

# Body and Soul in Ephrem the Syrian<sup>1)</sup>

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## Prologue

A good example of the perennial attempt of humans to find the origin and component of its nature can be found in the long history of soul and body, death and eternal life. Where do we come from? Of what is humankind comprised? What is our final destination? What would happen to body and soul after death? How do souls meet their partners in resurrection? We encounter all these questions not only in the Jewish tradition and Greek philosophers of Plato and Aristotle, and the Middle Platonists, but also in lengthy arguments of the Christian tradition.<sup>2)</sup> In Christian history, these issues have been expressed through cults of martyrs, veneration, saints, pilgrimages, relics, diverse hagiographies, and liturgies.<sup>3)</sup> Also we can easily see the recent

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1) A draft of this paper was read at the NAPS (Northern American Patristic Society), Chicago, IL, May 2002. I appreciate Dr. Kathleen McVey at Princeton Theological Seminary for her careful reading and comment.

2) Jan N., Bremmer, *The early Greek concept of the soul*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1983; Aristotle, *De Anima* (On the Soul), trans. by Hugh Lawson, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986; Simcha Paull Raphael, *Jewish views of the afterlife*, Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson, c1994; C. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, New York: Columbia University Press, c1995; B. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: a Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*, Cambridge [England], New York : Cambridge University Press, 1991.

3) Peter Brown, *The cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c1981.

profound interest in this subject from various perspectives.<sup>4)</sup>

Syrian Christianity is not an exception. Theologians from Tatian (120-173) to Ephrem (306-73), for instance, left several traces from which we can conjecture what they had the issue of body and soul on their minds. A certain tendency has prevailed in these discussions. The extent to which we can find similarity or consistency in their diverse arguments of body and soul, and death and resurrection, however, is still debatable. For example, F. Gavin in his short article written almost a century ago suggested a deep underlying consistency in the body and soul issue among all Syrian theologians and even several later Byzantine theologians.<sup>5)</sup> Nevertheless, a careful comparative study of the texts leads us to argue that there has been a wide variety of contrasting views among themselves. When we examine Syrian Christianity of the fourth century, our perplexity increases since there is little writing which deals primarily with the body and soul issue. This lack of sources is in contrast to the Cappadocian Fathers around that same period as seen, for instance, in *On the Soul and the Resurrection* by Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>6)</sup>

Ephrem, one of the greatest poets and theologians in early Syrian Christianity, is a remarkable figure who embodies a certain understanding of this issue in the early phase of Syrian Christianity.<sup>7)</sup> In his dramatic depiction, the eighth of the *Hymns*

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4) For example, the International Medieval Congress held in 2000 at Leeds, England, took this subject for its main topic.

5) F. Gavin, *The Sleep of the Soul in the Early Syriac Church*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 40 (1920): 103-20.

6) Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* (A select library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (NPNF), eds. by P. Schaff and H. Ware, Buffalo and New York, 1886-1900, vol. 5, 387-427); Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, trans. by Catharine P. Roth, Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993; Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina* (FOTC 58, 174-77).

7) For a short biography, see K. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian, Selected Prose Works*, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, c1994,

on *Paradise* illustrates how Ephrem first become involved in this issue. His puzzling but interesting speculation begins from his meditation on Luke 23:39-43, Jesus' Compassion to the Good Thief on the Cross.<sup>8)</sup> Jesus' compassion on the thief, This day you will be with me in Paradise (Lk. 23: 43), fills Ephrem with great joy. Ephrem believes the thief would be in Paradise immediately following his death. A quandary, however, causes Ephrem to stop briefly to ask himself how it is possible since the soul cannot have any perception without its mate, the body.

I imagined that he was already there, but then I considered  
 How the soul cannot have perception of Paradise  
 Without its mate, the body, its instrument and lyre,  
 In this place of joys anguish seized me  
 As I realized that it is not profitable to delve into hidden things  
 With respect to the Thief a dilemma beset me:  
 If the soul were able to see and to hear  
 Without its body, why then is it confined therein?  
 And if the body is no longer alive, why should the soul put to  
 death with it?<sup>9)</sup>

To enter Paradise, the soul needs its instrument and lyre which refers to the body. Here Ephrem discloses the tension and even conflict arising within himself about the fate of the soul and body after death. Ephrem was immediately seized by great anguish and

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8) Ephrem's commentaries on the Gospel provide a good source to examine his view of this subject. We can glean further examples from the book of Valavanolickal: The Last Judgment (Mt 25:35-46), The Rich Pool (Lk 12:16-21), and The Richman and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). Kuriakose A. Valavanolickal, *The Use of the Gospel Parables in the Writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem*, Frankfurt am Main; New York: P. Lang, c1996, 218-234, 254-258, and 288-305.

9) Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, (S. Brock, trans. SVSP, 1998), Des hl. Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnen de Paradso et Contra Iulianum, ed. by E. Beck, CSCO 174-75, Scr. Syr. 78-79. Louvain, 1957, VIII.2, 3.

a dilemma because he was not permitted to ponder hidden things such as the fate of the dead.

As we see above from a dramatic portrait of Jesus' compassion on the thief, Ephrem's poetic and symbolic character is the central literary code in understanding the issue of body and soul.<sup>10)</sup> As E. Beck labels Ephrem the most prominent poet and theologian in Syrian Christianity, it is not easy to understand fully Ephrem's view of body and soul without the proper recognition of symbol and poetic implication. Through his analysis of the terms *raza* and *tupsa*, *salma*, and *dmuta* in his Symbolism and Mystery in Aphrahat and Ephrem, Beck proves that symbolism penetrates all major topics.<sup>11)</sup> It is in Ephrem's poetic narratives and symbolic portraits that his creativity emerges best. Ephrem's interest in the body and soul, death and resurrection, appears to be spread over several writings such as the Hymns on Paradise, *Carmina Nisibena*, Letter to Publius, and S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan, and so forth.<sup>12)</sup> Even if his

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- 10) Robert Murray, *The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology*, *Parole de l'orient*, Vol. 6/7 (1975-6): 1-28; E. Beck, *Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphraat und Ephram*, *Oriens christianus*, Vol. 42 (1958): 19-40.
- 11) T. Bou Mansour, *La pense symbolique de Saint Ephrem Le Syrien*, *slik, Liban : Bibliothque de l'Universit Saint-Esprit, Kaslik-Liban*, 1988, 121-151. Bou Mansour explains how this symbolism is expanded in relation to other major cosmological topics. Here, symbolism is not just about God, creation, and world, but also it is closely related to other church traditions such as the Eucharist, myron, and baptism. Bou Mansour's interpretation of the symbol itself and the process of symbolizing is very picturesque in understanding the mysterious and symbolic hermeneutic of Ephrem.
- 12) Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, (S. Brock, trans. SVSP, 1998), *Des hl. Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnen de Paradso et Contra Iulianum*, ed. E. Beck, CSCO 174-75, Scr. Syr. 78-79. Louvain, 1957; *Des hl. Ephraem des Syrsers Carmina Nisibena*, ed. E. Beck, CSCO 218-19, Scr. Syr. 92-93. Louvain, 1961; II. CSCO, 240-41, Scr. Syr. 102-3, Louvain, 1963; *Les chants de Nisibe*, eds. by Paul Ehégali and Claude Navarre, Paris : Cariscript, c1989; *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan*, ed. by C.W. Mitchell, vol. I. London, 1912.

arguments on the body and soul may seem fairly inconsistent at first glance, I argue that Ephrem held concrete and consistent logic on this issue.

Taking into account scanty research on the body and soul in Ephrem, I examine the views of early Syrian theologians such as Tatian and Aphrahat. Then, I intend to explore the issue of body and soul within Ephrem's writings while raising relevant questions which could be brought from the broader studies of body and soul issues. Ephrem's speculation on this issue unveils other interesting points to be undertaken further. How does Ephrem describe the body and soul and its relationship? What would happen to the body and soul after death? How are the body, the soul, and the Holy Spirit related to each other? Are we to go to Paradise or Gehenna in death?

### Tatian (120-173)

Because Tatian eventually affected Aphrahat and Ephrem through the Diatessaron, we begin the survey of the issue of body and soul with Tatian in early Syrian Christianity.<sup>13)</sup> Even if he did not develop a concrete theory about this subject, the initial stage of his idea appears in the *Oratio ad Graecos*.<sup>14)</sup> There are three sections in the *Oratio ad Graecos* which address soul and body, and death and resurrection: (1) c.6 deals with the

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13) Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatessaron. *Commentaire de l'Evangile Concordant ou Diatessaron: Traduit du syriaque et de l'arménien*, ed. and trans. by L. Leloir, Sources Chrétiennes 121. Paris: Cerf, 1966; Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron: An English Translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709 [Commentaire de l'Evangile concordant], Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993.

14) Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos and Fragments*, Molley Whittaker, ed. and trans. Oxford Early Christian Texts. Oxford, 1982. For this paper, I refer to the English translation of M. Whittaker.

resurrection of body and soul at the Last Judgment as against Stoic doctrine; (2) c.12 and 13 discuss two kinds of spirit, the divine spirit and the material spirit; (3) c. 29 and 30 cover his own conversion history and obscure account of humans's regaining the lost divine spirit and immortality with it.<sup>15)</sup>

Tatian holds a view of a tripartite division in mankind which is comprised of the soul (), the body (), and the spirit (). This tripartite division, especially the inclusion of the spirit, suggests a good comparison to certain Greek philosophers such as Plato and later Neo-Platonists who divided human nature into a three-fold division of soul, mind, and body. Below, we will examine further similarity.

As for the relationship among the three components, Tatian puts an emphasis on the closeness of body and soul, and the predominant role of the spirit. For Tatian, first, the soul is the bond of the flesh, and the flesh is the dwelling place of the soul.<sup>16)</sup> They are so closely united that the soul sees by means of the physical eyes of the body and it cannot see without the body, nor can the body rise without the soul. In Tatian's overall argument, the spirit takes the central place. For the predominance of the spirit, Tatian even asserts, while comparing the soul to the spirit, that for the soul () did not preserve the spirit (), but was preserved by it. . . .for the spirit's home is above, but the soul's birth is below.<sup>17)</sup>

About the fate of body and soul after death, Tatian proposes a very interesting theory which emerges many times. Tatian gives his idea:

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15) Tatian, c.6, 12-13, and 29-30.

16) See, his commentary in the Diatessaron on 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19, 2 Cor 6:16, Eph 2:22. Diatessaron, The earliest life of Christ ever compiled from the four Gospels, being the Diatessaron of Tatian (circ. A.D.160) Literally translated from the Arabic version and containing the four Gospels woven into one story, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1910.

17) Tatian, c.13.1, 2.

The soul, men of Greece, is not in itself immortal but mortal; yet it also has the power to escape death. For it is ignorant of the truth it dies and is dissolved with the body, but rises later at the end of the world along with the body, to suffer death by immortal punishment; On the other hand, it does not die, even if it is dissolved for a time, if it has obtained knowledge of God.<sup>18)</sup>

In his short argument, two points in this description are important to note, namely, dissolution of body and soul in the state of death and death in immortal punishment. Regardless of their good or evil death, according to Tatian, the body and soul must be dissolved when they face death. However, this dissolution does not mean necessarily the entire death of the soul. At the same time, Tatian asserts that the body and soul must abide together in the grave since they are so closely united and complementary. At the last resurrection, the spirit comes back to raise the bodies of the righteous up while the wicked are condemned to death in immortal punishment ( ). Whereas the righteous will rise up with the body and soul reunited, the wicked must face eternal death.<sup>19)</sup>

### Aphrahat (d. 338)

Aphrahat, another representative of Syrian Christianity, is a fine example for showing the development of the body and soul issue.

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18) Tatian, c.13.1.

19) We will see a certain similarity between Tatian and Ephrem in the tripartite composition of humankind and in the body and soul relationship. The question, however, still remains unanswered about how visibly Tatian's theory is linked to that of Ephrem. With the influence of the Diatessaron, more concrete lineage of influence into Ephrem in the body and soul issue remains still less defined.

The main idea of Aphrahat on this subject can be seen in *On the Resurrection of the Dead and Death and the Last Things* in his *Demonstration*.<sup>20)</sup> Just like Tatian, Aphrahat holds a view of a tripartite division of humanity: the body, the soul, and the Spirit as a particle of the Godhead.

Aphrahat's articulation of the concept of soul begins with the Scriptural passage of Genesis 2:7, which states that men become a living soul. Humans are endowed with the soul from birth. As F. Gavin aptly argued, we should examine the various meaning of the term soul in the Syrian language. Does it mean simply the soul (ܐܢܝܡܐ) which is equivalent to the mind (ܡܝܢܐ) as in Origen and some other Greek philosophers, or something else? Gavin argues that the term of the soul must be scrutinized by looking at several different usages of the term in Aphrahat's writings in terms of the principle of natural life, psyche (ܢܦܫܐ), the spirit (ܪܘܚܐ), and the text itself and translation in Syrian language of I Cor. 15:44.<sup>21)</sup>

In this tripartite division of humankind, the role of the spirit becomes immensely important. Just like Tatian and even Ephrem later, the spirit is central in linking the body to the soul and leading them to the Godhead. What is more remarkable here, however, is Aphrahat's strong focus on the relationship of the spirit and baptism. Until baptism, the spirit is absent. Only baptism brings the spirit into the body. Simultaneously, the spirit makes baptism a true baptism and the spirit makes a human being fully human.

The spirit, which is central in human nature, is absent from all born of the body until they come to the regeneration of baptism. For they are endowed with the *soulish* spirit (from the first birth) which (spirit) is created in man and is immortal, as it is written,

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20) Aphrahat, *On the Resurrection of the Dead, the Demonstration VIII.17-20* (NPNF 13) and *Death and the Last Things, the Demonstration XXII* (NPNF 13).

21) F. Gavin, 103.



Man becomes a living soul.<sup>22)</sup>

What would happen to the body and soul in death or after death? First of all, the spirit, which was added through baptism, would go back to Heaven, its original habitat. Going back to its own nature, the heavenly spirit returns to the presence of God and Christ. This seems to be based on I Cor 15:44 and II Cor 5:6-7. II Cor 5:6 states that When we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord.<sup>23)</sup> As for the body and soul in death, Gavin argues, Aphrahat clearly says that the body is buried *soulishly* or psychically. With death, the soul is buried with the body and the power of sensation is taken from it. The soul does not depart from the body. Like Tatian, Aphrahat argues that they are buried together. However, Aphrahat continues to discuss the lack of sensation. He argues that humans cannot tell good from evil in this sleep, since the soul is buried in its own nature, and is deprived of sensation.<sup>24)</sup> Even if we cannot find any active intervention of the sleeping soul in the human world, nevertheless, the lack of sensation does not mean the absolute emptiness of consciousness during the sleep. Aphrahat talks about two different groups defined by the state of their conscience. First, the good rest with a good conscience and sleep well, waking alert and refreshed at the resurrection. The good are expecting their future of salvation even in their sleeping. To the contrary, the evil are restive and unquiet, for they are uneasy with the sense of foreboding and impending doom. To a certain degree, then, the soul remains active in the period of death.

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22) See, Aphrahat's commentary on Gen. 2:7. Recitation from Garvin's article, 103.

23) It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (I Cor15:44) and Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight (II Cor5:7). (Quotation from the NIV translation)

24) Aphrahat, Demonstration VIII.

Aphrahat uses the parable of the two servants (Mt 24:45-51) and the ten virgins (Mt 25:1-13) who are waiting for praise and punishment.<sup>25)</sup> In his commentary on those parables, Aphrahat calls the period of death sleep which will be intensified more in Ephrem.<sup>26)</sup> Given that he does not further develop this issue, I argue that it would be better to name this sleep the sleep of the soul. Where do they sleep? Is it in the boundary of Paradise as seen in Ephrem or in Sheol? In Aphrahat, this question does not seem too difficult to answer. The soul would remain with the body in the grave as seen in Tatian.<sup>27)</sup>

## Body and Soul in Ephrem the Syrian Tripartite Division of the Humanity

Just as we noticed in the writings of Tatian and Aphrahat, the tripartite division of human nature can be also observed clearly in the regenerate man of Ephrem. Ephrem identifies the body, the soul, and the Holy Spirit. The forty-seventh of the *Carmina Nisibena* is a good example of this theory. Here, Ephrem portrays how much the soul love its dwelling place, the body. When the soul gets on well with the body, the soul expels the evil, indwelling demon, and finally invites the Holy Sprit to dwell with both.<sup>28)</sup> In this context, the soul appears much more active as it loves and draws the body, and expels the demon by inducing the

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25) See *On the Resurrection of the Dead in Demonstration VIII* and *On Death and the Latter Times in Demonstration XXII*.

26) Also see the book by K.Valavanolickal, *The Faithful and the Wicked Servants (Mt 24:45-51) and The Ten Virgins (Mt 25:1-13)*, K. Valavanolickal, *The Use of the Gospel Parables in the Writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem*, 172-6.

27) For further comparisons and studies, we need to explicate the following biblical references: Is 38.18, Ps 6.6, 103.33, 145.4, Ecc 9.10.

28) *Carmina Nisibena XLVII*, CSCO 103, 48-51.

Holy Spirit. Even if it is true that Ephrem does not delineate in this section any concrete theory of the body and soul relationship, nevertheless, he proceeds far deeper into the general description of this issue than Tatian and Aphrahat do.

Despite Ephrem's similarities with his predecessors concerning the trichotomy of humanity, he articulates his argument in rather different ways. Unlike Aphrahat who connects the spirit to baptism, Ephrem traces the root of the concept of the spirit back to Genesis 1:27 which states that God fashioned him with His hands and He breathed a soul into him<sup>29</sup>) It is also remarkable to note how extensively Ephrem raises various issues relating to the soul and body in the background of his Genesis commentary.<sup>30</sup>) In Gen. 1:27, the lyre was silent and inactive until God breathed into it the spirit (*ruah*). Here the role of the spirit is greatly emphasized.<sup>31</sup>)

In Ephrem's explication of Gen 1:27, three things seem pertinent to our argument. (1) The pivotal role of the Holy Spirit, (2) the completeness of humanity through the union of body and soul, and (3) the hierarchy as a sort of lineage among the body, the soul, the Holy Spirit, and the Godhead. As we indicated briefly earlier, the Holy Spirit takes a central place in many Syrian theologians. Ephrem appropriates the term of the Holy Spirit very carefully and broadly. It is important to note the way in which Ephrem explicates the word *ruah* in Gen 1:26. Does it just mean the soul

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29) Ephrem, St. Ephrem the Syrian, The Commentary on Genesis, vol. 91, 94. For further discussion, see, Sebastian Brock, St. Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns of Paradise, 200. Tryggve Kronholm, Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the genuine hymns of Ephrem the Syrian with particular reference to the influence of Jewish exegetical tradition, Lund: LiberLromedel/Gleerup, 1978, 45-84.

30) See, the index in the Commentary on Genesis, FC vol. 91, 361, and 183-4.

31) Hymns on Paradise continues to explicate this point. Only at that point (*ruah*), the strings receive sound and the soul acquire speech by means of the body, Hymns on Paradise VIII.8.

or does it include a very broad meaning of the Holy Spirit? In this sense, the exact meaning of the ruah and its various uses in Ephrem's corpus are as important as the meaning of the soul in Aphrahat.<sup>32)</sup>

In his commentary on Gen. 1:26, Ephrem underlines the union of the body and soul while explaining the reason why Adam and Eve could not enter Paradise from the outset. The eighth of the *Hymns on Paradise* offers to us a very poetic narration of this issue. When God made Adam and Eve, they could not enter Paradise immediately since they are deficient because they lack the soul. Even the soul could not enter Paradise of itself and for itself. Only with the body and soul together, which represents purity and perfection, Adam and Eve entered that perfect place. Only when Adam was complete in everything, the Lord takes Adam and places him in Paradise. The perfection of Paradise, which is symbolized in the union of body and soul, can be demonstrated by other expressions of Ephrem. For instance, as the body and soul finally reunite at the last resurrection, the union of body and soul before they enter Eden can be compared to God's blessing and perfection.

God does not have to bless Adam in Paradise since Paradise and everything in that place are blessed. God blessed Adam on the earth first so that all the curses of the earth might be reduced and diminished through this Divine blessing.<sup>33)</sup> Such union of the body and soul is extended to the complete union of Eve and Adam. In illustrating how Eve was in Adam before her being, Ephrem says that:

Although she was not in his mind with him, but she was in his body, and she was not only in his body with him, but she was

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32) Further questions would be useful in understanding Ephrem's term more broadly. To what extent does the ruah differ from Origen's use of mind (nous)? What is the linguistic and theological usage of the concept?

33) Commentary on Genesis, FC vol. 91, 95.

also in soul and spirit with him for God added nothing to that rib that He took out except the structure and the adornment.<sup>34)</sup>

Another interesting aspect concerning the trichotomy of humanity comes from the ninth of the *Hymns on Paradise*.<sup>35)</sup> This passage is noteworthy in that Ephrem's argument concerning the hierarchy reveals possible traces of influence from Platonic and Middle- Platonic thought. This different level of hierarchy is expressed in the two stages of glory and ascension. In the ninth of the *Hymns on Paradise* (IX.20), Ephrem narrates that the soul is far more glorious than the body, the spirit is more glorious than the soul, and the Godhead is more hidden than the spirit. Oftentimes the concept of hidden-ness can denote superiority with which it resists revealing itself in the different level of glory, and we can interpret that the Godhead is more glorious than the spirit.<sup>36)</sup>

Then, by using putting on imagery (garment imagery), Ephrem continues to explicate that at the end, the body will put on the beauty of the soul, the soul will put on that of the spirit, while

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34) Commentary on Genesis, FC vol. 91, 94.

35) CSCO Scr. Syr. 79, 37; S. Brock, St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, 143-4.

36) Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God, Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998. *Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition*, eds. by M. Schmidt and C.F. Geyer, *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den oestlichen Vaetern und ihre Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Regensburg, 1982), 11-40. A. Kowalski, <Rivestiti di Gloria> Adamo ed Eva nel commento di S. Efrema a Gen2, 25, in *Christianismo nella Storia* 3 (1982): 41-60. Bou Mansour adopts this concept while explaining the meaning of Symbol, Truth, and Salvation: D'un apophatisme o la connaissance etait dissimulee par la graneur et la gloire du mystere, a un symbolisme ou la connaissance est recuperee au niveau de l'oeuvre salutaire, la symbolique du Fils est le noeud qui relie et qui permet le passage de l'un vers l'autre. T.Bou Mansour, *La pense symbolique de Saint Ephrem le syrien*, 103.

the spirit shall put on the very likeness of God's majesty.<sup>37)</sup> First of all, the Godhead again appears here as a high point which is not found easily in Tatian and Aphrahat. The putting on imagery is coalesced with the idea of beauty that can allude to a similar idea in Plotinus's *On Beauty*.<sup>38)</sup> Each lower stage can ascend to the next stage by putting on the beauty of the superior. This passage reveals that even though each stage is very different, they can be related to each other and have certain continuity. We can also find this in Middle Platonism in the idea of participation. It is also remarkable to see the idea of ascension in this very passage, which is much clearer in the next stanza, *Hymns on Paradise IX.21*:

For bodies shall be raised to the level of souls, and the soul to that of the spirit, while the spirit will be raised to the height of God's majesty; clinging to both awe and love, it neither circles too high, not holds back too much.<sup>39)</sup>

We cannot draw any clear-cut conclusion about the complete process of ascension or continuity. It is not easy to tell from these two stanzas any logical or aesthetic upward movement in Ephrem. We do not either know if there is any communication, whether unilateral upward or bilateral between the stages.<sup>40)</sup>

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37) CSCO Scr. Syr. 79, 37. *Hymns on Paradise IX.20*.

38) Plotinus, *On Beauty*, *Ennead 1.6*, trans. by A.H. Armstrong, Plotinus I, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966, 231-62. See also Gary Gurtler's Plotinus and the Alienation of the Soul, in *The Perennial Tradition of Neo-Platonism*, ed. by John J. Cleary, Leuven: UP, 1997, 221-34.

39) CSCO Scr. Syr. 79, 37: Die Körper werden erhoben auf die Stufe der Seelen die Seele wird erhoben auf die Stufe des Verstandes, - der Verstand aber zur Höhe der (göttlichen) Majestät, - indem er sich nicht in Furcht und in Liebe. Er schwingt sich nicht zu hoch empor noch bleibt er zu sehr zurück; sein Zurückbleiben ist klug, sein Emporfliegen nützlich.

40) From this argument, it is not difficult to induce some hypothesis. Four components have a definitive difference in terms of glory. They are hierarchical in the degree of glory. At the same time, there could be

## Body and Soul

Like the tripartite division of humanity, Ephrem presents many interesting arguments about the issue of body and soul even if they are scattered and incomplete.<sup>41)</sup> Here, I will explore primarily four aspects. First, how does Ephrem discuss the body? With what imagery does he describe the body? Second, how does Ephrem delineate the relationship between body and soul? Does he perceive the body itself, as positive, negative, or neutral? Does the body have any corporeal value? Third, do the soul and body have any continuity as we touch upon his argument of the fourfold component of his explication of ascension from the body to Godhead? Fourth, I will look at the subjects of persecution, other religions, saints, and their relationship to this issue.

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some continuity or way of ascending up to the Godhead. The lower stage could be definitely raised to the next stage. However, it remains unanswered whether they reveal something of themselves to other stages as we see in apophatic and cataphatic theology such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Middle-Platonists. It is not clear either to what extent Ephrem tried to explain this point. If we can find more visible traces, nonetheless, we can extend our argument into the medieval Christian theology since a very similar idea can be found in many places as seen in the medieval mystic traditions.

- 41) The questions of the body and the body and soul relationship are important when considering the context in which Ephrem lived. We can look at this aspect via the persecution of Christians and the increasing popularity of other Christian heretics. Ephrem witnessed the persecution of Julian which probably compelled him to write in defense of bodily persecution. The increasing popularity of Gnosticism and Manichaeism might have forced him to defend the material value of the world and human life. Also the value of the body as a mate of the soul cannot be neglected.

## Imagery of the Body

How and with what imagery does Ephrem describe the body? When we look at his description of the body, it is essential to note how he appropriates the poetic narration that he frequently uses in his symbolic description of the world, the human, and nature.<sup>42)</sup> I will explore the three modes of expression of the body, namely frame, garment, and womb. Primarily, the body provides the frame for the soul.<sup>43)</sup> The body needs the soul in order to live, and the soul needs the body to express itself in a visible and perceivable form. The soul requires the body in order to see, hear, and feel. Theoretically speaking, the soul can exist by itself. However, it cannot be a true existence without the frame of the body.<sup>44)</sup> The body as a necessary frame of the soul can be similarly applied to the stage of resurrection. Without the frame of the body, the soul cannot enter Paradise at the last resurrection. In Ephrem's interpretation of Gen 1:26, the soul would be still deficient without the frame of the body even if it would feel the waking call from Christ.

The body as a frame can be easily linked to the garment imagery which is frequently adopted in his symbolism.<sup>45)</sup> The garment imagery oftentimes functions with the ideas of taking off and putting on as a major tool to receive salvation or to have true knowledge. The first stanza of the Hymns on Virginity begins with the taking off and putting on imagery:

O body, strip off the utterly hateful old man,

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42) For example, see T.Bou Mansour, *La pense symbolique de Saint Ephrem le syrien*, 1-22.

43) Hymns on Paradise VIII.4.

44) Hymns on Paradise VIII.5.

45) S. Brock, 45-9 and 60-72. S. Brock, *The luminous eye : the spiritual world vision of Saint Ephrem*, Kalamazoo, Mich. : Cistercian Publications, c1992, 85-97.



Lest he wear out again the new [garment] you put on when you were baptized.

For it would be the inverse of paying his due  
that he, if renewed, should wear you out again.

O body, obey my advice; strip him off by [your] way of life,  
Lest he put [you] on by [his] habits.<sup>46)</sup> [Emphasis my own]

Another term for the body, which is used by Ephrem is the womb (uba) used frequently by him. The image of womb is evocative and multivalent as it brings together all levels of primordial significance in everything with levels of spiritual regeneration from God as a sustaining mother.<sup>47)</sup> For Ephrem the womb is a place where the soul receives its meaning. Ephrem portrays the soul as a kind of embryo in the womb. Last, as an embryo cannot survive after departing from the womb, the soul cannot have its own senses.

All three modes of explaining the body can be found without difficulty in Ephrem's corpus. Despite differences in description, the focal point is the same. The body is the container and vessel, which mediates the soul in a visible and sensible form. In describing the mode of the body, Ephrem uses a positive view of the body which will be furthered in its relationship to the soul.

## Relationship between Body and Soul

How does Ephrem illustrate the relationship between the body and the soul? Hymns on Paradise VIII.6 tells us that the body is a companion to the soul. Only through the senses of its

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46) Hymns on Virginity 1, K. McVey, Ephrem the Syrian, New York : Paulist Press, c1989, 261.

47) Bou Mansour, 78-82.

companion, the body, can the soul shine forth and be visible.<sup>48)</sup>  
The following quotation from *Carmina Nisibena* XLVII depicts an intimate relationship between body and soul:

Avenge, my Lord, the injustice, which happened at the house,  
Where she stayed, the soul as a tenant.  
This was the rent she paid when she departed;  
She destroyed and devastated (the house),  
May she enter it (the house, the body) again and live within it,  
once again,  
May she praise (him) in his house and sing in his rooms!  
And may the people hear (once more, *de nouveau*) her voice  
from the destroyed  
The soul, which allows him to participate in life, will move in  
his limbs,  
The movements of her thought will move in his senses,  
The riches of her perfume will smell in his joints,  
And (the body) will give back what he borrowed in order to  
reward her,  
Through him she will acquire her wealth,  
Through him she will sing her praises,  
When (people) in Paradise encourage her toils and efforts.<sup>49)</sup>

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48) Hymns on Paradise VIII.6.

49) *Carmina Nisibena* XLXV. 2,3, CSCO 103, 48. My translation is based on the German translation of Beck's CSCO edition and the French translation of Paul Fhegali and Claude Navarre: Raeche, mein Herr, da Unrecht, das am Haus geschah, in dem gewohnt hat die Seele (als) Mieterin. Das war die Wohnungsmiete, - die sie bei ihrem Auszug zahlte: sie zerstörte und verüetete (das Haus). Sie möge wieder eintreten und darin wohnen, von neuem! Sie möge in seiner Wohnung loppreisen und in seinen Raeumen singen! Und ihre Stimme möge man wieder hoeren aus dem verödeten Zelt! Die Anteil am Leben gebende (Seele) wird sich regen in seinen Gliedern, die Bewegungen ihrer Gedanken werden sich regen in seinen Sinnen, die Schätze ihrer Wohlgerueche werden duften in seinen Gelenken; und (der Koerper) wird zurueckgeben was er entlich, um sie zu beholen. Durch ihn wird sie ihren Reichtum gewinnen, durch ihn wird sie ihr Lob singen, - wenn (die Menschen)

A more varied and positive statement of its relationship can be found in another of Ephrem's writings, *Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan*.<sup>50)</sup> The *Prose Refutations* were written against the contemporary heretical teachings of Marcionism, Manicheism, and the preaching of Bardaisan. Against those early Christian heresies and religions, which in many cases despised and devalued physical reality, we can utilize many valuable sources in Ephrem's argument. Chapter five of *Prose Refutations*, particularly, presents many interesting points regarding Ephrem's view of the body and soul. Ephrem asserts that the body is not just a neutral or passive agent which plays the role only as an enclosing garment. Rather than assuming a passive role as a containing frame, it is very active. The body is described rather positively as a partner, a trumpet, a pure harp, and a companion to the soul. All these modes of expression are very familiar terms to Ephrem's symbolic description. Even in the moment of resurrection the body is also portrayed as a brother, a servant, and a companion.<sup>51)</sup>

Such a positive view of the body is grounded primarily in his idea that the body is not vile to be purified. This could be a strong reaction to Bardaisan and the Manichaeism which cheapened the value of the material body. In certain places, Ephrem criticizes the Manichaeism's account which states that because their souls were playing on this hateful harp, the intoxicating foulness of the body did not allow the melody of truth to be played on its strings.<sup>52)</sup> To criticize the Manichaean devaluation of the body, Ephrem appropriates the imagery of the harp, which is one of his central symbols in general.<sup>53)</sup> The

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dort (im Paradies) ihr Muehen und Laufen einfordern werden.

50) S. Ephraim's *Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan*. C.W. Mitchell, ed. vol. I. London, 1912.

51) *Prose Refutations* cvi.

52) *Prose Refutations* cvi.

53) The Fifth Discourse Against the False Teachings, in *Prose Refutations*,

heretics' hateful harp makes a sharp contrast to the pure and true harp of Ephrem. It is interesting to see how Ephrem utilizes the main themes such as garment, harp, and womb both in positive and negative terms. We can observe other examples in the Letter to Publius. After describing the gloomy sepulchres, Ephrem employs garment and harp imagery to illustrate the awful scenes:

Notice how their songs have turned to mourning, their harps to the sound of weeping, how their laughter is overcome by mourning, their sweet melodies by songs of lamentation. The garment of a spider has been woven for them there and a bed of worms lies beneath them and a covering of moths is spread over them like a tunic.<sup>54)</sup>

Likewise, in Ephrem, the joyous harp of the body works very cooperatively, while the hateful harp of the body functions very filthily for the Manichaens which is blocking the truth revealing itself. This positive evaluation of the body is based on its relationship to the soul. Ephrem states But it was not vile because the soul praises him who clothed it with the rational covering of intelligent senses in order that one might regulate the other by knowledge.<sup>55)</sup> The following quotation illustrates to us how positively Ephrem views the importance of the body:

The body is akin to all the beauties of the soul, and is partner with it in all good things, since it is able to learn by means of it, and teach by means of it, it (the body) is, as it were, a trumpet for it. For by its (the body's) mouth, it (the soul) preaches truth in the world, and it is a pure harp for it, by means of which it sounds forth truth in creation.<sup>56)</sup>

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xcii-cxix. For as further example, see K. McVey's Ephrem the Syrian, 43, 369, 372, & 385-98.

54) Letter to Publius 20, FC vol. 91, 353.

55) Prose Refutations cvi.

56) Prose Refutations ciii.

Ephrem's argument not only shows the intimate companionship between the body and the soul, but also forms a sharp departure from the teachings of Bardaisan and Manichaeism. The followers of Bardaisan may have led him to response to the body issue. Many Manichaens devaluated the corporeal value while highly evaluating the spiritual world. Unlike Plato and the Manichaens who regard the body as a lower or defiled object to be separated from the soul, Ephrem rejects any idea that the body is vile and foul.<sup>57)</sup> The body is not a prison house or a cage that encapsulates the soul.<sup>58)</sup> For Ephrem, the soul does not have to escape the body as the Manichaens strongly assert, simply because the body itself can be pure and righteous.<sup>59)</sup>

The positive idea of the body is also related to Ephrem's view of matter (*hule*). Ephrem rebukes the Manichaen argument of matter. He does not agree with the Manichaens that matter belongs to an evil existence.<sup>60)</sup> For Ephrem, only through the body, companion of the soul, does the soul shine forth and become evident. Consequently, it is almost impossible to ponder the body or soul without its counterpart.

## Continuity of Body and Soul

Based on such an understanding of matter in general and the body in particular, the *Prose Refutations* offer interesting imagery illustrating the body and soul relationship. First of all, the *Prose Refutations* put an emphasis on the unity and closeness of the body and soul. They depend entirely on each other. While illuminating why the shade cannot have any reality and power apart

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57) *Prose Refutations* cxxxi.

58) Plotinus, *On Beauty* I.8.51.

59) *Prose Refutations* xxxi.

60) *Prose Refutations* xcix.

from the body, Ephrem also claims that the body cannot have any power apart from the soul. As the shade without the body is unthinkable, so is it impossible to think of the body without the soul. On the other hand, the soul and body exist one in the other so that neither of them can be apart from its companion.<sup>61)</sup> Ephrem's explanation of the close interdependence between soul and body can be well elucidated in the following quotation:

But the soul which is great and perfect, how is it altogether dependent on the body? For it can do nothing without it. For hearing enters into it by the ears, smell comes to it by the body's inhalation, it (the soul) sees forms through the body's eyes, it tries tastes with the body's mouth, with the body's heart it discerns knowledge, and with the whole of it all manner of things. By the touch of its fingers it obtains a great and subtle perception, it touches with the finger the veins, and learns things that are invisible.<sup>62)</sup>

This interdependence of body and soul is also reinforced by the *Hymns on Paradise* VIII.4. Just as the body needs the soul in order to live, so does the soul require the body in order to see and to hear.

The close relationship between body and soul is expressed through the two fascinating images of the mirror and dream imagery. As we observed already in his commentary on Gen. 1:26, Ephrem claims that the soul is not sufficient for itself. Also the simple fact that the body acquires animal life does not bring the soul to its goal. In this sense, they are a mirror of one another.<sup>63)</sup> This mirror imagery appears again in his argument about death in the *Letter to Publius* where the mirror reflects the scene of Heaven and Gehenna. Ephrem also takes on dream imagery in

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61) Prose Refutations ciii.

62) Prose Refutations civ.

63) Prose Refutations cv.

illustrating the close interdependence of soul and body. Even while the soul actually sees something apart from the body in the dream, the soul cannot really see anything in its exact meaning. The soul and body depend upon each other so closely that the soul can have dreams only by it (the body) and with it and in the midst of it . . . in slumber and in sleep they are not separated from one another, since they are mingled with each other. <sup>64)</sup>

Although Ephrem clearly recounts the closeness and interdependence of the soul and body, it does not seem clear in what way the body and soul are continuous. As we look into Ephrem's understanding of the fourfold ascension from the body to Godhead, Ephrem uncovers some kind of continuity even though in a very poetic form. Nevertheless, it is not easy to point out any genealogical or lineal link between soul and body as seen in Plato and Origen.

### Light Sleeper: Body and Soul in Death

How can we describe death? What is the exact meaning of death? Among various arguments in Ephrem's writings, death means the split of the three natures of humanity into the body, the soul, and the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit returns to its original place in Heaven near God, as we observed in Aphrahat, the body and soul have to begin another long journey. It is ambiguous how the body and soul take their journey after death. Do they stay buried in the earth in a united form or do they stay separated?

Unlike Aphrahat, Ephrem argues that the body and soul must separate in death. Just as they perceive each other through the union of body and soul right before they enter Paradise, they

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64) Prose Refutations cvi.

forget one another by means of death.<sup>65)</sup> Given their unavoidable division in death, the intimate companionship remains still valid all the way up to the resurrection when they will recover their initial companionship.

And if it clothed itself (with the body) because it was compelled, it (the soul) awaits it (the body) in the resurrection so that in both worlds it (the body) may be to it (the soul) a brother and a servant and a companion.<sup>66)</sup>

The mode in which they keep companionship is not discussed in depth here. However, companionship in death is emphasized as much as in life.

Death is frequently portrayed as sleep. The entire state after death and before the resurrection is defined as sleep. The sixty-fifth of the *Carmina Nisibena* is appropriate for investigating Ephrem's view of sleep. Ephrem compares death to sleep where says Your deeper sleep prevents you from seeing the multitude of symbols how she speaks loudly of the resurrection.<sup>67)</sup> The real life is going on, hidden, and secret, and only semi-conscious as it waits for resurrection. This is extended to other imagery such as the fetus in the womb, the bud of a flower, the bird in the egg in Ephrem's other writings. This passage reveals several interesting points. First, Ephrem undoubtedly compares death to sleep. Death is also portrayed in various images with which we can allude to the continuity between body and soul. These images suggest the static status of the soul and body but nevertheless a certain continuity that would be fully recovered at the final resurrection.

Concerning this subject in general, a slightly perplexing question

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65) Prose Refutations cv.

66) Prose Refutations cvi

67) *Carmina Nisibena* LXV.9, CSCO 103, 91: Dein tiefer Schalf nahm dir (die Möglichkeit) zu sehen die Menge der Symbole, wie sie laut von der Auferstehung sprechen.



may be brought out. How can we accurately name this period of sleep? Can we simply identify this period of sleep as death? Can we legitimately say the soul and body are really dead after physical death or do they just sleep without noticing any reality of death? Although we may define death as a departure from this world itself or the separation of soul and body, when carefully looking at Ephrem's argument, it would be more pertinent to call this period the sleep of the soul something other than death. Ephrem represents a similar idea that the faithful departed are not dead, but they sleep. Sometimes this period of sleep is described as a rest. By speaking of sleep in terms of the overnight rest of the day labors, Ephrem articulates his idea by stating that just as in the eventide labors rest, so do they rest for a time in death, until like sleepers waked from their sleep in the tomb, they shall don glory.<sup>68)</sup>

What are they doing in this interim stage after death? Are the souls still active in their sleep, or just soundly and deeply sleeping without any memory or cognizance? Ephrem clearly discloses his idea that the soul would be active even in sleep. The concept of the light sleeper highlights Ephrem's position toward the issue of soul sleeping. He notes therefore there could be a semiconscious knowledge of what is passing, happening, just like 'a light sleeper.'<sup>69)</sup> Though ambiguous and not fully conscious, the soul can have some sort of knowledge. The extent to which the soul

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68) Recitation from Gavin, p105, footnote 4. This period of sleeping is oftentimes called the interim or intermediate period. Already in Tertullian (160-230), we come across the interim state of the soul. Delineating the concept of life in Hades after death, Tertullian talks about the soul in exile until the time of its resurrection. The argument of the interim stage can be found in many places including *Passio perpetuae et felicitati*, and *Hippolytus* (170-235). In Ephrem, we also detect a very similar case of the soul sleeping as in the interim stage. See also, Origen's *Dialogue with Heracleides*, Robert J. Daly, trans., ACW vol. 54, New York: Paulist Press, 1992.

69) Unfortunately, I cannot identify the source which was cited by Gavin.

could be active is not to be settled with clarity. Do they have any consciousness or power of reason? Or do they have any memory of previous things in this world? Ephrem seems to differentiate the power of reason from any kind of perception. Even if Ephrem clarifies that the soul is endowed with the power of reason in the interim stage, it is not always quite clear what he means exactly by the power of reason. Further complexity over this question originates from Ephrem's denial of any kind of perception of the soul after death. Therefore, the question remains unsolved. For how could we tell the power of reason from perception?<sup>70)</sup> Even the description of the light sleepers who have the semiconscious knowledge of what is passing and happening is somewhat limited as seen in *Prose Refutations*:

If its companion left it when rational and went to sleep, it lost all its memory... when it entered the body and was clothed with their senses, then it gained perception, and it sees even in a dream because it has the body; but it loses its senses in death.<sup>71)</sup>

Likewise, this passage argues that the soul, whether they are still holding the semiconscious knowledge of what is passing or not, they lost all memory in death. Only at the resurrection, likewise the end comes, the soul learns all these perceptions by means of the body.<sup>72)</sup> If only seen from this argument, Ephrem's argument of the activity of the soul in the state of death seems very minimal and limited. His statement of the certain power of reason and semiconscious knowledge should be separated from perception and memory in death.

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70) Ute Possekkel, Evidence of Greek philosophical concepts in the writings of Ephrem the Syrian, Lovanii: Peeters, 1999, 186-229.

71) *Prose Refutations* cvii.

72) *Prose Refutations* cv.

## Body and Soul at the Ante-room

What would happen to the body and soul while sleeping from death to resurrection? What would be the fate of the soul? Is there any qualitative change between a living body and a dead body? Are they dissolved into bite size pieces simply waiting for the final calling from Jesus at the resurrection as we see in the Gospel of Nicodemus?<sup>73)</sup> Can the soul enter Paradise? One passage alludes to the possibility that the soul enters Paradise right after death. Such an assertion, however, is checked immediately by Ephrem himself. As we generally noted in the Hymns on Paradise, the chance to enter Paradise immediately following death is rather negative. Ephrem is quite sure of this fact. As nothing imperfect can enter Paradise, the soul cannot enter Paradise without its companion the body. In this sense, we can say that the souls are sunk in sleep with their mates, bodies, until resurrection. However, the question immediately arises how the soul could stay together with the body after the body and soul separate. Do they stay divided at the same place? Avoiding the question of the place for the soul and body, Gavin suggests that we should look at the state rather than the place.<sup>74)</sup> Nevertheless, the body and soul could stay together before the final resurrection without entering Paradise. The following passages in *Carmina Nisibena* corroborates this assumption: One road, my brethren, lies before us all; from childhood unto death, and from death unto the resurrection thence branch out two ways - the one to the flames, the other to Paradise.<sup>75)</sup>

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73) Kim H.C., *The Gospel of Nicodemus: Gesta Salvatoris*, Toronto: Published for the Centre for Medieval Studies by the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1973.

74) Gavin, 106.

75) *Carmina Nisibena* LXXIII. 4, CSCO Scr. Syi. 103, 110: Wir alle, meine Brueder haben ein und denselben Weg, von der Geburt biz zum Tod, und

Although we do not know exactly where and how they share their place, they could stay together somewhere in the ante-room. Regardless of the exact place of the sleeping soul, Ephrem interestingly suggests the idea of an ante-room of paradise. In the Hymns on Paradise, this ante-room is described as on the borders of paradise(Hymns on Paradise VIII.11). The disembodied soul has to wait for the final resurrection outside the boundary of Paradise, since the soul cannot enter Paradise without its mate. Certainly, the good and the righteous reside or sleep there with a good expectation waiting for their missed bodies, mate, to come alive at the final resurrection.<sup>76)</sup> When the gate opens at the end time, the bodies and souls will be united and rejoice greatly together. Only at the final resurrection, they will become perfect and as a result they can enter Paradise with all their senses. This final union of the body and soul also leads us back to the Genesis story. Ephrem notes that As Adam was complete in everything, God took Adam and led him into Paradise. The soul of itself and for itself could not enter [Paradise].<sup>77)</sup> From all these arguments, Ephrem makes it clear that only after the final resurrection can the united body and soul enter Paradise. Before the final reunion, they have to wait in the waiting room or ante-room.

The various descriptions of Gehenna, Sheol, and Hades, could also denote some other useful interpretations. Of course, it is very unclear to see any visible connection between an ante-room and these images of Gehenna in its overall structure. Carmina Nisibena helps us glean Ephrem's concept of the whole story of Gehenna. Except for a few people who were lifted up to Heaven such as Enoch, Elijah, and Jesus, most go to Gehenna after death without

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vom Tod bis zur Auferweckung. Doch von da ab sind es zwei Wege: der eine ins Feuer und der andere nach Eden.

76) Hymns on Paradise VIII.11, CSCO 79, 33.

77) Hymns on Paradise VIII.9, CSCO 79, 37: Als nun vollendet war Adam in allem- da nahm und setzte ihn der Herr in das Paradies- und nicht war einzutreten fähig gewesen die Seele aus sich und für sich (allein).

any difference between the good and the bad. In this sense, Gehenna is simply but interestingly described as a kind of storage room until the final resurrection. Gehenna is the place where the souls of those who sleep in death are gathered, being in store under the guardianship of death. The storage imagery of Gehenna is similar to the ante-room imagery. More interesting in the *Carmina Nisibena* are the descriptions of Satan and Death which are personified as guardians of the souls. Just like a guardian at the grave of the crucified Jesus, Satan and Death guard all the souls until Jesus ascends and asks His souls to be freed from them. Here, the guardianship is rather passive, although portrayed as the forbidding figures of Satan and Death in that they try to control all the souls. Satan and Death must obey and fall to their knees when Jesus orders them to release all the captives.

A similar story emerges in the *Hymns on Paradise*. Ephrem narrates that Adam's Lord left [Heaven] to seek him, and He entered Sheol and found him [there].<sup>78)</sup> This short poetic narrative adds importance to its symbolic meaning to Jesus' descent into Gehenna through which the soul and body will be united.

The story of Jesus' descent into Gehenna in *Carmina Nisibena* exposes a resemblance to the Gospel of Nicodemus which contains imaginary works of three days when Jesus descended into Gehenna to save His souls right after the crucifixion.<sup>79)</sup> Ephrem's version, however, does not have any reference to the souls after Jesus' ascension. Ephrem does not talk about the fate of souls who would face death after Jesus' descent. Are all the souls after Jesus' journey into Gehenna going to Paradise or on the border of

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78) *Hymns on Paradise* VIII.10, CSCO 79, 33: Sein Herr verliess (den Himmel), um ihn zu suchen. Er betrat die sheol und fand ihn [dort].

79) J. Teixidor, *Le theme de la dscente aux enfers chez Saint Ephrem, L'orient syrien* 6 (1961), 25-40; Zbigniew Izydorczyk & Jean-Daniel Dubois, *Nicodemus's Gospel Before and Beyond the Medieval West, in the Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus* (Zbigniew Izydorczyk, Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 21-42.

Paradise? Does this mean that Gehenna has henceforth been empty? Does Jesus' conquest of Satan in Gehenna change the place where the dead are heading? Must all the souls and bodies who faced death after that event still reside in Gehenna while they wait for another visit from Jesus? Despite many interesting questions stemming from the *Carmina Nisibena*, this story certainly mirrors what will happen at the final resurrection and the last judgment that will be illustrated in his Letter to Publius.

The Letter to Publius, which mainly deals with the last judgment for the good and the wicked, begins with mirror imagery. The Holy Gospel as a polished mirror reproduces the image and the likeness of those who gaze at it. In a paradoxical form of narrative, the Gospel foreshadows through the mirror the future punishment and death in Gehenna and blessing in Paradise (LP 1 and 2). Through this mirror imagery, the righteous can envision themselves in Paradise, while the wicked can see the entire destitution and endless agony of Hades.<sup>80)</sup>

Descriptions of punishment for the wicked and reward for the good are illustrated quite precisely. In the Letter to Publius 3, Ephrem demonstrates how the soul of the wicked will spend its awesome and terrible time in Gehenna. Even the promise for the wicked will be grievous at the time when they see their masters abased in stature.<sup>81)</sup> For the wicked, the kenosis of Jesus and Jesus' descent into Gehenna mean nothing positive. Contrarily, those events only increase the grievance and destruction of the wicked which are mirrored in the Letter to Publius realistically. Grief is portrayed in that there the outer darkness can be seen clearly and from within it can be heard the sound of wailing and weeping, of groans, and of gnashing of teeth.<sup>82)</sup> Further vivid

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80) Letter to Publius, FC vol. 91, 336; Beck, *Das Bild vom Spiegel bei Ephraem*, in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 19 (1953): 5-24.

81) Letter to Publius 3, FC vol. 91, 340.

82) Letter to Publius 3, FC vol. 91, 340. Cf. Matt 8.12, 22.13, 25.30.

scenes of the last judgment are described in the Letter to Publius 5.<sup>83)</sup> In describing further grievance here, Ephrem cites the parables of the Rich-man and Lazarus.<sup>84)</sup> Letter to Publius substantially shows the nature of Gehenna. Ephrem's descriptions of punishment and reward, at least in the Letter to Publius, are rather based on the individual conscience that eventually can lead to the question of the free will and similar ideas in the comedy of Dante.<sup>85)</sup>

On the other hand, Ephrem fairly accurately describes the reward of the good. The judge of righteousness portrays all the riches in the treasure house for the divine children (LP 6-8). In explicating these scenes of Gehenna and Heaven, Ephrem returns to the parables of the Goats and Sheep (LP 8) and the Pure Virgins (LP 15). More specific descriptions of punishment and reward imply some sort of activity and consciousness of the soul even in Gehenna. We may conjecture that the good are alert expecting their reward, while the souls of the wicked can feel their impending destruction. Besides such a concrete portrait of Gehenna for the wicked and Heaven for the righteous, there is only slight allusion to the body and soul relationship.

## Persecution and Saints

Ephrem's view of persecution and the saints exhibits another dimension of the body and soul issue. Do they have any value through the various cults such as sacred relics and places? Bodies

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83) K. Valavanolickal, 218-234.

84) K. Valavanolickal, 288-305.

85) Letter to Publius, FC vol. 91, 337. Bou Mansour, *Aspects de la liberté humaine chez Saint Ephrem le Syrien*, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 60 (1984): 252-82; *La liberté chez Saint Ephrem le Syrien*, *Parole de l'Orient* 11(1983): 89-156, 12(1984/5): 3-89.

may be laid beneath the earth. Although a small section of the arguments concerning the saints in Ephrem deals somewhat with the reward of the martyrs in Paradise, it is not so obvious that Ephrem advanced to any further description about relics.

Anticipating further research, I will explore the topics of persecution, saints, and other symbolic imageries. As some external factors such as Manichaeism and Bardaisan forced Ephrem to react against their view of the material world, the persecution of Julian and the vicissitudes of his life may have caused Ephrem to react slightly. Constant persecutions of early Christians may have forced Christians to justify the persecuted and the dead by granting some corporeal value to the victim. We can easily conjecture that some continuity between the body of the dead and the soul remains since the persecuted body could not remain un-rewarded after death among the living Christians. Consequently, this persecution and hardship pushed Christians to produce the veneration and cults of martyrs, relics, and saints from very early period. A clear example can be gleaned from the Donatists.<sup>86)</sup> Through constant persecution, they envisioned death and the bodies of the dead processing into Heaven. Several dead bodies of the persecuted caused miraculous acts to occur while drawing many people to the place of death. Therefore, they naturally put importance on bodily pain and persecution. In the *Hymns against Julian*, however, we could not find much solid evidence of Ephrem's view of the body of the dead except in the two examples: The beneficial role of the various burial places of ancestors and the claim that the consolation of Jerusalem and Zion depends not on the rebuilding of the temple but on the visits of Christian pilgrims.<sup>87)</sup>

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86) Jean-Louis Maier, *Le Dossier Du Donatisme*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989; Mauren Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: the Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996.

87) *Hymns against Julian*, 4.23-5, K. McVey, Ephrem the Syrian,.



Ephrem's view of the saints shows another possible continuity of the body and soul. There is no distinct and complete writing on the saints in Ephrem's corpus. Unlike the later development of cults of saints, we cannot find any elaborated theory of the saints in Ephrem either. However, several places imply Ephrem's view of the saints and we can glance at how Ephrem symbolizes the imagery of the saints.

Some basic concepts emerge come from the Hymns on Paradise VII. Here the saints even on the earth can be seen as revealing paradise to the rest of humanity.<sup>88)</sup> The saints function as a mirror which reflects the Heavenly world and as ethical exemplars after which many ordinary people could follow. Hymns on Paradise talk about various aspects of the ethical exercise of the saints, such as obedience, the celibacy, chastity,<sup>89)</sup> and the virtuous life<sup>90)</sup> which symbolizes an interior disposition and the proper exercise of the gift of freewill. Here the physical reality of the saints' ethical lives signifies the spiritual value. This ascetic imagery reappears in the last part of the Letter to Publius. After observing the horrible scenes of Gehenna, Ephrem's soul and spirit become weak and anguished. However, he takes refuge in repentance and he hides himself beneath the wings of compunction. He seeks refuge in the shade of humility.<sup>91)</sup>

We can see a more fascinating story in the same hymn, Hymns on Paradise VII.19. Here, God repays all,<sup>92)</sup> and His treasures lie waiting for the persecuted.<sup>93)</sup> The body works in evident ways while the soul works in hidden ways. The clearest idea of the saints, particularly regarding persecution, comes from the following

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88) Hymns on Paradise VII

89) Hymns on Paradise VI.12. K. McVey, Ephrem the Syrian, 140, 144, 148, 214-217, 261-274, & 365-368.

90) Hymns on Paradise VI.13.

91) Letter to Publius 24, FC vol. 91, 355.

92) Hymns on Paradise VII.1.

93) Hymns on Paradise VII.12.

statement.

Those who have been crowned for our Lord's sake with the martyr's death by the sword shine out in glory there with their crowns, because their bodies despised the persecutors' fire, Like stars do they blossom in Paradise, those seven sons of light with their radiant mother, who, in their deaths, spurned the wrath of the impious king.<sup>94)</sup>

This passage suggests two things, the reward of crowning at the resurrection and the shining star imagery in Paradise. The reward of crowning is promised to those who died a martyr's death. Since the body of the righteous is finer and a hundred times subtler, they even resemble the mind when they are raised up at the resurrection. We find little mention of the corporeal value of the dead in this world after death. However, the reward at the resurrection is very clear. The imagery of the shining star is also remarkable.

## Epilogue

The purpose of this paper was to investigate how Ephrem the Syrian appropriates and articulates the concept of the body and soul, their relation to each other, and diverse portraits of death and afterlife. Unlike Gregory of Nyssa, for example, Ephrem did not leave any writing related systematically and exclusively on the issue of the body and soul. Nevertheless it should not hinder us

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94) Hymns on Paradise VII.19, CSCO Scr. Syi. 79, 28: Und die mit dem Schwert für unsern Herrn gehort wurden, - deren Kronen werden dort in Herrlichkeit erstrahlen, weil sie an ihren Körpern verachten haben das Feuer der Verfolger. Und wie die Sterne werden dort leuchten, die sieben Söhne des Lichts, deren Mutter unter ihnen erstrahlte, die in ihrem Tod verachtet haben den Zorn des Frevlers.

from drawing a general picture of this issue from Ephrem's various writings. Ephrem's view of body and soul could be better perceived if we look at his distinctive use of the symbols and symbolic portraits of the subject.

A brief comparison of Ephrem's view of the body and soul to those of Tatian and Aphrahat helped us locate Ephrem in the wider context of early Syrian Christianity. Based on several key texts such as Tatian's *Oratio ad Graecos* and Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*, I explored certain similarities and dissimilarities centering on the issues of the tripartite component of humans, centrality of the spirit, and complete union of the body and soul.

My chief concern was the various symbolic and poetic ways in which Ephrem depicts the body, the soul, and other related issues. First, the body is described as a frame, a garment, a womb which could be perceived in a form of visualized objects. The body is a frame that contains the soul, and that frame also gives a specific form to the soul. The body is also a womb that contains the embryo in it and can nourish it within the womb. Second, Ephrem's description of the relationship of the soul and body is also portrayed by the four major images of shade, mirror, dream, and harp. The body and soul cannot have any reality when they depart from each other. It is important to see Ephrem's very positive appreciation of matter and the material world. Third, this picturesque description continues the discussion concerning the meaning of death. The concept of light sleeper highlights his poetic narration. Concerning the relationship of the body and soul after death, Ephrem suggests other poetic imagery of a bud in the flower, a bird in the egg, and an embryo in the womb. In these three intriguing portraits, we can anticipate strong continuity between material and mental, body and soul, and activity and potentiality. This may allow us to trace the continuity between body and soul after death. While describing the place of the soul after death, fourth, Ephrem presents two different interpretations.

In the eight of the Hymns on Paradise, Ephrem states that the soul has to stay on the boarder of Paradise, which can be termed as an ante-room (storage room) until the soul can see and recover his mate and lyre. The *Carmina Nisibena* describes a different scene where the soul should be in dark Gehenna waiting for the visit of Jesus. It is surprising to see how Ephrem describes this difficult issue of soul and body not through philosophical and theological arguments but through poetic imagery.

For further research on this issue, body and soul in Paradise and body and soul in Ephrem's symbolic and poetic narratives must be examined in greater detail. As Nicholas Sed presented well in his article, *Les hymns sur le paradis de saint ephrem et les traditions juives*, Paradise allows us to compare the status of body and soul between before the Fall and after the Last Judgment.<sup>95)</sup> Sed's excellent analysis on the status and place of Paradise could allude to many things related to body and soul. Sed's special emphasis on the Jewish influence on Ephrem's thought will propose a certain connection between the Jewish tradition and the work of Ephrem. Particularly, Sed's argument on the concept of air ('awir) could inspire another reading on the body and soul relationship.<sup>96)</sup> As air constitutes intermediary uniqueness between the One and All, the symbolic function of air may function as a mediator between body and soul. To a certain degree, air and the Holy Spirit could play the same role.

Since most of Ephrem's argument can be best understood through his symbolism and poetic character, the body and soul issue ought to be approached within the broader spectrum of symbolism. As we noticed in the Hymns on Paradise, Ephrem's poetic narration goes far beyond the plain literal meaning. The

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95) N. Sed, *Les hymns sur le paradis de saint ephrem et les traditions juives*, in *Le Muson* 81 (1968): 455-501.

96) N. Sed, 495-501.

richness of meaning of body and soul also must be delved into with other symbolic expressions and typologies in Ephrem's corpus. At the same time this should be complemented by Ephrem's prose work such as Prose Refutations.

## &lt;요약문&gt;

## 에프람(Ephrem. 306-373)의 육체와 영혼 개념에 대한 연구

김 재 현

본 논문은 육체(body)와 영혼(soul) 개념, 이 둘 사이의 관계, 죽음과 죽음이후에 대한 다양한 주제들을 시리아 기독교의 대표적인 학자였던 에프람(Ephrem the Syrian)이 어떻게 묘사하고 발전시켰는가를 분석한다. 동 시대 사람인 니사의 그레고리(Gregory of Nyssa)와는 달리 에프람은 육체와 영혼에 관한 독립적 글을 남기지 않았다. 그럼에도 불구하고, 에프람은 다양한 저술들을 통해 육체와 영혼이란 주제에 관해 포괄적인 묘사를 남겼다. 그리고 그의 사상을 특징지우는 상징, 상징론, 그리고 상징적인 묘사들을 통해 육체와 영혼의 문제를 에프람은 가장 잘 그려내고 있다.

전체적인 논의의 배경으로 시리안 기독교의 이전 학자들이었던 타티안(Tatian)과 아프라하트(Aphrahat)의 육체와 영혼에 대한 논의들을 간략하게 살펴본 후, 에프람 자신의 육체, 영혼, 그리고 이와 관련된 주제들을 고찰 한다. 에프람은 먼저, 육체를 틀(frame), 의상(garment), 자궁(womb) 등의 시각적 개념을 사용하여 해석한다. 예를 들어, 육체는 영혼을 담는 틀이고, 태아를 담고 키우는 자궁이다. 둘째, 에프람은 영혼과 육체의 관계를 그늘(shade), 거울(mirror), 꿈(dream), 하프(harp)라는 네가지 주제를 사용하여 묘사한다. 이러한 상징적 묘사를 통해 에프람은 물질과 물질적 세계에 대하여 아주 긍정적인 해석을 담아낸다. 이런 시각적이고 시적인 묘사에 기초하여, 에프람은 죽음을 “light sleeper” 개념으로 해석한다. 죽음이후의 육체와 영혼의 관계 그리고 죽음이전과 이후의 관계를 에프람은 “꽃의 씨 눈,” “계란의 눈,” “자궁의 태아”라는 개념을 사용하여 그려낸다. 죽음 이후 영혼의 거하는 장소를 설명하는데 있어, 에프람은 천국과의 접경지(저장소) 혹은 예수의 방문을 기다리는 지하세계 (Gehenna)라는 공간개념을 도입한다.

이와 같은 시적이고 화려한 회화적 설명기법은 기독교철학과 신학의 어려운 주제들은 에프람이 얼마나 쉽고 이해할 만하게 설명하고 있는지를 보여준다. 더 나아가 이는 시리아 기독교의 가장 빼어난 학자였던 에프람의

상징에 대한 이해와 기독교 신학에 대한 상징적 해석학의 적용을 구체적으로 잘 보여준다