Imitating the Watchers: Restoring the Angelic Life of Adam in Early Syriac Thought

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Early Syriac writers often associate the prelapsarian state of Adam with the nature of angels, and advocate the imitation of angels by believers in the present age. Building on Winfrid Cramer's 1965 study of Ephrem's ideas about angels,[1] the present essay explores themes of resemblance between Adam, angels, and righteous human beings in the works of St Ephrem (d. 373). It compares his treatment of with that of Aphrahat (active 337–344), and with the slightly later work known as the *Liber Graduum*. In dialogue with more recent studies of early Christian views of angels it also surveys the different ways in which the three writers understood the angelic condition in relation both to humanity and to their different audiences.[2]

Introduction: the Angelic Adam

There is a widespread notion in early Judaism and Christianity that the state of Adam before the Fall was God's ideal for humanity. According to a tradition in early Jewish midrash, Adam shared in some angelic traitssince he was created with four attributes of the higher beings (i.e. angels): an upright stance, speech, understanding, and sight; and four attributes of the lower beings (i.e. animals): ingestion, procreation, excretion, and mortality.[3] God ordained this division of Man's nature so that if Adam sinned he would die, and if he did not sin, he would live.

There are two widely used words for 'angel' in the early Syriac tradition, both derived from Scripture.[4] The more common and generic term in the Peshitta is the Hebrew-derived *malā'kā,* ܡܠܐܟܐ, found in both Old and New Testament in Syriac. The minority term is *'īrā,* ܥܝܪܐ, found only in the book of Daniel (4:10, 14, 20) iof the 'Holy Watchers' and derived from the Aramaic *'īrā* (עירא), 'wakeful one'.[5] Despite its few attestations in the Bible, *'īrā* is particularly prominent in the works of Ephrem and his contemporaries.

In one place in his *Commentary on Genesis* Ephrem describes Adam as *'īr*. In this particular context the word indicates merely that he was awake. Yet it is also so close to the word for a celestial Watcher that it is hard to avoid the conclusion that we have here an allusion to a key characteristic of the angels found in Jewish tradition, namely there unsleeping nature. Thus in Midrash Genesis Rabbah,

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[1] *Die Engelvorstellungen bei Ephräm dem Syrer* (Rome; Pont. institutum orientalium studiorum, 1965).

[2] Especially Norman Ricklefs, 'An Angelic Community: the Significance of Beliefs about Angels in the First Four Centuries of Christianity', unpublished PhD dissertation, Macquarie University, 2002; R.M.M. Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy. A Study in their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephrem the Syrian*. STAC 40; Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen 2007); Bogdan Gabriel Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and other Early Christian Witnesses* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

[3] Genesis Rabbah XIV.3 (according to R. Yehoshua b. Nehemiah in the name of R. Hanina ben Isaac, and 'our rabbis' in the name of Rabbi Eleazar). See also Genesis Rabbah VIII. In the late first century CE work 2 Enoch 30:10–16, God makes Adam as 'a second angel, honourable, great and glorious'.

[4] The more specific terms 'cherub' and 'seraph' are also found in Syriac. They are also transliterations of the equivalents in Hebrew.

[5] For the connotations of ܥܝܪܐ, *'īrā* in Syriac see Cramer, *Die Engelvorstellung,* p. 155.

the angels sought to worship Adam, so God cast a deep sleep on him in order to demonstrate to the angels that he was only a human being.[6] In Ephrem's commentary, he says that 'The man was *'īr* [awake/a Watcher], anointed with radiance, and he had as yet no experience of sleep. He fell to the ground naked, and slept.'[7]

This description of Adam's state in the *Genesis Commentary* perhaps also alludes to another tradition from Jewish sources,[8] that Adam and Eve were once clothed in garments of glory but lost them at the Fall.[9] Thus in Ephrem's *Hymns on Paradise*, describing the aftermath of the sin of Adam and Eve,

> The seraphim cover themselves with their wings,
> and the trees of Paradise cover themselves with their branches,
> so as not to behold their Lord:
> they all blushed at Adam, who was suddenly found naked:
> the serpent had stolen his clothes! [10]

Like midrash, then, Ephrem's portrayals of Adam before Eve's creation and the Fall thus suggest Adam possessed a liminal state between that of the glorious, watchful angels and earth-bound human existence involving sleep and nakedness, and hinting at the potential for sexuality represented by the imminent creation of woman.[11]

The *Liber Graduum* more explicitly compares Adam with the angels, yet almost entirely in terms of the latter's lack of sexuality.[12] The author openly states that the angels' *qaddīšūṯā*, literally 'holiness' but indicating celibacy, is the ideal state for humankind as well but was rejected by Adam who wanted to be

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[6] R. Hosha'ya in Genesis Rabbah VIII.10.

[7] R.M. Tonneau (ed.), *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii*, CSCO 152, SS 71 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO: 1955), p. 32, II.12:

ܟܚܢܐ ܒܝ ܚܢܐ ܘܚܡܫ ܪܡܐ. ܗܠܝܢ ܗܢܐ ܒܝ ܚܒܝܒ ܠܐ ܝܕܥ ܗܘܐ. ܫܠܛ ܒܗ ܐܝܟ ܚܝܐ ܗܘܐ

[8] Found in Targums Onkelos, Neofiti and Pseudo-Jonathan of Gen. 3.21, Genesis Rabbah XX.12, bPes 54b; bSot. 14a; Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer §12.

[9] See S.P. Brock, 'Clothing metaphors as a means of theological expression in Syriac tradition' in *Typus, Symbole, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, M. Schmidt (ed.), Eichstätter Beiträge 4 (Regensburg: Pustet, 1982), pp. 11–40; reprinted in ed. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature and Theology* (Variorum Collected *Studies* Series, CS357. Aldershot, Hants. / Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate, 1992), IX.

[10] *HParad.* III.15 in E. Beck (ed.), *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradiso und contra Julianum*, CSCO 174, SS 78 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1957):

ܟܪܘܒܝܗܘܢ ܕܡܬܟܣܝܢ ܒܗܘܢ ܟܪܘܒܝ ܓܢܬ ܥܕܢ
ܕܠܐ ܢܚܙܘܢ ܠܡܪܗܘܢ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܐܬܒܗܬܘ ܥܠ ܐܕܡ ܕܫܟܚ ܥܪܛܝܠ
ܘܚܝܘܬܐ ܓܢܒܬ ܠܒܘܫܗ ܘܐܬܟܣܝ ܒܗ ܐܕܡ ܕܒܥܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܡܗܘܐ

Also *HParad.* XV.8, where Adam is described as shedding his glory.

[11] See G. Anderson, 'Celibacy or Consummation in the Garden? Reflections on Early Jewish and Christian Intepretations of the Garden of Eden', *HThR* 82 (1989), pp. 121–48.

[12] See A. Kowalski, *Perfezione e giustizia di Adamo nel* Liber Graduum (Rome: Pont. Inst. Orientale, 1989), pp. 58–63, who notes that the combination *qaddišūṯā/qaddiš d-lā regtā* reveals that lack of desire is the defining characteristic of this state of sanctification. René Roux notes that the *Liber Graduum* is only concerned with the exemplary nature of angels and their worship of God, and not at all in their cosmological function ('Angels and Demons in the Syriac Liber Graduum', in *Volksglaube im antiken Christentum*, eds. H. Grieser and A. Merkt [Festschrift für Herrn Prof. Dr. Theofried Baumeister anlässlich seiner Emeritierung im September 2009] [Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009], pp. 364–78 [366–67]). I am very grateful to the author for sending me a copy of his article.

like the animals:[13]

> [Adam] was 'holy' [i.e. celibate] like the angels and peaceable like the heavenly ones. But he saw an animal and wished to imitate it with regard to sexual intercourse, though [Adam and Eve] had no natural desire for copulation until they were persuaded by the Evil One to become earthly and acquire labour and earthly riches... they sinned and transgressed God's command, and hated 'holiness' and loved intercourse.... We have demonstrated in this that Adam and Eve had no desire until they sinned.
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> 'For a man watched the beasts and wanted to be like them', and hated the holiness of the angels: that is, through hoping to be greater than the angels and to become like their Lord. The Watchers were in anguish over Adam's fall and the anger that he received through the Evil One.'[14]

The author of the *Liber Graduum* argues that Adam's celibacy would have made possible a kind of dual existence:

> I shall expound how God commanded Adam in the beginning to be perfectly holy, like the Watchers and angels in heaven, so that even when standing physically on the earth, naked of everything, he should be dwelling spiritually in heaven with the angels, his mind clothed in his Creator's glory, and the earth invisible to him.[15]

Although both Ephrem and the *Liber Graduum* regard being clothed in glory as the ideal, primeval state, for Ephrem physical nakedness reflects shame and earthliness, whereas for the *Liber Graduum* this prelapsarian and chaste nudity is a virtue that signifies a lack of earthly preoccupation.[16]

We saw above how Ephrem associates wakefulness with the primordial condition of Adam, and as in

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[13] See the important article by Sergey Minov, 'Marriage and Sexuality in the *Book of Steps*'. From Encratism to Orthodoxy', in *Breaking the Mind. New Studies in the Syriac 'Book of Steps'*, eds.,K. S. Heal and R. A. Kitchen (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2014), pp. 221–61, where he analyses the author's ingenuity in overcoming the implications of God's clear injunction in Gen. 1.28 (and thus before the Fall) to humans to procreate by transferring it to the Evil One (see also pp. 238–39 for the origin of the idea). He also notes that the work passes over in silence the account of Eve's creation.

[14] Memra XV On the Marriage Instinct in Adam (§2, cols. 337.23–340.11, and §7, col. 352.15–20) in M. Kmosko (ed.), *Liber Graduum*, Patrologia Syriaca Pars Prima 3 (Firmin-Didot et socii: Paris, 1926):

ܗܘ ܐܕܡ ܡܢ ܒܗܡ ܐܘ ܡܛܠܐ ܕܢܬܕܡܐ ܠܗ ܗܘܬ ܐܦ ܡܢ ܚܣܝܢܐ ܕܐܬ ܠܗ ܚܫܩܐ ܕܢܬ ܒܗ ܠܐ ܒܛܒܝܥܬܐ ܕܒܥܠ ܙܘܓܐ ܐܠܐ ܕܐܬܦܬܝ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܚܕ ܒܝܫ ܕܐܬ ܠܗ ܥܡ ܚܘܐ ܕܢܫܬܟܚ ܠܗ ܥܡ ܚܘܐ

rabbinic tradition, its converse, sleep, is earthly and associated with death and sin. In the *Hymns on the Nativity* Ephrem alludes to this idea:

> Since Adam brought the sleep of death into creation by his sins,
> The Watcher [Christ] himself descended to wake us from the stupor of sin.[17]

The states of nakedness and sleep that are associated with earthly mortality in Jewish midrash are associated with that other attribute of non-celestial beings, sexuality and procreation.[18] A hint of this connection may also be present in Ephrem's description in his *Genesis Commentary* mentioned above, in which Adam falls down naked and sleeps, just before Eve is created from his side.[19] In contrast, although Aphrahat shows interest in angels and celibacy, this is not in relation to Adam, and Aphrahat never compares Adam with angels.[20]

Angelic encounters with righteous figures in the Bible

Ephrem makes some tantalising references to encounters of the righteous and the patriarchs with angels. Two of these encounters involve sleep.

a) Noah

The Peshitta of Gen. 6.9 states that 'Noah was a righteous man and innocent/guileless (*tammīm*) in his generations',[21] and in Gen. 7.1 God says, 'I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation'.[22] Ephrem interprets these references to mean that Noah preserved his virginity for 500 years.[23] In his *Genesis Commentary* this abstinence contrasts with the sexual corruption of the whole world. Ephrem implicitly rejects the tradition that the term 'sons of Elohim' in Peshitta Gen. 6.2, 4 refers to angels who descended to earth to have relations with human women.[24] He prefers the explanation

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[17] *HNat*. I.62, in E. Beck (ed.), *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)* CSCO 186, SS 82 (Secrétariat du CorpusSCO; Louvain 1959):

ܘܐܚܕ ܐܝܟ ܕܚܛܝܢ ܗܘ ܐܬܐ ܚܠܝܬܐ
ܠܒܢ ܕܐ ܚܙܐ ܘܒܥܢ ܥܡ ܫܚܬܗ ܕܚܛܝܐ

See also *HEpiph*. IV.8 for Christ as Watcher.

[18] As in Genesis Rabbah XIV.3 mentioned earlier. Compare Genesis Rabbah XXI.5 on Gen. 3.22: R. Pappas said that when the Man was 'one', he was 'like one' of the ministering angels. the view of Rabbi Berechiah in R. Hanin's name is that when there was just Adam, he was *kə-'eḥād* 'as one', but when his rib was taken from him (i.e. when Eve was created), he came to know good and evil. Cf. the similar interpretation of the verse in Targums Onkelos, Neofiti and Pseudo-Jonathan, using the Aramaic term *yəḥīdāyā* 'single, unique'. It may be compared to the similar Syriac term *īḥīdāyā* often used of dedicated celibates. For the concept of *īḥīdāyuṭā* 'the solitary life' in Syriac literature, see Shafiq AbouZayd, *Ihidayutha. A Study of the Life of Singleness in the Syrian Orient. From Ignatius of Antioch to Chalcedon 451 A.D.* (ARAM Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies; Oxford 1993), especially the sections on angels, pp. 267–69; Adam pp. 117–18; Noah pp. 118–19; Abraham pp. 119–20; Jacob p. 120. Also S. H. Griffith, '"Singles" in God's service; Thoughts on the Ihidaye from the works of Aphrahat and Ephraem the Syrian', *The Harp* 4: 1–3 (1991), 145–59, on the sense of the term *īḥīdāyā* ('consecrated single', 'single -minded'), especially its allusion to Christ, the 'Only One' of the Father, whom the *īḥīdāye* emulate.

[19] *Comm.Gen*. II.12 in Tonneau, (ed.), *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii*.

[20] See L. Brade, 'Überlegungen zu Afrahats Aussagen über Engel', *OC* 62 (1978) pp. 98–102.

[21] ܕܐܬܝܪ ܗܘܐ ܒܥܝܢܝ ܒܢܘܚ ܘ

[22] ܗܘ ܙܕܝܩ ܩܕܡܝ ܒܗܕܐ ܕܪܐ ܒܝܢ ܗܕܪ ܘ

[23] *Comm.Gen*. VI.1, in Tonneau (ed.), *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii*. This idea is first found in the third century Greek Christian writer Julius Africanus.

[24] A. van der Kooij, 'Peshitta Genesis 6: "sons of God" – Angels or Judges?', *Journal of Northwest Semitic Linguistics* 23/1 (1997) pp. 43–51, discusses the variant readings of the phrase in the Peshitta manuscript tradition ('sons of Elohim' or 'sons of judges'), and as reflected in Ephrem's works ('sons of gods' in *HNat*. I.48 and *Comm.Gen*, versus "'ons of God' in *HFid*. XVL.8 and *HParad* I.11, but 'sons of Elohim' in *HNat*. I.22, *HJejun*. II.2).

that they were the sons of Seth who were enticed into marrying the daughters of Cain.[25] Similarly, in Ephrem's *Hymns on the Nativity,* he contrasts Noah's self-control with the Sethites' unholy mingling with the Cainites:

> Noah saw the sons of Elohim, the holy ones who suddenly became licentious,
> and he looked for the Holy Son in whom the wanton are made holy.[26]

The verses on Noah's righteousness and innocence (Gen. 6.9 and 7.1) are cited several times in Aphrahat's *Demonstrations.* He emphasises even more strongly than Ephrem that Noah was continent for 500 years, and says that Noah only married and had sons when God told him that he alone would be saved from the Flood. Noah's preservation is due to his ܬܡܝܡܘܬܐ, *tammīmūṯā*, 'innocence', a quality seen almost entirely in terms of his lack of sexual experience and avoidance of association with the Cainites.[27]

Significantly, neither Aphrahat nor the *Liber Graduum* mentions the problematic episode where Noah gets drunk and lies exposed in his tent, before two of his sons dutifully cover him up without looking at him (Gen. 9.20-23). In contrast, Ephrem not only excuses Noah as being more susceptible to alcohol because it had been so many years since he had tasted any, but he also mentions in passing that Noah enjoyed angelic protection:

> Because Ham's brothers realized their father's resplendent virtue, and because like Jacob he was being protected both waking and sleeping by angels, with trembling they covered his nakedness, their faces averted.[28]

Where does this notion come from? Was it Noah's sexual purity that merited such angelic protection, according to Ephrem? There is evidence of Noah's association with angels in Qumran literature, and even of his own angelic status.[29] However, there is no suggestion in the Dead Sea scrolls that he was

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[25] *Comm. Gen.* IV.3 in Tonneau (ed.), *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii.* This idea is first found in the third century Greek Christian writer Julius Africanus.

[26] *HNat.* I.22 in Beck (ed.), *Hymnen de Nativitate*:

ܫܪܐ ܒܪܝ ܚܛܝܢ ܠܒܢܝ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܦܬܐܡ ܒܥܝܠ ܩܕܝܫ ܒܗ ܐܬܩܕܫ ܟܠ ܩܕܫ
ܘܒܥܐ ܚܣܝܢ ܒܥܝܠ ܕܒܗ ܢܬܩܕܫܘ ܟܠ ܕܚܝܕ ܒܗ ܐܬܬ

[27] Dem. III.2 col. 101 lines 3–4; Dem. XI.3 col. 473 line 23–col. 476 line 1; and especially the section in Dem. XIII.5–7, cols. 549–557 in J. Parisot (ed.), *Aphraatis sapientis Persae demonstrationes.* Patrologia Syriaca Vol. I (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Socii, 1894), cf. Dem. XXIII.14 col. 40 lines 18–21 in Parisot (ed.), Patrologia Syriaca Vol. II (1907). Kowalski, *Perfezione*, p. 40 notes that the *Liber Graduum* treats *tammīmūṯā* as a characteristic of the 'upright' figures of the Old Testament. Both Aphrahat and the *Liber Graduum* make much of Noah's humility (ܡܟܝܟܘܬܐ, *makkīḵūṯā*) an attribute that they associate with innocence. The *Liber Graduum* paraphrases Gen. 6.9; 7.1 to state, 'Thus [God] was pleased with Noah alone, because "I have seen that you alone of all the earth are innocent (ܬܡܝܡ) and humble (ܡܟܝܟ)"' (Memra XXI On the Tree of Adam, §13, cols. 620.19–622.6, in Kmosko (ed.), *Liber Graduum).*

[28] *Comm.Gen.* VII.2, in Tonneau (ed.), *In Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii*:

ܐܬܬܢ ܒܢ ܐܚܘܗ ܕܟܠ ܐܒܘܗ ܒܫܒܝܚ ܕܟܠ ܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܐܬܬܩܕܫ ܐܒܘܗ ܕܟܠ ܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܐܬܬܩܕܫ ܐܒܘܗ ܕܟܠ ܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܐܬܬ ܐܡ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܪ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܟܠ ܩܕܫ ܒܗ ܐܬܩܕܫ ܟܠ ܩܕܫ ܒܗ ܐܬ
ܡܟܝܟ ܒܗ: ܘܗܘ ܕܟܠ ܚܛܝܢ ܒܗ ܐܬܟܣܝ ܒܗ ܐܬܟܣܝ ܒܗ ܐܬ ܠܐ ܫܘܐ

There is a similar reference in *HNat.* I.23 (ed. Beck): 'The two brothers who covered Noah looked to God's only Son who would come to cover the nakedness of Adam who was drunk with pride':

ܬܪܝܢ ܐܚܝܢ ܕܟܣܘ ܠܢܘܚ ܒܒܪ ܚܝܕ ܕܟܣܝ ܠܗ ܠܐܕܡ ܕܫܟܝܪ ܒܓܐܘܬܐ
ܘܒܠܝܠܝܐ ܒܚܫ ܐܦܝܗܘܢ ܕܟܣܝ ܠܗ ܠܥܪܝܘܬܗ ܕܐܒܘܗ ܕܫܟܝܪ ܒܓܐܘܬܐ

[29] See Dorothy M. Peters, *Noah Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Conversations and Controversies of Antiquity*

celibate. In preserving some trace of an ancient Jewish link between Noah and angels, Ephrem's comment is unusual in the Christian world.

b) Abraham

Abraham's encounter with the three men (or angels) in Genesis ch. 18 is interpreted in quite different ways by Ephrem on the one hand, and by Aphrahat and the *Liber Graduum* on the other. For Ephrem in his *Commentary on Genesis*, it is vital that Abraham should perceive the identity of the men as angels and also recognise the Lord God himself. So though Abraham's immediate response is one of generous hospitality, God is clearly revealed to him in the person of one of the visitors. So Abraham indicates to the members of his household that these men are more than they seem. Since for Ephrem it is necessary for Abraham to have a conscious encounter with the Divine, the meal and footwashing become something of a charade, carried out to honour his guests and to gain blessing for his household.[30] In contrast, the episode's significance for Aphrahat and the author of the *Liber Graduum*, is merely the moral lesson that believers should act generously towards all equally, and therefore Abraham's hospitality must take place in ignorance of his guests' identity in order for it to be seen as meritorious.[31]

c) Jacob

Ancient exegetes discerned in the biblical text three encounters between Jacob and angels: the episode of the ladder reaching to heaven at Bethel (Gen. 28.12); the encampments of angels in Maḥanaim (Gen. 32.1–2); and implicitly in the wrestling match with the mysterious stranger in the place Jacob names Penuel (Gen. 32.24–31).[32]

Like Noah, Jacob is described as *tammīm* 'innocent', in the Peshitta of Gen. 25.27, which is cited also by Aphrahat.[33] However, it would be hard to interpret this instance of its use as indicating celibacy, given that according to Genesis Jacob had twelve children through two wives and their two maidservants. Furthermore his trickery towards his father, brother, and uncle would have made the patriarch Jacob an unlikely moral exemplar for either Aphrahat or the *Liber Graduum*. This may explain why Jacob hardly features in the *Liber Graduum*.[34] As for Aphrahat, he says rather cryptically that Jacob 'knew God',[35] perhaps alluding to the events at Bethel, Maḥanaim, and Penuel. Although Aphrahat often mentions Jacob in the *Demonstrations*, he never portrays him in association with angels.

(SBL Early Judaism and its Literature 26; SBL Press: Atlanta, GA, 2008), especially pp. 115–17 on the presentation of Noah's righteousness in pre-rabbinic Jewish Aramaic texts. C. A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*. (Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 42. Leiden / Boston / Köln: Brill, 1998), pp. 158–59, notes the description of Noah's angelomorphic appearance in 1 Enoch.

[30] *Comm.Gen.* XIV.4–XV.3, in Tonneau (ed.), *In Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii.*

[31] *Dem.* XX.17, col. 926 in Parisot (ed.), *Aphraatis sapientis Persae demonstrationes*), on supporting the poor; *Liber Graduum*, Memra IX.8 in Kmosko (ed.), col. 221, lines 17–26.

[32] A. Bakker, 'Christ an Angel? Study of early Christian docetism', *ZNW* 32 (1933), p. 256, notes that the idea that Jacob's opponent is an angel appears first in the Targum, under the influence of the reference in the Hebrew of Hosea 12.4, 5 to Jacob wrestling with an angel.

[33] *Dem.* IX .13 col. 440, lines 2–3, in Parisot (ed.), *Aphraatis sapientis Persae demonstrationes.*

[34] Apparently the only reference to Jacob in the *Liber Graduum* is in Memra IX.20, where he is said to have pursued Perfection by humbling himself before his angry brother Esau (ed. Kmosko, col. 244 lines 23–26).

[35] *Dem.* III.2, col. 101 line 7, in Parisot (ed.), *Aphraatis sapientis Persae demonstrationes.*

This is in stark contrast to Ephrem's treatment of Jacob. In his *Genesis Commentary* he interprets the vision of the ladder to heaven as a sign of reassurance to Jacob that God cared for him, by sending angels to protect him both sleeping and waking.[36] Ephrem also presents the encounter at Maḥanaim in terms of angelic protection experienced by Jacob when going up to Haran and also on his return from that place. The episode where Jacob wrestles with the angel is seen in terms of Jacob's self-knowledge: he realizes that he is simultaneously strong and weak. He and the angel fight in love, and the angel blesses him to show that he is not angry at having been defeated by an earthly being. But when Jacob sends a gift to Esau, he does so out of fear of his brother, and so his hip is dislocated: Ephrem says that he goes from being the equal in strength of a fiery angel to being lame, because of his failure to trust God.[37]

In Ephrem's *Genesis Commentary* Jacob's protection by angels is not portrayed as something merited by him. Perhaps Ephrem thought more in terms of the divine plan of salvation: God cared for the patriarchs whether they deserved it or not, and so angelic visitation does not presuppose virtue on the part of the human recipient.

d) Others associated with angels

i) Infants as angelic

For all three writers, however righteous the biblical patriarchs were, they could only encounter angels but not actually resemble them.[38] Yet for Ephrem, the infant (*šabrā*), who dies prematurely enjoys in Paradise a glorious state comparable to that of the 'Watchers', presumably because he is pure and without sin:

> Exalted in station, glorious in their brightness,
> as though kindred of the Watchers without blemish![39]

ii) The angelic Christ

Unusually, Ephrem describes Christ himself in angelic terms, as the 'Watcher' *par excellence* (note that Christ is never described as a *mala'ḵā*, an angel).[40] Christ is a 'Watcher' because he does not sleep and is not subject to death. Ephrem refers to this in his *Hymns on the Nativity*:

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[36] *Comm.Gen.* XXVI.1, in Tonneau (ed.), *In Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii.*

[37] *Comm.Gen.* XXX.1, 3, 4, in Tonneau (ed.), *In Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii.*

[38] Cf. Ephrem, *Comm.Diat.* XIX.7 (Armenian only: L. Leloir [ed.], *Commentaire de l'Evangile concordant. Version arménienne*. CSCO 137, SA 2 [Secrétariat du CorpusSCO: Louvain, 1953]): Philip desires to see the Father with his physical eyes, 'as formerly the just used to see angels and archangels'. Also the doubtfully Ephremic *Sermon on the Solitaries* (see below) *SErem* 96 (ed. Beck): to replace the families that the solitaries have left behind, the Watchers descend to be with them; while in *SErem* 166–67, the Watchers encamp by each solitary who loves God.

[39] *HParad.* VII.8–9 in Beck (ed.), *Hymnen de Paradiso*:

ܘܥܡ ܚܒܪ̈ܝܗ̇ ܕ̈ ܥܩ̈ܝܪ̈ܐ ܕ̈ ܚܣ̈ܝܢ ܪ̈ܘܡ̈ܐ
ܚܕ̈ܐ ܐܢܫ̈ܐ ܘ̈ ܚ̈ܝܬ̈ܐ ܘ̈ ܠܐ ܡ̈ܘܡ̈ܐ

[40] In contrast to the Greek tradition, where sometimes Christ is described as an angel (ἄγγελος: see Bakker, 'Christ an Angel?', p. 257). Cramer, *Die Engelvorstellungen,* p. 155, and especially Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy,* pp. 167–68, discuss the idea of Christ as 'Watcher'.

The Watcher came to make watchers in the created world… [41]

He who parted waters from waters
Parted from the Watchers and came down to mankind… [42]

The Watcher rose from the grave:
he had slept, waking. He came and found
the nations sleeping. He gave a cry of jubilation
and woke them. The sleepers confessed
the Watcher who had made watchers on earth.[43]

As noted above, in his *Genesis Commentary* Ephrem specifically rejects the idea that the *bənay 'elōhīm*, the sons of God, in Gen. 6.2, 4 were fallen angels who consorted with human women, presumably because for him, angels were non-sexual beings.[44] However, that rejected understanding of the episode may underlie *HNat.* XXVI.5 quoted immediately above, since it describes the true 'Son of God' parting from the 'Watchers', implicitly the *bənay 'elōhīm*/'sons of God', and descending to earth legitimately and for holy reasons. This reading is supported by *HNat.* I.22 mentioned earlier, where Ephrem tells us that Noah saw the wantonness of the holy sons of Elohim, and he looked for the Holy Son who would make the holy.[45]

There is just one passage where Aphrahat describes Christ as a Watcher, in terms of the unsleeping nature of God derived from Psalm 121.4. He notes the paradox that Jesus, although he was the unsleeping 'Watcher', was fast asleep in a boat on the sea.[46] The *Liber Graduum* never applies the title 'Watcher' to Christ.

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[41] *HNat.* XXI.4, 5 in Beck (ed.), *Hymnen de Nativitate*:

ܐܝܟ ܕܢܚ ܒܝܕ ܕܢܛ ܠܐ ܕܢܚ ܕܢܛ

[42] *HNat.* XXVI.5 in Beck (ed.), *Hymnen de Nativitate*:

ܗܘ ܕܦܠܓ ܡܝ ܠܡܛ ܡܚܪܬܐ
ܡܢ ܕܢܛ ܦܠܓ ܠܡܐ ܪܒ ܐܝܟ ܐܬܐ

The epithet is used of Christ in the *Acts of Thomas*: 'the Watcher of old, the waker of humankind', cf. 'he who sleeps not, but is awake' (W. Wright, ed., *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* [Williams and Norgate: London 1871], sections 60 and 66, pp. ܢ line 13 and ܠ line 9.

[43] *HNat.* VI.24 in Beck (ed.), *Hymnen de Nativitate*.:

ܐܡ ܟܗ ܕܢܐ ܡܢ ܟܗ ܡܢܐ
ܘܘܡܪ ܒ ܕܢ ܠܐ ܐܡܨ
ܕܡܙܐ ܘܩܡܐ ܡܟ ܗܡܒ
[ܗ]ܐܢ ܐܢ ܗܘܗ ܘܩܡܐ
ܟܢܐ ܘܒܝ ܕܢܛ ܚܘܒ

[44] See K. Sullivan, 'Sexuality and Gender of Angels', in *Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, ed. A. D. de Coninck (SBLSS 11; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2006), 211–28.

[45] See n. 19.

[46] *Dem.* VI.9, col. 277, lines 8–9 in Parisot (ed.), *Aphraatis sapientis Persae demonstrationes*:

ܗܒ ܕܢܐ ܗ ܘܠܐ ܢܐܡ ܢܡ ܗܘܗ ܚܠܟܐ ܟܝܐ ܡܐ

However, the Peshitta of Ps. 121.4 uses the term ܢܛܘܪܐ *nāṭūrā*, 'guard', rather than *ʿīrā*.

Restoring the Angelic life of Adam: Celibacy

If humans were regain the state that God intended for them, the very condition that Adam the father of humanity enjoyed before he disobeyed, what steps should they take? Our three sources agree that celibacy is the way to become like the angels,[47] and the key to this interpretation is the Old Syriac version of Luke 20.35–36:

> Those who are worthy of [Cur. + receiving] that world and that resurrection from the dead [Cur.: + the men do not take wives, and] women do not belong to husbands, nor can they die, *for they have made themselves equal with the angels*,[48] [Cur.: + as children of God], as children of the resurrection. [49]

'They have made themselves equal with the angels' ܐܫܘܝܘ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܡܠܐܟܐ, suggests the culmination of a deliberate process, whereas the Peshitta says only, 'for they are *like* angels'.[50]

Aphrahat draws on this idea in his *Demonstration* on Death and the Last Days:

> Our Lord says, 'Those who are worthy of that world and that resurrection from the dead, do not take wives, nor do women belong to husbands, because they are unable to die. Rather, they are like the angels in heaven and sons of God'.[51]

This resembles the wording of the Peshitta of Luke 20.35–36 rather than the Old Syriac, principally in using the phrase 'like the angels'. However, it is clear from the context in the *Demonstration,* which argues for celibacy, that Aphrahat is advocating an active process of making oneself like the angels in the present age.[52] Indeed, Aphrahat connects angels and celibacy very closely:

> Those who do not take wives are attended by the heavenly Watchers: those who maintain celibacy rest in the sanctuary of the Most High.[53]
>
> Therefore love virginity, the heavenly portion [and] communion with the Watchers of heaven. For there is nothing that compares to it, and in those who live like this, Christ

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[47] 'The principal function of angels vis-à-vis humans is to act as role models… Their similarity with humankind is founded on their shared nature as creatures' (R.M.M. Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy. A Study in their Devleopment in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephrem the Syrian.* STAC 40; Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen 2007, p. 163).

[48] G.A. Kiraz (ed.), *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels. Aligning the Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshitta and Harklean Versions*. Vol. 3 (Brill: Leiden, 1996), p. 416.

[49] See the useful discussion of the passages in Matthew, Mark, and Luke in Ricklefs, 'An Angelic Community', pp. 265–67. However, his 'tentative' suggestion (p. 272) that the interpretation of angelic life as consisting principally of celibacy came directly from the New Testament and that it preceded the interpretation of Adam's angelic status based on Second Temple pseudepigraphic literature and contemporary gnosticism, is unlikely: the influence of such Jewish ideas is likely to have been present from the beginning of Syriac Christianity.

[50] Peshitta Luke 20.35–36: ܐܠܠܝ ܕܙܟܝ ܠܗܘ ܠܗܘ ܕܢܣܒ ܠܗ ܠܗ ܕܐܬܝ ܠܗ ܕܐܬܝ ܠܗ ܕܐܬܝ

himself dwells.[54]

We see that the likeness of the angels of heaven is found with the victorious saint and on earth it is acquired by gift. [55]

Aphrahat may allude to a tradition that Elijah was celibate when he states that because the prophet bore 'the image of the heavenly Watchers, those same Watchers brought him bread and water when he was fleeing from Jezebel.'[56] But he may also be thinking of Elijah's life of solitude, since earlier in the same *Demonstration* he states that 'he who would assume the likeness of angels must be a stranger to humanity'.[57]

In this context we should perhaps add John the Baptist, called by Jesus the greatest 'of all those born of women' (Matt. 11.11). At the beginning of a long section of the *Diatessaron Commentary*, Ephrem identifies in what respect John was 'great', by means of the Old Testament citation just preceding this verse, Mal. 3.1, 'I am sending my messenger/angel (*mala'ḵā,* ܡܠܐܟܐ) before you'.[58] Ephrem states that John was not merely an 'angel' by name but also in his manner of life, because he rejected worldly matters and looked to heavenly things.

We saw above how the *Liber Graduum* holds Adam responsible for choosing to discard angelic *qaddīšūṯā* in order to become like the beasts. The author very grudgingly allows that marriage is acceptable as an intermediate state:

Unless you are like this [i.e. effectively dead to desire], your freewill obeys the Evil One and you wish [intercourse] as Adam did. Your Creator has granted it to you in wrath, as he did to Adam. He is angry because we abandon the 'sanctity' of the angels and imitate beasts. Yet he will show you mercy as he did Adam, and by preserving Uprightness in the married state, you may be saved despite being married.... [God] would say to you, '[Marriage] would have done you no harm, if you had not wanted to be as cattle and not as angels.'[59]

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[54] *Dem.* VI.19, col. 309 lines 22–23, in Parisot (ed.), *Aphraatis sapientis Persae demonstrationes*:
ܗܘ ܕܡܬܕܡܐ ܠܗ ܒܫܡܝܐ ܘܒܡܝܐ ܐܬܝܗܒ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܗܘ ܕܐܬܕܡܐ ܠܗ ܒܐܪܥܐ ܐܬܩܢܝ

Ephrem also advocates virginity and celibacy. In *his Hymns on Virginity,* for instance, he says that 'virginity loves the Watchers / And rushes to ascend to the Watchers' height.'[60] However, although in one place in the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* Ephrem refers to the fact that 'some people do not marry, through their imitation of the angels',[61] in a later section where only the Armenian text is extant[62] greater caution is expressed about the merits of virginity alone for angelic holiness: one must also be free of envy, rage and other vices in order to resemble the angels.[63] The presence of similar sentiments in Ephrem's *Letter to Publius* would seem to support the authenticity of this section in the *Diatessaron Commentary*.[64] In a section in the work called *Sermon on the Solitaries* there is a list of all the worldly anxieties and resentments towards other people that solitaries avoid. Thus they become like spiritual beings while they dwell among the carnal, and like angels (*mala'ḵē,* ܡܠܐܟܐ) while among the earthly.[65] However, although Cramer considered the *Sermon* a late work dating from Ephrem's supposed last years as a hermit, the memra is unlikely to be by Ephrem at all. It certainly goes further than Ephrem in its ascetical leanings. Moreover, it contains similar passages whose thought superficially resembles that of Ephrem but is systematized beyond the disciplines recommended by Ephrem in his authentic works.[66]

Other means of restoration of the angelic life

Ephrem in particular knows of other ways in which humans may recover their intended resemblance to the angels.[67]

i) *Communion with God*: In the *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, in the context of John the Baptist being superior to those born of woman, Ephrem speaks of

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[60] *HVirg*. I.8, in Beck (ed.), *Hymnen de Virginitate*. The full stanza runs,
'When the Beloved of the Watchers [i.e. virginity] has flown away, the consort of demons enters:
Desire, who is odious to the virginity that Joseph pursued.
For virginity loves the Watchers
And rushes to ascend to the Watchers' height.'.

ܗܘ ܕܚܢܢ ܟܕ ܢܣܒ ܒܬܘܠܬܐ ܘܚܢܐ ܠܐ ܫܚܐ ܘܩܐ
ܘܠܐ ܕܐܡܬ ܗܘ ܒܬܘܠܬܐ ܕܝܘܣܦ ܕܪܕܦ ܗܘ
ܠܐ ܫܚܐ ܠܥܝܪ ܢܣܒ ܚܢ
ܘܗܘ ܚܢܢ ܕܪܕܦ ܠܥܝܪ

[61] *Comm.Diat*. XVI.22 on Luke 20.34–36, in L. Leloir (ed.), *S. Ephrem. Commentaire de l'évangile concordant. Texte syriaque (Manuscrit Chester Beatty 709)*. Chester Beatty Monographs 8 (Hodges & Figgis: Dublin, 1963), p. 180: ... ܐܠ ܐܢܐ ܕܒܬܘܠܝܬܐ ܕܚܛܝܢ ܠܐ ܡܕܡ.

[62] See Carmel McCarthy's introduction to her translation of the *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, on the difficulty in determining the Ephremic authorship of parts of the work, especially involving passages lacking in either Syriac or Armenian (*Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron: an English translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709*. Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement Series 2 [Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1993], especially pp. 29–34).

[63] *Comm.Diat*. XVIII.19 in Leloir (ed.), *Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant: version arménienne*. 2 vols., CSCO 137, 145 (L. Durbecq: Louvain, 1953, 1954).

[64] S.P. Brock, 'Ephrem's *Letter to Publius*', *Le Muséon* 89 (1976), pp. 261–305, especially §§ 12, 15, 16 (pp. 284–86), where Ephrem stresses that it is better to be in a chaste marriage, clothed with the love of Christ and desirous of him, than to be a virgin lacking 'the good oil of excellent works'.

[65] E. Beck (ed.), *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones IV*, CSCO 334, SS 148 (Secrétariat du CorpusSCO; Louvain 1973) Memra II, pp. 16–28 = *SErem*. 109–132.

[66] See S.P. Brock, 'A brief guide to the main editions and translations of the works of St Ephrem', *The Harp* 3 (1&2) 1990, pp. 7–30, especially p. 22. E.G. Mathews, '"On Solitaries": Ephrem or Isaac', *Le Muséon* 103 (1990) 91–110, follows Beck and Leloir in doubting Ephrem's authorship of *SErem.*

[67] See also P.J. Botha, 'Fire mingled with Spirit: St. Ephrem's views on angels and the angelic life of Christians', *The Harp* 8–9 (1995–96), pp. 95–104, especially 101–104.

> ...one who loves God and is known by Him: for whoever is like this surpasses humankind, and stands in the rank of angels (*mala'k̲ē*).[68]

This is perhaps not so dissimilar from Aphrahat. Although he holds that the way to become like the angels is almost wholly through celibacy and the single life, also says:

> Those who have partnership with Christ and pursue peace and tranquillity, are his brothers and sons of God and heirs of the kingdom: they serve and are served by the Watchers of heaven, who neither envy, nor show jealousy, nor grow weary, nor sleep, but rejoice over sinners who repent of their sins.[69]

ii) *Baptism*: Through baptism, one puts on the 'Watcher', Christ. One of Ephrem's *Hymns on Epiphany* speaks of the believer as 'a free man who clothed himself in the water with the Watcher'.[70]

iii) *Fasting*: Early Jewish tradition held that angels do not eat.[71] Given that food is essential for life, none of our three writers claims that one should totally abstain from eating in order to become angelic! However, Ephrem does say that fasting grants the soul splendour before the 'Watchers', as well as making the body shine before earthly beings.[72]

iiv) *Participation in the Eucharist*: In his *Hymns on Faith* Ephrem relates Christ's new creation of humankind in the form of the 'Watchers' (ܥܝܪ ܩܕܝܫ) to the hidden spirit and fire in the eucharistic elements.[73]

v) *Keeping vigil:* For Ephrem the idea of vigil is very important, because by staying awake in order to pray, one becomes like the heavenly, unsleeping 'Watchers'. Ephrem's poetry also speaks of Christ waking mankind from the sleep of death: being 'wakened' from sin is sufficient to make people resemble

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[68] *Comm.Diat.* IX end §7 in Leloir (ed.), *Commentaire de l'évangile concordant. Folios Additionels* (1990) p. 132: ܒܟ ܘܒܟܐ ܘܫܡ. ܕܡܫܐ ܢܒܝ. ܗܘ ܕܡܢ ܒܟ ܕܐܬ ܗܘ. ܒܟ ܐܢܐ ܡܕܡ ܕܐܬ ܗܘ. ܕܡܠܐܟܐ ܘܒܢܝ ܐܠܗܐ ܐܢܘܢ.

[69] *Dem.* XIV On Exhortation, §31, col. 653, 7–13, in Parisot (ed.), *Aphraatis sapientis Persae demonstrationes*: ܘܐܡܪ ܘܡܫܟܚܐ ܕܡܐ ܕܐܬ ܒܗ ܕܫܠܡܐ ܥܡ ܟܠ ܐܢܫܐ ܘܒܟܐ: ܕܡܢ

the 'Watchers'. These related themes are found extensively in the *Hymns on the Nativity,* as noted earlier,[74] including the following stanza:

> The mouth of the Watchers shouted out 'Peace!' to those keeping watch
> The good news from the Watchers who brought it met those keeping watch:
> who would sleep on this night that awoke Creation?
> The Watchers mingled with the watchers and rejoiced that the world was saved.[75]

In Ephrem's *Hymns on Virginity*, the virgins singing praises are compared to the bridesmaids of the gospel parable and to the angelic watchers:[76]

> 'Because the time of the Bridegroom has not been revealed to us,
> you virgins have become our watchers'.

Unusually and significantly among our three writers, this reference is to women resembling angels.

vi) *Keeping the 'Higher Law'*

In the context of Matt. 5.20, that one can only enter the Kingdom of heaven by going beyond the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, Ephrem views the 'higher law' as helping those who are perfect attain the rank of angels.

> [Christ] wished to bring the mature (*məšalmānē*) into the company of the mature, in other words, the perfect (*gəmīrē*) to be among the angels.[77]

vii) *Rejoicing over penitents*

Another way of resembling the angels, says Ephrem, is to rejoice over the sinner who repents, as the Watchers do because they are compassionate.

> Lord, let us resemble the Watchers, who rejoice over the penitent!
> I would be most blameworthy if I were not mournful;

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74 *HNat*. I.62; VI.24 in Beck (ed.), *Hymnen de Nativitate*, see notes 41–43 above.

75 *HNat*. XXI.10–11 in Beck (ed.), *Hymnen de Nativitate*:

ܡܢ ܦܘܡ ܥܝܪ̈ܐ ܩܠ ܫܠܡܐ ܠܢ̈ܛܪ̈ܐ ܕܨܚܝܢ
ܒܣܪܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܥܝܪ̈ܐ ܐܬܬ ܠܢ̈ܛܪ̈ܐ ܕܨܚܝܢ
ܡܢ ܝܬܪ ܕܫܪ ܠܠܝܐ ܕܐܬܥܪ ܥܠܡܐ...
ܫܒܚ ܥܡ ܥܝܪ̈ܐ ܘܒܟ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܐܬܦܪܩ

76 HVirg. V.10 in Beck (ed.) *Hymnen de Virginitate:*

ܠܐ ܐܠܐ ܕ ܐܬܐ ܘܐܡܪ
ܕܐܢܫ̈ܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܥܡ

See discussion in E. M. C. Weedman, 'Mary's Fertility as the Model of the Ascetical Life in Ephrem the Syrian's Hymns of the Nativity' Ph.D. dissertation, Marquette University, 2014, pp. 102; 158–63. She also notes instances of negative 'watching' in Ephrem (p. 158), and that in much of the Enoch tradition the angelic Watchers are 'negative examples, not something to be emulated' (p. 163). More questionable, however is her argument that Christ replaces Metatron/Enoch as Watcher (p. 165).

77 *Comm.Diat*. VI.5 in Leloir (ed.), *Commentaire de l'évangile concordant. Folios Additionels* (1990), p. 62:

ܡܥܡܩܬܐ ܕܐ ܕܐܦ ܒܥܠ ܡܥܡܩܬܐ ܕܐܦ ܥܠ ܕܐ ܡܬܩܠ.

the Watchers would regard me as an uncaring mother![78]

vii) *Worship*

Aphrahat, Ephrem and the *Liber Graduum* are in agreement in regarding worship as the main function of the angels. Thus for believers, to worship in a truly spiritual way is to resemble the angels.[79]

For the author of the *Liber Graduum*, Adam was originally meant to worship together with the angels:

> 'Conduct yourself in these matters', his Creator commanded Adam, 'with your mind in heaven as an inhabitant, and your body on earth as a stranger and sojourner. Serve and worship above in these ways, like a Watcher along with the Watchers.'[80]

Adam and his descendants forgot the true, heavenly worship that they used to perform with and like the angels, and so the writer of the *Liber Graduum* argues, 'God gave them a visible form of worship on earth, in the likeness of that heavenly one, lest they perish utterly'. Yet with the coming of Christ and his reconciliation of humanity to God, it is possible for the truly spiritual to know 'the hidden, heavenly worship', if they abandon earthly things.[81]

In another Memra the writer explains,

> The Perfect are like the angels (*mala'ḵē*), as our Lord said, 'Those who are worthy of that resurrection cannot die but are like angels' [Luke 20.35–36]. So now, since 'they are like angels', whoever wishes to be made perfect should resemble angels. Let us see what the function of angels is: angels do not till the soil, nor clothe the naked, nor feed the hungry, nor does their mind remain on earth. Rather, they admonish every one as he is able with the word of our Lord. As they are constantly in His presence, and minister to his greatness, they are not concerned about their nourishment, since our Lord cares for them and for everyone. Those who would become like angels must imitate angels, and proclaim the word of our Lord, as he commanded them, 'Do not be concerned about food and clothing', nor about themselves nor

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[78] *CNis.* XXXI.25 in E. Beck (ed.), *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena*, vol. 1, CSCO 218, SS 92 (Secrétariat du CorpusSCO; Louvain 1961):

ܟܬܝܢ ܒܥܐ ܡܢܝ ܬܒܪ ܚܠܦܬܐ
ܘܠܐ ܐܚܠܐ ܠܐ ܦܠܚ ܒܝܠܐ ܠܐ
ܘܐܦ ܠܐ ܬܫܥܐ ܟܬܝܢ ܫܡܥ ܠܐ

[79] See A. Golitzin, 'Earthly Angels and Heavenly Men: the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Niketas Stethatos, and the tradition of 'Interiorized Apocalyptic" in Eastern Christian ascetical and mystical literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001), pp. 125–53.

[80] Memra XXI On the Tree of Adam, §3, col. 592 lines 8–11, in Kmosko (ed.), *Liber Graduum*:

ܟܬܒ ܟܡ ܐܝܟ: ܩܒܠ ܕܐܡܪ ܒ ܡܫܝ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܐܡ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܐܡ ܚܕܐ ܒܫܡܝܐ: ܗܟܢܐ ܐܚܐ ܕܐܝ ܐܢ ܐܬ ܒܫܡܝܐ ܐܝ ܐܢ ܐܬ ܒܐܪܥܐ ܐܝ ܐܢ ܐܬ ܟܬܝܢ ܐܝ ܐܢ ܐܬ ܥܡ ܥܝܪ ܥܡ ܥܝܪ.

See Kowalski, *Perfezione*, pp. 81–85.

[81] Memra XXVIII.9, col. 800 lines 15–24, in Kmosko (ed.), *Liber Graduum*:

ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܝ ܐܢ ܐܬ ܒܗ ܐܡ ܒܗ

their relatives, since our Lord cares for them and for everyone...[82]

viii) *Becoming like children:* Our three authors make a connection between angels and children, as we saw earlier in Ephrem.[83] Aphrahat also mentions Matt. 18.3,10,

> Our Lord gave us a type and likeness, that we should become like children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. He told us not to despise little ones, because their angels continually behold the Father in heaven.[84]

However, Aphrahat does not pursue this theme further.

For the author of the *Liber Graduum*, the association of children and angels is related to Adam's state before the Fall. This idea is developed at some length in Memra XV, entitled On the Marriage Instinct in Adam, where it is explained that Adam and Eve were unashamed of their nakedness because they were like nursing infants. This provides another reason for the Perfect to pursue celibacy, namely in order to return to a prelapsarian state of sexual innocence. Absence of fleshly desire is held to be something angels and children have in common:

> Infants are free of care and desire, they do not pass judgment, and are allowed to weep all the time....[85]

> Our Lord said, 'Those who are worthy of the resurrection are like the angels of God and cannot die', meaning, 'those who know my words and keep them will be like the angels'. How then can we claim that desire will not be removed from human beings? Does desire exist in angels, about whom our Lord said 'You will be like them'? If you argue that it is in that world [that is to come] that we will be as angels, let us hear what the Lord says: 'You will be taken up [from this world] as you are'...[86]

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[82] Memra XXV.8, col. 752 lines 1–20, in Kmosko (ed.), *Liber Graduum*:

ܟܬܝܒ ܐܢ ܐܦ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܐܬܝܗܒ ܠܢ ܡܪܢ ܕܢܗܘܝܢ ܐܝܟ ܛܠܝܐ ܘܐܝܟ ܥܦܪܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܢܥܠܘ ܠܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ. ܐܡܪ ܠܢ ܕܠܐ ܢܒܙܘ ܠܙܥܘܪܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܛܠܝܐ ܗܟܝܠ ܕܒܫܡܝܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܢ ܦܬܝܐ ܕܐܒܐ. ܐܦ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܐܡܪ ܠܗܘܢ ܡܪܢ ܕܐܝܟ ܛܠܝܐ ܢܗܘܘܢ ܐܝܟ ܡܠܐܟܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܢ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܝ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܝ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܝ

... Unless someone becomes [now] as the likeness of angels, in whom there are no fleshly wants or bodily desire from this world, he will not be like them in that world, just as our Lord said.[87]

Although as we saw earlier, in his *Hymns on Paradise* Ephrem depicts infants who died unblemished like the angels, he takes another point of comparison in the *Hymns on Virginity*. He brings in a reference to Matt. 18.3, 'unless you change and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.' Ephrem explains why Jesus said this, in terms of what he understands as the unquestioning obedience not just of children but of angels:

The disciples ran to the seat of the one who commands:
he showed them a child who receives commands without irritation
and in the likeness of the Watchers, serves without grumbling.
For Watchers have neither throne nor seat.[88]

Conclusion

This essay has examined how far Ephrem's approach to human relations with angels, and to restoring the angelic life in humanity, is comparable to that of Aphrahat and the *Liber Graduum*.

Ephrem emphasizes the biblical encounters with angels of Noah, Abraham and Jacob, but these episodes are downplayed or omitted by Aphrahat and the *Liber Graduum*. This is no accident: for the *Liber Graduum* the righteous biblical figures of the past are examples of the 'Upright' rather than exemplars for the 'Perfect' ones it directly addresses. If the righteous of the past had been worthy to meet angels, one might conclude that through Christ it was entirely within the average Christian's grasp to resemble angels, with a little extra effort. This would undermine the author's advocacy of the difficult pursuit of Perfection and of angelomorphism, especially through celibacy.

Some differences of emphasis between the three writers can be explained by genre. Aphrahat and the *Liber Graduum* are writing treatises aimed to promote asceticism. In contrast, Ephrem is

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[87] Memra XV.3–4, cols. 344 line 22–col. 345 line 2, in Kmosko (ed.), *Liber Graduum*:
... الا ولا انه لا هذه امه والملاك: وحصة القديسين هي في هذا العالم... الا ولا انه لا هذه امه والملاك: وحكم هي ما حكما: لا هذه حكما هي امه ولهذا: امه ولهذا.

[88] *HVirg*. XXXIV.9 in E. Beck (ed.), *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate,* CSCO 223, SS 94 (Secrétariat du CorpusSCO; Louvain 1962):

ܗ ܐܬܡܢܥ ܡܫܡܫܐ ܐܬܚܫܒ ܥܠܝܢ
ܡܢ ܕܠܐ ܡܨܥ ܘܡܥܒܕ ܐܢܘܢ ܕܐܠ ܡܢ
ܥܠ ܠܐ ܡܥܡܕ ܐܬܐ ܘܡܫܡܫ
ܘܡܫܡܫ ܡܢ ܕܐܠ ܐܢܘܢ ܕܐܠ ܐܬܚܫܒ

('Watchers' have no seat because they always stand in the presence of the Almighty, ministering in his Presence: see also Ephrem's *CHaer*. 32.6 cited by Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, p. 166.) The pseudo-Ephremic *SErem.* 383–416 (ed. Beck) describes solitaries as shunning the evils of the world, and instead embracing mourning, humility, fasting, celibacy, quiet, truth, honesty, purity (*tammīmūṯā*): through them is fulfilled the command to become as children.

writing *Hymns* to be performed in churches for the benefit of a varied Christian congregation, and his *Commentary on Genesis* also seems to envisage a broader audience. (The problem of the disputed authenticity of the *Sermons on the Solitaries* has already been mentioned.) Ephrem's understanding of Christ as the archetypal 'Watcher' who came down to make human beings also 'Watchers', means that the possibility of humans becoming like angels is achieved primarily by Christ rather than through human effort, though human participation in the process is strongly encouraged. For him it is possible for the average Christian believer to discover or recover some aspects of the angelic life, for instance through baptism, the eucharist, worship, fasting and vigils. However, although he is more positive towards marriage than Aphrahat, and much more so than the *Liber Graduum*,[89] it is clear that Ephrem believes celibates can enter more fully into this dimension because without the distraction of worldly cares they can be more single-minded. Ephrem's work lacks the rigid divisions of the *Liber Graduum*, with its distinction of the Perfect (who are meant to imitate angels), and the Upright, who are good people but second-rate spiritually, and thus quite unable to resemble angels. Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* also strongly advocate an ascetic, celibate lifestyle for the Members of the Covenant, the *bnay qyāmā*, as the only way to achieve true angelomorphism. Both Aphrahat and the *Liber Graduum* address a religious elite, and both place the onus on Christians to work at achieving equality with the angels.[90] However, all three sources regard the achievement of resemblance to the angels, as advocated in Luke 20:35–36, as the restoration of Adam's original state in Paradise.[91]

[89] See Minov, 'Marriage and Sexuality', pp. 247–48, on Ephrem's and Aphrahat's acceptance of marriage as God-given, and pp. 256–57 on a more conciliatory attitude in Memra XIII.3 of the *Liber Graduum*.

[90] Bucur's valuable study *Angelomorphic Pneumatology* discusses Clement's notion that 'Gnostic souls' may gain access to the Divine Presence, having become angels (*Adumbr. Jude 5:24)*: 'there can be no doubt that these texts by Clement of Alexandria preserve an ancient biblical and extra-biblical tradition – namely that of a transformation from human into angelic – which will be eliminated in mainstream Christian theology…' p. 46, and n.174 p. 46, 'it is important to observe that the depiction of *eschatological* humanity as angelic or angelomorphic corresponds to the depiction of protological humanity as angelic or angelomorphic', citing influential texts in the NT such as passages including Matt 22:30 and Luke 20:36 p. 47), also citing Tertullian *Marc.* 3.9.4, 7 (n. 178), and Irenaeus (n. 180). However, he notes (p. 42, n.156) that Clement does not envisage a *restoration* to a protological state, but a 'promotion to eschatological perfection' in *Ecl.* 57.1, 5.

[91] The author of the *Liber Graduum* (Memra XV.7 col. 352 line 25 – col. 353 line 2), describes how Adam's rejection of angelic 'holiness' caused enmity between heavenly and earthly beings, yet now, 'when we keep the words of Our Lord, the heavenly ones are reconciled with us; after Jesus was revealed, he revealed to whomever wishes that he should resemble the primordial creation of Adam':

هلا وبلغ هكذه وهن هكذه حمد حكتا: هم والحكد وم معه حلا حمد وحز وهه اسر حنكه وهه وابم هجكه.