender as they did to account for the discrepancy in usage. Charlesworth must have given more weight to the occurrences of masculine words used with Spirit. Beck, Drijvers, Murray, Brock, and McVey may have based their assessment on cases with feminine forms.

8. 2 Biblical evidence

Throughout the Syriac Old Testament, Spirit is treated as a feminine noun when it refers to the Spirit of God. Regardless of whether the Spirit of God (*ruah - Elohim*) in the Old Testament is identical to the Holy Spirit of the New Testament, the Spirit's treatment in the Syriac Old Testament reflects the original feminine imagery and the translators' acceptance thereof. This may have some bearing on whether the Syriac Old Testament was derived from Jewish Christians.

Ascertaining the precise grammatical gender for *ruah* and *ruha* (Spirit) in Syriac New Testament usage is the next step in specifying a grammatical gender of 'Spirit'.⁹ In the discussion that follows, 'gender' refers to the grammatical gender only unless otherwise specified. The gender of *ruah* and *ruha* in isolation is indeterminate, as the diversity of scholarly opinion attests. Therefore one must rely on an associated adjective or verb to determine which gender the writer/translator applied to the Spirit. Since Greek verbs are not specific as to gender, the translator could easily have used a feminine Syriac verb when translating verbs which were related to the Spirit. The fact that the translator (a man?) switched to a masculine Syriac verb indicates that something other than expected subject-verb agreement was at work.

The majority of the verses in the New Testament which refer to the Holy Spirit are unhelpful with respect to distinguishing gender because the Spirit is usually the

direct object, the object of a preposition, or in some other indeterminate syntactical arrangement. Of the cases in the Old Syriac Gospels and the Syriac Peshitta Gospels where 'Spirit' is syntactically related to a word which could mark the gender, all six Old Syriac Gospel verses and eleven of the thirteen Syriac Peshitta Gospel verses employ a verb in the feminine form for the Spirit. Two verses (Lk. 12: 12 and Jn. 14: 26) change from a feminine verb in the Old Syriac to a masculine in the Peshitta. The verb is 'teach' (from ܐܠܟ, $\sqrt{\text{ylf}}$) in both.

Excluding the Catholic Epistles and Revelation for now, in citations where the syntax could distinguish gender, the remaining books of the Peshitta New Testament treat the Spirit as feminine except for nine instances in Acts. The Spirit is treated as a masculine in Acts 1:16, 2: 4, 10: 19, 11: 12, 19: 6, 20: 23, 20: 28, 21: 11, 28: 25. There is no clear-cut reason for the inconsistency in Acts.

The treatment of 'Spirit' in the Catholic Epistles and Revelation discloses how the Spirit was viewed in later times since these books were not in the Syriac Bible until the seventh-century Harklean edition. Whereas 'Spirit' occurs only once in the Catholic Epistles, it is used nine times in Revelation, and significantly all ten occurrences are masculine. Jude vs. 20 describes the Spirit with a masculine adjective while the Holy Spirit is associated with masculine verbs in the seven verses of Revelation (2: 7, 11, 29; 3: 6, 13, 22; 14: 13). This indicates that the Syriac tendency to see the Holy Spirit as feminine was changing, perhaps because of Hellenisation and the continuing influence of teachings which were considered heretical by those becoming more powerful politically. The change from feminine gender in the early period to masculine later on is related to dogma, not grammar.

8. 3 Extra-biblical evidence

Brock surveys the Syriac Bible and Syriac literature from the second to the tenth century. He divides the texts into three stages depending on which gender the Holy Spirit was given by the writers.¹⁰ In the early period, to about 400 A. D., the

Spirit is invariably treated grammatically as feminine. In the second stage from the early fifth century on, disapproval of the Spirit as feminine set in causing some writers to switch to masculine forms for the Spirit. From the sixth century on, *ruḥa* is regarded as masculine except for occasional liturgical or poetic texts with specific metrical considerations.

8. 4 How translation affects the Spirit's metaphorical gender

The matter of the metaphorical gender of the Spirit is as ambiguous as the grammatical gender partly because imagery of the Holy Spirit is sparse. The practice of portraying the Holy Spirit as a 'Mother' has been investigated along with all of Ephrem's imagery of the Spirit. The grammatical gender of Spirit in the Romance and Germanic languages from which English was derived and the androcentric practices of early theologians and more recent scholars (from the seventeenth century to the present) have tended to masculinise, or at least, to defeminise the image of the Holy Spirit in the minds of twentieth-century Christians in the West. This is not to say that women in the same positions of power would necessarily avoid the pitfalls. However when male-oriented translation practices radically alter faith perceptions and adversely influence scholarly judgements, androcentrism must be recognised and, it is hoped, be alleviated.

By using 'correct'¹¹ grammatical convention many scholars have helped to portray the Holy Spirit as a masculine character. This can be done in several ways. The most obvious is using 'He' or 'His' when translating pronouns referring to feminine Syriac words like spirit and Divinity (ܪܘܚܐܘܬܐ, '*alahuta*'). When mentioning the Holy Spirit, most scholars who do not use the neuter third person pronoun, have, until recently, invariably replaced the Syriac feminine pronouns with 'He, His, or Him' in order to match their translations with the masculine images of God current at the time. This leads to odd translations such as Morris' 'His beloved

in His womb' where the Syriac clearly has *ܡܚܒܘܬܐ ܡܚܒܘܬܐ* ('Her beloved in Her womb').¹²

Johnston usually replaces a feminine form for God in the Syriac with a masculine one in English, for example in *H. Epi.* 6.1. 1.

ܕܢܗܘܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
'The Spirit came down from on high and hallowed the waters by His brooding.'¹³

Occasionally he may use the English neuter, but he never employs a feminine pronoun for the deity.

Although Drijvers, Murray, and Brock draw attention to the feminine gender of Spirit, they generally do not express the femininity in their translations.

English is not the only language in which the Spirit is defeminised. Beck translates *ܕܒܪܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ* as 'Zwei Töchter gebar er' (He brought forth two daughters) and *ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ* as 'Sie ist die Tochter, die er auf seine kniee - nahm und in Schlaf sang' (He is the daughter whom he put on his knees and sang to him).¹⁴ Using German grammar correctly, Beck alters the Syriac feminine to masculine for the masculine noun *Geist* (Spirit) and Her daughter. Twice he footnotes that the Syriac is feminine. The change in gender creates a confusing situation because the German verb 'to bear', *gebar*, the preterite of *gebarren*, is used only with a female subject. The male's action in reproduction is 'to beget', *zeugen*. So the motherly image 'she brought forth' becomes 'he brought forth'. Despite correct German subject-verb agreement, stanzas 1 and 8 militate against referring to the Holy Spirit as Masculine.

8. 5 Discounting the Divine Feminine and females

Changing the Holy Spirit's grammatical gender from feminine to masculine gradually results in eliminating the feminine aspect of the Spirit. The Divine Feminine is most often undermined by labeling feminine images of God as 'Gnostic' or 'heretical'. For instance, according to Georgi's translation of Bornkamm's

introduction to *The Acts of Thomas*, Bornkamm equates the use of the title 'Mother' for the deity with Bardesian Gnosticism.¹⁵

Drijvers credits Atargatis with being a fertility Goddess and overlooks Her other domains of power. While he mentions that in Bardaisanian Christology, Christ came from a union between a Father (Hadad, the Semitic Sun God) and a Mother (Atargatis), he completely ignores the role of the Spirit as Mother which Bardaisan encouraged by fusing Atargatis with the Holy Spirit.¹⁶

It is possible to diminish women or femininity by the choice of words. Brock exemplifies a scholar who acknowledges Ephrem's interest in feminine imagery. Yet in his wide-ranging article on 'The Holy Spirit as Feminine in Early Syriac Literature', Brock introduces Ode of Solomon 19 with the words 'what to us seems a bizarre example' of the use of feminine imagery.¹⁷ The word 'bizarre' has negative connotations, unlike 'surprising' or 'amazing'. The phrase 'what to us' unfortunately adds authority to what is being said. Thus the reader is subtly (unconsciously?) guided to a potentially adverse view of the passage before it has even been read.

Occasionally a scholar deals with the very issue of male-female relationships. In a book entitled *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female*, Baer registers his confusion with Philo's terminology by remarking 'One of the most perplexing problems to be encountered in Philo's writings is the identification of the various "men" referred to'.¹⁸ Unfortunately Baer himself adds to the confusion by his use of the generic 'he/men'. In citing *Op. Mundi*. 134, Baer translates ἔπλασεν ὁ θεός τὸν ἄνθρωπον, which is based on Gen. 2: 7 (וַיַּצַּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם), as 'God formed man'.¹⁹ Since both the Greek ἄνθρωπον and the Hebrew האדם mean human, the reader interested in what Philo has said about women, or humanity, is oftentimes left wondering if women are included in Baer's 'man/men'.

8. 6 Acknowledging the Feminine

Allberry exemplifies a scholar who seems to have been aware of female-male issues in the Manichaean Psalm Book. He uses 'her' for soul and matter, presumably because the Coptic original does so. Allberry's index gives nine references to 'father' and eight to 'mother'. He ends both entries with 'etc.' to indicate there are yet others. In fact the divine Father occurs at least 175 times. The heavenly Mother appears only 14 times. So Allberry indexes 57% of the references to the Mother and only 5.7% of the references to the Father.

Murray also recognises that the Mother in Aphrahat's commentary of Gen. 2: 24 in *Dem.* 6 and in *The Odes of Solomon* can be identified as the Holy Spirit without meaning the texts are Gnostic. He refers to the image of the Divine Feminine in Isaiah as a biblical example.²⁰

Throughout *Ephrem The Syrian: Hymns* (1989), McVey translates the pronouns associated with Spirit as feminine. This practice conveys a much more authentic image of the Holy Spirit and other feminine abstract ideas in Ephrem's writings.

8. 7 The practice of personification in antiquity

Although the personification of Wisdom is not a common feature in early Syriac literature,²¹ the practice of characterising feminine linguistic forms as a female can, nevertheless, be demonstrated by the portrayal of Wisdom as a female in Prov. 8: 1 - 9: 6, Ben Sira 24 and the Wisdom of Solomon. The images of Wisdom as a female figure have been well documented.²²

Augustine offers further evidence that the grammatical gender of a word could in fact influence the metaphorical imagery of that word when he says Wisdom 'is a woman in sex, since the word to designate it both in the Greek and Latin language is of the feminine gender.'²³ While acknowledging that Wisdom is a 'woman', this Latin Church Father still equates the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each with

Grammatical gender is not explicitly a part of Mani's statement or Ephrem's refutation. Mani and Ephrem seem to disagree primarily on the interpretation of metaphorical gender. Mani claims that darkness loved light, and must have implied that water loved fire and vice versa, and that fire loved light. Ephrem dismisses Mani's underlying argument that 'opposites attract' by pointing out the simple facts that fire can absorb water (in small amounts, by changing it into steam), (large quantities of) water can put out a fire, and fire and light are similar entities. The ability for one element to extinguish another means, to Ephrem, that the two would not 'love' each other.

Ephrem seems to accept the rule that 'like attracts like' when he remarks that 'fire loved fire, and spirit [loved] spirit, and water [loved] water.' He introduces metaphorical gender into his counterargument by asking if some natures are male and others female. His question also involves an opposition between darkness and goodness. Ephrem's question implies his rejection of the notion that the natures of the elements are male or female. To Ephrem, it seems as if love has no purpose in the absence of sexes. Therefore if the natural elements are not female or male, Mani's premise that darkness and light loved each other must be false.

8. 8 Summary

The diversity of scholarly opinion on the grammatical gender of the word 'spirit' in Syriac reflects the religious turbulence current in the early centuries of the Syriac-speaking church. The survey of the grammatical treatment of the Holy Spirit in the Syriac Bible and other early Syriac literature indicates that, during the fifth century, external factors affected the grammatical and the metaphorical genders of the Holy Spirit. Grammatical considerations alone can not account for using masculine, rather than feminine, forms for the Holy Spirit. The change resulted from theological developments.

Ancient translation practices could, and did, affect the way their community envisaged the Holy Spirit. Similarly some modern scholars have, perhaps inadvertently, defeminised the Holy Spirit by using masculine constructions in English (or German), when the Syriac text has feminine forms. Androcentric translation techniques have led to seeing the Holy Spirit as Masculine, or with no specific gender. The survival of the Holy Spirit as Feminine in a few Syriac liturgies or poetry means that, for the Syriac church, at least, the feminine aspect of God was present, although it was gradually undermined. However in the twentieth-century West, the images of the Holy Spirit as Feminine were almost completely eliminated because of the grammatical and theological conventions used by the translators. The ancient practices of personification indicate that grammatical gender could be used to substantiate the point a writer wished to make. However it could just as easily be disregarded.

8. 9 Footnotes

- 1 Noldeke, p. 60.
- 2 See Charlesworth, p. 83, n. 5, for his commentary on the Holy Spirit in Ode 19.
- 3 J. Payne Smith, p. 533. My emphasis.
- 4 R. Payne Smith, 2, col. 3850.
- 5 H. J. W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, p. 146, n. 1 on tr. Edmund Beck, *CSCO* 170 (1957), p. 187, n. 3; p. 188, n. 8.
- 6 Murray, *Symbols*, p. 143.
- 7 Brock, *Luminous Eye*, p. 143.
- 8 McVey, p. 70, n. 46.
- 9 Brock, 'The Holy Spirit as Feminine', pp. 74-6, confirms my findings. Section 8. 2 was worked out independently of Brock's article.
- 10 Brock, 'The Holy Spirit as Feminine', pp. 74-5.
- 11 Stanley, pp. 800-2. While discussing development of the so-called generic 'he' and generic 'man/men', Stanley demonstrates that grammar is proper merely because the (male) grammarians have said so. Since the purpose of language is to communicate, any speech patterns which enable the speaker to accomplish his/her goals are, in some sense, correct.
- 12 *H. Faith* 9. 9. 11 in Morris, *Select Works*, p. 142. Syriac, *CSCO* 154, p. 46.
- 13 Tr. A. Edward Johnston, 'Fifteen Hymns for the Feast of the Epiphany' in ed. J. Gwynn, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 13, Series 2 (Oxford: 1898), p. 273. *CSCO* 186, p. 160.
- 14 *H. Her.* 55. 4, 5, German in *CSCO* 170, p. 188; Syriac in *CSCO* 169, p. 207-8.
- 15 Bornkamm, tr. Georgi, pp. 438-40.
- 16 Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, p. 151.
- 17 Brock, 'The Holy Spirit as Feminine', p. 82.
- 18 Baer, p. 21-2. This book was of interest because of Philo's possible influence on Aphrahat's commentary on Gen. 2: 24.
- 19 Baer, p. 21.
- 20 Murray, *Symbols*, p. 318.
- 21 Brock, 'The Holy Spirit as Feminine', pp. 81, 87, n. 30.
- 22 See Rose Horman Arthur, *The Wisdom Goddess: Feminine Motifs in Eight Nag Hammadi Documents* (Lanham, New York: University Press of America, 1984); Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine*; and Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979).
- 23 Ed. McKenna, p. 347.
- 24 Ed. McKenna, pp. 466-7.
- 25 J. W. C. Wand, *The Atonement* (London: SPCK, 1963), p. 83. Wand's statement was brought to my attention by the Rev. Dr. Ruth Page.
- 26 Murray, *Symbols*, p. 314. Wisdom is equated with the Spirit of the Lord in Wis. 1: 6-7 and with the Holy Spirit in Wis. 9: 17.
- 27 William Gray, 'Wisdom Christology in the New Testament: Its Scope and Relevance', *Theology* 89, No. 732 (November 1986), pp. 450-3.
- 28 Ed. M. Adriaen, 'Commentary on Isaiah', *Corpus Scriptorum, Series Latina* 73 (1963), p. 459. 77-83, lines 75-86, with reference to Isai. 40: 9-11: 'Nec non et illud: *sicut oculi ancillae in manibus dominae suae*, animam interpretantur ancillam, et dominam Spiritum sanctum. Sed et in evangelio quod iuxta Hebraeos scriptum Nazaraei lectitant, Dominus loquitur: *modo me tulit mater mea, Spiritus sanctus*.

Nemo autem in hoc parte scandalizar; debet, quod dicatur apud Hebraeos spiritus genere feminino, cum nostra lingua appelletur genere masculino, et Graeco sermone neutro. In divinitate enim nullus est sexus. Et ideo in tribus principalibus linguis, quibus titulus dominicae scriptus est passionis, tribus generibus appellatur, ut sciamus mellius esse generis quod dixer sum est'.

²⁹ Eds. Mitchell, Bevan, Burkitt, 2, pp. 48-9.

³⁰ J. Payne Smith, p. 362, Moon can be either masculine or feminine in Syriac.

³¹ Eds. Mitchell, Bevan, Burkitt, 2 pp. 210-1.

³² Water, (ܡܝܢ, *meye*), is usually plural.

³³ This is singular, but the female natures from goodness are plural.



Roses, Dove, Cross, and Fire

Roses signified various Goddesses throughout the Ancient Near East. Therefore the roses in this picture signify the feminine aspect of God. The dove, the cross and fire are symbols of one or more Personae of the Holy Trinity.

Ephrem's imagery of God can be classified into three groups which are presented in the following order: 1) feminine images of the 'Father' and the 'Son', 2) cases in which the metaphorical gender of the Spirit is determined by virtue of the grammatical gender of words associated with 'spirit', and 3) metaphorical images of the Holy Spirit, which are subdivided into neuter, masculine, and feminine images.

Although Ephrem's predecessors rarely address the Holy Spirit as Mother, it seems to have been an acceptable practice. There is evidence to suggest that he knew of the practice of calling the Holy Spirit Mother.¹ But only once does Ephrem refer directly to the Holy Spirit as Mother; and then it is in a polemic against the Bardaisanites' teaching on the Mother of life.

9. 1 Feminine images of the 'Father' and the 'Son'

9. 11 Feminine but not motherly images

H. Nat. 21. 5 portrays Jesus as a weaver.

ללמט גת דכבדא סו מל דאב
כאמלכא כבדא סו מל דאב
לכחל מלכא סו מל דאב
כאמלכא כבדא סו מל דאב
לכחל מלכא סו מל דאב
כאמלכא כבדא סו מל דאב
לכחל מלכא סו מל דאב

But let us sing the birth of the First-born: how Divinity wove a garment for Herself in the womb. She put it on and came forth in birth; She took it off again in death. She took it off once; She put it on twice. When the left hand put it on, She snatched it from her [hand], and put it on the right hand.

Part of the personification of Divinity as a female in this stanza depends on whether weaving was the domain of one sex. Since it was the archetypal occupation of women in antiquity, Jesus is portrayed as doing 'women's work'.³

Otherwise grammatical considerations provide the main basis for imaging the Divinity as female. The word Divinity (ܐܠܗܘܬܐ, 'alahuta) is feminine. Ephrem consistently uses feminine constructions for the Divinity. The Divinity changes

'clothes' three times. During Jesus's gestation and birth, Divinity clothed Herself in a human body. At His death, She took off the body. And at the resurrection, She put on a transformed body. Her moving the 'clothes' from the left to the right hand indicates the elevation of humanity which resulted from Jesus's resurrection.

9. 12 Functional motherly images

Most of the images of God as a Mother rely on reference to God's womb. Since Jesus became incarnate in Mary's womb instead of in her bosom, when Ephrem employs the word ܩܘܐ ('*ubba*, bosom or womb) in comparison to a woman's womb and her giving birth, Ephrem is considering God's womb, not God's bosom. Therefore '*ubba* has been translated as womb.

God is described as a wet-nurse, or nursing Mother, in *H. Church* 25. 18:

ܩܘܐ ܕܗܘ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ ܩܘܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ ܩܘܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ
 ܩܘܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ ܩܘܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ ܩܘܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ
 ܩܘܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ ܩܘܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ ܩܘܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ
 ܩܘܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ ܩܘܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ ܩܘܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ

The Divinity is attentive to us like a wet-nurse with a child, who keeps his feeding schedule, who knows when he will be weaned, and how long he will grow with milk, and how long he will be nourished with bread. And She weighs [him] and gives him more food according to the state of his development.

The image of God as a Mother is ambiguous because Ephrem compares Divinity to a wet-nurse. Having a wet-nurse distances the child from the mother somewhat; therefore the image of God as Mother is slightly diminished. Divinity seems more like a servant to a mother who is unable or unwilling to feed the baby herself.

However God's Motherhood is suggested because breast-feeding is one of the usual roles of a mother. Divinity is described as a nurturing and knowledgeable Mother, or Mother-substitute, who keeps the baby's feeding schedule, knows when he should be weaned, when to put him on solid food, and when he is maturing.

H. Resur. 1. 7 presents an image of God the 'Father' as a Mother giving birth to Jesus:

תלמא דאבא אבא תא נאכא
 נאכא פיא נאכא נאכא
 תא נאכא נאכא נאכא
 נאכא נאכא נאכא נאכא
 כוּפִי גִיָּא כִּי⁵

The Word of the Father came from His womb and put on a body in another womb. She [Word] proceeded from [one] womb to [another] womb. And chaste wombs are filled with Her. Blessed is He who has resided in us.

Ephrem explicitly depicts the 'Father' as a Mother by comparing 'Her' pregnancy with Mary's. Yet the Word does not reside in the wombs of the chaste because they are pregnant. Based on the gender of נַכְפֵּה (*nakfe*), the 'chaste wombs' are, in fact, a group of men or of both sexes. Since God the 'Father' has a womb, by analogy, men do too. Word (תְּלֵמָא, *mellta*) is grammatically feminine; Ephrem has treated it as such throughout this stanza. So there is a metaphorical image of the 'Father' as a Mother and a grammatically inspired picture of the Word, or Son, as a female.

H. Nat. 13. 7 continues the comparison between God's womb and a woman's:

אֵל אֵשׁ נִבְרָא בְּמִטְרָא
 מִמָּא כְּפִתְרָא מִמָּא נִבְרָא זִכְרָא
 גְּדֻלְמוֹתָא אֵל אֵשׁ נִבְרָא
 פִּיָּא בְּלִבָּא מִמָּא זִכְרָא מִלְּוָם
 תֵּן בֵּי נִבְרָא וְנִבְרָא מִלְּוָם⁶

If anyone seeks Your hidden nature, lo, it is in heaven in the great womb of Divinity. And if anyone seeks Your revealed body, lo, it rests and looks out from Mary's small womb.

Questions concerning the origin of Jesus's Divinity and humanity give rise to an analogy between Mary's and the Divinity's wombs. Jesus's hidden nature is in God's womb just as His growing fetus is in Mary's. Divinity's baby does not seem interested in the world; He is just there in the Divine womb. Mary's baby rests and looks out.

H. Nat. 27. 15, 19-20 also concerns Jesus's being brought forth from the womb of Divinity:

15. זכ אמוֹתָ דְּגַלְגַּלִּי מִן־זִמְרָא
 לִי דְּזִמְרָא כְּפִלְלִי סִלְלִי
 דְּשִׁמְחָא לְרַחֵם לְרַחֵם
 פְּרִיָּה דְּגַלְגַּלִּי דְּרַחֵם לְרַחֵם אֲשֵׁרֵהּ
 19. תְּהִיָּה אֲרַם לְלִבִּי סִינִי
 דְּחִסְרָא חֲסִיָּה דְּכִי כִּי
 אֲרַם תְּהִיָּה אֲרַם לְלִבִּי דְּאִזְרִי
 דְּבִלְלִי חֲסִיָּה דְּכִי כִּי דְּחִסְרָא, כְּאִזְרִי
 20. חֲסִיָּה, דְּשִׁמְחָא
 מִן־כִּלְלִי מִן־אֲשֵׁרֵהּ
 מִן־כִּלְלִי דְּלִבִּי מִן־כִּלְלִי,
 מִן־כִּי כִּי מִן־כִּי מִן־כִּי מִן־כִּי

15. [It is] a great wonder that He did not proceed gradually from that height to descend [and] come to littleness. He flew from the womb of Divinity to [the womb of] humanity.

19. I give thanks for Your first birth which was hidden and concealed from all creation. I also give thanks for Your second birth, which was revealed and younger than all creation, yet they are in Your hands.

20. [I give thanks for] the births of the Only-Begotten, one above and one below, one the stranger which is strange to all, and one the kinsman which is connected entirely to humanity.

These stanzas add detail to the basic theme of *H. Nat.* 13. 7. Ephrem is amazed that Jesus did not come to humanity in a more gradual manner. In st. 15 Jesus flew (ܘܦܪܗ, *prah*) from one womb to the other like a bird. The image of the Divinity as Mother is overshadowed by Jesus who, like a chick breaking out of its egg, seems to have given birth to Himself.

He praises God for Jesus's births from Divinity and from Mary (st. 19). Ephrem describes Jesus's two births in relation to earthly creatures. His Divine birth was concealed from them; it was before their creation and so older. His human birth occurred after the creatures were made and so it was younger than them.

Ephrem personifies the first birth as a stranger and the second as a kinsman (st. 20). Jesus's two births were rather different. Whereas the first was totally hidden and Divine, the second was visible and fully human.

H. Virg. 52 presents several images of God as a Parent:

ܘܦܪܗ ܘܦܪܗ ܘܦܪܗ 6. 8-9

אַ תַּחֲבֵרָא אֶבְכֵרָא אֶתְּ תַּחֲוִי לֵבָנָא
 7. 8-9 אַ אִי מִן דִּיאֲחִיזְעָא לֵבָנָא
 דִּלְלָא מִן לֵבָנָא דִּיאֲחִיזְעָא⁸

6. 8-9 You are hidden in Your Parent. If His womb can be investigated, His Child can also be comprehended.

7. 8-9 And if He who is the Parent were defined, it would be easy for His Child to be explained.

Masculine grammatical forms and feminine imagery combine to produce an androgynous image of God as a Fatherly Mother. Ephrem refers to God as אַלְדָּא (*yalôdâ*), that is, 'parent, one who begets or brings forth'.⁹ This is the masculine form, namely father. The feminine, mother, is אַלְדָּא (*yalôdta*). Yet the Son rests in the womb of the 'Father'. If the Fatherly Mother can be investigated or defined, then the Son could be comprehended and explained. Ephrem emphasises the inscrutability of the 'Father' and the Son by making the same point in sts. 6 and 7.

H. Faith 62. 10 presents another androgynous image of God.

תֵּן דִּלְךָ לֵבָנָא דִּיאֲחִיזְעָא אֶתְּ כִּימֵי בְּרִיאַת מִן
 חַלְדָּא לְבַן בְּרִיאַת אֶבְכֵרָא דִּילְבָנָא
 אֶחְשַׁבְתָּ תֵּיבֵי כִּי בְּרִיאַת דִּיךָ תֵּיבֵי
 דִּיאֲחִיזְעָא מִן בְּרִיאַת אֶבְכֵרָא לְאֲחִיזְעָא
 לֵבָנָא דִּיךָ אֶבְכֵרָא דִּילְבָנָא חַלְדָּא
 לֵבָנָא אֶבְכֵרָא¹⁰

Who would not be astonished that if even His Son is a servant, [then] the womb of His Parent made Him a fellow-creature to everything? And He was indeed more glorious in the birth from Mary which made Him a true brother to humanity, than from the Womb which made Him a fellow-creature of all - [even] reptiles and animals.

Again Divinity, called (*yalôdâ*) (Parent or Father), has a womb and gave birth to Jesus. As Mary's son, Jesus was a 'true brother to humanity'. But as Divinity's Son, He became a fellow-creature, not just to humans, but to all the animals and reptiles, i.e., creation. In declaring that Jesus's birth from Mary was more glorious than His birth from Divinity, Ephrem expresses the remarkable opinion that it was, in some sense, preferable for Jesus to be born from Mary rather than from Divinity.

two of them marvelled at each other, how much they were able to grow by grace.

Mary and Jesus are portrayed as mothers. Jesus entrusted Mary to John who was made in His image. Mary hugged her baby to her breast, and later Jesus hugged His son John to His breast. The end of st. 2 is particularly poignant. When Jesus was crucified, He repaid Mary for bringing Him up. Ephrem overlooks Joseph's fathering.

St. 3 begins with the crucifixion as repayment of debts. Since Mary had a debt which had to be repaid, she could not have been sinless. Ephrem again depicts Jesus as a Mother with breasts. John sucked Jesus's breasts just as He sucked Mary's. Hidden mysteries are the Divine equivalent of mother's milk. Mary and Divinity were both nurturing mothers. Jesus felt as secure approaching his mother's breasts as John did approaching his Mother's breasts. This is evident in that Jesus and John approached his respective mother's breasts in the same way - confidently.

Whereas st. 2 began with Jesus's giving Mary to John, st. 3 ends with His giving John to Mary. Ephrem seems to recognise that a child provides not only protection or financial support, but companionship as well. He displays sensitivity to Mary by portraying Jesus's awareness of how much she would miss Him. So Jesus gave John, His harp, to comfort His mother rather like a surrogate son.

As a fetus in Elizabeth's womb, John realised that the Exalted One humbled Himself to be conceived in Mary's womb and to be born and breast-fed (st. 8). Ephrem stresses the difference between Mary's and Divinity's wombs by calling Mary's womb feeble and her milk weak. Elizabeth envisages her son at God's (Jesus's) breast. Elizabeth and John are amazed that they were able to discern these things and how much they developed through grace.

In *H. Nat.* 4. 149-150 Ephrem describes Jesus as the Living Breast and in sts. 153-4 as the Womb of creation:

ܩܘܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ 149.
ܩܘܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

Mary gave birth to Jesus bodily; He gave birth to her spiritually. Jesus is portrayed as a mother because He brought forth Mary and humanity in the Divine Image.

Mary is not the only one to whom Jesus gave birth. In *H. Nat.* 23. 14. 2,

Ephrem remarks

15 אַז זכר גמאָר באַר כּוֹלֵךְ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אַבְרָהָם
O Great One who became a baby, you brought me forth again by your birth.

By acknowledging that Jesus brought him to another birth, the 'newborn' Ephrem identifies with Jesus as a baby. Yet the Baby is also the Great One and Ephrem's 'Mother'.

Sermons of our Lord 2 contrasts three 'mothers'.

זוּמָה דְּגֵאֲבָלָהּ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֲלֻמְתֵּיהּ אֶתְּרָא חַסְתָּ . אִתְּרָא אֲשֵׁרֵיהּ דְּלֵא
כְּחַסְתָּ אִתְּרָא דְּגֵרְמָנִיָּהּ דְּלֵא כְּחַסְתָּ . דְּאֲשֵׁרֵיהּ דְּגֵאֲבָלָהּ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ
אֲשֵׁרֵיהּ אֶתְּרָא חַסְתָּ . אִתְּרָא אֲלֻמְתֵּיהּ דְּלֵא כְּחַסְתָּ אִתְּרָא זֵמְרָא
דְּלֵא כְּחַסְתָּ . לֵבָנָה מִמָּא מַחְבֵּלָהּ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֲלֻמְתֵּיהּ זֵמְרָה דְּגֵאֲבָלָהּ לֵבָנָה
אֲשֵׁרֵיהּ . דְּלֵא דְּלֵא לֵבָנָה דְּגֵרְמָנִיָּהּ . לֵבָנָה דְּגֵרְמָנִיָּהּ אֲשֵׁרֵיהּ לֵא
דְּגֵאֲבָלָהּ אֲלֻמְתֵּיהּ מִלְּבָנָה דְּגֵרְמָנִיָּהּ אֲשֵׁרֵיהּ לֵא דְּגֵאֲבָלָהּ אֲלֻמְתֵּיהּ
16 דְּגֵאֲבָלָהּ

This is He, who was brought forth from Divinity naturally, and from humanity unnaturally, and from baptism unusually, so that we will be brought forth from humanity naturally, and from Divinity unnaturally, and from the Spirit unusually. Therefore He was born from Divinity to bring us the second birth which is taught. His birth from the Father is not to be investigated, but believed, and His birth from a woman is not to be abhorred, but elevated.

Ephrem depicts Divinity, humanity, and baptism as mothers. He presents Jesus's birth from Divinity side by side with His human and baptismal births. For Jesus the first is natural; the other two are not. For humans, birth from a woman is natural; but births from Divinity and baptism are not. Thus Jesus's birth from Divinity is as natural as a woman's giving birth to her baby. But baptism is an unnatural birth both for Jesus and for humans.

Johnston translates אֲלֻמְתֵּיהּ (*ethled*) as 'begotten' for Jesus's birth from Divinity and humanity's birth.¹⁷ The verb means 'to be begotten, to be born, to be

brought forth'.¹⁸ But Johnston is simply not able to consider God as a mother, even though the word Divinity is feminine. This is particularly apparent when he translates אֱלֹהִים (*iled*) as 'His generation' from the Father and 'His birth' from Mary.

Doubters were investigating Jesus's birth from the Father and abhorring His birth from Mary. Ephrem instructs them on their response to Jesus's births from Divinity and Mary, by saying to believe the first birth and to elevate the second.

Ephrem addresses the church in *H. Epi.* 11. 2.

פלא מרמא תרן תרמגולא
 כסודא נסוּא כולא
 בך, כמ זמורא אבסומא גרמא גרמא
 כח פרוא גלמא תרן תרן
 גכח פרוא גרמגולא
 נכח לך כסמ
 גכח עמ כרוא¹⁹

Our Lord opened baptism in the blessed river Jordan. The height and the depth and the wings of the Spirit rejoiced in Him. He brings forth the first fruits of His peace from the water, for they are the first fruits of your [church's] baptism. The Good One by His compassion will cause His peace to bring forth first fruits on earth.

The mothers are Jesus, baptism, and Peace. Jesus has a dual role. He is the midwife who assists mother baptism in giving birth in the Jordan river. But He is also a Mother who gives birth to Peace who then gives birth to offspring on the earth.

Similarly in *H. Faith* 9. 9. 7-11 Ephrem compares the womb of the Divine Essence to Elizabeth's womb:

מא ענא גמכ אל לוא גמכמ נמל תרן גמכ
 לרמגולא גכח עככמ כמכמ²⁰

[Since] that [man] was reproved who investigated the child of his [wife's] womb, let him fear who has approached the Essence to inquire into Her beloved in Her womb be afraid.

Ephrem uses Zechariah's punishment to teach what happens to those who question God or God's messengers. Elizabeth exemplifies the Divine Essence's conception of Jesus because she conceived counter to nature, after she had gone through

menopause. The Essence is not bound by nature and so can be a Mother who conceived and gave birth to the beloved Jesus.

In *C. Nis.* 29. 4 Jesus and Ephrem are depicted as mothers.

ܠܘܝܢ ܡܘܠܝܚܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ
 ܡܘܠܝܚܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ ܕܝܫܘܥ
 21, ܡܘܠܝܚܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ

You said To Jerusalem that You would gather her in [Your] arms as a mother gathers her chicks under her wings. Lord, let Your Truth gather my children under my wings.

Ephrem recalls Mt. 23: 37 in which Jesus described Himself as a mother hen. He then applies the image of a mother hen to himself. He prays that the Lord's Truth will gather Ephrem's children under his wings.

9. 2 Grammatical gender as an indicator of metaphorical gender

Grammatical usage is not a reliable means of determining a metaphorical image because grammatical gender occasionally depends on a dot above the pronominal suffix ܐ (h) which designates the feminine. Since the attached ܐ (h) is an unpronounced phoneme despite the presence or absence of the dot, the metaphorical image is tenuous because the dot can easily be omitted. Nevertheless, for the sake of completeness, several excerpts are given in which metaphorical gender is based on grammatical gender.

Bird imagery offers a classic example of the relationship between grammatical and metaphorical gender because the verb 'hover' (Hebrew *riḥef*, Syriac *raḥef*) is traditionally associated with a mother bird hovering over her young.²² Thus in Gen. 1: 2 'the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters', the feminine form of 'hovering' allows the verse to be interpreted as if the Spirit were a mother bird.²³ In all probability the grammatically feminine gender of *ruaḥ* in Hebrew is influencing the depiction of the Spirit of God. The bird was most often considered a mother in the early church because of passages like Dt. 32: 11-2, Job 39: 27-30, and Mt. 23: 27 (Lk. 13: 34).

9. 21 Masculine forms

H. Nat. 17. 1 depicts Mary's baby as a male bird grammatically.

ܘܢܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ,ܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ ܕܳܝܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ
 ,ܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ ܕܳܝܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ
 ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ ܕܳܝܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ
 24 ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ ܕܳܝܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ

Mary said 'The baby that I carried carried me. He lowered his pinions and placed me between his wings and soared into the air. He promised me "the height and the depth will be your Son's".'

Since Ephrem used the masculine forms for the verbs and of the pronominal suffix, he sees this bird as a male. He draws a direct analogy between the baby boy and the bird. The bird is implicitly depicted as a mother by using the verb ܐܢܝܢ (*t'en*) for Mary's carrying Jesus in her uterus and for the bird's carrying Mary between his wings. ܐܢܝܢ means 'to carry in the womb, or in the arms'.²⁵

H. Virg. 12. 7 presents another image of a male bird.

ܘܢܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ ܕܳܝܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ
 ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ ܕܳܝܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ
 ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ ܕܳܝܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ
 26 ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ ܕܳܝܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܡܳܐܳܝܳܢܳܐ

He [Satan] was as blind in this as in that. For if the psalm is fulfilled concerning Him [which] is written there: 'With his pinions so he will deliver you,' indeed, the bird is unable to fall for the air under his pinions is like the earth.

Both the Syriac Old Testament and Ephrem treat the bird in Ps. 91 grammatically as a male. The image of a bird being supported aloft by the air is similar to *H. Virg.* 11. 15 in which the bird is lifted up by the air like a bride. Whereas in *H. Virg.* 11. 15 Ephrem used the usual word for bird, the grammatically feminine ܦܪܗܬܐ, *prah̄ta*, in this stanza he employs the less common masculine word ܦܪܘܗܐ, *paruḥa*, and other masculine grammatical forms for the bird.

In *H. Faith* 51. 7 Ephrem mentions the Father's voice, the Son's power, and the Spirit's hovering. Line 6 includes the phrase ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ (*w-rahā b-rahafē*, And the Spirit by His hovering).²⁷ Ephrem uses the masculine pronominal suffix for the Spirit, or perhaps, the dot above the ܡ (*h*) is missing. Although technically this is an example of grammatically treating the Holy Spirit as masculine, the masculine aspect of the Spirit is not otherwise apparent.

Similarly in *H. Church* 45. 15. 3, Ephrem employs the masculine form of the verb with the Spirit.

28 $\text{ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ}$

And the Spirit helps him [the ascetic] in the struggle.

Like *H. Faith* 51. 7, this line follows sentences about the Father and the Son. Perhaps Ephrem is subconsciously being influenced by their masculine character.

9. 22 Feminine forms

The feminine aspect of the Holy Spirit can be seen in *H. Epi.* 6. 1:

$\text{ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ}$
 $\text{ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ}$
 $\text{ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ}$

The Spirit stirred from on high and sanctified the waters by Her hovering. In the baptism of John, She left all [the others] and rested on One. But now She has descended and rests on all that are born from water.

Baptism is portrayed as a mother because the baptised 'are born from water'. The image of a bird is implied by the Spirit's hovering. Also the Spirit's descent and resting over the newborn Christians suggests the flight of a bird. Since Ephrem used feminine verbs and the feminine pronominal suffix for the Spirit, the Spirit, and the bird by analogy, are metaphorically feminine. The image of the Holy Spirit as a Mother is rather subtle.

The Holy Spirit functions similarly in *H. Nat.* 5. 10.

$\text{ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ}$
 $\text{ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ ܡܥܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܒܪܗܘܢܐ}$

Oil is, therefore, the friend of the Holy Spirit and Her minister. It accompanies Her like a disciple. She seals priests and anointed ones by it, for the Holy Spirit brands her mark onto Her sheep by the Anointed One. The hidden mark of the Spirit is also sealed by the oil on bodies which were anointed in baptism and sealed in the dipping by the symbol of the signet ring that marks its imprint in sealing wax.

Ephrem employs feminine pronouns and verbs for the Holy Spirit. The oil is the Spirit's minister and like a disciple to Her. Their relationship suggests that the Spirit is a Teacher. In view of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and His parables about sheep, the imagery of the Holy Spirit as a Shepherdess branding Her sheep is remarkable. The dipping is, of course, baptism.

9. 23 Indeterminate form

Ephrem refers to Jesus as a dove in *H. Nat.* 26. 8:

ܘܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܢ
ܘܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܢ
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ܘܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܢ³³

Let the fifth day praise That One who, on the fifth day, created reptiles and sea monsters of which the serpent is their kind. He deceived and led our mother, a girl without understanding, astray. The deceiver ravished the girl. The false one was made known by the Dove. The Wise One who crushed the crafty one shone forth and emerged from the innocent womb.

Ephrem contrasts deception and innocence as personified by a serpent and a dove respectively (st. 8). Eve and Mary are also contrasted. Ephrem excuses Eve on the grounds of ignorance. He implies that her innocence is lost by using the verb *ܘܢܗܘܢ* (*bazah*), which usually means 'to mock, insult, scoff at'. But when used of a woman, it can also be 'to ravish'.³⁴ Thus Ephrem uses a verb with sexual connotations to describe what the deceiver did to the young girl, Eve.³⁵

He symbolises Jesus with a specific kind of bird - a dove. The word *ܘܢܗܘܢ* (*yawnah*) is of common grammatical gender, meaning the same word is used for both

the male and female dove.³⁶ Thus a dove's sex is determined by the parts of speech associated with it. Since dove is an object of a preposition, the syntax cannot determine the grammatical gender. The metaphorical image of the dove is equally indistinct. If the dove were a male, it would correspond to Jesus's biological sex but, if it were a female, it would reinforce Jesus's identification with a mother hen. The dove is the Wise One who emerged from Mary's innocent womb. Ephrem describes the fulfilment of Gen. 3: 15 by depicting the Wise One crushing the crafty serpent. He transfers an image which usually symbolises the Holy Spirit to Jesus. This indicates the variety of meanings a single symbol can evoke. It also signals marginalisation of the Holy Spirit because one of Her most recognisable symbols has been applied to the Son.

9. 3 Images of the Holy Spirit

9. 31 Metaphorically neuter images

In *H. Epi.* 1. 5 the Spirit is symbolised by a cloud.

ܟܘܢܐ ܗܒܠܐ ܗܘܝܬ ܟܘܢܐ
 ܗܝܢ ܟܘܢܐܢܬ ܗܘܝܬ ܗܝܢ
 ܟܘܢܐܢܬ ܗܘܝܬ ܗܝܢ ܟܘܢܐܢܬ
 ܟܘܢܐܢܬ ܗܘܝܬ ܗܝܢ ܟܘܢܐܢܬ
 ܟܘܢܐܢܬ ܗܘܝܬ ܗܝܢ ܟܘܢܐܢܬ³⁷

A cloud rested and kept the heat away from the home. She formed a type of the Holy Spirit who rested over you in baptism and she tempers the flame from [burning] your bodies.

Since the Holy Spirit is frequently symbolised by fire or warmth, it is striking for a cloud which filters the sun's heat to typify the Spirit. Just as a cloud prevents the sun from scorching the earth, so the Holy Spirit at baptism keeps the fires of judgement at bay. Ephrem is portraying the Spirit's protective nature as opposed to Her purifying ability. The image is neuter metaphorically, but feminine verbal forms are used for cloud because ܟܘܢܐ (*anana*) is a feminine noun.

H. Faith 74. 9 relates the Spirit to warmth.

38 כְּכֹפֶל הַחֶמֶד כִּי כָל הַיְּבוּשִׁים כִּי כָּל הַיְּבוּשִׁים כִּי כָּל הַיְּבוּשִׁים
 All things are ripened by warmth just as all things are sanctified by the Spirit, O visible type.

Ephrem symbolises the Spirit with the sun's warmth. Warmth (חֶמֶד, *hamimuta*) is a feminine noun; but the image is not metaphorically specific as to gender.

The Spirit appears most often coupled with fire. Although fire frequently symbolises the Spirit, in cases like this, the two seem to be separate. *H. Faith* 10. 17 typifies the fire-Spirit pair.

כִּי כָּל הַיְּבוּשִׁים כִּי כָּל הַיְּבוּשִׁים כִּי כָּל הַיְּבוּשִׁים
 כִּי כָּל הַיְּבוּשִׁים כִּי כָּל הַיְּבוּשִׁים כִּי כָּל הַיְּבוּשִׁים
 כִּי כָּל הַיְּבוּשִׁים כִּי כָּל הַיְּבוּשִׁים

39 לֹא אֵשׁ וְרוּחַ קָדְשׁ בְּבֶטֶן הַיְּהוּדִיָּה אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה לְיֵשׁוּעַ
 Lo, fire and Spirit in the womb of her who brought You forth. Lo, fire and Spirit in the river in which You were baptised, fire and Spirit in our baptism, fire and the Holy Spirit in the bread and cup.

The image of the Holy Spirit is metaphorically and grammatically indistinct. The Spirit's presence at Jesus's birth, His baptism, other baptisms, and the Eucharist indicates the vital role the Spirit played in Jesus's life and continues to play in the lives of Christians.

Ephrem's *Commentary on the Gospel* 2. 6 exemplifies his treatment of the overshadowing of Mary by the Holy Spirit:

Some dare to claim that Mary became fully Joseph's wife after the Saviour's birth. How could she who was the dwelling-place of the Spirit, who was overshadowed by divine power, ever become the wife of a mortal and bear children in pain, according to the ancient curse?⁴⁰

Usually the passages about the overshadowing of Mary by the Holy Spirit reveal as much about Mary as they do about the Holy Spirit because, to Ephrem, Mary is inseparable from her role as Jesus's mother.⁴¹ All that can be said about the Spirit in this passage is that the Spirit dwelt in Mary. Thus there is no metaphorical image.

Ephrem himself provides an alternative method of getting pregnant in *H. Nat.* 1.10:

ܐܩܪ ܕܠܥܘܠ ܕܠܗ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠ ܕܐܡܡ ܡܠܠܗ ܐܩܪ ܕܠܥܘܠܐ
 42ܡܠܠܐܡ ܕܐܩܪ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ

The Spirit spoke a word by the worm, for he brings forth without sexual intercourse; the type which the Holy Spirit fashioned has its explanation today.

Ephrem uses feminine verbs for the Holy Spirit. The word worm (ܕܠܥܘܠܐ, *tawl'a*) is grammatically masculine. Since worms seem to reproduce asexually, Ephrem considers the worm to be an example of Mary's conception. He adds authority to this interpretation by having the Spirit explain the type of the worm. This may also be the only truly androgynous metaphorical image of the Holy Spirit in that a worm is biologically bisexual.

H. Faith 18. 16 provides another example from nature of conceiving without a mate.

ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ
 ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ
 ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ
 43ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܠܐ

Whenever the womb of that [bird roosting] in his nest upon his wing conceives chastely from the breeze [created] by the fluttering of her wings and brings forth a chick without sexual intercourse, lo, [the denier] has in his house a mirror of Mary.

Ephrem compares Mary's conception to a certain type of bird because it was thought the female got pregnant without assistance from the male bird. The bird in the stanza apparently conceives simply from the airstream caused by the beating of her own wings. The bird's sex is confused because the dots above the pronominal suffix ܡ (h) which indicate the feminine are missing in three places: nest, wing, womb. Although Ephrem is not averse to portraying males as mothers in childbirth, the bird is most probably female because her virginal conception is compared with Mary's.

Yousif translates the pronominal suffix as 'her' throughout the stanza because it was 'popular in antiquity' to think that vultures conceived without a mate.⁴⁴ Morris is more selective with his interpretation of dots, present and absent. While he uses 'her' for the nest and the womb where the dots are missing, he ignores the dot over

54 ܠܘܐ ܣܦܪ ܐܘܪܘܫܝܡܐ ܠܘܠܐ ܠܘܐ ܠܘܐ

For in the beginning the Spirit who hovered, hovered over the water. They [water] conceived and gave birth to sea monsters and fish and birds. The Holy Spirit hovered in baptism and gave birth mystically to eagles:

virgins and elders,
and She gave birth mystically to fish:
chaste ones [celibates] and intercessors,
and mystically to sea monsters:
lo, the wily become as innocent as doves.

Although the Spirit is not called 'Mother,' the Spirit is depicted as a mother who conceives and gives birth to various types of Christians just as the water conceives and gives birth to different kinds of creatures. Like the waters in stanza 15, the Spirit would have conceived without recourse to a sexual manner of reproduction. Despite the ambiguity of the gender of the Spirit in the role of creative conception, the Spirit is clearly depicted as a mother here. In fact both the Spirit and the baptismal waters conceived. The births of the eagles and fish suggest that the Spirit is Mother to the church, at least to those who minister to the community, because the offspring (virgins, elders and celibates, intercessors) perform functions within the church. But the birth of the sea monsters is different in that the new-born sea monsters are described by their past and current characters. This birth, baptism, results in a transformation of the wily into innocents.⁵⁵ Therefore the Holy Spirit is presented as a Mother whose giving birth relates both to a person's actions and being. Ephrem's choice of offspring is curious - eagles, fish, and sea monsters. Although he chooses fish to symbolise celibates and intercessors, he may deliberately avoid symbolising the Holy Spirit with a fish because it is the symbol of Atargatis.

9. 333 Ephrem's only use of 'Mother' for the Holy Spirit

Although Ephrem applies motherly characteristics to a wide range of concepts and individuals (human and divine), in his whole literary corpus, *H. Her.* 55 is the sole example of Ephrem's calling the Holy Spirit 'Mother'. He himself does not actually identify the Spirit as the 'Mother', but rather attributes the appellation to Bardaisan and his followers. It seems the Bardaisanites became splintered into

factions with varying doctrines. *H. Her.* 55 is a compilation of quotes, supposedly from Bardaisan, or from his son, Harmonius, or from anonymous others.⁵⁶ Ephrem unsystematically attacks the teachings of Bardaisan and his disciples. Thus stanzas 2; 3. 5; 5; 6. 4; 7. 1b - 2 and 8 - 11 are directed against Bardaisan, while stanzas 1; 3. 1, 6; 4; 6. 1 and 7. 1a are against his followers. The specific arguments are summarised in the table at the end of the discussion.

1.

נִלְהַ גַּב אֲתִיר, חַל כְּתִים, דְּכֹ דִי
 דַּל אֲהַב שְׂמֵרָה, דְּאִמְרָה דְּאֲרִיבָה שְׂבִירָה
 וְגַם זִנְיָה מִשְׁבַּח נָרְחָה מִן אֲכָרָה דִּי
 אֲרִיבָה כִּי אִוּרָה כְּלִיבָה מִלְּבָבָה
 אֲרִיבָה, כִּי אִוּרָה שְׂמֵרָה מִגִּישָׁה
 אֲשֶׁר לִלְבָבָה
2.

מִדְּאֲרִיבָה דַּל שְׂלִיבָה לְרִשְׁמֵינָה לְיָרִיבָה
 לְרִפְיָה מִלְּבָבָה לְרִיבָה מִזִּמְרָה, וְזִיבָה
 דִּיבָה כִּי אִוּרָה לִבָּה כִּי אִוּרָה דִּיבָבָה
 מִזִּבָּה דְּאִרְפָּה מִזִּבָּה לִיבָה אִוּרָה מִלְּבָבָה
 כִּיבָה כִּיבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה
 מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה
3.

תִּבָּה דַּל שְׂמֵרָה מִזִּמְרָה, דַּל שְׂמֵרָה
 דְּאֲרִיבָה דִּיבָבָה מִזִּבָּבָה אִוּרָה מִזִּבָּבָה
 מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה לִיבָבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה
 מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה
 מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה
4.

אִוּרָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה
 מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה
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 מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה
5.

אִוּרָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה
 מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה
 מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה
 מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה
 מִזִּבָּבָה מִזִּבָּבָה

ܘܢܝܢ ܕܢܫܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
 ܘܢܝܢ ܕܢܫܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ 57

In the translation, Bardaisan's beliefs are italicised, Ephrem's ridicule is underlined, and his rebuttal appears in bold print.

1. But pray, my brothers, for the Bardaisanites who will not be changed yet. Such⁵⁸ [people] say childish things: '*Something emanated and descended from that Father of life, and the Mother, in the mystical [shape] of a fish, conceived and brought Him forth, and He was called the Son of life, Holy Jesus .*' Our praises to his begetter.

2. And because he says: '*It is entirely impossible for a solitary one to bear fruit and to bring him forth,*' he called our Lord, '*offspring, who from the house of the Two was born from the mystery of sexual intercourse .*' But our Lord whose **body was not even born from two [humans], how much more unsullied was his divine nature which was light from light?**

3. Who will not seal his ears so he will not hear what they are saying: '*The Holy Spirit brought forth two Daughters [and said to the Firstborn] "After You ⁵⁹ I will have [another] Daughter, and You [will have] a Sister'."* [It is] a disgrace to relate how Her conception took place. Let Jesus purify my mouth for, lo, I have defiled my tongue to reveal their mysteries.

4. '*She brought forth Two Daughters: one, the shame of dry land, the other, the form of water*'. See how they blasphemed, for **not even the image of the demon is seen in the water.**⁶⁰ **How much more did it [water] become clear and conceal the nature of the Holy Spirit.** From it [water, we have] an example, for Her likeness is unable to be depicted even in the mind.

5. And he says: '*When will we also⁶¹ see your wedding banquet? The young Spirit is the Daughter whom She [Holy Spirit] put on Her knees and sang to.*' So he testifies in his hymns. She [Spirit] is trampled by his blandishments and enfeebled by his harmonies, for he disgraced the fair name of the Holy Spirit who is unsullied by anything.

6. Their secret hymn is sufficient for their disgrace, for that in which She said: '*My God ⁶² and my Lord, you have forsaken me, me alone*'.⁶³ And because he was detestably ashamed, he clothed his hymn [with] the beauty of the psalm, chaste and holy, from which our Lord quoted: 'My God, God, why have you forsaken me?'

7. *They assert that they learned the Law from Moses.* [But] he treated it with contempt, for he composed: '*[At] the top of the building ⁶⁴ whose gates opened before the Mother at [Her] command .*' And he set the garden in a shameful place. **The Beautiful Law will reprove their detestable doctrine** like a mirror.

8. He also hated the blessed garden of the Holy One, and he asserted [that there is] another disgraceful garden: *'The Gods measured it and set it. The Father and the Mother planted it with their sexual intercourse. They planted it with their footsteps* ⁶⁵. In his story of the garden their adversary was Moses, for he did not write these things.

9. It is written about Eden that the Lord planted the garden. **Moses proclaimed one**: but *this* [man] *introduces two*. *'The Gods measured it and set it' in a place whose name I am ashamed to mention. The serpent that led Adam astray by the tree, deceived [and] led this [man] astray by his stories of the garden.*

10. *He considered the Sun and the Moon. He compared the Father with the Sun. He compared the Mother with the Moon. Males and females, deities and their children. And he blasphemes, filling his mouth, with praises for the many. 'Praise to You, lords, and to you, adherents of lords, assembly of Gods', he proclaimed and is unashamed.*

11. **They found the slain Jews of the house of the Maccabees, on whose chests were found images of impiety, for they offered prayer and the oblation for the dead.** And you, adherents of the Blessed One, pray for Bardaisan, for he departed in paganism, 'Legion' in his heart and our Lord in his mouth.

This hymn is significant for several reasons. One is that the Holy Spirit is represented as a fish (stanza 1). Although the fish came to be accepted as a Christian symbol, at this time it symbolised the Goddess Atargatis.⁶⁶ The contempt with which Ephrem treats this image shows that the Mesopotamian religious elements which Bardaisan incorporated into his teachings were still forces to be reckoned with in his time.

The syncretism between Bardaisan's cosmological system and Christianity is also apparent. In stanza 1 the Mother, Father, and Son of life are the Holy Trinity, yet in stanza 10, the Mother and the Father are the Moon and Sun.

A third feature is that the Holy Spirit is called 'Mother' and gives birth: first to a Son and then to two Daughters (sts. 1 and 3 respectively). While the Son is identified as the 'Son of life, Holy Jesus', the identities of the two Daughters are unclear. They are probably the earth and water which are mentioned in st.4.⁶⁷

Ephrem, or perhaps Bardaisan, describes markedly different relationships between the Parents and Their Son and the Mother Spirit and Her Daughters. Both

the Father and Mother of st. 1 are depicted as remote from the Son. Neither Parent ever speaks to the Son. But the Mother speaks to the first Daughter, and rocks one of Them on Her knees and sings to Her. No Father is mentioned. The images of the Mother and Daughters are more realistic than those of the Father, Mother, and Son.

Ephrem is clearly polemicising against Bardaisan and his syncretism. This is shown in a number of ways. He begins and ends the hymn by asking for prayers for the Bardaisanites, believing that they will not change and that Bardaisan was possessed by 'Legion'. Ephrem counters Bardaisan's teachings by a combination of ridicule and rebuttal of doctrinal points. Bardaisan's teachings and Ephrem's responses to them are in the table below:

1. Bardaisan: Jesus was born from sexual intercourse (st. 1-2).
Ephrem's ridicule: Labelling the idea childish (st. 1).
Ephrem's rebuttal: Since Jesus's humanity was not from sexual intercourse, his Divinity certainly was not (st. 2).
2. B.: The Spirit had two Daughters, the dry land and water (st. 3-4).
E. ridicule: One should avoid listening to the Bardaisanites, Ephrem's mouth had to be purified just from relating their beliefs because they blasphemed (st. 3-4).
E. rebuttal: Not even a demon's image could be seen in the water which concealed the unimaginable Spirit (st. 4).
3. B.: Daughter Spirit's wedding banquet, Mother-Spirit with Daughter (st. 5).
E. ridicule: The Spirit was hurt and disgraced by Bardaisan's hymns.
E. rebuttal: The Spirit was unsullied, so She never had sex or gave birth.
4. B.: God left the Spirit alone on earth (st. 6).
E. ridicule: Their secret hymn was disgraceful, Bardaisan and his followers should be ashamed.
E. rebuttal: Bardaisan misused the Psalm Jesus quoted.
5. B.: Law from Moses, sex implied between Father and Mother (st. 7).
E. ridicule: Bardaisan's doctrine of the garden was detestable.
E. rebuttal: The Law itself refutes Bardaisan's teachings.
6. B.: Mother and Father populated earth by having sex in the garden (st. 8).
E. ridicule: Bardaisan hated the blessed garden and taught a disgraceful garden instead.
E. rebuttal: Moses did not write these things.
7. B.: The gods measured and set the garden in its place (st. 9).
E. ridicule: There are two gardens, Bardaisan's is too shameful to say where it is, he was deceived by the serpent.
E. rebuttal: Moses proclaimed one garden.

8. B.: Relating the Father to the Sun and the Mother to the Moon who had children, the Bardaisanites worshipped an assembly of deities. (st.10).
 E. ridicule: The Bardaisanites blasphemed unashamedly (st.10).
 E. rebuttal: The Maccabean Jews died because they were idolatrous⁶⁸ (st.11).

In this hymn Ephrem defends the nature of the Incarnation, the ineffability and purity of the Holy Spirit, who is not the wisdom-Spirit aeon of Gnosticism, and the authority of the Bible as Ephrem had received it. The fact that Ephrem never calls the Holy Spirit 'Mother' anywhere else suggests that the appellation 'Mother' was either too evocative of Bardaisan's teachings or too reminiscent of the cult of Atargatis, or both. So Ephrem seems to have considered 'Mother' to be a dangerous, even heretical, title for the Holy Spirit.

9. 4 Summary

Since the first and second principles of the Trinity are most frequently called the Father and Son, they are primarily regarded as masculine. Though that is not to say God has a specific sex. Ephrem's willingness to characterise these two 'masculine' Personae as Mothers is refreshing. Sometimes metaphorical images are based on grammatical considerations. Occasionally Ephrem mixes masculine grammatical constructions and feminine imagery which yields an image of God with both masculine and feminine components. These can best be described as androgynous images of God. However the impact of images dependent on grammar is uncertain.

The most prevalent feminine images of God the 'Father' are those in which maternal functions are applied to God. Ephrem depicts God as a wet-nurse to new Christians, compares God's womb to Mary's, refers to God's giving birth or breast-feeding, and comments on the Parent's (and Child's) inscrutability. Jesus is portrayed as a weaver, the living breast, and a mother who gives birth spiritually.

Bird imagery is also common. Ephrem tends to use a male bird for Jesus and a female for the Holy Spirit. It is likely that Jesus's sex influenced Ephrem's choice. If so, his practice of depicting the Spirit with a female bird could suggest that he

regarded the Holy Spirit as Feminine. Thus the bird's sex, and usually the associated grammar, are determined by the metaphorical gender of the referent.

Ephrem uses very few metaphorical images of the Spirit regardless of gender. Grammatical usage for the Spirit was in a state of transition from feminine to masculine forms. There are some grammatically inspired masculine images of the Holy Spirit, but not many. An analogy to oil is the most definite; but this is actually a metaphorically neuter image in a stanza in which the Spirit is otherwise described by feminine grammatical forms. The Spirit is signified by metaphorically neuter images such as a cloud, warmth, wind (or a breeze) or by analogy to a worm and a bird who were believed to conceive asexually. Ephrem personifies the Spirit as a female by depicting Her as a weaver and as a shepherdess.

He applies motherly imagery to the Holy Spirit often enough that he seems to be comfortable with the image of the Holy Spirit as a Mother. In view of Ephrem's portraying the Spirit as giving birth to different groups of Christians, his refusal to call the Holy Spirit 'Mother' is jarring. Based on Ephrem's writings as a whole, the Spirit is predominantly the feminine principle of the Trinity. His polemic against the Bardaisanites manifests the potential confusion in acknowledging the Spirit as Mother. Ephrem probably shies away from calling the Holy Spirit Mother because of the place the Bardaisanites gave to Atargatis, their fusion of the Goddess with the Spirit, and their prevailing influence.

9. 5 Footnotes

¹ Murray, *Symbols*, p. 144, n. 2, mentions two passages in the Armenian Diatesseron Commentary.

² *CSCO* 186, p. 105.

³ McVey, p. 174, n. 471.

⁴ *CSCO* 198, p. 57.

⁵ *CSCO* 248, p. 79; See also Brock, *Luminous Eye*, p. 143.

⁶ *CSCO* 186, pp. 74-5.

⁷ *CSCO* 186, pp. 139-40. McVey, p. 213, n. 599, comments 'Ephrem, like other anti-Arian polemicists, contrasts the utter uniqueness of Jesus's divine and human births'.

⁸ *CSCO* 223, pp. 167-8.

⁹ J. Payne Smith, p. 192.

¹⁰ *CSCO* 154, p. 193.

¹¹ *CSCO* 223, pp. 89-91. Stanza 6 contains several lacunae. The parts of the lines which are legible do not add significantly to the motherly imagery.

¹² *CSCO* 186, p. 39.

¹³ *CSCO* 186, p. 105-6.

¹⁴ *CSCO* 186, p. 118.

¹⁵ *CSCO* 186, p. 120.

¹⁶ *CSCO* 270, p. 2.

¹⁷ Tr. Johnston, ed. Gwynn, p. 305.

¹⁸ J. Payne Smith, p. 192.

¹⁹ *CSCO* 186, p. 185.

²⁰ *CSCO* 154, pp. 45 - 46.

²¹ *CSCO* 218, pp. 64-5. See also Robert Murray, 'St. Ephrem the Syrian on Church Unity', *ECQ* 15, Nos. 3-4 (1963), p. 172. Murray translates the last line as 'Lord let thy truth gather thy children under my wings'. However both 'children' and 'wings' definitely have the first person possessive pronominal suffix.

²² Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 22 n. 1, 313; Brock, 'Holy Spirit as Feminine', p. 82.

²³ Since *ruah* can also mean 'wind,' some English versions of Gen. 1: 2 have 'the Spirit' in the verse with 'wind' in a footnote while others have the reverse.

²⁴ *CSCO* 186, p. 87.

²⁵ J. Payne Smith, p. 179.

²⁶ *CSCO* 223, p. 39.

²⁷ *CSCO* 154, p. 159.

²⁸ *CSCO* 198, p. 115.

²⁹ *CSCO* 186, p. 160.

³⁰ *CSCO* 186, p. 47.

³¹ *CSCO* 212, p. 30.

³² *CSCO* 223, p. 26.

³³ *CSCO* 186, p. 135.

³⁴ J. Payne Smith, p. 40.

³⁵ 4 Macc. 18: 8 refers to the idea that the serpent defiled Eve's motherhood. For the opinion that Satan, in the guise of the serpent, had sexual intercourse with Eve, see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, tr. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia: The

Jewish Publication Society of America), 1 (1968) p. 105, and 5 (1983), p. 133, for the footnotes.

36 J. Payne Smith, p. 190.

37 *CSCO* 186, p. 144.

38 *CSCO* 154, p. 226.

39 *CSCO* 154, p. 51.

40 Murray's translation of the Armenian, *CSCO* 137, p. 26, is from 'Mary, the Second Eve in the Early Syriac Fathers', *ECR* 3, No. 4 (Autumn 1971), p. 379. Leloir's Latin translation, *CSCO* 145, p. 19, lines 16-21, is: 'Nam sunt nonnulli, qui audent dicere Mariam fuisse uxorem Iosephi post nativitatem Salvatoris. Quomodo possibile erat hoc fieri, (nempe) illam quae fuit domus habitationis Spiritus, et cui obumbravit divina virtus, coniugem fieri mortalis (hominis), et partum plenum doloribus parere, ad similitudinem primae maledictionis?'

41 Examining the Mary-Spirit and Mary-Jesus images in depth is beyond the scope of this study.

42 *CSCO* 186, p. 2.

43 *CSCO* 154, p. 71.

44 Yousif, p. 60, bases his opinion on Basil's *Commentary on the Six Days of Creation*, viii 6.

45 Morris, *Select Works*, p. 169.

46 *CSCO* 223, p. 82.

47 J. Payne Smith, pp. 4, 308.

48 McVey, p. 362; Murray, 'Mary', p. 374, refers to *EC* 20. 32, *H. Church* 49. 7, *H. Church* 35. 17, and *H. Virg.* 23. 5.

49 *CSCO* 223, p. 17.

50 *CSCO* 186, pp. 189-90.

51 Cited in Murray, *Symbols*, p. 318; ¶19. 15, Armenian in *CSCO* 137, p. 277, lines 11-15; Latin in *CSCO* 145, p. 199, lines 6-9: 'Non est dictum de Eva, eam sororem esse Adami, aut filiam eius, sed (eam esse) ex eo. Ita non est dicendum Spiritum sanctum filium (esse), nec sororem, sed (illum esse) ex eo, et consubstantialem ei'.

52 Murray, *Symbols*, p. 318; A. Orbe, 'La Procecion del Espiritu Santo y el Origen de Eva', *Gregorianum* 45 (1964), pp. 103-18.

53 Murray, *Symbols*, p. 143, n. 2.

54 *CSCO* 186, p. 172.

55 Matt. 10: 16 may be the basis of the wily and the innocent. The disciples were required to be both. But Ephrem sees baptism as a birth which changes the wily into innocents.

56 Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, p. 49.

57 *CSCO* 169, pp. 207-9.

58 Noldeke gives 'such' as a possible meaning for the combination of the particle א 'of, for', etc., and the preposition כְּ 'like', p. 228 ¶ 352. Beck notes the omission of this particle in some mss., *CSCO* 169, p. 207, n. 1. The alternative phrase would be 'like [those] who say childish things'.

59 Literally 'at your foot'. For 'after you', see Davidson, p. 675, under רגל (*rgel*). For the variants in the manuscripts and other Biblical evidence, see Beck, *CSCO* 170, p. 187.

60 This may relate to the Gnostic myths of an archetypal human who, after seeing itself in the water, is received into the natural order. The human (grammatically masculine) and the natural order (grammatically feminine) have intercourse, and the

latter produces offspring. See the 'Secret Book according to John in the Long Version', pp. 30-1, and "The Hermetic Corpus: Tractate 1 [Poimandres]', pp. 454-5 in Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (London: SCM Press, 1987) or Giversen, p. 73, lines 33-4.

⁶¹ ܐܦ ('af) 'also' relates the future wedding to the recent births. Having seen, in some sense, the twins' birth, the speaker asks when the wedding will take place.

⁶² Beck gives ܐܠܗܐ (God) in the text and ܐܠܗܐܝ (my God) as a variant reading in n. 3. The variant is preferred because the Spirit is supposedly quoting Ps. 22: 1 which is 'My God, my God'. The variant in the same manuscript quotes Jesus as saying 'God, God', p. 188, n. 5. Since the first person pronominal suffix was not pronounced, it was frequently omitted in the manuscripts.

⁶³ Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, p. 146. In Manichaean belief, the Spirit helped in creation, became entangled in matter, and was abandoned.

⁶⁴ I have given a literal translation because it was commonly believed that deities resided in the heavens, for example on Mt. Olympus, the home of the Greek Pantheon, and according to several sources, the Mother's place was the highest, the eighth, heaven. See Christine R. Downing, 'The Mother Goddess among the Greeks' in *Book of the Goddess: Past and Present*, ed. Carl Olson (New York: Crossroad, 1986), p. 50, and in Layton: p. 169, 'The Gnostics according to Irenaeus' 1. 29. 4; p. 39, 'The Secret Book according to John' 14. 26-33; and p. 196, 'The Archontics according to St. Epiphanius' 40. 2. 3. An acceptable alternative translation is 'palace', Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, p. 147.

⁶⁵ Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, p. 147, gives 'descendants' referring to G. Widengren, *Mesopotamian elements in Manichaeism*, p. 18. Assuming a parallel to *zuwaghon*, Beck uses 'Sprosslingen', meaning 'descendants, sprouts'. Following Brockleman's Lexicon, under *durkata*, Beck suggests secondary meanings of 'concubine, servant', and the most probable, 'offspring', *CSCO* 170, n. 13, p. 189.

⁶⁶ Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, p. 151; Oden, p. 44; eds. and trs. Harold W. Attridge and Robert A. Oden, Jr., *The Syrian Goddess (De Dea Syria) Attributed to Lucian, Texts and Translations* 9 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 50-1, ¶45.

⁶⁷ Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, p. 145.

⁶⁸ Ephrem uses the account as a warning against the Bardaisanites teachings and also as an encouragement to his own followers to pray for Bardaisan. Although Ephrem forcefully refuted, and even ridiculed, Bardaisan's teachings, he does not relegate him to hell. This indicates his compassion.



Trinity of Candles

Ephrem was interested in keeping the order of the Holy Trinity with the Father First, the Son Second, and the Holy Spirit Third. Although the three candles in the picture are all red, they are slightly different in height and shape. Only the second candle has a flame. This signifies the place of primary importance that Ephrem accords to the Son as the Light of the world and the gradual extinction of the Feminine aspect of the Holy Spirit.

Most of the material on the Trinity is in the volume of *Hymns of Faith* (eighty-seven hymns) and the *Sermons of Faith* (6 sermons).¹ However excerpts from other collections are included to provide a more complete picture of Ephrem's treatment of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father and the Son. Although Ephrem describes the Holy Spirit acting individually in the overshadowing of Mary, in baptism and in the eucharist, usually the Spirit appears in some variation of the Trinitarian formula 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'. Ephrem treats the Holy Spirit in a manner that is noticeably different from the Father and the Son. Whereas they are addressed by a wide range of titles - many of which relate the two, Ephrem invariably refrains from giving the Spirit any appellation, referring to Her simply as the 'Holy Spirit'.

10. 1 Absence of the Holy Spirit

H. Nat. 2 contains several titles which relate the Father and the Son while excluding the Spirit: Good One's Son, He who sent His Heir, Just One's Son, Word of the High One, Son of the Lord of all, and Son of the Secret One.² Based solely on the references to the Father or the Son individually, Jesus is Ephrem's main interest.

In *H. Resur. 1* Ephrem concentrates on Jesus to such an extent that he almost excludes the Father. Yet he does once refer to God meaning the Father, to the Father twice, and to the Parent twice. So the Father is not entirely overlooked. The hymn is, however, bereft of any reference to the Holy Spirit. Jesus's titles are many: Priest, Pontiff, Great One, Shepherd of all, Wakeful One, Pure One, Living One, Lord of the flock, new Bread, Power, Hope, Salvation, Word, God, Provider of all, Giver of drink to all, Lamb (twice), King (twice), and Lord (twice).³

The Spirit is not even mentioned in four of the six *Sermons on Faith*.⁴ These expositions concentrate on God's inscrutability and warn against investigating Divinity. Ephrem considers the Father and the Son to be integrally related to each other as can be seen in the following excerpts:

S. Faith 1. 145-49, 2. 1, 5. 97-101, 6. 333.

145. אִם גַּם לִמְנוּחָיו לִי כִּי אֵין אֲחֵרִים אֵלָיו

וְכָל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה בְּיָדוֹ לֹא יִשָּׁרְרָה אֵלָיו

149. לֹא יִשָּׁרְרָה אֵלָיו לִבְנוֹתָיו

כִּי אֵין אֲחֵרִים אֵלָיו לִבְנוֹתָיו

145. There is One who is nearer to Him than anyone, He who by His hand made all things. No servant comes near Him, for the Son is near Him.

149. No fellow-creature is by His side, for His Child sits by His side. There is a great distance between the Creator and a creature.

In these stanzas Ephrem ponders the relationships of creatures and of the Son to the Creator. Only the Son is near the Creator. Otherwise a great distance separates God from the servants. The Son, without the Spirit, sits at the Creator's side. The Holy Spirit is not a servant in the way created things are. Ephrem overlooks the Spirit's existence as part of the Trinity altogether.

וְכָל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה בְּיָדוֹ לֹא יִשָּׁרְרָה אֵלָיו

כִּי אֵין אֲחֵרִים אֵלָיו לִבְנוֹתָיו

The Father is complete in His Essence, and the First-born [is complete] in His Birth: a perfect Father of a perfect Son. The Child is perfect like His Parent.

The Father's completeness is measured in terms of His Essence whereas Jesus's completeness is evaluated with respect to His Birth. Ephrem emphasises the Father's and the Son's perfection and their Parent-Child relationship by repetition. He completely excludes the Spirit.

97. הָיִינוּ בְּיָדוֹ לִבְנוֹתָיו

כִּי אֵין אֲחֵרִים אֵלָיו לִבְנוֹתָיו

101. אִם גַּם לִמְנוּחָיו לִי כִּי אֵין אֲחֵרִים אֵלָיו

וְכָל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה בְּיָדוֹ לֹא יִשָּׁרְרָה אֵלָיו

97. Go, first search His Father. Prove your power with His Parent. Begin and end by investigating Him. Measure Him length and depth.

101. If you measure that Essence, then you have measured the Son who is from His womb. If you are able to measure the Father, you are also able [to measure] His Only-Begotten.

Ephrem advises those who wish to delve into God's nature to begin with the Father.

If they are able to answer questions about the Father, they will be able to discover

Jesus's nature. Mention of the womb of the 'Father' suggests an image of God as Mother. The thought of investigating the Holy Spirit does not seem to have arisen, at least not in this sermon.

אֵין כֹּחַ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר לְרַחֵם כְּמִתְּנָה אֲבִיחָא
 לְשׁוֹן בְּנֵי שָׁמַיְיָ אֲבִיחָא לְשׁוֹן בְּנֵי שָׁמַיְיָ⁸

If there is tranquility and peace in that, why is there conflict in this?
 They see there One Child and, at His hand, His One Parent.

The Son alone is at the Father's side. Again Ephrem comments on the Parent-Child relationship without mention of the Holy Spirit.

According to *H. Faith* 4. 1, of the multitude of those serving God, the Son is God's only companion:

אֵלֶּיךָ אֶלְפֵי מֵתֵיבָה
 זָכֵר זָכֵר וְתִמְלֵךְ
 אֶלְפֵי אֲבִיחָא
 לְשׁוֹן דְּבִצְרָה לֵךְ חַיִּי
 חַלְמֵי עֵץ כְּשֶׁחֶסֶד
 לְרַעְיוֹנֵה מִתְּנָה
 לֵב לֵב לֵב לֵב זָכֵר
 אֵלֶּיךָ בְּנֵי שָׁמַיְיָ
 לֵב לֵב זָכֵר זָכֵר מִ, כְּחַלְמֵי
 זָכֵר זָכֵר עֵץ זָכֵר זָכֵר
 זָכֵר זָכֵר אֲבִיחָא⁹

A thousand thousands stand; a myriad of myriads run. Thousands and myriads are unable to search the One, for all of them stand serving in silence. He [God] has no companion except the Child who is from Him. He is sought within the silence. When the angels went to search, they found the silence and were restrained.

This is a comment on the impossibility of investigating God who is served by a multitude including angels. The Child is the *בְּרִיחָא* (*bar mutba*), which means 'consort, assessor'¹⁰ or in modern terms - companion. Only the Child could be the Father's consort, assess Him, or provide appropriate company for Him. A consort was usually a spouse. That the Spirit might have, in any way, been the Father's consort was unthinkable for Ephrem. Therefore he consigned the role of the

consort to the Child to eliminate any misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit's relationship to the Father.

10. 2 The Holy Spirit in the shadow of the Father and the Son

Although the Holy Spirit is included in *H. Faith 77*, Ephrem is more interested in the Father and the Son.

20. ܠܘܬܝܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
 ܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
21. ܠܘܬܝܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
 ܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
22. ܠܘܬܝܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

20. The names of the Father and the Son and the Spirit are equal and united in the hovering at baptism.

21. The names are united; the action is equal and [of] one will. They bear [it] as one yoke and they come;

22. and as They are equal in the hovering at baptism, so They are also equal in Their unity.

The hymn has thirty stanzas about how the Son knew the Father. Ephrem draws an analogy between the root and its fruit to make his point. Although he declares that the Spirit is equal to and united with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is mentioned in just these three stanzas. Ephrem is concerned to stress the Trinity's equality and unity in baptism, particularly in the hovering. Thus Ephrem implicitly takes the dove which symbolised the Holy Spirit alone at Jesus's baptism to signify the Father, the Son, and the Spirit at other baptisms.

H. Faith 23. 13 presents the order of the Trinity and reveals the inconsistency in the Spirit's treatment.

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

12 כְּמֵתֵיבָא רְבִיבָא אֵינִי רְבִיבָא

That the Father is First, this is without dispute. That the Son is Second, this is without doubt. And the name of the Spirit is Third, lest you destroy the order of the names.

No one disputes the Father's place or doubts the Son's. But the last clause functions as a warning to others concerning the order of the Trinity. The change in syntax signals that the Spirit is perceived differently. Whereas exactly the same sentence structure is used to describe the Father and the Son, Ephrem changes the sentence about the Spirit. Although the Father Himself was First and the Son Second, it is the name of the Spirit which is Third. This is curious since the Spirit has never had a name as such. Ephrem's insistence on the order of the Trinity suggests that the Spirit is not universally accorded third place. He needs to prevent the potential corruption of the order. The change could be nothing more than stylistic variation. Yet Ephrem repeats phrases often enough for the Spirit's treatment here to be noticeable.

H. Epi. 3. 14 exemplifies a passage in which the Spirit seems to outshine the Father and the Son, at first, only to be 'put in Her place' later in the stanza.

בְּשֵׁיבֵתֵיבָא דְדָוִד אֵינִי רְבִיבָא אֵינִי רְבִיבָא

כְּבִיבֵתֵיבָא דְדָוִד אֵינִי רְבִיבָא אֵינִי רְבִיבָא

וְכִיבֵתֵיבָא דְדָוִד אֵינִי רְבִיבָא אֵינִי רְבִיבָא

13 דְּכִיבֵתֵיבָא דְדָוִד אֵינִי רְבִיבָא אֵינִי רְבִיבָא

My brothers, the Spirit descended [for] David's anointing and scented the human heart, and he delighted in Her. The fragrance of his heart [is] like the fragrance of his oil. The Spirit dwelt in him and sang in him. The anointing that you have is greater for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have moved and descended to dwell in you.

Rendering a correct translation depends on first determining whether the underlined word was originally 'Spirit' or 'fire'. Beck accepts 'fire' based on the manuscript evidence. But he notes that 'Spirit' is a variant. Since 'scented' is a cognate of Spirit, Ephrem is playing with the root $\sqrt{r\dot{h}}$ ($\sqrt{r\dot{h}}$). Word plays are a usual part of his style. In addition $\sqrt{b\dot{s}m}$ in line 2 is both 'delight in' and 'perfume' which ties in with the word play on scent. 1 Sam. 16: 13 records that the Spirit descended on

David. Spirit is therefore the better choice. The scribe may have written 'fire' rather than 'Spirit' because the fire descended on the meat and bread in Ju. 6: 21.

At first it seems that the Spirit has a more significant role than the Father and the Son. The Spirit descended at David's anointing, scented the human heart, dwelt and sang in David, and he delighted in Her. But the anointing which is given to the baptised is greater because the Father and the Son move and descend with the Holy Spirit into the baptised. The additional presence of the Father and the Son result in making baptismal anointing more important while diminishing the role of the Spirit.

S. Faith 4. 157-89 is another passage in which the Spirit is initially treated like the Father and the Son. However Ephrem subtly distances the Spirit from the other two.

157. חַבֵּב סַמְעֵאלָא כַפְסֵימְהֵלָא לֵל אֲבִיזָא אֵלָּא נִסְכָּא
 דְּאֵלָּא אֲכָא חַבֵּב נִבְּ דְּאֲבִיזָא מִמָּה לֵּל אֵשׁ נִבְּ
 161. דְּאֵלָּא כִּיָּא חַבֵּב אֲבִיזָא דְּאֲבִיזָא חַבֵּבָא מִמָּה לֵּל אֵשׁ
 כִּיָּא סַמְעֵאלָא חַבֵּב נִבְּ דְּאֲבִיזָא לְבַחֵלָא לֵּל אֵשׁ נִבְּ
 165. דְּאֵלָּא, חַבֵּב אֲכָא אֲבִיזָא דְּנִסְכָּא לֵּל אֵשׁ אֲבִיזָא
 דְּאֵלָּא, אֲכָא כִּיָּא מִמָּה דְּנִסְכָּא דְּלִבָּא אֲבִיזָא
 169. דְּאֵלָּא אֲכָא דְּסַמְעֵאלָא אֵשׁ דְּנִסְכָּא לֵּל אֵשׁ
 דְּאֵלָּא מִמָּה אֲכָא חַבֵּב נִבְּ דְּאֲבִיזָא לֵּל אֵשׁ
 173. דְּסַמְעֵאלָא מִמָּה אֲכָא מִמָּה כִּיָּא דְּאֲבִיזָא מִמָּה אֵשׁ
 דְּאֵלָּא אֲכָא דְּסַמְעֵאלָא אֲכָא חַבֵּב לֵּל אֵשׁ
 177. לֵּל נִסְכָּא פִּסְּ כִּיָּא לֵּל אֲכָא דְּמִמָּה פִּסְּ
 לֵּל נִסְכָּא פִּסְּ אֲכָא לֵּל אֲכָא דְּמִמָּה פִּסְּ
 181. כִּיָּא דְּאֵלָּא חַבֵּב דְּאֲבִיזָא, לֵּל אֵשׁ
 לֵּל אֲכָא דְּאֲבִיזָא דְּאֲבִיזָא דְּאֲבִיזָא
 185. אֵשׁ, כִּיָּא דְּאֲבִיזָא אֲכָא אֲכָא דְּאֲבִיזָא דְּאֲבִיזָא
 אֲכָא מִמָּה, אֲכָא אֲכָא אֲכָא אֲכָא
 189. אֲכָא מִמָּה אֲכָא אֲכָא אֲכָא אֲכָא
 אֲכָא אֲכָא אֲכָא אֲכָא אֲכָא¹⁴

157. Truth is written concisely. Do not make a long investigation. Everyone knows that there is a Father; but no one knows in what manner He is.

161. We all profess that there is a Son; but we cannot define in what manner and how He is. Everyone professes the Holy Spirit; but no one is able to search Him.¹⁵

165. Profess then that there is a Father; but do not profess that He can be defined. Also believe that there is a Son; but do not believe that He can be investigated.

169. Assert that there is a Holy Spirit; but do not assert that She can be searched. Believe and assert that They are One, and do not doubt that [They are] Three.

173. Believe that the Father is First. Assert that the Son is Second. Also do not doubt that the Holy Spirit is Third.

177. The First-born never commanded the Father, for He is the Commander. The Spirit never sent the Son, for He is Her Sender.

181. The Son who sits at the right hand does not seize His Father's position. The Spirit who is sent from Him does not seize the Son's rank.

185. The Son rejoices that His Parent is great and the Holy Spirit that His Beloved is great. Joy is there and unity and mingling with order.

189. The Father knows the birth of the Son. The Son knows the beckoning of the Father. The Father beckons and the Son knows. The works are performed by the Spirit.

While the imagery of the Holy Spirit is undeveloped compared to that of the Father and the Son, S. Faith 4 balances the Three reasonably well in sts. 157-69. These stanzas declare the existence and inscrutability of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit while cautioning against questioning their natures.

In ordering the Personae of the Trinity, st. 173 sets the Spirit apart from the other two principles. The statements to believe the Father is First and to assert that the Son is Second are positive injunctions. The caution about the Holy Spirit's place is a negative statement 'do not doubt'. The $\Delta\kappa$ ('af, 'also') interrupts the flow of the stanza, thereby separating the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son.

In keeping with Their having distinct places, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit each perform certain functions. The Father is the Commander and the Son the Sender (st. 177). The Spirit is the Worker, though She is not given that specific title (st. 189).

Ephrem devotes sts. 181-85 to the Son's and Spirit's acceptance of Their places in the order of the Trinity. The Son sits contentedly at the Father's right hand and does not seek to move into First place. The Spirit unreservedly accepts Her place without trying to take the Son's place. Ephrem distances the Spirit from the Father

and the Son. She does not sit by either of Them because She was sent into the world. Jesus is as glad that His Father is great as the Spirit is that His Beloved is great. Ephrem remarks that there is joy, unity, and mingling among the Trinity. But the unity and mingling are unconvincing. Neither the Father nor the Son rejoice because the Spirit is great. Perhaps great was not regarded as an appropriate attribute for the Holy Spirit.

St. 189 further demonstrates the Spirit's separation from the Father and the Son. The Father knows the Son's birth, and the Son knows the Father's beckoning. Apparently there is nothing for them to know about the Spirit. The Spirit performs Their works. Yet this need not indicate that the Spirit has intimate knowledge of the Father's and the Son's plans; She does what the Father beckons and the Son sent Her to do.

It is clear that Ephrem sees the Trinity as a vertical hierarchy in which the Father is the highest, the Son is in the middle, and the Spirit is lowest. The Trinity as presented in sts. 177-89 could not be symbolised by a circle or triangle because the Spirit and the Father do not have a relationship based on mutuality. Their interaction is totally one-sided, from the Father to the Spirit through the Son. The Spirit's 'thoughts' about the Father and His 'thoughts' about Her are omitted.

10. 3 One in three and three in one?

H. Epi. 12. 6 presents the actions of the Trinity in baptism.

ܐܘܬܘܪܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ
 ܕܘܚܪܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ
 ܕܘܚܪܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ
 ܕܘܚܪܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ
 ܕܘܚܪܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ

The Father sealed [baptism] to exalt [it], and the Son betrothed it to glorify [it], and the Spirit with His threefold seal engraved it and it [baptism] manifests Holiness. Blessed is He who shows mercy on all.

Based on the masculine grammatical forms used for the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's metaphorical gender is masculine in this stanza. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each perform different functions in baptism. The Father and the Spirit both seal baptism. The Father's seal exalts baptism; the Spirit's seal engraves it so that it manifests Holiness. Significantly whereas the Father's seal is not actually mentioned, the Spirit's seal is described in detail. It is a threefold seal which marks baptism. Instead of sealing baptism, the Son betrothed it to glorify it. Thus baptism is depicted as the bride of Christ.

H. Faith 51. 7-8 also concerns baptism.

7.
 גוֹשְׁמֵי אֱלֹהִים מְהֵרָה כְּפִיךָ דְּגִבְיָהּ, מִן
 לְפָנֶיךָ דְּכֹחַ סִינַי אֲכַפְיָהּ דְּכֹחַ, מִן סִינַי וְיָדְךָ כְּלִמְסֵי
 אֲלֵי בְּיָדְךָ מִיּוֹם אֲרֵבֵיךָ דְּגִבְיָהּ אֶפְרַיִם אֲרֵבֵי
 אֲדֹמָה מִן אֲלֵיךָ אֲרֵבֵיךָ אֲרֵבֵיךָ לְאַשְׁמֹרֶת
 דְּאֲכַר כֵּן מִלֵּךְ אֲכַר כֵּן מִלֵּךְ
 אֲרֵבֵיךָ כִּימְסֵי אֲשַׁכְּסֵי לְאַשְׁמֹרֶת
 נְבִיא דְּגִבְיָהּ דְּגִבְיָהּ אֲלֵיךָ
 8.
 דְּאַשְׁמֹרֶת לְמִסְגֵּר אֲלֵי בְּיָדְךָ מִיּוֹם
 אֲרֵבֵיךָ מִן אֲכַפְיָהּ דְּכֹחַ אֲרֵבֵיךָ
 מִן אֲרֵבֵיךָ אֲרֵבֵיךָ אֲרֵבֵיךָ אֲרֵבֵיךָ
 אֲרֵבֵיךָ, דְּגִבְיָהּ אֲכַר אֲכַר אֲכַר אֲכַר
 אֲרֵבֵיךָ אֲרֵבֵיךָ אֲרֵבֵיךָ לְאַשְׁמֹרֶת¹⁷

7. It is presumptuous for us to call You by a name which is different from that which Your Father called You. For He called You 'My Son' alone on the Jordan river. And when You were baptised, even You, the mystery of the Trinity baptised Your humanity: the Father by His voice, and the Son by His power, and the Spirit by His hovering. Praise for Your hovering.

8. Who could deny the Threefold names for Their hovering first ministered beside the Jordan? It is true that by the names in which Your body was baptised, lo, [our] bodies are baptised. And though there are very many names of the Lord of all, He has baptised us in [the names of] the Father and the Son and the Spirit separately. Praise for Your majesty.

Although each of the Personae are included, Jesus is the focus of these stanzas.

Ephrem recalls Jesus's baptism to exemplify how to address Him (st. 7). Since the

microcosm of the world. When the spirit, the soul, and the body accord in their belief in the Trinity, then the Trinity prevail over all things.

Ephrem correlates the spirit, the soul, and the body each to one of the Personae of the Holy Trinity (st. 5). The suffering spirit is imprinted by the Father. The suffering soul is blended into the Son. The martyred body is joined with the Holy Spirit.

H. Faith 73. 1-8, 18-20 contain the most typical images of the Trinity.

1. מֵא פִלְחָא שְׁרָא אֲכֹרָא
 גִּשְׁרָא אֲכֹרָא גִּשְׁרָא
 רִשְׁרָא רִשְׁרָא
2. אֲכֹרָא מֵא מֵא מֵא
 גִּשְׁרָא מֵא מֵא מֵא
 רִשְׁרָא מֵא
3. מֵא מֵא מֵא מֵא
 גִּשְׁרָא מֵא מֵא
 רִשְׁרָא מֵא
4. מֵא מֵא מֵא מֵא
 גִּשְׁרָא מֵא מֵא
 רִשְׁרָא מֵא
5. מֵא מֵא מֵא מֵא
 גִּשְׁרָא מֵא מֵא
 רִשְׁרָא מֵא
6. מֵא מֵא מֵא מֵא
 גִּשְׁרָא מֵא מֵא
 רִשְׁרָא מֵא
7. מֵא מֵא מֵא מֵא
 גִּשְׁרָא מֵא מֵא
 רִשְׁרָא מֵא
8. מֵא מֵא מֵא מֵא
 גִּשְׁרָא מֵא מֵא
 רִשְׁרָא מֵא
18. מֵא מֵא מֵא מֵא
 גִּשְׁרָא מֵא מֵא
 רִשְׁרָא מֵא

19. מַחְמֵהוּ רַחֵם אֲבִי 19.
 וְיֵשׁוּעַ אֵלֶיךָ אֲבִי אֲנִי וְרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ
 אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ
 20. אֲבִי אֲנִי אֲבִי אֲנִי 20.
 אֲבִי אֲנִי אֲבִי
 אֲבִי אֲנִי אֲבִי

1. Lo, the sun [is] a symbol for the Father, and the light for the Son, and the warmth for the Holy Spirit.
2. And while it is one, a trinity can be seen in it; who can explain the incomprehensible?
3. The one is many: the one is three, and the three are one, a great amazement, a visible wonder.
4. The sun is distinct from its ray; but mingled with it, for its ray is also the sun.
5. But no one speaks of two suns, though its ray is also a sun to those below.
6. Nor do we call on two Gods, though our Lord is also God over creation.
7. Who can search how or where the ray is connected, [or] its warmth connected [to the sun], yet [each] remains free?
8. Though they are not separate, nor confused, [yet they are] distinct, commingled, and connected, yet [each] is free - a great astonishment.
18. But when the ray returns to its source, since it is not separated from its parent,
19. it leaves its warmth here, just as the Holy Spirit, whom our Lord left with His disciples.
20. Consider the analogies in creation, and do not doubt the Trinity, lest you perish.

Regardless of the mutuality in other stanzas, the Spirit is absent from stanzas 4-6 which focus on the relationship between the Father and the Son. Ephrem symbolises the Father with the sun, the Son with its light, and the Spirit with its warmth (st. 1).²⁰

He uses the unity, yet distinctness, of the sun, its light, and its warmth to explain the Trinity (sts. 2-3). He concentrates on the sun and its ray (sts. 4-5) to conclude that since there is only one sun, Father and Son are also One God (st. 6). Warmth and the Holy Spirit seem to be superfluous to the argument.

21 ܡܠܠܬܐ ܡܝܘܚܝܬܐ

1. The Word of the Most High came down and put on a weak body with two hands. And He took two harps in His right and left [hands]. He erected a third [harp] in His presence to be a witness to the [other] two, for the middle harp taught that their Lord is playing them.

2. But He played and even that third harp was deemed worthy and fulfilled the [other] two. When He raised and revived Lazarus, the first nature was not perfected. But if the nature were imperfect, why did He not perfect it and [then] raise it. It would have been simpler to perfect that which was corrupt and destructive before its restoration

The hymn refers to the Incarnate Word playing two harps with His hands. The harpist is a male because Jesus became incarnate as a male. These stanzas are significant in terms of the relationship between grammatical and metaphorical gender because 'Word' (ܡܠܠܬܐ, *mellta*, in the construct state) is treated as a masculine noun throughout, although it was grammatically feminine.

This is one of the few times in which Ephrem depicts the Word metaphorically. Usually he applies imagery to other subjects (Divinity, the speaker, etc.) and *mellta* is the object, such as the offspring the mouth gave birth to or a fetus in the womb.²² *Mellta* frequently occurs in syntactical arrangements which are indeterminate both metaphorically and grammatically. When Ephrem does personify the Word as a male, it is in direct analogy to Jesus's sex. When Word appears as a female, it is generally because the noun is being treated grammatically as feminine.

However Ephrem's grammatical treatment of Word is quite inconsistent.²³ Although he sometimes uses feminine parts of speech for Word, he prefers masculine forms when 'Word' refers to Jesus. Thus he disregards its conventional grammatical gender. Similarly Ephrem occasionally treats *mellta*, meaning 'speech,' as a masculine; but feminine forms are more numerous. Since the grammatical gender of *mellta* was changing to accommodate a metaphorical perception of Jesus as the Word, the gender of *mellta* when it meant speech may have also changed inadvertently. Ephrem's grammatical defeminisation of *mellta* was continued by later writers as well.²⁴

10. 5 Summary

Despite Ephrem's use of feminine imagery of the Holy Spirit elsewhere, his rejection of the title 'Mother' is obvious especially when he discusses the relationship between the Father and the Son. He overlooks the Spirit altogether. It is as if the Spirit does not have a role in the 'family'. This is probably because when he stresses the Parent-Child relationship, the most likely role for the Holy Spirit would be one which is problematic - the Mother.

Ephrem's interest in asserting the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son resulted in his excluding the Holy Spirit from a number of hymns (and sermons) or making Her subordinate to the other Two when he did include Her. The Spirit is rarely accorded equal status with the Father and the Son. Finding hymns in which the Spirit maintains Her position as one of the three principles of the Holy Trinity is difficult. There are passages which seem hopeful. Unfortunately as the hymn continues, the Father and the Son usually overshadow the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is Ephrem's primary concern. There are few hymns with absolutely no mention of Him. Occasionally Ephrem omits the Father. But considering the abundance of material elsewhere, omission of the Father from a given hymn hardly counts as marginalisation of the Father.

Ephrem's treatment of the Holy Spirit was not unusual for the fourth century. The deity of the Spirit was not asserted until the Council of Constantinople (381 A. D., nearly a decade after Ephrem's death). But this Council's statement about the Holy Spirit was not as precise as was the declaration about the Son and the Father which was promulgated earlier by the Council of Nicea (325 A. D.). The doctrine of the Trinity was developed most completely in the East by John of Damascus (d. 749) in his *De Fide Orthodoxa*. In the West, Augustine, writing in the early fifth century, set out a rigorous statement of the doctrine of the Trinity in his *De Trinitate*.²⁵

A brief consideration of Ephrem's grammatical treatment of *mellta* demonstrates the impact that theological developments can have on language use. Just

as the image of the Holy Spirit as Mother was in decline, *mellta* was changing grammatically from feminine to masculine.

10. 6 Footnotes

¹ *CSCO* 154 and 212.

² *CSCO* 186, pp. 13-19.

³ *CSCO* 248, pp. 77-82.

⁴ Stanzas in this collection are numbered sequentially, but not consecutively.

⁵ *CSCO* 212, p. 4.

⁶ *CSCO* 212, p. 8.

⁷ *CSCO* 212, p. 39.

⁸ *CSCO* 212, p. 48.

⁹ *CSCO* 154, p. 9.

¹⁰ J. Payne Smith, p. 54.

¹¹ *CSCO* 154, p. 236.

¹² *CSCO* 154, p. 82.

¹³ *CSCO* 186, p.149.

¹⁴ *CSCO* 212, pp. 35-6.

¹⁵ Ephrem uses the masculine suffix for the Spirit here, but feminine constructions elsewhere.

¹⁶ *CSCO* 186, p. 188.

¹⁷ *CSCO* 154, pp. 159-60.

¹⁸ *CSCO* 154, pp. 69-70.

¹⁹ *CSCO* 154, pp. 223-5.

²⁰ Wisdom 7: 29-30. The symbols of sun and light were applied to Wisdom before they were used for the Trinity.

²¹ *CSCO* 223, pp. 105-6.

²² See *H. Church* 30. 1 in chapter 5 for the former image and *H. Resur.* 1. 7 in chapter 9 for the latter.

²³ Since Ephrem's commentary on the Diatessaron begins with a discussion of Jn. 1: 1 (*In the beginning was the Word*), a survey of it would provide information on the changing use of *mellta*. It is of note that Ephrem repeatedly cites the initial clause of the verse as ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܗܘܐ ܠܗܘܐ (*brešit hwa mellta*), with the masculine ܠܗܘܐ (*hwa*).

²⁴ Brock, *Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, p. 4.

²⁵ Berkhof, pp. 82-3.

Chapter 11: Conclusions

Ephrem's contemporary religious environment and the Syriac church's preference for celibacy are the major reasons Ephrem discontinued his predecessors' practice of calling the Holy Spirit 'Mother'. Although he applied feminine imagery to the Holy Spirit, he deliberately avoided the title 'Mother'. The Syriac church developed in the midst of a pluralistic religious and cultural milieu which included competing branches of Christianity. Ephrem's Syriac-speaking church was aligning itself with the Greek-speaking church at a time in which the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was in the process of being formulated.

Since most of the early Syriac authors were celibates writing for other celibates, it is difficult to obtain an accurate picture of the Syriac church's attitudes to marriage and conjugal relations. Virginity (and therefore celibacy) were clearly regarded as the ideal. However Ephrem tolerated sex within marriage primarily for procreation and to distinguish his church from the extremes of encratism.

The fact that such an influential figure as Ephrem in early Syriac Christianity refused to call the Holy Spirit 'Mother' and polemicised against the Bardaisanian Mother of Life may have had some impact on how Ephrem's successors treated the Spirit grammatically. During the fourth and fifth centuries, conventional Syriac grammatical usage was in the process of changing to accommodate the metaphorical defeminisation of the Spirit. By the sixth century, the Holy Spirit was treated grammatically as masculine except in poetic or liturgical settings.

The application of feminine imagery to the Divine by Ephrem and his predecessors and Ephrem's affirmative portrayals of non-divine subjects as females indicates the wide-spread acceptance of feminine imagery. While examining Ephrem's feminine imagery, several topics have arisen which are beyond the scope of this study. These are described in the section on 'Areas of further research'.

11. 1 The Divine Feminine in writers before Ephrem

Excerpts from a number of texts which originated in Edessa, Alexandria, Athens, or Rome were examined to ascertain how the Divine Feminine was portrayed. Special attention was given to the images of the Holy Spirit as Feminine. Most of the passages were chosen because they were already known for their feminine images of the Divine.

Although the image of the Holy Spirit as Mother was the most prevalent, 'Mother' was not a common address for the Holy Spirit in early Syriac literature, not even in the documents most frequently cited by scholars discussing the Divine Feminine. Images of a bisexual deity (the Mother-Father) or of a Divine couple (a distinct Mother and Father) appear almost as often as images of the Mother Spirit. Occasionally the Holy Spirit is personified as a Female, but not as a Mother. Mani and Augustine (writing after Ephrem) portrayed the Spirit as masculine. While Mani worshipped a Divine Mother, she was not usually identified as the Holy Spirit. Augustine categorically rejected the image and the title of 'Mother' for the Holy Spirit.

11. 2 Ephrem's application of feminine imagery

Ephrem's feminine imagery relies on his characterisation of non-divine and divine subjects as mothers, brides, wives, daughters, sisters and on his personification of characters as females with no specific family role. The mother image is the most prevalent. The bride appears frequently; the daughter less often. Personifications of a generic female without a familial role are common. The images of the wife and the sister receive the least attention. A sufficient number and variety of images was surveyed to provide the imagerial background from which to consider Ephrem's portrayals of the feminine aspect of the Divine.

Ephrem's use of feminine imagery, even for himself and other males, indicates that it was an acceptable form of expression. His activities in writing hymns for women's choirs, his treatment of female biblical and apocryphal characters, and his

frequent mention of groups of people in female and male pairs (i.e., daughters and sons) suggest that his relations with women would not provide a reason to discontinue addressing the Spirit as 'Mother' altogether.

11. 21 To non-divine subjects

Ephrem devoted a fair portion of his writing to females.¹ The image of the mother, especially her reproductive role, is a powerful one for Ephrem as evident in the numerous concepts he personifies as mothers. These include baptism, the church especially in contrast to Zion or the synagogue, the earth, creation, Sheol, the mind (usually Ephrem's), the sea, the male fish which swallowed Jonah, Adam, Nisibis, and three of the bishops of Nisibis. Ephrem was particularly interested in baptism as a mother. His concentration on this portrayal may have been one factor in delaying the development of the image of the church itself as a mother.

The mothers Ephrem admired are usually biblical or apocryphal characters such as Mary, Elizabeth, Hannah, Shamona, Sarah, Zipporah, the Canaanite woman, Bathsheba, the mothers of Jeremiah, of Jonah, and of James and John.

Tamar and Ruth are the only women Ephrem praises for actively seeking pregnancy. He extolls them for violating social customs because they did it to bring about Jesus's eventual birth. He desexualises Tamar's and Ruth's blatant sexual seductions of Judah and Boaz by interpreting them spiritually.

Ephrem praises Mary for giving birth to Jesus and Mary Magdalene for being the first person at the tomb. Unfortunately they were fused into one woman so completely it is sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish one Mary from another. Mother Mary seems to be the least human of the women in Ephrem's hymns because he consistently treats her as little more than a vessel, treasured though it may be. His practice of referring to Mary as 'the womb' demonstrates his interest in her as a container. He interpreted the presence and absence of Mary's labour pains theologically.

Bridal imagery constitutes Ephrem's primary use of the image of the bride. He is adept at applying sexual imagery to make a spiritual point. He employs sexual images in his bridal imagery to illustrate the intimacy between the Heavenly Bridegroom and the church as bride. After arousing anticipation in the betrothal stage of the relationship, he desexualises the events in the bridal chamber (the 'honeymoon'). Since the Bridegroom is virtually always the centre of attention, the images of the bride are rarely developed very much.

The images of the church as bride are the most common. Ephrem contrasts the church with the synagogue, Israel, or Zion especially in terms of the church's fertility and the synagogue's sterility. He also portrays faith and a bird as brides and prayer as a betrothed virgin.

In the examples considered, Ephrem's usage of ܐܬܬܐܘܪܐ ('*atta*'), in its restricted sense of 'wife', suggests that he tended to separate spirituality from sexuality. This tendency may have been influential in his avoiding the image of the wife. The possibility of a wife's engaging in sexual relations is at odds with Ephrem's preference for celibacy. The wife's sexual nature is obvious in contrasting Solomon's wives with the virgins betrothed to Jesus. When relating the antics at Julian's festival for the Goddess, he calls attention particularly to the sexual immorality of the wives. Except for the church, the word 'wife' seems to connote adultery or promiscuity.

Like the mothers and brides, some of Ephrem's daughter images are personifications of concepts and others are literary characters. The image of the church as daughter is simply another vehicle by which to contrast the church and the synagogue.

'Eve's daughter' and 'David's daughter' are common addresses for Mary. When Ephrem contrasts Mary with Eve, the issue is usually Eve's disobedience and consequently her infidelity versus Mary's obedience and sustained virginity. Despite Mary's virginity, Ephrem's acknowledgement that there were chaste daughters among

the Hebrews and virgin daughters of rulers implies that David's daughter was not alone in her purity. An advantage in the image of the virginal daughter is the absence of a husband or groom. Therefore the daughter has more potential for preserving her virginity. Ephrem depicts the Antiochene church as the King's daughter who was unwavering in her fidelity. She rejected Julian's advances and his faith so vigorously that she was tortured and dismembered.

Ephrem's portrayal of Asenath exemplifies his reticence to call a woman a wife, when he can call her a daughter instead. He uses Asenath's love for her husband as a model of the church's love for 'Joseph's son'. He focuses on Asenath as the daughter of Midianite priests to symbolise the Gentile church.

Ephrem displays particular interest in the nameless daughters of Lot and Jephthah. Lot's daughters pose a threat to the model of chastity expected of daughters. He uses them as warnings against drinking wine, and the likely consequence, loss of virginity. He excuses the daughters for tricking Lot into getting them pregnant because of their fear and youth in one stanza; but in another, he blames them and wine more than he does Lot, despite the circumstances. Therefore Ephrem expresses ambivalence towards Lot's daughters.

Twice Ephrem explicitly draws an analogy between the sacrifices of Jephthah's daughter and Jesus. He interprets Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter so that it foreshadows Jesus's death. He portrays the daughter as actively choosing death. Taking this interpretation to its logical conclusion leads to drawing an unfortunate analogy between Jephthah and God the Father as murderers of their offspring.

Ephrem uses 'sister' to relate two characters, like Sheol and fever or Martha and Mary. But he does not develop the image in any way. There are a number of images of females which do not fall into the familial categories of mother, bride, wife, daughter, and sister. Although literary characters, such as Anna, would have been someone's daughter, and had been a bride and a wife earlier in her life, Ephrem's

interest in her is as a celibate woman. She exemplifies the model of a woman who chose the Heavenly Bridegroom instead of a human husband.

Ephrem envisages the Samaritan woman in a marriage of convenience and continence. She created the façade of a marriage to avoid reproach, but remained celibate out of fidelity to a Lord she had not yet met. She is a model for humanity because, through their debate, Jesus led her to the conclusion that He was the Messiah.

Martha is extolled because she proclaimed Jesus as the Christ, and she had the faith to realise that Jesus could have healed her brother and the courage to speak her mind on the subject. Sarah recognised the type of Jesus's death in Isaac's near sacrifice. Ephrem credits Martha and Sarah with hospitably serving divine guests. Rahab and Mary Magdalene were prostitutes who gave up having many men for the sake of Jesus. Ephrem contrasts what they were and what they became to affirm them as models of chastity. He compared himself to the menstruating ('sinful') woman who crept up to touch the hem of Jesus's clothes. She provides an example of someone who overcame tremendous trepidation to reach Jesus.

He uses a dead woman to symbolise the Old Testament and an ill woman for the New Testament. He personifies victory, the year, and the letter *yud* as females. The personifications are females primarily because of the grammatical gender of the nouns. However the female image is substantiated by his referring to victory as a maiden, the year as the mistress of treasures, and *yud* as the queen of letters.

Although some of Ephrem's female role models were mothers, except for Ruth and Tamar, they are lauded for the non-maternal aspects of their lives. He affirmed them for a variety of reasons some of which are not supported by the biblical accounts. Sexual inactivity is almost a pre-requisite for approval.

11. 22 To Divine subjects

Ephrem characterises God the 'Father' and Jesus as Mothers quite freely. He portrays the 'Father', sometimes called Divinity or Parent, as a Mother holding Jesus in Her womb and breast-feeding Him. Ephrem's most vivid personification of God as a female and mother is his description of God as a wise and nurturing Wet-nurse to newborn (newly baptised) Christians.

Some of Ephrem's motherly imagery of Divinity may be derived from the grammatically feminine gender of the word Divinity (ܐܠܗܘܬܐ, 'alahuta). However he also depicts the Messiah who became incarnate as a male in the same way - as a Mother holding creation in Her womb, giving birth (spiritually), and breast-feeding all creation. Therefore it seems as if neither metaphorical gender ('Father') nor biological sex deterred Ephrem from applying motherly images to God the 'Father' and the Son.

Yet Ephrem is more circumspect in his portrayals of the so-called feminine principle of the Trinity as a Mother. Most of the images of the Holy Spirit are not gender specific either metaphorically or grammatically. The Spirit's uncertain gender is apparent in Ephrem's practice of coupling the Spirit with fire in phrases like 'fire and Spirit in the womb'.

The Spirit's role in the overshadowing of Mary is another prime example of indistinct images. It is invariably described in syntactically indeterminate arrangements, and the metaphorical imagery is usually sparse as well. Ephrem gives at least three possible ways that the Spirit could have overshadowed Mary and she could have conceived without sexual intercourse: the worm and a bird, probably the vulture, which were thought to reproduce asexually and Mary's conceiving through her ear or perhaps through her hearing. Each of these explanations of Mary's pregnancy presents indistinct metaphorical images of the Holy Spirit.

The notable exceptions which present maternal images of the Holy Spirit are *H. Epi.* 8. 15 and *H. Her.* 55. In *H. Epi.* 8. 15 the Holy Spirit is depicted as a Mother giving birth to different kinds of Christians, thereby indicating that the image

of the Spirit as Mother is powerful. However *H. Her. 55* is a rigorous polemic against the Holy Spirit as the Bardaisanian Mother of Life. The contrast in these passages suggests that the Mother image is not so problematic as the implication that the Mother and the Father produced Jesus from a sexual union. The Holy Spirit's purity must be above reproach. The title 'Mother' is too evocative of Atargatis and the Mother Spirit of Bardaisanian Christianity.

There are no images of the 'Father', Son, or the Holy Spirit as a bride or wife. Because the masculine aspect of the 'Father' and the Son were predominant, they were both seen as Bridegrooms, the former of Israel as bride, the latter of the church as bride. Portraying the Spirit as a bride could imply that She had sex with the Heavenly Bridegroom. The images of Jesus in the womb are sometimes androgynous because Ephrem may switch between using feminine constructions for Divinity and masculine ones for the male baby.

Similarly Ephrem does not apply the daughter image to any of the principles of the Trinity. Twice he overlooked the differences in sex to draw a direct analogy between the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter and Jesus's death. This is the only time Ephrem in any way implies that a daughter could symbolise Jesus.

Ephrem personifies the Holy Spirit as a female by portraying Her as a Shepherdess branding Her sheep (the baptised) and as a weaver weaving garments in the baptismal waters. He also personifies Divinity as a weaver weaving a body for 'Herself' in Mary's womb.

Besides feminine images, Ephrem signifies the Holy Spirit by a cloud and by oil and its power. The cloud (grammatically feminine) and oil and its power (both grammatically masculine) are some of the metaphorically neuter images. Since oil and its power are grammatically masculine, the masculine aspect of the Spirit is implied by analogy.

Occasionally Ephrem presents androgynous images of God by mixing grammatical and metaphorical genders. Androgynous imagery can be seen in

passages in which Ephrem treats the 'Father,' 'Jesus,' or the Holy Spirit grammatically as masculine while applying birthing imagery to Them. Since there are few metaphorical images of the Holy Spirit, androgynous images of the Spirit are generally those in which the Spirit is treated inconsistently grammatically - some feminine forms and some masculine.

11. 3 Celibacy's effect on Ephrem's imagery

11. 31 Ephrem's evaluation of humanity (i.e., both sexes together)

With respect to biblical role models, males are usually evaluated in terms of their obedience to God, and females in terms of their relations with the men in their lives.² Although the Bible is Ephrem's major source of inspiration, he judges both sexes in terms of their relationship with the Heavenly Bridegroom. A woman's relationship with her husband or son could not be a standard for evaluation when marriage was not an ideal to attain. Ephrem assesses male and female actions and character primarily on the basis of individual fidelity to God as exemplified in a life of celibacy. He personifies males as females but rarely females as males.

Ephrem almost always uses a woman as a type of the church and only once portrayed a female (Jephthah's daughter) as a Christ figure. The image of the church as a bride is so evocative for Ephrem that he interprets various biblical accounts to portray men as types of the Bridegroom and women as types of the church. This leads to the general conclusion that men typify Jesus, and women exemplify the church.

Since Jesus is both divine and human, using Him as the standard for comparison results in a tendency to discount being human in the face of Jesus's divinity while simultaneously exalting humans because of the Incarnation. Ephrem is so overwhelmed by the paradoxes inherent in Jesus's two natures that he concentrates on Jesus's divinity to the detriment of His humanity. Thus there are times when Jesus does not seem to be a fully human baby. The converse also occurs. Ephrem

occasionally characterises Jesus's humanity realistically, even mentioning that He perspired and His body got dusty. When Ephrem allows Jesus to be completely human, he is able to elevate other humans.

11. 32 His assessment of women

While the biblical tendency to view women solely with respect to their familial roles is limiting, Ephrem errs on the other side. There are two ways to look at his characterisations of women. On the one hand his spiritual outlook gave him a different vision of what it means to be a woman (or man). Thus he did not restrict women to their stereotypical roles. He could see beyond a woman's sexual capacity. Yet on the other hand, he was unable to accept the goodness of sexuality and so women (except for Jesus's foremothers and His mother) were not valued in their social roles as wives and mothers.³

How Ephrem's own celibacy affected his understanding of women is difficult to determine. Even though he could be sensitive to the needs of women, he expresses ambivalence towards mothers except for those with some significance to Jesus's birth or those who were exceptional in some way. Ephrem was unable to transfer his belief that Jesus's birth exalted all human births into affirming pregnancy and motherhood. He tolerated marriage to distinguish his church from encratic hatred of the body and sex. Just as Ephrem desexualises conjugal relations into a sexless marital relationship in his images of the church as the bride of Christ, so he transforms the sexual nature of human motherhood into a spiritual, lifeless kind of mothering.

Motherhood was not generally an acceptable option for women because of the Syriac church's preference for celibacy regardless of their marital status. This relegated motherhood to the realm of those who were too 'weak' to devote themselves to a life of chastity. The church's concern for chastity discounted motherhood. But celibacy would have been welcomed by some because it gave them control over their lives. Except for Mary's conception, pregnancy was an overt sign that the church had

not yet reached the state of perfection in which sexual distinctions would be abolished. Minimising pregnancy, and consequently motherhood, may have made the differences between the sexes seem less obvious. Celibacy may account for some of the unrealistic portrayals of women. Despite the lack of realism, many of Ephrem's female characters are inspiring.

11. 33 His images of the Holy Spirit

There is a discrepancy between Ephrem's acceptance of feminine and motherly imagery for a whole range of subjects (divine and human, both sexes) and his rejection of the title 'Mother' for the Holy Spirit. Calling the Spirit 'Mother' implied the possibility that God the Father and the Spirit Mother engaged in sexual relations. This thought was abhorrent because of the Syriac church's aversion to sexual relations. The primary effect celibacy had on the portrayal of the Holy Spirit was a decline in the image of the Spirit as Mother.

11. 4 Rejection of the title 'Mother' for the Holy Spirit

Various factors about which I am not knowledgeable may have had some bearing on Ephrem's rejection of the title 'Mother' for the Holy Spirit. However from this study, the conflict between the so-called orthodox and heretics seems to be the most plausible reason for Ephrem's refusal to address the Holy Spirit as 'Mother'. Although the title 'Mother' was acceptable, though infrequent, in the early history of the Syriac church, it was probably suppressed as a consequence of aligning his church with the Greek church. As early as 200 A. D., 'orthodoxy' was becoming defined in such a way that the feminine aspect of the Divine was rejected.⁴ By the fourth century 'heresies' of the Holy Spirit were beginning to develop,⁵ perhaps because the proto-orthodox were so pre-occupied with determining doctrines of the Father and the Son.

Ephrem's increasingly Greek oriented church was still not the most prevalent group despite his vigorous polemics. The continuing influence exercised by the followers of Marcion, Bardaisan, Mani, Arius, and others stimulated 'orthodox'

Christians to clarify their faith specifically with respect to the nature of Jesus's Divinity and the relation between the Father and the Son. Jesus's Divinity was emphasised by concentrating on His birth instead of on His baptism. Transferring attention from Jesus's baptism to His birth subtly reinforced the image of God as Jesus's Father. Whereas at Jesus's baptism the Holy Spirit had a visible role which was understood as feminine because the dove was regarded as a mother, the Holy Spirit's action in Jesus's birth was invisible and indescribable.

Ephrem overlooks the Spirit especially when discussing the Father and the Son relationship. It is as if the Spirit does not have a place in the 'family'. This must be because when he stresses the Parent-Child relationship, the most likely role for the Holy Spirit would be one which is problematic - the Mother. The image of the Mother was diminished as a consequence of ascetic attitudes to conjugal relations. Since the mother image is the most evocative female image, decline in the image of the Holy Spirit as Mother also ensured the eventual elimination of the feminine aspect of the Spirit. The image of God as Father increased while the image of the Holy Spirit as Mother gradually declined. 'Mother' was too reminiscent of the independent, powerful Syrian Goddess who was worshipped by the Bardaisanites and others.

11. 5 Language and imagery

Grammatical gender effects metaphorical gender when it serves Ephrem's purposes. Generally the former depends on the latter. However correlations between the grammatical gender of words and their referents may be arbitrary. Sometimes Ephrem mixes grammatical and metaphorical genders by pairing nouns of one grammatical gender with a character of the opposite metaphorical gender. At other times he matches the metaphorical gender of the character with a noun of the same grammatical gender.

Despite the difference in the grammatical gender of the word 'spirit' in Greek and Syriac, the defeminisation of the Holy Spirit in Ephrem's hymns resulted from

dogmatic reasons, some of which were current in the Greek church. But it is difficult to determine to what extent the prevalence of Greek elements within Christianity influenced the theological developments of the first four centuries.⁶ According to Brock, the fifth century is the transition period during which certain feminine words came to be treated grammatically as if they were masculine.⁷ However it appears that Ephrem, writing in the fourth century, may have been instrumental in initiating the metaphorical defeminisation of the Holy Spirit because of his refusal to call Her 'Mother'.

11. 6 Contribution to Syriac Studies

This study contributes to the understanding of what it means to claim that the Holy Spirit was regarded as feminine in early Syriac literature by concentrating on Ephrem's imagery of the Holy Spirit. Both grammatical and metaphorical usages have been considered as indicators of the gender of the Holy Spirit. This classification has demonstrated that, depending on the writer's purpose, grammatical gender may be used to support ideological arguments, and conversely, that metaphorical gender may influence grammar to the point of actually changing it.

Ephrem's use of motherly imagery for the Holy Spirit has been distinguished from his use of the title 'Mother'. This distinction revealed that he applied motherly characteristics to the Holy Spirit, although he rejected the appellation 'Mother'. His feminine images of the Holy Spirit, of the 'Father', and of the 'Son' have been analysed in the context of his portrayals of women, and of a comparison of his characteristics of both sexes within certain passages. The sexual nature of some of Ephrem's images has been recognised.

Further contributions are the translations of *H. Her. 55* and *Sermons of our Lord 53*. Usually just a few provocative citations are given from *H. Her. 55* during the course of investigating a broader subject such as Bardaisan's cosmology. However the whole hymn has been translated and analysed in detail. Analysis of *H.*

Her. 55 revealed Ephrem's thoroughness as a polemicist. He ridiculed and refuted each of the Bardaisanian doctrines mentioned. Ephrem's hostility to the Holy Spirit as Jesus's Mother and the Father's sexual partner is explicit.

Sermons of our Lord 53 will be totally unfamiliar to most readers because not even excerpts of it are given elsewhere. This hymn is of particular interest with respect to women's ministry. It traces priestly and prophetic authority from God through the Aaronic line to Jesus and on to Mary. The images of Mary as priest and prophet are not typical of Ephrem. However Ephrem does not allow Mary's being a woman to deter him from following his train of thought to its logical conclusion: that Simeon gave Mary the gifts of priesthood and prophecy.

11. 7 Further research areas

Research in the following might increase our understanding of Ephrem's worldview and the elements which encouraged the eclipse of the Divine Feminine.

11. 71 Arising from this study

When both the Greek and Syriac are preserved, a comparison may answer questions such as: does the Greek text consistently use masculine or neuter forms where the Syriac has feminine? Has the Syriac text been changed to the masculine gender where the feminine would be expected? Since much of the Greek material attributed to Ephrem is spurious, the comparison will necessitate determining the authenticity of the documents before conclusions can be reached.

A thorough analysis of Ephrem's characterisation of women and men, particularly in their roles as parents, might show whether he applies one standard to men and another to women. Both sexes gave up their roles as parents when they became celibates. For men this could mean a significant loss of power. Ephrem depicted Joseph as a tender father figure. He may have been aware that some men would miss being fathers. An in depth study of the image of God as Father and the Father-Son relationship might be informative of family life in the fourth century.

The role of the Holy Spirit in salvation itself was gradually undermined, in part because of the focus on Christ caused by the christological conflicts.⁸ Although the Bible associated the Spirit with wisdom and enlightenment, these qualities were accorded to the Logos in the New Testament and later writings. Was the development of the image of the Holy Spirit as Mother sacrificed as a consequence of the early church's concentration on the human (male) Messiah?

Other issues to be considered are how the practice of including married persons in the church affected feminine images of the Holy Spirit, and whether a decrease in the use of the Mother-Spirit image corresponded to an increase in the adoration of Mary.

Are the masculine images of God and the switch in the Spirit's metaphorical gender subconscious projections of the male ego onto God? This would require a sound knowledge of psychology. The potential for misinterpreting the psychological reasons for the behaviour and attitudes of someone in antiquity and of a rather different culture from the twentieth-century West should not be underestimated.⁹

11. 72 Pertaining to Ephrem's literature in general

How selective are Ephrem's interpretations of the biblical accounts? For example, he overlooks Jonah's disobedience (*H. Virg.* 42) and the circumstances under which Jesus spoke to Martha about her hospitality (*H. Virg.* 26). Images in the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* would be informative of Ephrem's attitudes to women because he comments on so many passages concerning biblical women.

Why is 'church' (ܩܕܝܫܐ, 'edta) treated inconsistently grammatically? How widespread is the practice of associating masculine forms with 'church'? Did using masculine forms delay the development of the image of the church as Mother?

Since most of the ancient near eastern deities were symbolised by, or associated with, certain animals or plants, an analysis of how Ephrem describes

specific creatures and vegetation might provide further insight into Ephrem's religious heritage.

11. 8 Summary

The worship of the Goddess Atargatis and the power struggles between religious strands which were later considered orthodox or heretical, and, to a lesser degree, Syriac Christianity's interest in celibacy influenced Ephrem's portrayal of the Holy Spirit as Mother. Ultimately the image of the Spirit as a Mother was based on the ancient near eastern Divine Triad which consisted of a Mother Goddess in whom most of the power resided, a Father God who was primarily Her consort, and a virile young Son.¹⁰ Ephrem readily gave the attributes of other Gods to the Father or to the Son. But he never accorded to the Holy Spirit the range of powers which Atargatis or other Goddesses exercised. Feminine, especially motherly, imagery of the Holy Spirit was acceptable to Ephrem; but the title 'Mother' was not. Since he applies motherly imagery to a diverse range of divine and human subjects of both sexes, his refusal to call the Holy Spirit 'Mother' is remarkable. Ephrem probably wanted to eradicate any possible syncretism between Atargatis and the Holy Spirit because Atargatis was an independent Goddess. Confusion between the two would make the Holy Spirit too independent of the Father and the Son. Ephrem's attitudes to women demonstrate that misogyny did not cause him to reject the title 'Mother' for the Holy Spirit.

11. 9 Footnotes

¹ The lists of mothers, brides, daughters, wives, sisters, and other females are incomplete because the analysis of the images of the Holy Spirit took priority over examining all of Ephrem's images of females. He includes many nameless women, like the widow of Zarephath or the Shunamite, and groups of women such as the women of Bethlehem and the chaste Hebrew daughters.

² Fuchs, p. 119.

³ As in the Bible, sisters are rarely mentioned. Martha and Mary and Lot's daughters (always called daughters, never sisters) are about the only sisters Ephrem discusses. Daughters fare a bit better because 'daughter' can be a general term for a female of a certain household, nation, faith, or of the human race. Ephrem appreciates daughters, especially Jephthah's, Jethro's (Zipporah), and Eve's and David's (Mary).

⁴ Pagels, p. 68.

⁵ According to Athanasius, writing c. 358 A. D., J. Stevenson, *Creeds, Councils and Controversies*, revised by W. H. C. Frend (London: SPCK, 1989), p. 79.

⁶ Barr, p. 10, n. 1.

⁷ Brock, 'The Holy Spirit as Feminine', p. 77.

⁸ Gelpi, pp. 4-5. Petro B. T. Bilaniuk, *Theology and Economy of the Holy Spirit: An Eastern Approach* (Bangalore, India: Dharmaram Publications, 1980), pp. 1-2.

⁹ See Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Theory and Practice in Late Ancient Asceticism: Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5, No. 2 (Fall, 1989), pp. 26-9, in which Clark describes the problems inherent in this type of study with reference to Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine. There would be similar reasons for caution in researching the topic suggested here.

¹⁰ Brock, *Syria Baptismal Tradition*, p. 4. Widengren, p. 49.

Epilogue

Although differences in the grammatical gender of the word 'spirit' in Greek and Syriac may have had some bearing on the defeminisation of the Holy Spirit, it is more likely that the change came about for dogmatic reasons. The continued popularity of the Mother Goddess and Ephrem's interest in aligning his branch of the Syriac-speaking church with the Greek-speaking part were probably factors in his rejection of the title 'Mother' for the Holy Spirit.

From my survey of Ephrem's characterisations of females, it seems that Ephrem did not fully appreciate human sexuality. But his treatment of females and males in similar situations indicates that he freely regarded both sexes as role models - as long as they were celibate. However he tends to use males to typify the Divine Bridegroom and females for the church-bride. When taken to extremes, two unfortunate consequences can occur. Men can be deified and become separated from the rest of the church. As the distance between 'Christ-like' men and 'church-like' women increases, women's abilities to image God are dismissed and they are marginalised. In either case, sexist typology can be damaging because it can lead to distorted images of the Divine, the church, women, and men. Despite Ephrem's ambivalence to sexuality and his potentially harmful typology of women as the church-bride and men as the Bridegroom, he appears to have been able to handle his relations with women to benefit himself, them, and his church.

Regardless of the motherly images Ephrem used for the Holy Spirit, his refusal to use the title 'Mother' for Her paved the way for the Spirit's defeminisation by his successors. 'Mother', as an appellation for the Holy Spirit, seems to have suggested sexual relations. Ephrem could not tolerate the implication that the Mother and the Father might have engaged in sex or that Jesus was produced from Their sexual union.

In twentieth-century Great Britain, an inability (or unwillingness) to distinguish between a God who has both feminine and masculine aspects and a deity

who is solely feminine (i.e., the Mother Goddess) leads to rejection of the title 'Mother' for God. This is demonstrated by the notable scholar C. S. Lewis:

To say that it [God's gender] does not matter is to say either that all the masculine imagery is not inspired, is merely human in origin, or else that, though inspired, it is quite arbitrary and unessential. And this is surely intolerable: or, if tolerable, it is an argument . . . against Christianity. It is surely based on a shallow view of imagery. . . . a child who has been taught to pray to a Mother in Heaven would have a religious life radically different from that of a Christian child.¹

Lewis equates praying to God the Mother with not being Christian. He has conveniently overlooked the inspiration of the feminine imagery of God in the Bible, early church fathers like Clement of Alexandria, and mystics such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Julian of Norwich. Hooper's publishing a book in 1971 with articles Lewis wrote in the previous twenty-five years demonstrates Hooper's esteem for Lewis. In the preface he asserts the timeliness of Lewis's writings:

Considering how rapidly theological fashions change, it might be expected that these pieces would already be old stuff. There are, however, I expect, others like myself who are more concerned with whether a book is *true* than whether it was written last week. I believe that Lewis' refusal to compromise, neck or nothing, Heaven or Hell, does not for one moment detract from their relevance to the basic problems which still assail us.²

Whereas Lewis disclosed simple ignorance of feminine imagery for God in the Bible and Christian tradition and ridiculed the idea, Hooper manifests increasing hostility to the Motherhood of God in several ways. Although Lewis gave the article the innocuous title 'Notes on the Way' in 1948, when collecting essays for a book in 1971, Hooper gave the piece a provocative (and prejudicial) title 'Priestesses in the Church?'. The fact that Hooper even included the essay in a book published in 1971 suggests his, and perhaps others', discomfort with the topic.

When Jesus became incarnate and was born through Mary, he elevated humanity. While Ephrem acknowledged this several times, he more often regards the Incarnation as divinity lowering itself to the level of humanity. For the sake of wholeness in the churches, and therefore in society, there is a need to balance

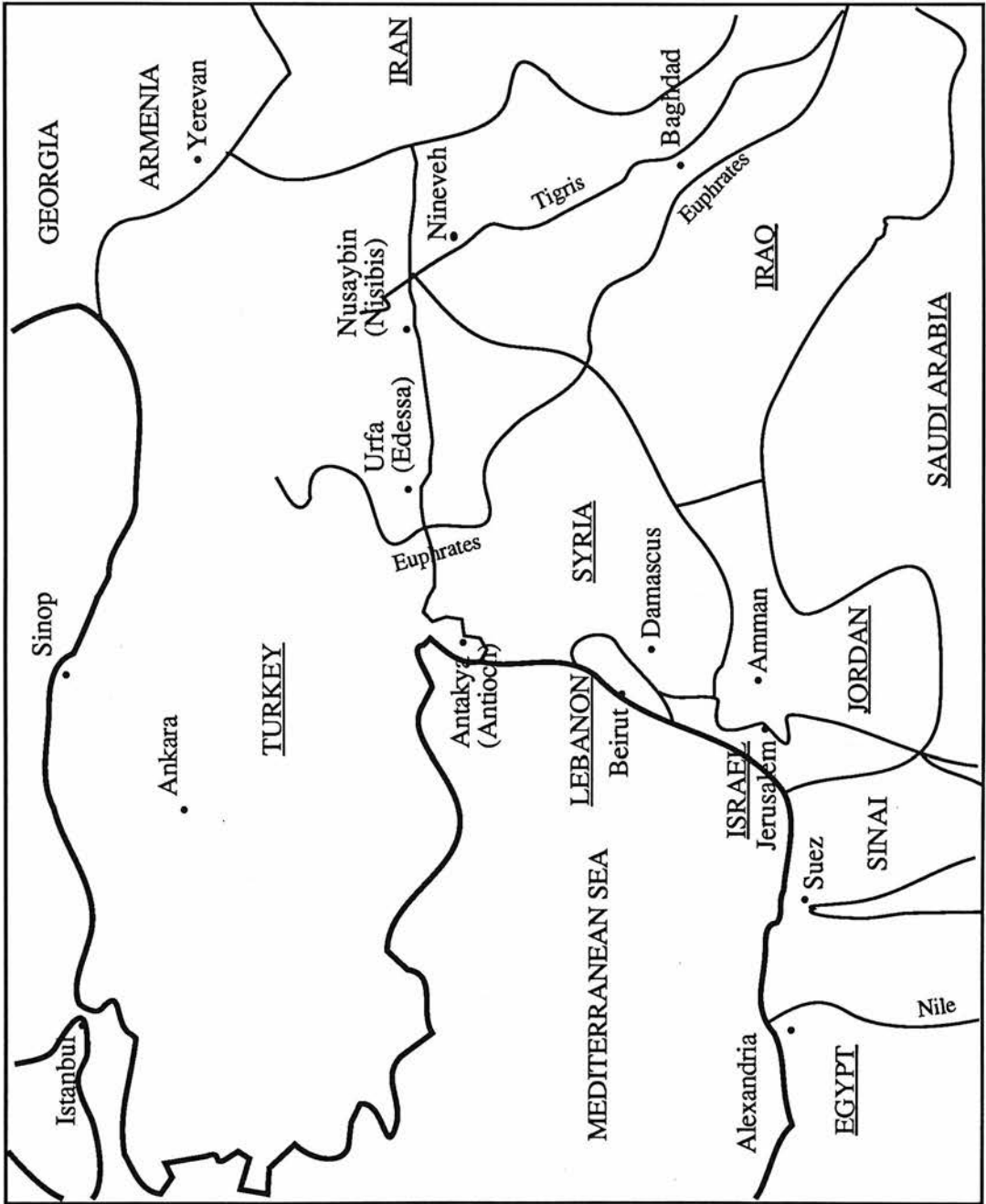
humanity's elevation with Jesus's Incarnation and to re-claim the fulness and the strength of the Divine Feminine which have been suppressed.

Footnotes

¹ C. S. Lewis, 'Priestesses in the Church?' in *Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1971), p. 194. First published as 'Notes on the Way' in *Time and Tide*, 29 (14th August, 1948), pp. 830-1.

² Hooper, *Undeceptions*, p. vii.

Appendix A: Middle East



Note: modern-day boundaries are shown. Adapted from *The Concise Oxford Atlas*, ed. D. P. Bickmore, reprint (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 60-1.

Appendix B: Reasons for Ridiculing the Greek pantheon

	Aristides		Tatian	
	<u>sexual</u>	<u>non-sexual</u>	<u>sexual</u>	<u>non-sexual</u>
<u>Goddesses</u>				
Aphrodite	1	2	1	0
Artemis	0	3	0	1
Athena			1	1
Demeter			0	1
Kore	0	1		
Rhea-Cybele	2	1	1	1
Leto			0	1
Phaethon's sisters*			0	1
<hr/>				
Total	3	7	3	6
 <u>Gods</u>				
Aidoneus			1	0
Antinous			0	1
Apollo	1	2	0	2
Ares	2	5	0	1
Asclepius	0	3	0	1
Kronos	2	4	0	1
Dionysius	1	3	0	1
Hephaestus	0	2		
Herakles	0	6		
Hermes	0	6		
Poseidon			0	1
Tammuz	1	2		
Twins (Castor & Polydeuces)*			1	0
Zeus	6	0	3	0
<hr/>				
Total	13	33	5	8

*= counted as 1

Appendix C: Images of the Divine Feminine in pre-Ephremic Literature

1. The Holy Spirit as Mother
 - a. Without the Father
 - Ode of Solomon 28. 1-2
 - Epiclesis ¶50, *Acts of Thomas*
 - Gospel of Philip* ¶30
 - Gospel of the Hebrews* ¶3
 - Macarian Homilies 27 and 30. 2
 - b. With the Father
 - Bardaisan in Ephrem's *H. Her.* 55
 - Gospel of Thomas* ¶101
 - Hymn of the Pearl
 - Epiclesis ¶142, *Acts of Thomas*
 - Gospel of Philip* ¶3
 - Aphrahat Dem. 18. 10
 - Gaius Marius Victorinus ¶1. 58
 - Macarian Homilies 28. 4 and 54. 4
2. The Mother and the Holy Spirit as separate characters
 - a. Mother with a distinct Father
 - Ps. of Herecleides
 - Ps. to Jesus 269
 - Philo of Alexandria on Gen. 2: 24
 - b. One bisexual Deity
 - Ode of Solomon 19
 - Zervan in Mani's writings
 - Clement of Alexandria ¶1. 6
 - Secret Book According to John* ¶2. 13-15; 5. 5-6
3. The Holy Spirit as Female, not Mother
 - Ode of Solomon 19
 - Gospel of Philip* ¶14
4. The Holy Spirit as Masculine
 - Mani's twin
 - Augustine

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