

Anthropology in the hymns of St. Ephraim the Syrian

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Abstract. *Church music is one of the most dynamic and generous (from the perspective of the scientific approach) parts of Church theology. Its location at the confluence of liturgy, art, dogma, history, and tradition gives it a unique characteristic that foresees a paradox: the difficulty of approach combined with the pleasure of study. The reason why this topic was chosen is that this theme is the rich theological and poetic experience of Saint Ephrem's "hymns" which proves to be extremely current and generous. If the specific genius of the Latin West lies in the sphere of law, and of the Greek East in that of philosophy, then that of the Syrian East lies in the sphere of poetry. The theology that is present in the writings of Saint Ephraim have influenced worship, liturgical music, the most important connections being related to the biblical and exegetical field. The object of the work is, therefore, to present the theological-symbolic depth of the thought of Saint Ephraim. The hymns of the saint obviously express the amazing synthesis of the symbolic elements most specific to Semitic-Aramaic Christianity. At the conclusion of this work, in which we have attempted to develop the ideas present in the Ephraimian hymns, it is preferable to find ourselves in front of a transformative reading, in which the ancient texts do not remain simple pseudoscientific speculations, but also help us in the spiritual sphere, as Saint Ephraim the Syrian says: "This Jesus made so many symbols, that I fell completely into their ocean."*

Keywords: *anthropology, musicology, Syriac literature, theology, poetry.*

Introduction

Working not with concepts but with images, metaphors and comparisons, St. Ephraim embodies in his hymns Siro-Aramaic Christianity, of Judeo-Christian origin, perfectly. Intended for liturgical use, St. Ephraim's "hymns" are grouped into thematic cycles: on Easter, on the Nativity and the Presentation of the Lord, on the Church, on Paradise, on faith and against heresies. Their division is often similar, the same hymn being able to encompass a variety of themes and aspects in a remarkable, polyphonic symbolic coherence: exegetical, theological, liturgical, and ascetical. A specific feature of the Ephraimian "hymns" is their profound intimacy with the world of the Holy Scriptures, both in its literality and in its profound images and symbols.

The reason for choosing this theme is due to the rich theological and poetic experience of the "hymns" of St. Ephraim prove to be extremely topical and generous. If the genius specific to the Latin West lies in the sphere of law, and that of the Greek East in that of philosophy, then that of the Syriac East lies in the sphere of poetry. The theology that is present in the writings of St. Ephrem influenced worship, liturgical music, the most important connections being in the biblical and exegetical fields. The main features of Syriac Christian spirituality are "asceticism," "symbolism," "individualism"

(emphasis on personal experience). The hymns of St. Ephraim capture through their theology a remarkable balance, which is put forward through poetic and symbolic formulas, between the fundamental paradoxical polarities of our Christian faith, which in Greek or Latin Christianity will always tend towards conflictual drifts. The theology of the hymns of St. Ephraim will make him a true ancestor of Roman Melodious, and the greatest poet of the patristic age.

Therefore, the object of the work is to present the theological-symbolic depth of the thought of St. Ephraim. The hymns of the saint express most obviously the astonishing synthesis of the most specific symbolic elements of Semitic-Aramaic Christianity. St. Ephrem assimilates and reinterprets through his theological thought, biblical motifs but also mythical, Jewish, and Judeo-Christian representations.

Regarding the bibliographical material used, it is necessary to specify that this scientific work is inspired by specialized books known in the academic theological environment and argues its content with the statements of established theologians of the Orthodox Church and beyond. In this regard, we mention the names of some of them: Jean-Claude Larchet, Georgios, Andrew Louth, Tomáš Špidlík, Georges Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, Panayotis Nellas, Dumitru Stăniloae and Ilarion Alfeyev. Professor Sebastian Brock, the Syriac scholar who, today dominates the field of Syrian Christian studies, and has a special place in our thesis. In his scholarly work he introduces us to both the theological richness specific to the Syriac tradition and the historical root causes that have caused the Syriac East to be left out of the consideration. Another important work that helped us in the writing of this work is that of Costion Nicolescu, entitled "Christ - the Shelter, the Garment, the Food, the Doctor and the Healer of man and mankind on the path of salvation".

Without claiming to exhaust this topic of great theological significance, we consider that the thesis entitled: "Anthropology in the hymns of St. Ephraim the Syrian" can be characterized as novel in that it addresses topics of great theological depth, trying to develop the theological ideas present in the writings of St. Ephraim the Syrian.

The Syriac space, cradle of Christian poetic-musical theology

It is a platitude that we cannot talk about music without mentioning Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, and others. They were not only instrumentalists and composers, but also outstanding theorists. To talk about church music without considering the Syriac space is from the start a seriously incomplete approach.

The 20th century has the great merit of bringing back to life the ethos of a Christianity long ignored. Syriac Christianity, the so-called Syro-Aramaic vein, is of incomparable liturgical richness and of very beautiful poetic expression. Moreover, most of the Eastern Church's melodies (singers, composers) are of Syriac origin. The historian Eusebius of Caesarea in his Church History¹ limits the interpretation of the history of Christianity to the Greco-Roman world. Since then, this serious amputation of the Syriac Christian tradition has extended to the dawn of modernity. It was the English school (Oxford) and the French school (Paris) that rehabilitated this forgotten tradition².

The Syrian fathers wrote musical compositions, but especially poetic theology. It is enough, perhaps, to mention a few names³: Saint Ephraim the Syrian (celebrated on 28th January), Saint John Damascene (celebrated on the 5th of December), Saint Andrew Chrysostom (celebrated on 4 July), Saint Cosmas the Melodist (celebrated on 12 October), Saint Sophronius of Jerusalem (celebrated on 11th of March) and, last but not least, Saint Roman the Melodist (celebrated on the 1st of October).

Christian Anthropology – Composite Nature

According to the revelation of God (Acts 2:7; Acts 18:27), and the interpretations given by the Holy Fathers, God created man with a "composite nature"⁴ composed of two elements: body and soul. By virtue of this complementarity that the human being carries within himself, he unites in himself both the material and the spiritual parts of the cosmos⁵. Ancient philosophy also took this reality into account: the existence in the human being of two opposing principles, body, and soul - but nonetheless inseparable. Ancient philosophy was helped at first by the anthropology expressed in the Jewish world, and later by the formulas existing in the Christian world. The nature of the soul was identified in the philosophical world as being spiritual, but the philosophical view of the body was wrong, as it was an evil and hostile matter for the soul⁶. Additionally, from this perspective, Plato in his work called, "The Republic" offers an interpretation of the text: "The duty of the wise man is to

¹ Ioannis G. Kourembelis, *Hristologia la Sfântul Roman Melodul și importanța ei soteriologică*, traducere din Neogreacă și note introductive de Alexandru Prelipceanu, Iași, Editura Doxologia, 2018, p. 21-23.

² Françoise Briquel Chatonnet și Muriel Debié, *Le monde Syriaque sous les routes d'un christianisme ignoré* Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2018.

³ Nicolas Lossky, *Teologia muzicii liturgice: o perspectivă ortodoxă*, traducere de Cezar Login, Cluj-Napoca, Edit. Renașterea, 2013, p. 51.

⁴ Feriçitul Augustin, *Confessiones*, în Scrieri alese, traducere de Nicolae Barbu, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1985, p. 206.

⁵ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre suflet și Înviere*, traducere de Teodor Bodogae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, p. 368.

⁶ Lars Thunberg, *Antropologia teologică a Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul: Microcosmos și mediator*, traducere de Anca Popescu, Sophia, București, 2005, p. 115

flee as quickly as possible from this world”⁷, affirming that "flight" is the natural vocation of every man to resemble God.

The independence of the elements that make up human nature is shown in various forms. Firstly, the Holy Scripture shows us that the soul and the body were brought to life by two different works: the soul being made up by the "breath of life" given to man by God at the same time as the body was made up of "dust and ashes" (Acts 18:27), and the body is the very work that God has done with His hands. Each element is different in its content: the body being created by God from the dust of the earth, belonging to the sensible world, and thus having elements specific to irrational beings. The soul, being of a spiritual nature, invisible and immaterial, is the element which unites man most closely with God and which enables man to "delight" (Psalm 36:5) in the grace God has given man⁸.

St. Maximus the Confessor affirms that the soul can live even if it is not united with the material element, this being his basic argument that the soul by its very nature is indestructible and immortal⁹.

Man is built "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:26). The theme of the "image" that we humans have received from God is one of interest both to Old Testament anthropology and to Christian anthropology. Holy Scripture presents us with the existence of an "image of God" in the Book of Acts, but also in the Epistle to the Colossians, whose author is St. Paul. In the book of Acts, the Hagiographer presents man as the only creature created "in the image" of the Creator: "And God said: Let us make man in our image and likeness [...] And God made man in his own image; in the image of God, He made him" (Genesis 1:26-27)¹⁰. In the Epistle to the Colossians, Jesus Christ is defined as the Logos incarnate and "the image of God" (Colossians 1:15).

Holy Fathers such as St. Athanasius the Great, Clement of Alexandria, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, finally arrived at the idea that man is built in the "image" of the Savior Jesus Christ, being therefore "Image of the Image"¹¹.

Pauline anthropology shows us that man must attain to the "likeness" of his Creator, and this is possible to the extent that man is willing to bear within himself, "the image of the heavenly man" (1 Corinthians 15:49). A prominent theologian of the twentieth century, Panayotis Nellas, in his work

⁷ Tomáš Špidlík, *Spiritualitatea răsăritului creștin*, vol. I. Manual sistematic, Deisis, Sibiu, 2005, p. 83.

⁸ Sf. Ioan Damaschin, *Dogmatica*, traducere de Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1943. pp. 58-60.

⁹ Lars Thunberg, *Antropologia teologică a Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, p. 116.

¹⁰ Tomáš Špidlík, *Spiritualitatea răsăritului creștin*, vol. I, p. 85.

¹¹ Panayotis Nellas, *Omul – animal îndumnezeit. Perspective pentru o antropologie ortodoxă*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2009, p. 62.

entitled, 'Man - the divinized animal,' in just a few pages, deals with the divine traits that are also present in man. Based on the anthropology of Saint Paul, the theologian Panayotis Nellas concludes that man, created after the, "Image of the Image," which is the Savior Jesus Christ, takes on the divine-human qualities that the Savior had in His Person. It is the very nature of man that calls him, "to go beyond the limits of the limits of creation and to become infinite"¹², just as the Son of God is infinite by nature. Man has been endowed by God with wisdom, as God is All-Wise: "God has been pleased to impart His wisdom to His creatures, so that He might put a certain stamp of His image on everything, and that all created things might be wise and worthy of God." Saint Athanasius the Great tells us that man, receiving the saving work of Christ, can also become, "all-wise"¹³.

The creation of man

God is the King, the Lord, the mighty Creator of all creation including its absolute Judge. All these attributes of God command respect and fear, but he remains full of love for man, manifesting it in His own will to dwell and draw near to man. Man is a corporeal and material being created by God, an aspect that Saint Ephraim places great emphasis on in his arguments against the Manichee and Marcionites. The destiny that man has is Paradise or dwelling in the light of Divine Glory¹⁴. In the theology of the saint there is an important emphasis on the free will that man must unmistakably assume. The history of salvation is seen as a long succession of either victories or defeats that man bears to earn his salvation. After the fall, man is seen as stripped of his former glory, cast out into Satan's world of temptation, a world subject to death and corruption, ending in the prison of hell¹⁵.

According to Saint Ephraim, the body was created by God for the purpose of being inhabited by Him and to be a temple of God: "do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?" (1 Corinthians 6:19). The body of Adam was created by God to bring him and his soul into the likeness of God. The entire existence of man is a journey between birth and death, and this journey must be spent with great wisdom by man, to succeed in earning his eternity with God¹⁶.

True joy for man is achieved in the harmony of union between his soul and body, and the path of conversion or of deification must be travelled together. After the Fall, man suffered a sickness of

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 64.

¹³ *Ibid.* pp 64-65.

¹⁴ Ioan I. Ică Jr., „O teologie poetică a misterului pascal”, *Sf. Efreim Sirianul , Imnele Păresimilor, Așimelor, Răstignirii și Învierii*, trad. Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis, Sibiu, 2010, p. 17.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

¹⁶ Costion Nicolaescu, *Hristos – Adăpostul, Hrana, Veșmântul, Doctorul și leacul omului și al omenirii pe calea mântuirii: (conținutul spiritual al nevoilor trupesti vitale, la Sfântul Efreim Sirul)*, Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2011., p. 378.

both soul and body, and his integral healing is achieved by embracing both body and soul. Death temporarily interrupts the union between soul and body, the body returning to its state of dust that it had before its creation. At the finale of this separation awaits the resurrection, which, in a spiritualized manner, makes it possible to rebuild wholeness for the eternity set before it by God. When God created man, He gave him marvelous gifts, making him in His own image and likeness, establishing a privileged relationship that man can enjoy before God. The Fall caused the alteration of the ontological condition, and this was restored by the Incarnation of the Son of God. In the Church there is a re-creation of man which God brings about through the liturgical life, through Holy Baptism which heals the ontological illness caused by the sin of our forefathers. It is Christ who healed the sick freedom of man, making him capable of being saved¹⁷.

Saint Ephraim, while referring to the Savior Jesus Christ as the new Adam, wishes to emphasize the ontological character of the Lord's work of salvation:

*"But there came another Athlete, the second, unbeatable,
and put on the same skirts and arms in which Adam had been overcome.*

*When the enemy saw the cloaks and weapons of the victor,
Adam rejoiced, not noticing that he had been deceived.*

The one inside the shawls would have frightened him, but his appearance gave him courage.

He came to conquer, the evil one was conquered and turned back!"¹⁸.

It is important to see how this ontological restoration of man was accomplished, Christ putting on the garment of the body through His Incarnation, thus renewing man. The body of the Savior is made of Eucharistic food, so man is healed when sharing it, and is enabled to attain to deification by the grace of the Holy Spirit¹⁹. The goodness of God shown through His sacrifice on the Cross gives man the possibility of putting on the likeness of the Son²⁰. In the Church of Christ, man has been given innumerable gifts with which to acquire the likeness of God, the Christian having in the Church a privileged space to encounter God in His Holy Trinity. The Church also offers man the liturgical

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 379.

¹⁸ Sf. Efrem Sirianul, *Imnele Raiului*, traducere de Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis, Sibiu, 2010, p. 103.

¹⁹ Costion Nicolaescu, *Hristos – Adăpostul, Hrana, Veșmântul, Doctorul și leacul omului și al omenirii pe calea mântuirii: (conținutul spiritual al nevoilor trupesti vitale, la Sfântul Efrem Sirul*, p. 379.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 379.

life, blessings, prayers, the uninterrupted assistance of divine grace and especially the Holy Mysteries, gifts which make it possible to fulfill the true mission of man on this earth, namely, to delight in God and have union with Him.

The value of the body

Saint Ephraim is far removed from certain trends in early Christianity, such as dualistic or Platonic tendencies, which sought to denigrate the body and its value²¹. St. Ephraim's attitude was because the body, being created by God, should not be considered evil or useless to man for his salvation. The author recalls the testimony of Holy Scripture in 1 Corinthians 6:19: "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?" bringing forth the great honor that God Himself provides to the body, making it the dwelling place of the Most Holy Trinity²².

In the, "Hymns of the Nativity and Annunciation," St. Ephraim presents the value of the body, "clothed by God":

"You are the Son of the Creator, who is like your Father.

As the Maker made Himself in the womb pure flesh, He clothed Himself in it,

He came forth and clothed with glory our weakness through the mercy He brought from His Father"²³.

The Eucharist is another one of the testimonies of St. Ephraim concerning the value of the body, combating certain Christians who accepted the Eucharist but referred to the body as unclean:

"If our God had despised the body as something unclean or ugly and evil,

then the Bread and the Cup of Salvation must also be something ugly and unclean to these heretics"²⁴.

The life of mankind is a journey between the original Heaven and the final Heaven. The image of Paradise in the hymns of Saint Ephraim the Syrian. St. Ephraim presents the two paradises in a very free way: the primary paradise - the "lost" paradise - and the eschatological paradise - the "found" paradise. The two paradises are presented by St. Ephraim through the prism of a man who finds the

²¹ Sebastian Brock, *Efrem Sirul I. Ochiul luminos. Viziunea spirituală a lumii la Sfântul Efrem Sirul. II. Imnele despre Paradis*, traducere de Ioan I. Ică Jr. și Mircea Ielciu, Deisis, Sibiu, 1998, p. 59.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 60

²³ Sf. Efrem Sirianul, *Imnele Raiului*, p. 7.

²⁴ Sebastian Brock, *Efrem Sirul I. Ochiul luminos. Viziunea spirituală a lumii la Sfântul Efrem Sirul. II. Imnele despre Paradis*, p. 60.

premises in the Bible, and then through spiritual senses, meditation and wisdom rediscovers it, keeping a middle way between fear and love²⁵. The author presents us with a spiritual visit to Paradise, the poet seeing its mysteries through the eyes of the soul, since this Paradise cannot be penetrated by the eyes of the flesh, thus wishing to understand what cannot be understood rationally.

Moreover, concerning the beauty of this Paradise, the author speaks to us in human terms, since human nature, being powerless, cannot comprehend the divine glory and its brilliance. To be able to understand something of the mysteries of Paradise, the author expresses its glory and greatness according to the measure of human understanding:

"Let not your mind be troubled with words alone, for heaven is clothed only in the words of your world; not out of poverty is it clothed in the images of your world, but because your flesh, which is too weak, is not able to touch its greatness, and its beauties are greatly diminished when painted in the pale colors to which you are accustomed"²⁶. Thus, we must always bear in mind that the whole image that the author presents of Paradise is subtle and full of deep spirituality.

Original Paradise

Concerning the Garden of Eden, St. Ephraim tells us that there dwelt a beauty without blemish, a peace without anxiety. Thus, Eden is presented as the, 'summit of all good':

"I found in this book both the bridge and the gate to heaven.

I passed through and entered.

My eye remained out, but my heart went in.

I began to walk among things unsearchable.

It is a bright, clear, sublime, and proud height.

The book gave it the name Eden: the piscoir of all blessings"²⁷.

There was an inner paradise where God dwelt, watched over by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and an outer paradise where all created creatures, including man, were seated. After

²⁵ Ilie Frăcea, „Idei teologice în «Imnele Paradisului» ale Sfintului Efreim Sirul”, *Studii Teologice II*, 5-10, 1979, p. 605.

²⁶ Sf. Efreim Sirianul, *Imnele Raiului*, p. 7.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

man was created, he was placed in the outer paradise, to make himself well pleasing to God by his priestly obedience and service. St. Ephraim shows us in the "Hymns of Heaven" (XV, 14) that outside the outer paradise, there was an even lower space, where Eve was deceived by the serpent:

"The serpent served as a garment which the wicked one put on.

seeing their innocence, he was filled with cunning,

he cooked up a cunning trap for the hearing of the two ignorant children.

And in their simplicity, they readily listened to the words of him who showed his care on his face but hid his cunning within.

His face in other times the Iscariot teaches you"²⁸.

Throughout the history of mankind, the devils have acted against man to prevent him from entering the final heaven. Since the Fall of Man, Paradise has been closed to man for a long time: "The cherub and the edge of the sword have fenced off Paradise" (Hymns on Paradise IV, 1). Since the paradise of St. Ephraim is divided into many hierarchical places, the removal has been gradual, increasingly serious, according to the quantity and the gravity of the sins committed by man:

"When Adam sinned, God expelled him from Heaven,

but in His goodness, He gave him the lowland outside of it by placing it in the valley at the foot of Heaven.

But continuing to sin, men were also expelled from here, and because they were not worthy to border

on Heaven, God commanded the Archons to cast them down Mount Qardu"²⁹.

The final heaven – reopening and reclaiming paradise

Adam, being bathed in the water and blood of the Savior Jesus Christ, he regains life, he is reintegrated into Paradise. The tomb where Christ was buried becomes a symbol of Eden, where Adam died, which is also suggested in the Crucifixion icon. Through Christ, Adam regains the lost Garden³⁰. Tanios Bou Mansour emphasizes the existence in St. Ephraim of a salvation which accompanies and precedes the effort of humanity, and which is presented in a virtual way in the Ascension of the Lord³¹. It is Christ who holds the keys to Heaven: "He came and gave us the keys to

²⁸ Ibid. p. 125.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 28.

³⁰ Costion Nicolescu, *Adăpostul, Hrana, Veșmântul, Doctorul și leacul omului și al omenirii pe calea mântuirii: (conținutul spiritual al nevoilor trupesti vitale, la Sfântul Efreim Sirul,* p. 91.

³¹ *Ibidem,* p. 91.

“Anthropology in the hymns of St. Ephraim the Syrian”, *Astra Salvensis*, XI (2023),
no. 22, p. 20-33.

Heaven; for His treasures await us.” Of course, the path of repentance cannot be neglected, as the classic example of King David shows us. This example is also shown by St. Ephrem in his hymns on Paradise (XIII, 8):

*"Though he disliked the wild beasts' home,
it was necessary for the king to remain there but, despite his folly and wandering,
he remembered he was human and prayed to be returned to his former home.
And when the Good One returned him, he gave thanks to His mercy.
Blessed is He who in him has given us an example of return!"³².*

The heavenly condition

It is impossible for man, even for a poet or a theologian, to describe the landscape of Paradise:

*"What mouth has ever spelt heaven?
What tongue has told of its glory?
What mind has depicted its beauty?
For its inward depths cannot be searched,
I will only marvel at the things seen, the things without,
and so know how far I remain from its hidden ones!"³³.*

Paradise is the place where the glory of God is present. The psalmist David believed in the possibility of the glory of God being established here for a time, among us, in this world: "Yes, His salvation is near to them that fear Him, that in our land He may make His glory His dwelling place" (Psalm 84:10). The Old Testament saints have a concrete picture of the help that the glory of God offers to man: "above all, glory shall be a covering and a foliage to keep shade from the heat by day, a shelter and a cover from storm and rain" (Isaiah 4:5-6). St. Ephraim shows us in the Hymns of Heaven (XI, 2), that everything is in perfect balance in Paradise:

"Neither hurtful frost nor scorching heat is in that place of blessing and delight.

³² Sf. Efrem Sirianul, *Imnele Raiului*, p. 63.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 89.

*It is the shore of joys, the haven of pleasures,
the haven of light and gladness*³⁴.

In this sub-chapter we have tried to relate some aspects of the wonderful theological teachings of St. Ephraim and to highlight the combination of poetry and faith, the elements present in all these hymns. The teaching of St. Ephraim concerning the "Lost" and "Found" Paradise is based on the Holy Scriptures and the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the differentiation between the two paradises lies in the relationship between Christ and Adam, mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans. Among the holy fathers he is considered to be the first to attempt to systematize an Orthodox teaching on the Last Judgment and on Heaven and Hell. St. Ephraim combats the teachings of the Marcionites and the Docetists, who claimed that the Savior Jesus Christ had an apparent body, insisting in his writings on the reality of the body that the Savior, "clothed." He also insists that the body of the Savior is the body of Christ. Although his teaching on pneumatology is written before the Second Ecumenical Council (381), it is dogmatically correct and assumed by the Church Fathers.

According to the testimony of Blessed Jerome, the hymns of St. Ephrem were read after the reading of the Holy Scriptures. Canon 59 of the Synod of Laodicea forbade the reading of particular hymns in worship without prior verification, so as not to bring heretical teachings into the Christian communities. All hymns were checked by the bishop, not arbitrarily, but according to the dogmatic criteria laid down by the ecumenical synods. Thus, through the hierarchs, the hymn writings were dogmatically related to the ecumenical doctrinal definitions, or to the teaching that the Church preached³⁵. The recitation of St. Ephrem's hymns in worship, therefore, constitutes their being Orthodox.

The heavenly state and the "fulfilment of the image" through the likeness of God

According to Holy Scripture, man in Paradise was created with a natural predisposition or vocation towards his Maker. Adam's search for God was specific to his entire ontological structure, so that he could later serve Him. This inclination which man has towards God was and is possible for the human race, thanks to that element of nature which we have mentioned, and which theology calls the 'face.' Man is an icon of God and has the destiny, as St. Basil the Great tells us, to be God according to grace. The Fathers of the Church considered the first state of Adam, and in analyzing it, they

³⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

³⁵ Ilie Frăcea, „Idei teologice în «Imnele Paradisului» ale Sfintului Efreem Sirul”, p. 614.

concluded that perfection can be accepted only by regarding the spiritual capacities that Adam had at his disposal, with the aim of fulfilling his vocation³⁶. Adam did not achieve perfection to be united with God, but only had ontological capacities which, by their very nature, desired deification. For the human being to be "filled" with divine grace, to be sanctified, it was necessary that all the spiritual capacities that man had at hand be put to work³⁷.

Much has been meditated upon in the works of the Patristic Tradition and in the writings of the Fathers of the twentieth century, not only on the state with which man was given by God. Father Dumitru Stăniloae reflected on this heavenly reality in which Adam found himself. The great Romanian theologian captures a relative perfection of Adam, in that he, "Was free from evil impulses and tended towards communion with God and with his fellow men"³⁸. Father Dumitru Stăniloae affirms a very important aspect for Christian anthropology. This statement consists in the fact that the nature of created man did not have in him the substance of sin. Adam was not sinful by nature³⁹, but he had the possibility of sinning, which he used. Because man did not obey the commandment given by God, he felt upon himself the state of sin, the fall in which he stood before God. If Adam had directed his whole will in accordance with the measure of his ontological gift, he would have been strengthened spiritually, and thus removed himself from bodily death and the fall with it of his whole nature, which he had assumed⁴⁰.

Creation played a very important role in the communion of man with God even before the Fall. It represented the divine love shared with Adam and a way of contemplating and getting to know the Creator. The reasons behind the sensible realities were understood relating to God, being seen wholly in God alone, and God manifesting Himself through them by His uncreated energies⁴¹. It is important to emphasize that the bodily senses were subordinate to the spiritual capacities of man. The inner structure was illumined by the grace of God through the continual communion of Adam with God, and these were what guided his life⁴².

³⁶ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Terapeutică bolilor spirituale*, traducere de Marinela Bojin, Sophia, București, 2006, p. 15

³⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2010, p. 427.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 428

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁴¹ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Terapeutică bolilor spirituale*, p. 42.

⁴² John Behr, *Ascetism și antropologie la sfântul Irineu de Lyon și Clement Alexandrinul*, trad. Adela Lungu, Doxologia, Iași, 2016, p. 181.

Our forefather Adam used his bodily functions in a healthy way⁴³. He put them at the service of God and enjoyed the gifts of the seen realities of the world by using them. The way of enjoying the gifts received was prudent and devoid of any desire for attachment or idolatry: "The eyes of man in the beginning did not escape covetous and crafty looks, of lust or of preying"⁴⁴.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, and later Clement the Alexandrian, testify that the state of the first people before they came out of obedience to God was one of spiritual immaturity and incompleteness⁴⁵.

The Alexandrian theologian uses the concept of, "perfect incompleteness," wishing to show that the soul capacities of man were without fault as an ontological given, but still could not reach the fullness of their potential⁴⁶. Paradise was full of harmony and peace: harmony between the created and the Uncreated, between man and the cosmos, and especially harmony between the psychosomatic capacities that man had precisely to reach divinity.

Conclusions

From the content of the above thesis, we can see that the subject of, "Theology in the Hymns of St. Ephraim the Syrian," occupies a prominent place in the field of Patrology. Assumed by the Patristic Tradition and developed in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the experience of the Church, the tradition of Syriac Christianity has, in its nature, a mystical and symbolic power, through which it deepens theological ideas specific to Syriac Christianity. In presenting the origins of Syriac Christianity in the opening part of the paper, this work wishes to present the theological richness of the hymns, given the context in which they were written, responding to the heresies of the period. Then, in the work, it hopefully develops each theological concept present in the hymns of St. Ephraim the Syrian. Beyond a development of a concept from a dogmatic point of view, it also wanted to bring to the surface the spiritual richness found in the hymns of St. Ephraim the Syrian.

Analyzing the hymns of St. Ephraim, we noticed the deep spiritual experience of the saint, through which the Word of God is deepened and interpreted congenially with the help of exegetical methods. All this was accomplished within a life anchored both liturgically and sacramentally. The assumption of his writings on our part is precisely the assumption of this way of Christian life both

⁴³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 435.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem.*, p. 434.

⁴⁵ John Behr, *Ascetism și antropologie la sfântul Irineu de Lyon și Clement Alexandrinul*, p. 177.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*, pp. 177-178.

from the liturgical point of view, through the services of the Church, in which the mysteries of God are revealed to man, and from the sacramental point of view.

The Hymns of the Saint are also an extraordinary and virtuosic theological-poetic commentary on the Mysteries of Christian initiation in the order in which they were celebrated in the Old Syrian Church. They are a unique testimony of the sacramental symbolic realism and spirituality of one of the oldest Churches of Christianity, whose incomparable theological voice was Saint Ephraim. His hymns reveal him not only as the most fascinating and fabulous Christian poet of all time, but also as one of the most profound patristic theologians. Here, he practices another theology which is poetic and symbolic, faithful to the revelation of the mystery and open to adoration, a possible alternative to the sophisticated and degraded theologies of the past and a chance of renewal for the discourse of the Church in the future.

Finally, we conclude this scientific work entitled: "Anthropology in the Hymns of St. Ephraim the Syrian," recalling the chance that we possess to encounter the exemplary patristic exegesis in the writings of St. Ephraim and vibrating in a spiritual harmony with the multiple symbolic registers of his "objective." At the end of this work, in which we attempted to develop the ideas present in the Ephraimian hymns, it is preferable to find ourselves in front of a transformative reading, in which the ancient texts do not remain simple pseudo-scientific speculations but also assist us in the spiritual sphere, as Saint Ephrem the Syrian says: "This Jesus made so many symbols, that I fell completely into their ocean"⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ Sebastian Brock, *Efrem Sirul*, p. 20.