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ISAAC OF NINEVEH'S CONTRIBUTION TO SYRIAC THEOLOGY: AN ESCHATOLOGICAL REWORKING OF GREEK ANTHROPOLOGY

by

Jason Scully

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate school,
Marquette University,
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT
ISAAC OF NINEVEH'S CONTRIBUTION TO SYRIAC THEOLOGY:
AN ESCHATOLOGICAL REWORKING OF GREEK ANTHROPOLOGY

Jason Scully

Marquette University, 2013

This dissertation responds to an explicit *desideratum* from Robert Beulay, who, in his book *La Lumière sans forme*, calls for a presentation of Isaac's thought with special attention to his sources.

Contrary to the belief of older scholarship, I conclude that Isaac's anthropology and eschatology are much more than a Syriac repetition of Greek Evagrian thought; rather, they are influenced by John the Solitary, a Syriac author who has received less scholarly attention. Although Isaac refers to Evagrius, as well as Pseudo-Dionysius and Pseudo-Macarius, to define specific terminology, the influence of John the Solitary permeates all areas of Isaac's thought.

The first part of this dissertation investigates the sources for Isaac's anthropology. Isaac appropriates Evagrius's definitions of the tripartite soul to explain how evil arises from the natural goodness of the soul and he uses Pseudo-Dionysius's and Pseudo-Macarius's definition of loving desire to explain how the soul naturally prepares the mind for the reception of heavenly knowledge, but these definitions only make sense within the context of John's three degrees. The three degrees framework explains that the operation of the soul depends on the degree of ascetical renunciation performed by each monk.

The second part of this dissertation examines the sources for Isaac's eschatology. Isaac rejects Evagrius's eschatology, which focuses on returning the soul to the original purity of creation and instead emphasizes an eschatology in which the future state of the soul surpasses original purity. Isaac bases this future-oriented eschatology on John's obsessive interest in the life of the world to come.

The third part of this dissertation investigates the sources for Isaac's conception of wonder, which, I argue, is Isaac's most significant contribution to Syriac theology. Wonder renders Isaac's ascetical system coherent because it unifies anthropology with eschatology by accounting for the way that the material human being embraces the spiritual order of the world to come. Although Isaac turns to Evagrius and Pseudo-Dionysius in order to construct ancillary definitions for the term wonder, John's conception of wonder as heavenly knowledge of the world to come is the basis for Isaac's conception of the term.

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Finally, I am grateful to my parents for their continued support and most of all to my wife, Ellen Scully, who diligently proof-read this entire dissertation, even the boring parts. If this dissertation makes sense, it is because Ellen helped me discover what points I really wanted to make and how to communicate these points in a clear fashion.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CPE	*Connaissance des Pères de l'Église*
CSCO	*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*
DSp	*Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*
OCA	*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*
OCP	*Orientalia Christiana Periodica*
OS	*Östkirchliche Studien*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
SC	*Source chrétiennes*
SM	*Studia Monastica*
SP	*Studia Patristica*
SVTQ	*St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*
VC	*Vigiliae Christianae*
ZAC	*Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*
ZAM	*Zeitschrift für Aszese und Mystik*

INTRODUCTION

ISAAC OF NINEVEH: BIOGRAPHY AND TEXTS

Since scholars have already published detailed accounts of Isaac's biographical history, I will provide only a brief summary.[1] Information about Isaac's life comes from two historical references. One is the *Book of Chastity* by Isho'dnah, from the early ninth-century and the other is from an anonymous document preserved by the West Syrians and found in a fifteenth-century manuscript published by I. Rahmani in the early twentieth-century.[2] From these documents and internal evidence from Isaac's own writings, we learn that Isaac was born in the region of Beit Qatar, on the Persian Gulf sometime around 613 CE.[3] He was consecrated as bishop of Nineveh around 676 CE, but his career as a bishop was short since he quickly retired from office in order to live the life of a hermit in the mountains of southeast Iraq. According to Isho'dnah, in the *Book of Chastity*, Isaac abandoned his position as bishop for a "reason which God knows," but the document published by Rahmani suggests that the Patriarch, George the Katholikos, may have asked Isaac to step down because the citizens of Nineveh were displeased to have a foreigner as their bishop.[4] After retiring from the office of bishop, Isaac first lived as a

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[1] For the most thorough biographical overviews, see the introduction to *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, ed. Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Boston: 1984), lxii-lxxvii and Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita: Ricerche su Isacco di Ninive e la sua fortuna* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2002), 3-114.

[2] J.B. Chabot, "Le Livre de la chasteté, composé par Jésusdenah, Evěque de Basrah," in *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire* 16 (1896): 277-78. I. E. Rahmani, *Studia Syriaca I* (Lebanon: Charfet Seminary, 1904), 32-33.

[3] For further background on the region of Beit Qatar in antiquity, see Jean Maurice Fiey, "L'Élam, La première des métropoles ecclésiastiques Syriennes Orientales," in *Communautés syriaques en Iran et Irak des origines à 1552* (London: Variorium Reprints, 1979), 221-67 and "L'Élam, La première des métropoles ecclésiastiques Syriennes Orientales (*suite*)," in *Communautés syriaques en Iran et Irak des origines à 1552* (London: Variorium Reprints, 1979), 110-53.

[4] See Sabino Chialà, Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita, 58-59 and Holy Transgifuration Monastery, The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian, lxvii-lxx.

hermit in the mountains of Beit Huzaye, to the south of Nineveh, and ultimately retired to the monastery of Rabban Shabur, where he remained until his death.

Internal evidence suggests that Isaac composed his ascetical homilies late in his life, around 688 CE.[5] Although the biographical document published by Rahmani states that Isaac became blind and that the monks of the monastery of Rabban Shabur wrote down his teachings, Isaac himself writes that he himself penned the ascetical homilies, probably while he was dwelling in solitude and still endowed with sight.[6] While neither biographical document says much about the genesis of the discourses, some of them seem to be letters and some of them are answers to questions.[7]

The ancient sources disagree on the number of books that Isaac wrote: Isho'dnah speaks generally of books by Isaac on "way of life of the solitary," the text published by Rahmani specifies that Isaac composed five books, and finally, Abdisho of Nisibus attributes seven books to Isaac in his *Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writings*.[8] In addition, a number of spurious works have also been attributed to Isaac.[9] Many of Isaac's homilies

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[5] Holy Transfiguration Monastery, The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian, lxii-lxvii.
[6] Holy Transfiguration Monastery, The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian, lxx-lxxi.
[7] See Sabino Chialà, Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita, 78-79.
[8] See Sabino Chialà, Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita, 66.
[9] For a discussion of these texts, see Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita*, 73-77. The older theory that Isaac composed *The Book of Grace* no longer holds currency. Scholars attributed *The Book of Grace* to Isaac because Aurthur Vööbus discovered five manuscripts in the libraries of the Syrian East that identify Isaac as the author of *The Book of Grace*. See A. Vööbus, "Eine neue Schrift von Ishaq von Ninive," *OS* 21 (1972): 309-12. In addition, J. Sanders noted a number of similarities between Isaac's writings and the *Book of Grace* in J Sanders, "Une prière inedited d'Isaac de Ninive," in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala: Festschrift für Prof. Mag. Dr. J.P.M. van der Ploeg O.P.*, ed. W.C. Delsman et al. (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1982), 499-511. Finally, Gabriel Bunge claims that Isaac dictated *The Book of Grace* to other monks after he retired in the monastery of Rabban Shabur. See Gabriel Bunge, "Mar Isaak von Ninive und sein 'Buch der Gnade'," *OS* 34 (1985): 3-22.

Recent scholarship, however, no longer attributes *The Book of Grace* to Isaac. The monks of the monastery of the Holy Transfiguration monastery ascribe *The Book of Grace* to Simon Tabyutha. For a detailed analysis, see Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, lxxi-lxxxv. Also see Paolo Bettiolo, "Povertà e conoscenza: appunti sulle Centurie Gnostiche della tradizione Evagriana in Siria," *Parole de l'Orient* 15 (1988-1989), 114-18.

were lost until recent discoveries in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-centuries.[10] At the present time, we have critical editions to three collections of ascetical homilies written by Isaac and unpublished manuscripts of fragments from a fourth collection.[11] According to Sabino Chialà, neither internal nor external evidence suggest any evolution of thought between the different collections, although the second and third collections seem to have more eschatology, express more original thought, and have more systemization than the first collection.[12]

PURPOSE AND PRESENT STATE OF RESEARCH ON ISAAC'S SOURCES

This dissertation will contribute to a fuller understanding to the development of the ascetical theology of Isaac, whose importance is not commensurate with the relatively small amount of scholarship dedicated to his thought.[13] Isaac is one of the most

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[10] For background on the recent discovery of the second part, see Sebastian Brock, "Isaac of Nineveh: Some Newly Discovered Works," *Sobornost* 8:1 (1986): 28-33. For background on the recent discovery of the third part, as well as a summary of the homilies therein, see Sabino Chialà, "Une nouvelle collection d'écrits d'Isaac de Ninive," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 54:3-4 (2004): 290-304.

[11] *Mar Isaacus Ninivita De Perfectione Religiosa*, ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris: Nihil Obstat, 1908; repr. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007); *Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part,' chapters IV-XLI*, ed. Sebastian Brock, CSCO 554, Scriptores Syri 224 (Louven: Peeters, 1995); *Isacco di Ninive Terza Collezione*, ed. Sabino Chialà, CSCO 638, Scriptores Syyri 247 (Louven: Peeters, 2011). The authenticity of the third part is under some dispute. Chialà, who published the critical edition and translated it into Italian, claims that a thorough examination of the texts reveals indisputably that Isaac is the author. See Sabino Chialà, "Une nouvelle collection d'écrits d'Isaac de Ninive," 292-93: "On peut affirmer avec certitude, me semble-t-il, la paternité isaaquienne de cette collection, pour les raisons suivantes: sont présents dans notre collection des discours sûrement authentiques appartenant tant à la Première qu'à la Deuxième collection; le style et la terminologie sont les mêmes; mais c'est surtout le contenu qui me paraît en parfait accord avec le reste de l'œuvre." Patrick Hagman, however, calls for reservation in attributing authentic authorship to Isaac; see Patrick Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 235-36: "The collection contains some ideas that seem somewhat alien to Isaac, and I have, for this reason, decided to treat the *Third Part* with some caution. Clearly there is also much in common with the texts we consider authentic, but the possibility that this collection may contain some writings by other writers in the same tradition as Isaac cannot be completely discounted."

[12] See Sabino Chialà, Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita, 78.

[13] There are only two recent monographs on Isaac of Nineveh: Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita*, published in 2002 and Patrick Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh*, published in 2010. Also see the book –length section on Isaac in Georg Günter Blum, *Die Geschichte der*

influential Syriac theologians, as his writings influenced later Syriac authors, such as Joseph Hazzaya (eighth-century) and John Dalyatha (eighth-century), and Greek authors, such as Gregory of Sinai (1255-1346) and Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), through Greek translation.[14] Isaac's influence on the Latin tradition became widespread in the fifteenth-century, when Latin translations of his text began to be circulated.[15] Isaac's writings have also been translated into numerous modern languages.[16]

This dissertation will respond to an explicit *desideratum* from one of the premier scholars in the field of Syriac theology. In his book *La Lumière sans forme* (1987), Robert Beulay points out the need for a presentation of Isaac's thought with special attention to his sources.[17] Sabino Chialà's recent monograph on Isaac, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita* (2002), is a solid first step towards this goal, but the

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Begegnung christlich-orientalischer Mystik mit der Mystik des Islams, Orientalia Biblica et Christiana 17 (Wiesbaden: 2009), 145-289.

[14] For a thorough overview of Isaac's reception in antiquity, see Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita*, 281-306. Also see Wassilios Klein, "Die Heiligkeit Isaak des Syrers von Ninive (7.Jh.) in der neuzeitlichen orthodoxen Überlieferung," in *Syriaca II. Beiträge zum 3. deutschen Syrologen-Symposium in Vierzehnheiligen 2002*, ed. Martin Tamcke, Studien zur orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 33 (Münster: LIT, 2004), 91-104. For a thorough analysis of the manuscript tradition and reception history of Isaac's texts in the Iberian Penninsula, see V. Sebastià Janeras, "La diffusion d'Isaac de Ninive dans la Péninsule Ibérique," in *Eastern Crossroads: Essays on Medieval Christian Legacy*, ed. Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, Gorgias Eastern Christianity Studies 1 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), 247-74. For a thorough analysis of the provenance and translation history of the three tenth-century Georgian translations of Isaac's homilies, see Tamara Pataridze, "Les Discours Ascétiques d'Isaac de Ninive: Étude de la tradition géorgienne et de ses rapports avec les autres versions," *Le Muséon* 124:1-2 (2011): 27-58.

[15] Chialà mistakenly says that Gregory the Great mentions Isaac in his *Dialogues*. This conclusion cannot be correct, since Gregory the Great (c. 540-604) predates Isaac. Chialà's overview of the Latin appropriation of Isaac relies on Gregory the Great's discussion of a certain "holy man" near Spoleto named Isaac, who, as Gregory records, said that "A monk who seeks possessions here on earth is no monk." This statement was appropriated and used by the Spiritual Franciscans in favor of their argument for radical poverty. Chialà traces out the history of commentary on this statement through the thirtheenth- and fourteenth-centuries, but this history cannot originate with Isaac of Nineveh. The Isaac in Gregory's dialogues must be a different Isaac. See Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita*, 291-306.

[16] For an overview of modern translations, see Sebastian Brock, "From Qatar to Tokyo, by way of Mar Saba: The translations of Isaac of Beth Qatraye (Isaac the Syrian)," *Aram* 11-12 (1999-2000): 475-84 and Sebastian Brock, "An Ecumenical Role Played by Monastic Literature: The Case of St Isaac the Syrian," *One in Christ: A Catholic Ecumenical Review* 40:3 (2005): 53-58.

[17] See Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans forme: Introduction à l'étude de la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale* (Chevetogne: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1987), 9.

general nature of the study — Chialà intends it to be a "general panoramic" — prevents him from performing an in-depth examination on any one particular area of Isaac's thought with respect to particular theological issues.[18] An overview of the rest of the present state of research on Isaac reveals that scholars have too often ignored the Greek and Syriac sources that Isaac used to develop his complex synthesis of the ascetical life.

The paucity of secondary literature on Isaac's sources exists because most of it is in the form of articles on his contribution to the spiritual life. The most thorough presentation of Isaac's contribution to the spiritual life is Hilarion Alfeyev's book entitled, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*.[19] While this work provides a helpful anthology of quotations from Isaac's texts, it does little to situate Isaac in his historical setting. Articles on Isaac's general contribution to the spiritual life include Nikolaus Von Arseniew's "Geistige 'Nüchternherit' und Gebet," Sebastian Brock's "St. Isaac of Nineveh and Syriac Spirituality," C. N. Tsirpanlis's "Praxis and Theoria," and Erica Hunter's "Isaac of Nineveh, the Persian Mystic."[20] Other articles focus on particular aspects of Isaac's contribution to the spiritual life: Gregory Mansour has written about the role of humility in Isaac's spirituality;[21] David Lichter, Paul Mascia, and Geefarhese

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[18] See Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita*, vi: "L'intento è innanzitutto quello di offrire una panoramica generale della figura di Isacco."

[19] Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000). Also see Hilarion Alfeyev, "Prayer in St. Isaac of Nineveh," in *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, ed. Pauline Allen, Raymond Canning, and Lawrence Cross (Brisbane: Centre for Early Christian Studies: 1998), 61-80

[20] Nikolaus von Arseniew, "Geistige 'Nüchternheit" und Gebet: Einige Züge aus der Mystik des christlichen Ostens, hauptsächlich nach der mystischen Lehre des Isaak von Syrien," *ZAM* 15 (1940): 136-43; Sebastian Brock, "St Isaac of Nineveh and Syriac Spirituality," *Sobornost* 7:2 (1975): 79-89; C. N. Tsirpanlis, "Praxis and Theoria: The Heart, Love and Light Mysticism in Saint Isaac the Syrian," *The Patristic and Byzantine Review* 6 (1987): 93-120; and Erica Hunter, "Isaac of Nineveh, the Persian Mystic," *Iqbal Review: Journal of the Iqbal Academy of Pakistan* (1988): 91-95.

[21] Gregory J Mansour, "Humility according to St. Isaac of Nineveh," *Diakonia* 28:3 (1995): 181-86.

Panicker have commented on the role of tears in Isaac's spirituality;[22] Justin Popovitch and J. Touraille and have both written about the role of knowledge in Isaac's spirituality;[23] Sabino Chialà has written about the importance of solitude in Isaac's spirituality;[24] and André Louf has written about the role of God's love in Isaac's spirituality.[25] Several articles have been published on the contemporary relevance of Isaac's writings on the spiritual life.[26] And finally, a number of scholars have commented on the important role that Isaac's writings play in ecumenical relations.[27] While Isaac's contribution to the spiritual life is one of his greatest legacies, more work needs to be done that goes beyond his basic contribution to spirituality.

A valuable, but less common, approach to the study of Isaac is, as Beulay has suggested, through an examination of his sources. Isaac's ascetical writings, though highly original, are also a complex synthesis of many different Greek and Syriac sources. Scholars have begun to sort through the different sources that contributed to Isaac's ascetical system, but the question of Isaac's dependence on Greek and Syriac sources

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[22] David A. Lichter, "Tears and Contemplation in Isaac of Nineveh," *Diakonia* 11 (1976): 239- 58; Paul T Mascia, "The Gift of Tears in Isaac of Nineveh: A Transition to Pure Prayer and the Virtue of Mercy," *Diakonia* 14:3 (1979): 255-65; and Geevarghese Panicker, "Prayer With Tears: A Great Feast of Repentance," *The Harp* 4 (1991): 111-33.

[23] Justin Popovitch, "Théorie de La connaissance et de Dieu chez Saint Isaac le Syrien," *Contacts* 22 (1970): 32-53 and 119-47 and J. Touraille, "Isaac le Syrien: témoin de l'impossible," *Contacts* 34 (1982): 170-78.

[24] Sabino Chialà, "Isaac de Ninive et sa doctrine: entre solitude et communion," *Irénikon* 83:4 (2010): 479-99. This article also exists in Italian as Sabino Chialà, "Isacco di Ninive e il suo insegnamento, tra solitudine e comunione," in *Comunione e solitudine/Communion et solitude. Monastero di Bose, 8-11 settembre 2010*, ed. Sabino Chialà, Lisa Cremaschi, and Adalberto Mainardi (Monastero di Bose: Qiqajon, 2011), 105-25.

[25] André Louf, "Pourquoi Dieu se manifesta, selon Isaac le Syrien," *CPE* 80 (2000): 37-56.

[26] See Gabriel Bunge, "Mar Isaac of Niniveh and his Relevance Nowadays," *Christian Orient* 7 (1986): 193-95. Also see Sebastian Brock, *The Wisdom of St. Isaac of Nineveh* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006), vi-xx.

[27] Sebastian Brock, "Aspects oecuméniques des oeuvres de Saint Isaac le Syrien," in *Le Monachisme Syriaqu du VIIe siècle à nos jours*, Patrimoine Syriaque, Actes du colloque 6.1 (Antélias: Centre d'Études et de Recherches Pastorales, 1999), 121-27; Sebastian Brock, "An Ecumenical Role Played by Monastic Literature," 53-58; André Louf, "Isaac le Syrien. La grâce, non pas les œuvres," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 51 (2001): 243-46; and Antoine, Audo, "Isaac of Nineveh, John of Dalyatha and Eastern Spirituality'," *One in Christ: A Catholic Ecumenical Review* 44:2 (2010), 29-48.

remains unsettled because scholars have yet to determine whether or not Isaac's ascetical thought is fundamentally Greek or fundamentally Syriac. Older scholarship compared Isaac to Greek texts while more recent scholarship has begun to look into Isaac's dependence on sources written in Syriac.

An overview of the secondary literature that has discussed Isaac's dependence on sources reveals the need for a re-evaluation of the way that Isaac used Greek and Syriac sources. I will conclude that Isaac's ascetical system is fundamentally Syriac, though he uses Greek sources to provide technical terminology. In particular, I will claim that Isaac is especially dependent on John the Solitary (early fifth-century), but he builds Greek definitions from Evagrius (346-399), Pseudo-Macarius (fourth-century), and Pseudo-Dionysius (*c.* 500) into his essentially Syriac system.

ISAAC'S DEPENDENCE ON GREEK SOURCES

Turning first to Greek sources, we see that scholars have studied the relationship between Isaac and three Greek authors: Evagrius, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Pseudo-Macarius.[28] The most substantial work on Isaac's use of sources has been on his use of Evagrian texts. Many scholars hold the sentiment that Evagrius' doctrine is the primary key to interpreting several of the unclear passages in Isaac's texts. Antoine Guillaumont expresses this notion quite clearly when he states, "On a pu épouver assez rapidement

[28] Scholars have also just begun to examine Isaac's dependence on Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428). Sabino Chialà and Nestor Kavvadas have identified Theodore as an important source for Isaac's eschatology. See Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita*, 92-101; Nestor Kavvadas, "Some Observations on the Theological Anthropology of Isaac of Nineveh and its Sources," *Scrinium* 4 (2008): 147-57; Nestor Kavvadas, "Some Observations on the Theological Anthropology of Isaac of Nineveh and its Sources," *Scrinium* 4 (2008): 147-57; and Nestor Kavvadas, "On the Relations between the Eschatological Doctrine of Isaac of Nineveh and Theodore of Mopsuestia'," in *SP* 45, ed. J. Baun and others (2010): 245-50.

qu'une des clefs, et sans doute la principale, pour l'interprétation de l'œvre d'Isaac est la doctrine d'Évagre, qu'Isaac cite assez souvent."[29] Guillaumont's position represents an older strategy of interpreting Isaac that tended to favor Evagrian influence over other Greek and Syriac sources.

Other articles study the relationship between Evagrius and sub-categories of Isaac's thought, particularly regarding contemplation and prayer. One important work on the relationship between Evagrius and Isaac is Sebastian Brock's detailed article comparing the occurrence of contemplative language in Isaac's writings with similar language in texts by Evagrius, John the Solitary, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Pseudo-Macarius. Brock concludes that Isaac's use of language related to the terms "theoria" and "noetic" is most often in deference to Evagrius.[30] Brock's thorough index of terminology is a helpful resource for determining how Isaac appropriated language from various authors, but especially Evagrius. A similar strategy has also been employed by Sabino Chialà, also with regard to Isaac's dependence on Evagrius.[31]

Scholars have also studied the connection between Isaac and Evagrius regarding prayer. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony has compared Evagrius and Isaac on pure prayer and she concludes that "although Isaac does not create a new theory of contemplative prayer, he provides an entirely fresh and original view on the matter, as a result of merging the Evagrian and Syriac traditions."[32] Although Bitton-Ashkelony emphasizes Evagrius as the primary influence on Isaac's notion of pure prayer, her conclusion is also an

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[29] Antoine, Guillaumont, "Le mystique syriaque Isaac de Ninive," in *Études sur la spiritualité de l'Orient Chrétien*, Spiritualité Patristica 66, (Bellefontaine: Abby of Bellefontaine, 1996), 21.
[30] See Sebastian Brock, "Discerning the Evagrian in the writings of Isaac of Nineveh: a preliminary investigation," *Adamantius* 15 (2009): 60-72.
[31] Sabino Chialà, "Evagrio il Pontico negli scritti di Isacco di Ninive," *Adamantius* 15 (2009): 73-84.
[32] Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (νοῦς): Pure Prayer according to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh," *ZAC/ Journal of Ancient Christianity* 15:2 (2011), 319.

important recognition that, even though Isaac appropriated Evagrius's thought, he did so by redefining definitions and terminology with definitions and terminology from past Syriac authorities.

Several scholars have identified Evagrius as the primary influence on Isaac's theology, especially in contradistinction to Pseudo-Dionysius.[33] Although Pseudo-Dionysian writings influenced other Syriac writers and although elements of Isaac's thought resemble Pseudo-Dionysian themes, most scholars downplay the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Isaac. This conclusion, I argue, is not fully accurate. Ysabel De Andia, for example, claims that Isaac is more interested in Evagrius's emphasis on returning the *nous* to the primordial state of original purity than transcending the intellect, as in Pseudo-Dionysius.[34] I will arrive at the opposite conclusion in chapter three of this dissertation. Likewise, Sebastian Brock concludes that the Dionysian corpus did not exert a very strong influence on Isaac, and this lack of influence is reflected in the small number of phrases that Isaac has in common with Sergius' Syriac translation of Pseudo-Dionysius's text.[35] In chapter six of this dissertation, I will argue that Isaac's definition of wonder and astonishment relies on Pseudo-Dionysian language of darkness. In another article, Brock points out that, unlike other Eastern Christian authors, Isaac does not follow Pseudo-Dionysius in downplaying the heart in favor of the mind.[36] Yet, as

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[33] For a comparison of Evagrius's influence in contradistinction to Pseudo-Macarius, see Alexej Muravjev, "Macarian or Evagrian: The Problem of Origenist Legacy in Eastern Syriac Mystical Literature," in *Origeniana Octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition, Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress Pisa, 27-31 August 2001*, ed. L. Perrone (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 1185-91.
[34] Ysabel de Andia, "Hèsychia et contemplation chez Isaac le Syrien," *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 53 (1991), 48.
[35] Sebastian Brock, "Some Uses of the Term *Theoria* in the Writings of Isaac of Nineveh," *Parole de l'Orient* 22 (1996), 418.
[36] Sebastian Brock, "The Prayer of the Heart in the Syriac Tradition," *Sobornost* 4:2 (1982): 131-42.

Alexander Golitzin has pointed out, this conclusion relies on an outdated distinction between heart and mind.[37]

Although Evagrius is clearly a strong influence on Isaac's thought, this dissertation will re-examine the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Isaac's development of the terms wonder and astonishment, which play a central role in Isaac's ascetical system. Isaac's emphasis on the ecstatic experience of the world to come — what he calls wonder — is more Pseudo-Dionysian than it is Evagrian. Since ecstatic experience is central to Isaac's thought, the importance of Pseudo-Dionysius's influence in this regard has been undervalued.

The precise influence of Pseudo-Macarius's writings on Isaac remains unclear. Assemani first noted that quotations from a Macarius occurred in the works of Isaac in the eighteenth-century and Chabot reiterated this observation a century later.[38] Marriot, in the early twentieth-century, was the first person to look at each of these citations in detail and concluded that Isaac read a few Syriac translations of Pseudo-Macarius' letters and attributed these works to Macarius of the desert, but otherwise knew nothing of the corpus of Macarian Homilies.[39] More recently, however, Brock has pointed out several similarities between the corpus of Macarian Homilies and Isaac's writings, particularly

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[37] See Alexander Golitzin, "The Mysticism of Dionysius Areopagita: Platonist or Christian?," *Mystics Quarterly* 19.3 (1993): 98-114 and Alexander Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagita: A Chrisitan Mysticism?" *Pro Ecclesia* 12.2 (2003): 161-212.
[38] J. S. Assemani, *Bibl. Or. i*, (Rome: 1719), 448; J. B. Chabot, *De S. Isaaci Ninivitae vita, scriptis et doctrina* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1892), 71.
[39] See G. L, Marriot, "Isaac of Nineveh and the Writings of Macarius of Egypt," *Journal of Theological Studies* 20 (1919): 345-47.

language used to describe the activity of the Holy Spirit on the soul.[40] Similarly, Bettiolo finds connections between the Macarian Homilies and Isaac in the area of prayer.[41]

Despite this initial work on the relationship between Isaac and Pseudo-Macarius, scholarship has yet to produce a full-scale comparison between the Syriac Macarian corpus and Isaac's writings. One problem that has plagued scholars who attempt to compare Isaac and Pseudo-Macrius is the significant differences that exist between the Greek and Syriac collections of Pseudo-Macrius's writings. Scholars have often compared Isaac's writings to the Greek versions of Pseudo-Macarius's texts, but this approach is problematic because the Syriac Macarian corpus is not a straightforward translation from the Greek, but rather a summary and loose paraphrase. Chapter two of this dissertation will examine Isaac's dependence on the Syriac collection of the Macarian homilies regarding the theme of *eros*.

The present state of research on Isaac's use of sources, with its abundance of texts tracing out the specific influence of Evagrius on aspects of Isaac's thought, creates the impression that Evagrius's writings were the main source of inspiration for Isaac. While one cannot deny the important influence that Evagrius's texts played in the formation of Isaac's thought, it would be incorrect to assume that Evagrius was the predominate influence on Isaac. While this dissertation will also emphasize the understated connection between Isaac and Pseudo-Dionysius and between Isaac and Pseudo-Macarius, we must turn to the Syriac world for more important influences on Isaac's

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[40] Sebastian Brock, "Maggnānūtā: A Technical Term in East Syrian Spirituality and its Background," in *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont: Contributions à l'étude des christianismes orientaux*, Cahiers D'Orientalisme 20 (Geneva: Cramer, 1988), 128-29.
[41] Paolo, Bettiolo, "Prigionieri dell Spirito: liberta creaturale ed eschaton in Isacco di Ninive e nelle sue fonti," *Annali di Scienze religiose* 4 (1999), 352.

thought. This dissertation will claim that it is the Syriac author, John the Solitary, who provides the foundation to Isaac's thought.

ISAAC'S DEPENDENCE ON SYRIAC SOURCES

Recent literature has begun to search for Isaac's influences more within the realm of Syriac authors rather than within Greek sources. The first article to cite the importance of Syriac sources over and against Evagrian sources for Isaac's thought was an influential article by E. Khalifé-Hachem, entitled "La prière pure et la prière spirituelle selon Isaac de Ninive."[42] This article identified the importance of John the Solitary in discerning Isaac's influences, especially Isaac's teachings on prayer. Khalifé-Hachem concluded that although Evagrian texts influenced superficial aspects of Isaac's thinking on prayer, John the Solitary's writings influenced the foundation of Isaac's teachings. He says, "A cela nous ajoutons qu'Isaac ne paraît pas avoir bien assimilé la doctrine d'Évagre; c'est pourquoi il reste fondamentalement dépendant de Jean le Solitaire, tandis que son évagrianisme, quoique très apparent, reste superficiel."[43] Since Khalifé-Hachem, other scholars, such as Guillaumont, Hunt, and Chialà have found strong connections between Isaac and John the Solitary.[44]

In addition to John the Solitary, scholars have now begun to examine Isaac's dependence on other Syriac thinkers. Isaac's dependence on Ephrem has been the subject of a number of studies. In a recent article, Sabino Chialà has noted the general

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[42] E. Khalifé-Hachem, "La prière pure et la prière spirituelle selon Isaac de Ninive," in Mémorial Mgr Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis (1898-1968) (Leuven: Impr. Orientaliste, 1969), 157-73.
[43]E. Khalifé-Hachem, "La prière pure et la prière spirituelle selon Isaac de Ninive," 172.
[44] See Antoine, Guillaumont, "Le mystique syriaque Isaac de Ninive," 216; Hannah Hunt, "Praying the Body: Isaac of Nineveh and John of Apamea on Anthropological Integrity," *The Harp* 11-12 (1998-1999): 153-58; and Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita*, 109-113.

importance of Ephrem as an authority for Isaac.[45] Likewise, Sebastian Brock has found general similarities in the way that Isaac and Ephrem both reflect on the meaning and function of the natural world.[46] Ysabel de Andia has pointed to the shared imagery of the pearl in authors such as Isaac, Ephrem, and Jacob of Serug.[47] And finally, Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony has noted that Isaac relies on Ephrem's definition of wonder.[48] Chapter six of this dissertation will build on Bitton-Ashkelony's observation and specify the precise way in which Isaac developed Ephrem's concept of wonder.

While scholars are beginning to look more and more into the possible relationship between Isaac and earlier Syriac sources, more work needs to be done. This dissertation will advance the field of studies on Isaac by examining the relationship between John the Solitary and Isaac.

Isaac's Dependence on Other Sources

Other approaches to the examination of Isaac's sources are worth mentioning. First, scholars have examined the relationship between Isaac and various forms of secular philosophy. Earlier scholarship attempted to make connections between Isaac and Greek Neoplatonic or Stoic philosophy. In his translation of the first set of homilies by Isaac, A. J. Wensinck supplied several footnotes with references to the *Enneades* of Plotinus,

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[45] Sabino Chialà, Sabino, "Efrem nei mistici siro-orientali e in particolare in Isacco di Ninive," in *Saint Éphrem, un poète pour notre temps*, Patrimoine Syriaque, Actes du Colloque XI (Antélias, Liban: Centre d'Études et de Recherches Orientales, 2007), 241-53.
[46] Sebastian Brock, "Humanity and the Natural World in the Syriac Tradition," *Sobornost* 12:2 (1990): 131-142.
[47] Ysabel de Andia, "Hèsychia et contemplation chez Isaac le Syrien," 21.
[48] Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (νοῦς)," 371.

the *Sentences* of Porphyry, and the *Diatrabe* of Epictetus.[49] Although scholars have acknowledged Isaac's general dependence on a Platonic model of the soul (via Evagrius), the notion that Isaac appropriated specific aspects of his ascetical theory from Neoplatonic thinkers no longer holds currency.[50] Recent studies into the relationship between Isaac and Syriac secular philosophers have been more helpful. Especially noteworthy is Sebastian Brock's article that points out Isaac's use and citation of a secular Syriac philosopher named Secundus.[51] Otherwise, Isaac shows little interest in the world of secular philosophy.

Another avenue for framing Isaac's thought is his relationship to Jewish sources. Mary Hansbury's unpublished dissertation examined this subject in detail for the opening chapters of the first set of homilies.[52] Brenda Fitch Fairaday's examination of Isaac's imagery of the cross also reveals Isaac's deference to Jewish themes, such as Isaac's equation of the cross with the new Ark of the *Shekinah* of God.[53] This Jewish imagery of the *Shekinah* will be discussed in more detail in chapter six of this dissertation.

Finally, little work has been done on Isaac as a polemicist. Indeed, as Patrick Hagman has noted, polemics is not generally a concern for Isaac, as Isaac himself writes "We are not concerned here to rebuke or censure the faults of others, for this is not our

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[49] See A. J. Wensinck, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh* (Wiesbaden, 1969), 5 n. 1, 9 n. 4, 11 n. 3, 14 n. 1, 15, n. 1, 22 n. 2, 130 n. 1, and 204 n. 1.

[50] See for example, André Louf, "Pourquoi Dieu se manifesta, selon Isaac le Syrien." 51: "Dans cette tradition spirituelle, qui attache une si grande importance à ce que les auteurs syriens appellent la 'fréquentation de l'homme intérieur du cœur' — autre expression pour désigner le recueillement et l'intériorité — aucune trace de néo-platonisme ne vient en général reléguer au second plan le rôle joué par le corps dans le parcours spirituel."

[51] Sebastian Brock, "Secundus the Silent Philosopher: Some Notes on the Syriac Tradition," *Rheinisches Museum für Philogie* 121 (1978): 94-100.

[52] Mary Hansbury, "Evidence of Jewish Influence in the Writings of Isaac of Nineveh: Translation and Commentary," Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1987.

[53] Brenda Fitch Fairaday, "Isaac of Nineveh's Biblical Typology of the Cross," in *Papers presented at the thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1995*, ed. M.F. Wiles and E.J. Yarnold (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 385-90.

custom."[54] Yet Isaac's texts do contain polemical material against secular philosophers and the Messalians.[55] Nevertheless, more work needs to be done on the theological currents that Isaac is responding to in his writings. Chapter two of this dissertation will situate the development of Isaac's anthropology in terms of his polemical motivations.

THESIS AND METHODOLOGY

In response to Beulay's desire for a more detailed study on the relationship between Isaac and his sources, this dissertation will map out precise linguistic correlations between Isaac's writings and texts by earlier authors that played a role in shaping his thought. While much of the scholarship on Isaac has focused on the obvious relationship between Evagrius and Isaac, I will build on Khalifé-Hachem's article and conclude that the foundations of Isaac's ascetical theology depends more on the thought of John the Solitary than on Evagrius.

The first part of this dissertation (chapters one and two) will examine the sources that Isaac used to develop his anthropology. Although he inherits the basic structure of Evagrius's anthropology, Isaac's polemical interest in combating philosophers who deny the natural goodness of the created order causes him to situate his anthropology within the framework of John the Solitary's three degrees. This strong polemical interest that

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[54] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.14.23 (Brock:63). See Patrick Hagman, "St. Isaac of Nineveh and the Messalians," in *Mystik – Metapher – Bild. Beiträge des VII. Makarios-Symposiums, Göttingen 2007*, ed. Martin Tamke (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2008), 55.

[55] Isaac mentions the errors of the Philosophers in Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:2117). For Isaac's polemical work against the Messalians, see Patrick Hagman, "St. Isaac of Nineveh and the Messalians," 55-66. Also see Nestor Kavvadas, "Beobachtungen zum Verhältnis zwischen ostsyrischem Eremitentum und kirchlicher Liturgie am Beispiel Isaaks von Ninive," in *Liturgie und Ritual in der Alten Kirche: Patristische Beiträge zum Studium der gottesdienstlichen Quellen der Alten Kirche*, ed. Wolfram Kinzig, Ulrich Volp, Ulrich and Jürgen Schmidt, Patristic Studies 11 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 177-86, where he shows that Isaac formulated his liturgical practices in reaction to the Messalians.

Isaac associates with Evagrius's anthropology is due, in part, to Babai the Great, whose commentary on Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* explicitly used Evagrius's anthropology to combat philosophers who denied the natural goodness of the soul.

The second part of this dissertation (chapters three, four, and five) will examine the sources that Isaac used to develop his eschatology. Isaac does not follow Evagrius's eschatology, which focuses on returning the soul to its original purity; instead, he follows John the Solitary in positing a future-oriented eschatological state that surpasses the original purity of creation. Isaac does not follow Evagrius's eschatology because both the first Syriac translator of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* and Babai re-interpret Evagrius's eschatology to such an extent that many of its distinctive components were lost. As a result, Isaac turns to John the Solitary in order to develop his eschatology.

I have chosen to focus this dissertation on Isaac's anthropology and eschatology because these two topics are essential components to his ascetical system. According to Isaac, asceticism is the means through which a person acquires union with God. Anthropology considers the inherent structures of a human being (body, soul and spirit) and how these inherent structures function so as to enable a monk to progress towards his ultimate end: heavenly worship in the world to come. Eschatology studies the ultimate end itself, for a monk needs to know where he is going before he can arrive there.

This dissertation will examine the theological areas of anthropology and eschatology in order to prove one thesis: the teaching of John the Solitary forms the essential framework to Isaac's ascetical system. This thesis, however, requires qualification, for Isaac does not just copy John's ascetical system verbatim, but expands John's foundation. The third part of this dissertation will show how Isaac unites his

anthropology and eschatology through the concept of wonder. His definition of wonder is an original synthesis of linguistic terminology and concepts from Ephrem, John the Solitary, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Evagrius. Isaac's genius is his ability to synthesize ideas from a wide variety of theological traditions.

Summary of Dissertation

This dissertation will be divided into three parts. The first part will contain two chapters on the background and formation of Isaac's anthropology while the second part will contain three chapters on the background and formation of Isaac's eschatology. Both of these parts will demonstrate that texts by John the Solitary play a significant role in forming the foundation of Isaac's thought. The third part will point to Isaac's original contribution of using the concept of wonder to unite his anthropology and eschatology.

Part 1

The first part of the dissertation will examine Isaac's anthropology. Although Isaac inherits Evagrius's anthropology, which is itself a reiteration of Plato's threefold division of the soul (i.e. irascible, concupiscible, and rational), he reinterprets and builds on this anthropology by inserting it into a polemical debate on the natural goodness of the soul.

The first chapter will trace Isaac's reception of Evagrian anthropology. As Antoine Guillaumont has shown in *Les 'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique*, Isaac and other Syriac authors did not read a literal translation of Evagrius's important text, the

Gnostic Chapters, but instead read an altered version that removed and corrected some of the controversial elements of Evagrius's thought. The changes made by this first Syriac translator were further solidified in the Syriac mindset by the first commentator of the *Gnostic Chapters*, Babai the Great. Babai infused Evagrius's anthropology with a strong polemical component aimed at upholding the natural goodness of the soul. In particular, he emphasizes the role of the will in directing the three parts of the soul either towards virtue or evil.

The second chapter will show how Isaac reworks Evagrius's anthropology around the question of the natural goodness of the soul. Like Babai, Isaac is also motivated by a polemical interest to uphold the natural goodness of the soul, but his account of the natural goodness of the soul differs from Babai's because he uses ideas from Pseudo-Macarius, Pseudo-Dionysius, and John the Solitary to frame his anthropology.

First, Isaac employs Pseudo-Dionysius's and Pseudo-Macarius's discussion of the role that *eros* plays in the ascetical life. Isaac correlates *eros* with the concupiscible part of the soul in order to posit a positive role for erotic desire in the purification of the soul. Second, Isaac integrates Evagrius's threefold division of the soul into John the Solitary's framework of the "three degrees." According to John, the ascetical life consists of three levels, or degrees: the levels of the body, soul, and spirit. At the level of the body, the monk is subject to the material needs and desires of the body; at the level of the soul, the monk begins to adopt an attitude of repentance and to practice ascetical deeds in order to quell the passions and acquire virtue; at the level of the spirit, the monk has acquired purity and has eliminated evil inclinations. By placing his threefold anthropology within the framework of John's three degrees, Isaac finds a more sophisticated way to uphold

the natural goodness of the soul. According to Isaac, God placed the impulses of desire and anger into each of three parts of the soul in order to help purify the soul and protect it from distractions, but these impulses work differently depending on which level of the ascetical life the monk has achieved. The impulses of the soul purify the soul only when the monk reaches the spiritual level of the ascetical life.

PART 2

The third and fourth chapters will examine the subject of Isaac's eschatology. Chapter three will show that Isaac's eschatology differs substantially from Evagrius's eschatology. Unlike Evagrius, Isaac does not claim that the world to come will resemble the original state of purity; rather, Isaac states that God created human beings with the intention of making them even better than their original creation. Isaac rejects Evagrius's eschatology because both the Syriac translator of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* and Babai carefully eliminated the controversial parts of Evagrius's eschatology, leaving Isaac with a future-oriented eschatology that is fundamentally different than Evagrius's system that was based on recovering the original purity of creation.

The fourth chapter will examine the roots of Isaac's eschatology, which is focused on a future state that is better than the original purity of creation. The thesis of this chapter will be that Isaac bases his future oriented eschatology on John the Solitary's interest in the life of the world to come, which John derives from a series of Pauline biblical passages.

Chapter five will show that Isaac turns John's hope for the future world into a reality that can be experienced proleptically by monks in this present world. While Isaac

follows John in defining anthopological perfection in terms of an inner reception of knowledge concerning the world to come rather than in terms of a visible manifestation of ascetical observances, he stresses the real possibility of experiencing this perfection in this world.

PART 3

One problem with Isaac's system is that his anthropology and eschatology are initially at odds with one another. Isaac's basic acceptance of Evagrius's anthropology coupled with his rejection of Evagrius's eschatology means that his anthropology and eschatology no longer fit together like they did for Evagrius. Isaac must look elsewhere to unite his anthropology and eschatology. The sixth and seventh chapters will show how he unites his eschatology and his anthropology through the notion of wonder, which is proleptic participation in the future world

Chapter six will examine both Greek and Syriac precedence for Isaac's notion of wonder (ܬܡܗܐ) and another closely related term, astonishment (ܬܡܗܢܐ). Isaac's definition for these two terms is a complex synthesis with recourse to multiple Syriac and Greek authors. While the close connection between wonder and astonishment comes from Ephrem, the framework for these terms comes from John the Solitary, who associates wonder and astonishment with the world to come. At the same time, Isaac turns to Pseudo-Dionysius and Evagrius to formulate definitions for each term. Based on Pseudo-Dionysian and Evagrian texts, Isaac says that wonder is the way that human beings comprehend revelations from the world to come and astonishment represents human inability to comprehend revelations from the world to come.

Chapter seven will explain the relationship between Isaac's anthropology and his eschatology by arguing that wonder renders Isaac's ascetical system coherent. Wonder exists as the meeting ground for Isaac's anthropology and his eschatology because it is an experience of the future, eschatological state within the material, anthropological structures of the human being. According to Isaac, wonder represents the limit of human modes of apprehension and the beginning of divine revelation within the human mind. This perception of wonder is a proleptic experience of the world to come and it enables human beings to live in this world according to the way of life appropriate to the heavenly realm.

PART 1: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF ISAAC OF NINEVEH

CHAPTER 1

THE BACKGROUND TO ISAAC'S ANTHROPOLOGY: HOW EVIL ARISES FROM THE NATURAL GOODNESS OF THE SOUL

While Isaac inherits the outline of Evagrius's anthropology, polemical debates concerning the question of how evil arises from the natural goodness of the soul require him to make improvements to Evagrius's basic system. In order to refashion Evagrius's anthropology so that it could better account for the both the origin of evil and the natural goodness of the soul, Isaac situates it within the framework of John the Solitary's three degrees and he uses elements from the Greek *eros* tradition to strengthen his position.

The present chapter will examine the transmission of Evagrius's anthropology into the Syriac milieu while simultaneously showing how it became connected to the project of providing a solution for the question of how evil arises from the natural goodness of the soul. Babai's commentary on Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* is the most relevant source for this project because Babai explicitly uses Evagrius's anthropology as a polemical tool for combating heretics who deny the natural goodness of the soul. The next chapter will turn to an examination of how Isaac improves the anthropologies of Evagrius and Babai by introducing new elements from Pseudo-Macarius, Pseudo-Dionysius, and, most importantly, John the Solitary.

1.1 Evagrius's Anthropology

Evagrius's work entitled *The Practical Life* lays out an anthropological system that builds on Plato's tripartite description of the soul.[1] Scholars have already discussed the relationship between Evagrius's anthropology in this text and its relationship to various passages within Plato's texts, so I will only present a brief portrait here.[2] Although Evagrius does not reveal any direct dependence on Plato, he nevertheless inherits Plato's concept of the tripartite soul through Gregory of Nazianzus, whom Evagrius cites in connection with this idea.[3] For Plato, as he describes it in *Republic 4.440*, the soul is divided into three parts: the rational (*logistikon*), the irascible (*thymos*), and the concupiscible (*epithymos*). In order for an individual to pursue virtue, these three parts of the soul must exist with a harmonious balance, which Plato refers to as justice in the soul.[4] The irascible part determines whether or not the soul is balanced and therefore just, for sometimes the irascible part allies itself with the rational part when it gets angry at injustice, for example, but at other times, the irascible part allies itself with the concupiscible part, for instance, when a person experiences anger aroused by desire

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[1] The *Practical Life* was translated into Syriac and is found in a number of manuscripts together with another important work, *The Gnostic*. For further background on the Syriac version of the *Practical Life*, see Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont, *Évagre le Pontique: Traité pratique ou le moine*, ed. Antoine Guilaumont and Claire Guillaumont, CS 170 (Paris: *Les Éditions du Cerf*, 1971), 319-34. For Isaac's use of the Syriac version of the *Practical Life*, see *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part,' chapters IV-XLI*, ed. Sebastian Brock, CSCO 554, Scriptores Syri 224 (Louven: Peeters, 1995), n. 29 on p. XXV. I have used a translation from the Greek text because, unfortunately, there are no critical editions of the Syriac manuscripts.

[2] See especially Michael O'Laughlin, "The Anthropology of Evagrius Ponticus and its Sources," in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Petersen (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988): 357-73; Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory: Mind, Soul and Body in the 4th Century* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 43 and 88-92; Julia Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 89-94; and Patrick Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 59-60.

[3] Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 89 (SC 171:680). Page numbers refer to *Traité le Pratique ou Le Moine*, ed. Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont, CS 171 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1971).

[4] Plato, *Republic* 4.444d. Cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 479b.

instead of reason.[5] The former scenario represents a just soul that is harmoniously balanced (i.e., the irascible part of the soul is properly subservient to the rational part) while the latter scenario represents an unbalanced, or unjust soul (i.e., the irascible part overwhelms the rational part).

Plato adds further nuance to this theory of the soul in a well-known passage from the *Phaedrus*. Here, he likens the soul to a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. The charioteer, he says, represents reason, which serves as the "pilot" of the soul, capable of directing the irascible and concupiscible parts. Next, he likens the irascible part to a noble breed of horse because, when directed by the mind, it naturally powers the chariot towards heaven and he likens the concupiscible part of the soul to an ignoble bread of horse because it tends to pull the entire soul down towards earth.[6]

Evagrius inherits this theory of the soul in both *The Practical Life* and the *Gnostic Chapters*. Like Plato, he designates the rational part of the soul as director of the other two parts.[7] Unlike Plato, he finds positive functions for both of the passionate parts of the soul, that is, for the irascible and concupiscible parts. In *The Practical Life* 89, Evagrius explicitly states that the soul is tripartite and, throughout the rest of the work, he describes the various ways that the irascible and concupiscible parts can be used for either virtue or evil.[8] Since he recognizes that both the irascible and concupiscible parts of the soul have the potential to stimulate virtuous endeavors, Evagrius says that God

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[5] Plato, *Republic* 4.440-41a. Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 69-73.
[6] Plato, *Phaedrus* 246.
[7] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.56 (PO 28:83): "The mind instructs the soul, the soul the body, and only the man of God is able to know the man of knowledge." ܡܠܦܢܐ ܡܠܦܢܐ ܠܢܦܫܐ ܢܦܫܐ ܠܦܓܪܐ ܡܠܦܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܠܚܕ ܝܕܥ ܠܡܕܥܬܐ ܕܝܕܥ. Page numbers refer to *Les Six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" D'Évagre le Pontique*, ed. Antoine Guillaumont, PO 28 (Paris: 1958).
[8] Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 89 (SC 171:680-88). Evagrius mentions all three parts of the soul together in numerous passages throughout the *Gnostic Chapters*. See Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.53 (PO 28:43) and 1.68 (PO 28:49).

purposely created the soul with these two abilities so that they could help stimulate contemplation of God after the fall. In *Gnostic Chapter* 6.85, he states that the two passionate parts of the soul, unlike the rational part, were created specifically to help human beings recover from the fall.[9] As a result, he envisions the practical life of ascetical labor as the means of harnessing the irascible and concupiscible parts of the soul so that they cease operating in an unnatural way and begin to perform the natural function of helping the rational part of the soul engage in contemplation of God.

This goal of harnessing the passionate parts of the soul so that they operate according to nature is accompanied by practical difficulties. Evagrius says that the demons tempt human beings by attacking the irascible part of the soul through hardship and the concupiscible part of the soul through dreams.[10] When the demons are successful with their temptations, the victims of demonic attacks experience the passions of anger and desire, which, for Evagrius, are the unnatural manifestations of the irascible and concupiscible parts of the soul.[11] Evagrius says in *The Practical Life* 24: "[The demons] drag us towards worldly desire and compel the irascible part, contrary to its nature, to fight with people, so that with the mind darkened and fallen from knowledge it may become the traitor of the virtues."[12] The unnatural manifestations of the irascible and concupiscible parts of the soul distract human beings from contemplating God and lead people away from the life of virtue.

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[9] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.85 (PO 28:253).
[10] See Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 22 (SC 171:552), 54 (SC 171:624-26), and 84 (SC 171:674).
[11] See Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 11 (SC 171:516): "Anger is a boiling over of the irascible part" (Sinkewicz:11) and Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 4 (SC 171:502): "Desire is the source of every pleasure" (Sinkewicz:97). English translation refers to *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.35 (PO 28:111).
[12] Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 24 (SC 171:556) (Sinkewicz:102). Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.59 (PO 28:123-25).

Evagrius realizes the difficulty of using the irascible and concupiscible parts of the soul for virtue. The first step is to prevent both parts of the soul from falling prey to demonic distraction and to heal them from any harm already accomplished by the demons. He recommends a program of opposing virtues to combat the arousal of anger and desire. "Compassion and gentleness," he says, "diminish irascibility."[13] Likewise, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs all help cool boiling irascibility and extinguish lustful desires.[14] Evagrius also mentions prayer as a successful tool for healing the passionate part of the soul.

> Those things which heal the passionate part of the soul require also the body to put them into practice, and the latter because of its weakness is not sufficient for these labours. Prayer, on the other hand, invigorates and purifies the mind for the struggle, since it is naturally constituted for prayer, even without this body, and for fighting the demons on behalf of all the powers of the soul.[15]

A soul that has undergone healing in these ways no longer needs to fear the demons.[16]

According to Evagrius, these remedies for the soul foster virtue and allow its passionate parts to work according to nature. The cultivation of virtue does not involve suppressing the passionate parts of the soul, but rather, virtue occurs when all three parts of the soul achieve a harmonious balance by working according to their natural capacities. The most detailed description of the way in which the three parts of the soul work towards this conception of virtue is in *The Practical Life* 89, where Evagrius, like Plato, describes justice in the soul as a harmonious balance between all three parts.

> When virtue arises in the rational part it is called prudence, understanding, and wisdom; when it arises in the concupiscible part it is called chastity, love, and abstinence; and

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[13] Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 20 (SC 171:548) (Sinkewicz:101).
[14] Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 71 (SC 171:658).
[15] Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 49 (SC 171:610) (Sinkewicz:106). Cf. Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 63 (SC 171:680).
[16] See Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.73 (PO 28:169).

> when it arises in the irascible part it is called courage and perseverance; but when it penetrates the entire soul it is called justice.[17]

A just soul is a soul that has achieved a harmonious balance among all three parts.

Evagrius says that a virtuous soul ignores the distractions of the world and contemplates incorporeal things instead of material things. Once the mind achieves contemplation, it is impassible and no longer needs the passionate parts of the soul. Evagrius says in *The Practical Life* 66, "The mind has completed its work when it has no awareness of the irrational part of the soul, for knowledge has carried it off to the heights and separated it from sensible things."[18] The most vivid description of the virtue of an impassible soul, however, comes from *Gnostic Chapter* 2.6: "The laboring soul, which has flourished by the grace of God and has been removed from the body, exists in those places of knowledge where the wings of its impassability will lead it."[19] Evagrius repeats this same line in *On Thoughts* 29, but adds the following ending: "[The soul] will receive also the wings of that holy Dove and will take flight through the contemplation of all ages and will find rest in the knowledge of the worshipful Trinity."[20] According to Evagrius, the virtuous soul contemplates knowledge of the Trinity.

In summary, Evagrius's anthropology builds on Plato's description of the tripartite soul. For Evagrius, as for Plato, human being attains virtue when the parts of

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[17] Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 89 (SC 171:680-82) (Sinkewicz:111). For further background on this text and its dependence on the anonymous philosophical text, *On the Virtues and the Vices* 1-2, see Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont, *Traité le Pratique ou Le Moine*, 682-83. Cf. Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 24 (SC 171:556): "The angels urge us to turn the irascible part of the soul against demons because this is natural" (Sinkewicz:102) and Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 86 (SC 171:676): "The rational soul acts according to nature when its concupiscible part longs for virtue and the irascible part struggles on its behalf" (Sinkewicz:111).

[18] Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 66 (SC 171:650) (Sinkewicz:66). Cf. Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 87 (SC 171:678), where Evagrius says the person who makes progress in the practical life diminishes and eventually annihilates the passions.

[19] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.6 (PO 28:63).

[20] Evagrius, *malig. cog.* 29 (CS 438:254-56) (Sinkewicz:174). Page and line numbers refer to *Sur les pensées*, ed. Paul Géhin and Claire Guillaumont, CS 438 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998).

the soul work according to nature. For Evagrius, especially, God created the body with the passionate parts of the soul, which act as temporary tools to help minds retrieve contemplation of God. Through cleansing the soul of the passions and acquiring virtue in their place, the irascible and concupiscible parts of the soul assist the rational part of the soul in contemplating God.

1.2 The Syriac Translator's appropriation of Evagrius's anthropology

The first assimilation of Evagrius's writings into the Syrian milieu comes from the initial translation of the *Gnostic Chapters* into Syriac. This translation, as Guillaumont has shown, is not merely a straightforward rendering of Evagrius's Greek into Syriac, but also a reinterpretation of Evagrius's ideas with the deliberate aim of removing controversial Origenist elements, which Syrian Christians rejected.[21] Guillaumont refers to this early, corrected translation of the *Gnostic Chapters* as S1, while he labels the later, more literal Syriac translation S2.

Scholars have not yet identified the first Syriac translator of the *Gnostic Chapters*. According to Guillaumont, Philoxenus of Mabbug (c. 450-523), who often cites Evagrius, was likely the author of the corrected version (S1) of the *Gnostic Chapters,* or at least, represents the earliest witness to it. Guillaumont bases this assertion on a letter attributed to Philoxenus, in which the writer reveals that he had made a translation or commentary of the text.[22] This theory no longer holds currency, in large part due to two articles by John Watt, who has challenged Guillaumont's findings. In the first article,

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[21] For a complete analysis of the Syriac manuscript tradition of the Gnostic Chapters, see Antoine Guillaumont, Les'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et le l'histoire de l'Origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962), 200-58.
[22] Antoine Guillaumont, 'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique, 209-13.

Watt admits that an examination of Philoxenus's teachings on cosmology and eschatology indicates that Philoxenus agreed with the corrected version (S1) of the *Gnostic Chapters*, but at the same time, he claims that Philoxenus is not familiar with the later, uncorrected version (S2), which means that he was unaware of what Evagrius had originally said and could not have been the translator.[23] In his second article on the subject, Watt proposes instead that the corrected version (S1) was made in Edessa during the fifth-century by a translator who adhered to Antiochene theology and drew the inspiration for his adaptation of Evagrius from Theodore's criticism of Origenism. Philoxenus, Watt admits, likely came into contact with this version while he was a student in Edessa.[24] Although scholars are not yet sure of the identity of this anonymous translator, they do agree that he made his translation sometime during the fifth-century.

As we will see in Part 2 of this dissertation, the Syriac translator of the *Gnostic Chapters* rejected Evagrius's cosmology and eschatology as heretical manifestations of Origenism. The initial Syriac translator, however, found nothing heretical in Evagrius's anthropology and therefore did not make any significant changes to the sentences in the *Gnostic Chapters* pertaining to anthropology. *Gnostic Chapters* 1.68, 1.84, 1.85, 3.35, 3.59, 4.73, 4.79, 5.11, 5.27, 5.66, 6.41, 6.51, 6.53, 6.54, and 6.83-85 all retain Evagrius's emphasis on the three parts of the soul. The Syriac translator's choice of terms to designate the three parts of the soul nevertheless lacks the same degree of precision as the corresponding Greek terms. He uses the term "mind" (ܪܥܝܢܐ) to represent the rational part of the soul, "anger" (ܪܓܙܐ) to represent the irascible part of the soul, and "desire"

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[23] John Watt, "Philoxenus and the Old Syriac Version of Evagrius' *Centuries*," *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980): 70-75.
[24] John Watt, "The Syriac Adapter of Evagrius' *Centuries*," in *SP* vol. 17.3, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 1392.

(ܪܘܓܙܐ) to represent the concupiscible part of the soul. The difference between the Syriac rendering and the Greek rendering is that the Syriac does not use two different words to describe the part of the soul and the corresponding passion associated with it. For example, the term "anger" refers to the actual part of the soul itself, but it also refers to the passion of anger that may arise from soul, whereas the Greek uses two different words (*thymos* and *orgē*) to describe the part of the soul and its corresponding passion.[25] Both Babai and Isaac follow the Syriac translator in this choice of terminology to designate the three parts of the soul and to talk about their corresponding passions.

1.3.1 Babai's Appropriation of Evagrius's Anthropology: The Polemical Context and the Introduction of Free Will

The next step in the reception history of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* comes from Babai the Great, the abbot of the monastery of Mount Izla from 604 to his death in 628, who, in the early seventh-century, wrote a massive commentary on Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters*. Since Babai based his commentary on the corrected version (S1), his understanding of the text shows how this translation was first received and appropriated into the Syriac world.

Like the Syriac translator, Babai retains Evagrius's emphasis on the three parts of the soul, which he also calls anger, desire, and mind, but in addition, his commentary on

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[25] The distinction between the parts of the soul and the passions that arise from the soul was common in Greek moral psychology, but was not taken up in the Syriac world. For example, see Gregory of Nyssa *de anima res.* (PG 46:57C), where Gregory recalls Macrina's distinction between the impulse (*hormē*) and the part of the soul itself: there is the impulse of desire (*orexis*) and the desiring part of the soul (*epithymos*). See Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory*, 141; Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique: essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), 71-6; and Richard Norris, *Manhood and Christ: A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 34. n. 4: Gregory "uses 'passion' in two senses—according as he regards it as a natural part of man's God-given constitution, or as the perversion of this nature, i.e., vice."

the *Gnostic Chapters* shows how valuable Babai thought this anthropology was for rejecting the heretical notion that evil was inherent in the human soul.[26] Like his counterparts in the Greek speaking world, Babai was faced with a strong opposition that claimed that the mere existence of evil proves that the material world is evil.[27] The assumption of these unnamed opponents was that evil cannot arise from something that is inherently good, so the obvious existence of evil in the world implies that creation itself, and the human soul in particular, is inherently evil. So useful was Evagrius's tripartite anthropology to Babai's polemical argument against the inherent nature of evil in the soul that he even introduces it into polemical portions of the *Gnostic Chapters* that were not originally about the tripartite division of the soul.[28]

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[26] See, for example, Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.84 (Frankenberg:122:5-6) and *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.59 (Frankenberg:228:31-34). Page and line numbers refer to *Euagrius Ponticus*, ed. W. Frankenberg, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen Philologisch-Historische Klasse 13.2 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912).

[27] Babai does not name his philosophical opponents, but Nemesius of Emesa, a Greek author who wrote during the final decade of the fourth-century, may help shed some light on the identity of Babai's opponents. Nemesius wrote a treatise entitled *On the Nature of Man*, which also addresses the issue of whether or not evil is an inherent part of creation. In this treatise, Nemesius explicitly identifies two philosophical opponents who claimed that God created evil as an inherent part of creation. The first opponent is the Manichees, whom Nemesius says believe that the universal soul is subdivided into particular bodies and, as a result, becomes subject to the passions. See Nemesius of Emesam, *de natura hominis* (PG 40:577a), where he says that the Manichaeans say that "the soul is immortal and incorporeal, adding that there is but one single soul for the whole world, which is subdivided and parceled out to particular bodies, whether those bodies be inanimate or ensouled. . .Thus they make the soul immortal at the expense of parceling out its substance, representing it as corporeal, and subjecting it to passions" (Telfer: 286-87). English translation refers to *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, trans. William Telfer, The Library of Christian Classics 4 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955).

A second position that Nemesius criticizes is the Stoic doctrine of destiny. In particular, he names Chrysippus and Philopator as two perpetrators of this teaching, which is ultimately, for Nemesius, a strict form of determinism. See Nemesius of Emesa, *de natura hominis* (PG 40:741d-743a): "They [the Stoics] make the stars themselves wicked, as now procuring adulteries, and now inciting murders. Or, rather than the stars, it is God their Creator that bears the blame in their place, seeing that he made them such as would pass on to us an impetus to evil deeds which we cannot resist" (Telfer:398).

Another possible polemical opponent is Eunomius. Michel Barnes has argued that Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Nature of Man* was written in response to the Trinitarian debates of the 380's and, in particular, in response to the anti-Nicene polemic of Eunomius, who made much of the implication of the passions. See Michel Barnes, "The Polemical Context and Content of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology," *Medieval Philosophy & Theology* 4 (1994): 1-24. For further background on Greek polemical debates centered on questions of moral psychology see Richard Norris, *Manhood and Christ*, 3-78.

[28] See, for example, Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.81 (Frankenberg:118:1-15), *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.28 (Frankenberg:206:17-25), and *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.85 (Frankenberg:328:7-12).

Since this material is useful for dealing with heretics, Babai offers an extensive analysis on the subject of the three parts of the soul and, specifically, why the three parts of the soul are not naturally evil. In order to ensure that Evagrius's anthropology holds up against the arguments of his polemical opponents, Babai must find a more satisfactory way of accounting for the existence of evil.

Babai's argument against those who say that God created human nature with evil inclinations is to blame the existence of evil on the misuse of the fallen will, not on the natural constitution of the soul. This free-will argument was a standard theodicy by Babai's time and he employs it in his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 3.59.[29]

> If we employ these three parts of the soul in such a way that the power of our freedom sometimes wills good and sometimes wills evil, then it is clear that neither the body nor even the soul are evil from the nature of their creation. Indeed all that God made was "very good," but the will is free and powerful.[30]

In this passage, Babai mimics the language of Gen. 1.31 in the Peshitta to describe the state of God's creation as "very good" (ܛܒܐ ܛܒܐ). According to Babai, this positive evaluation of creation applies to the parts of the soul as well. God made the parts of the soul to follow the virtuous directives of the will, which means that when the will directs the parts of the soul towards evil ends, they become corrupt and operate in a way that is

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[29] The free-will argument was already popular in the Greek-speaking world. Nemesius, to name one example, makes a similar argument in Nemesius of Emesa, *de natura hominis* (PG 40:776ab)*:* "But no one should blame God because we, having mutable faculties, are evil. For the badness is not in the faculties, but in our habits, and our habits are as we choose; and surely it is by our choice that we become evil. We are not evil by nature" (Telfer:421).

[30] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.59 (Frankenberg:230:2-5). ܡܫܬܡܫܝܢ ܬܠܬ ܡܠܝܢ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܕܐܢ ܡܬܚܝܠܝܢ ܒܗ ܚܝܠܐ ܕܪܝܬܢܘܬܢ ܕܥܒܕܝܢ ܛܒܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܛܒܬܐ ܗܘܝܢ ܡܢ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܒܪܝܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܗܘ ܕܟܠ ܕܥܒܕ ܐܠܗܐ ܛܒ ܛܒ ܠܚܘܕ ܕܛܒ ܛܒ ܗܘ ܐܠܐ ܕܨܒܝܢ ܗܘ ܚܝܠܐ ܕܪܝܬܢܘܬܢ ܕܐܠܗܐ. Also see Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.84 (Frankenberg:120:27-29): "Here [Evagrius] enlightens us concerning the three parts that are known to exist in rational nature. [These three parts] do not work together in [the soul] as is the case with the rest of the animals, but rather, according to the [rational nature's] will and by those who will, when they will, in so far as they will." ܡܫܬܡܫܝܢ ܬܠܬ ܡܠܝܢ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܕܐܢ ܡܬܚܝܠܝܢ ܒܗ ܚܝܠܐ ܕܪܝܬܢܘܬܢ ܕܥܒܕܝܢ ܛܒܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܛܒܬܐ ܗܘܝܢ ܡܢ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܒܪܝܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܗܘ ܕܟܠ ܕܥܒܕ ܐܠܗܐ ܛܒ ܛܒ ܠܚܘܕ ܕܛܒ ܛܒ ܗܘ ܐܠܐ ܕܨܒܝܢ ܗܘ ܚܝܠܐ ܕܪܝܬܢܘܬܢ ܕܐܠܗܐ. Cf. Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.47 (Frankenberg:88:6-19).

unnatural for them. God created the soul "very good," but misuse of the will corrupts the goodness of God's creation.

Babai supplies another explanation of how the will determines the ethical posture of the parts of the soul in his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 1.84. His main concern in this passage is to explain how anger and desire operate either towards virtuous or evil ends. Anger and desire are naturally disposed to temperance and holiness, he says, but after the fall, the will hinders their natural disposition and coerces them into acting with licentiousness, which is against nature. Babai says the following about desire:

> For those who act according to free will, [the parts of the soul] stand between two actions, as [Evagrius] says, "desire is receptive of temperance and licentiousness." As long as [desire] wills freely, it attains temperance and holiness and is joined with the vision of God.[31]

For Babai, evil directives from the will prohibit desire from operating freely, in accordance with its nature.

Babai describe the various ways that the passions of anger and desire harm the human person when the will directs them towards evil.[32] In his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 1.85, for example, he calls the soul's subjection to the evil directives of the will "fornication" because evil directives betray the soul's natural disposition. The passability of the soul, he says, "commits fornication with the wills of the flesh by trespassing the law and the unclean spirit of evilness [bring] troubles to [the mind] from all of its

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[31] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.84 (Frankenberg:120:35-38). ܐܠܐ ܒܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܒܝܬ ܚܐܪܘܬܐ: ܕܪ ܟܠܬܐ ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܘܣܥܪܬܐ: ܗܘ ܒܪܐܬܐ ܐܡܪ. ܕܪ ܟܠܬܐ ܠܗ ܡܩܒܠܢܝܬܐ ܗܝ ܕܢܟܦܘܬܐ ܘܕܙܠܝܠܘܬܐ. ܐܝܟ ܕܒܪ ܬܗ̇ܝܒܐ ܚܐܪܘܬܐ. ܩܢܝܐ ܢܟܦܘܬܐ ܘܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ: ܘܠܗ̇ ܢܩܦܐ ܚܙܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ.

[32] See Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.35 (Frankenberg:212:22-24): "He is teaching us about the essence of those three powers, that is, when they acted outside of their nature by trespassing the law, which was the cause of sickness for each of them." ܗܘ ܡܠܦ ܠܢ ܥܠ ܐܘܣܝܐ ܕܬܠܬܗܝܢ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܬܠܬܐ ܚܝܠܝܢ: ܗܢܐ ܕܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܟܝܢܐ ܒܥܒܪ ܢܡܘܣܐ ܥܒܕܘ: ܘܕܐܝܬܝܗ̇ ܗܝ ܥܠܬܐ ܕܟܘܪܗܢܐ ܕܟܠ ܚܕ ܡܢܗܘܢ.

surroundings."[33] Elsewhere, in his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 5.27, he describes how the passions that arise from anger and desire act like diseases that cloud the understanding. First, Babai turns to the problem of passions that arise from wrongly directed anger:

> Within [the soul], there is anger that opposes evil and this is according to nature, for the soul is not disturbed by it. However, there is [also] unnatural [anger], which is emptied of honor and is a transgressor. On account of [this anger], the soul is disturbed and troubled, for [anger] clouds over the contemplation that belongs to [the soul] from the understanding of intellections. Because of this, he says that the [sort of] anger that causes disturbances blinds one's sight. For all of these reasons, [anger] not only troubles the intellect so that it does not consider those things that are upright, but it also fights against [upright things] to the point that it damages [the intellect].[34]

Next, he turns to the problem of passions that arise from wrongly directed desire:

> "Unnatural desire" does not desire the virtues, but instead [desires] fulfillment in the dishonorable passions. It conceals the perceptions that are before [the intellect's] sight as well as its understanding. Since [man] is inflamed with filthy desire, he does not consider his former compunction or the recompense of eternal torment prepared for him. Sadness follows when this momentary passion is completed. [Since] he does not perceive his stench or the destruction [caused by] his action, he covets, in his inflammation, something that is really nothing.[35]

While the three parts of the soul (anger, desire, and mind) are all inherently good, free will causes anger and desire to operate against their nature, thereby producing passions that cloud the mind and disrupt the natural harmony of the soul.

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[33] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.85 (Frankenberg:122:17-19).

[34] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 5.27 (Frankenberg:328:19-23).

[35] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 5.27 (Frankenberg:328:24-28).

1.3.2 BABAI ON HEALING THE SOUL: THE RESTORATION OF HARMONY AND THE POSITIVE FUNCTION OF THE PASSIONATE PARTS OF THE SOUL

Babai wants to uphold the inherent goodness of the soul despite the claim made by some heretics that the soul is naturally evil. He introduces free will as the source of evil and as an explanation for why the soul produces passions that disrupt its natural harmony. In order to convince his readers that Evagrius's three parts of the soul are devoid of any evil, he must also show how the soul can overcome the disruption of harmony and how, once harmony is restored, the passionate parts of the soul can work towards virtuous ends instead of evil.

Babai believes that ascetical labor trains the will to direct the three parts of the soul towards activities that lead to spiritual knowledge of God, which enables the soul to return to a harmonious state of undistracted contemplation called spiritual knowledge. In his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 6.51, Babai says, "labors of the will are necessary before the soul can obtain health in its being," and he goes on to say that when the soul "is purified from the passions of desire and anger which are outside of nature, then it becomes a partaker of spiritual knowledge."[36] Ascetical labor stimulates healing in the soul by enabling it to participate in spiritual knowledge.

The most detailed explanation of this healing process of the intellectual part of the soul occurs in Babai's commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 3.35. In this section of the commentary, Babai explains that the ascetical labor of contemplating God's work in creation restores the intellectual part of the soul to its original, uncorrupted state of creation.

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[36] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.51 (Frankenberg:392:22-23). ܦܪܥܢܝܢ ܠܐܝܣܘܪܐ ܕܨܠܠܘܬܗ ܕܢܦܫ. ܘܚܝܠܐ ܗܝ ܡܬܡܨܝܐ ܘܚܝܠܐ ܒܡܘܫܚܬܗ܆ ܐܦ ܟܠܗ ܦܓܪܐ ܠܐ ܦܟܪܐ ܕܢܠܗܛܗ܆ ܘܠܘ ܐܝܟ ܚܫ̈ܚܬܐ ܕܒܕܡܘܬܢ ܐܬܝܬܗ ܚܘܬܡܝܢ.

> The intellectual part of rational nature is "the mind" that fell from exalted contemplation. "Knowledge," which is assembled from contemplating creation and from the administrative actions that are usefully and wondrously performed over all of this, heals [the mind] and brings it back to the perfection of health from which it fell.[37]

Babai also prescribes remedies for anger and desire. For unnatural anger, he prescribes the ascetical discipline of love:

> Love is the thing that heals the [part of intellectual nature] that fights against creation with ungodliness. [This part is] the "anger" that trespassed the law and which hates people who are created in [God's] image.[38]

The ascetical labor of temperance and excellence in virtue bring healing to fallen desire:

> Temperance and excellence in virtue work to heal the "desire" that transgressed the law. [Desire] is corrupted by disruption: either bodily in nature, which is corruption of the temple of God, or else [disruption of] the soul, which worships idols. [Temperance and excellence in virtue] sanctify the former uncleanness and brings it back to its natural [condition], where desire for those commandments of our Lord will be joined to all those who belong to him.[39]

Babai states that the healing of desire does not entail the destruction of desire, but rather a reorientation of the object of desire. The healthy soul no longer desires bodily things, but instead follows God's commandments and assists those monks who want to restore harmony in their soul.

For Babai, a properly functioning soul means that all three parts of the soul work together in unison. The goal is not to extinguish the passionate parts of the soul, but to

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[37] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.35 (Frankenberg:212:25-28). ܠܗܘܢܐ ܠܗ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܡܢܬܐ ܡܬܡܠܠܢܘܬܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ ܡܠܝܠܐ܆ ܘܢܦܠ ܡܢ ܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܡܪܝܡܬܐ܆ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܠܗ ܕܡܬܟܢܫܐ ܡܢ ܬܐܘܪܝܗ ܕܒܪܝܬܐ܆ ܘܡܢ ܦܘܪܢܣܐ ܕܗܘܝܐ ܥܠ ܟܠ܆ ܕܡܢ ܒܥܘܕܪܐ ܡܫܬܥܒܕܝܢ ܢܥܝܡܐܝܬ ܘܬܗܝܪܐܝܬ ܡܬܐܣܝܐ܆ ܘܡܗܦܟܐ ܠܗ ܠܘܬ ܓܡܝܪܘܬ ܚܘܠܡܢܐ ܕܡܢܗ ܢܦܠ.

[38] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.35 (Frankenberg:212:28-30). ܘܠܚܡܬܐ ܠܗ ܕܡܚܒܪ ܢܟܘܬܐ܆ ܗܝ ܕܚܠܬܐ ܠܢܡܘܣܐ ܒܪܘܫܐ ܒܪܘܫܥܐ܆ ܘܣܢܝܐ ܠܒܢܝܢܫܐ ܕܒܨܠܡܗ ܐܬܒܪܝܘ܆ ܚܘܒܐ ܗܘ ܕܡܐܣܐ.

[39] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.35 (Frankenberg:212:30-33). ܘܠܪܓܬܐ ܕܥܒܪܬ ܢܡܘܣܐ ܐܣܝܐ ܕܢܟܦܘܬܐ ܒܫܘܚܠܦܐ܆ ܐܘ ܦܓܪܢܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܝܗ ܚܒܠ ܗܝܟܠܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ܆ ܐܘ ܢܦܫܢܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܝܗ ܕܦܠܚܐ ܦܬܟܪܐ܆ ܢܟܦܘܬܐ ܘܡܝܬܪܘܬܐ ܥܒܕܝܢ ܠܗ ܐܣܝܘܬܐ. ܗܝ ܕܡܩܕܫܐ ܠܛܢܦܘܬܐ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ܆ ܘܡܗܦܟܐ ܠܗ ܠܘܬ ܟܝܢܝܘܬܐ܆ ܕܟܕ ܪܓܬܐ ܦܘܩܕܢܘܗܝ ܕܡܪܢ ܡܬܢܩܦ ܠܟܠܗܘܢ ܕܝܠܗ.

get them to work in harmony with the intellectual part of the soul by restoring their natural impassability.[40]

> When these two other parts of the soul — desire and anger — retain impassability, they are united to the intellectual part of the soul in one spirit, one light, and one honor and when the numbers and stirrings of division come to an end, then there are no longer two desires and two angers, but one desire in one strength and one knowledge mingled in one light of the entire soul.[41]

Since passions confuse the parts of the soul and distract the mind, the only way for the parts of the soul to work together is to eliminate the passions. When the passions are eliminated and desire and anger are once again working naturally, the soul will work towards the discovery of knowledge.

In this same chapter, Babai reiterates Plato's and Evagrius's position that the rational part of the soul exists as the head of the soul, but he is also clear that the rational part of the soul needs the passionate parts of the soul in order to function properly. He alludes to the importance of the bodily passions in his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 6.51, when he says, "We distinguish the majesty of the rationality of the soul: it is a nature that exists and has life in and of itself even if it cannot do what is proper for it

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[40] Babai's positive evaluation of the passionate parts of the soul is similar to Gregory of Nyssa's conclusions in chapter three of *On the Soul and Resurrection*. See Gregory of Nyssa *de anima res.* (PG 46:61ab). Like Babai, Gregory blames the negative use of the passions on free will, but states that the soul's attachment to bodily perception can be used for good ends. "Necessarily, therefore, through the faculty of perception our soul becomes associated also with the traits which are joined with perception. These are the traits which, when they occur in us, are called 'passions,' which were not bequeathed to human life solely for evil (for the Creator would bear the blame for evil, if because of them the necessity of transgression had been built into our nature). Instead, by the particular use of our free choice such impulses of the soul become instruments of virtue or wickedness, just as steel, forged according to the intention of the craftsman, is shaped towards whatever the smith desires, becoming either a sword or some agricultural implement" (Roth: 56). English translation is from *The Soul and Resurrection*, trans. Catherine P. Roth (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993).

[41] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.81 (Frankenberg:118:6-9). ܟܕ ܗܠܝܢ ܬܪ̈ܬܝܢ ܡ̈ܢܘܬܐ ܐܚܪ̈ܢܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܕܐܬܬܣܝܡ ܪ̈ܓܬܐ ܘܚܡܬܐ ܩܢܝ ܠܗ̇ ܫܦܝܘܬܐ: ܘܐܦ ܗ̈ܢܝܢ ܡܬܚܝ̈ܕܢ ܥܡ ܡܢܬܗ̇ ܡܬܡܠܠܢܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ: ܒܚܕܐ ܪܘܚ ܒܚܕ ܢܘܗܪܐ ܘܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ. ܘܟܕ ܫܠܡܝܢ ܡܢ̈ܝܢܐ ܘܙܘ̈ܥܐ ܕܦܠܝܓܘܬܐ: ܗܝܕܝܢ ܠܝܬ ܪ̈ܓܬܐ ܐܘ ܪ̈ܓܬܐ. ܘܠܐ ܚܡܬܐ ܘܚܡܬܐ. ܐܠܐ ܚܕܐ ܪ̈ܓܬܐ ܒܚܕܐ ܚܝܠܘܬܐ. ܒܚܕܐ ܝܕܥܬܐ: ܒܚܕ ܢܘܗܪܐ ܡܚܠܛܐ ܠܗ̇ ܠܟܠܗ̇ ܢܦܫܐ.

without the body."[42] Although the rational part of the soul orders anger and desire, it still relies on their help in order to obtain true knowledge.

In particular, Babai explains how the bodily senses (ܪ̈ܓܫܐ) assist the soul in achieving knowledge by providing sensual perceptions from the material world and by offering protection to the soul in the form of ascetical labors. Babai associates the bodily senses with the passionate parts of the soul because they provide anger and desire with their connection to the material world. In his commentary on *Gnostic Chapters* 4.71, for example, he says that "the soul cannot perceive or learn in some way or another without the bodily senses."[43] In addition to this task of providing further perception into God's created order, the bodily senses also offer protection to the soul by participating in ascetical labors. In his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 4.85, he says, "The bodily senses are required for the protection of the soul, for it is on account of the senses, through [their] labors of virtue, that human beings are lifted out of the depths of darkness to the light of His life."[44] When the senses are subjugated in bodily labor, the passionate parts of the soul continue to work towards spiritual knowledge.

In summary, Babai says that anger and desire play an important role in the soul's effort to obtain union with God through spiritual knowledge. Although they can hinder this process of obtaining spiritual knowledge, they can also push the intellect towards greater heights so long as the will directs them appropriately. For Babai, the important role that free will plays in directing the parts of the soul in the quest for spiritual

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[42] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.51 (Frankenberg:392:22-23). ܦܪܝܫܝܢ ܠܐܝܡܪܐ ܕܡܠܠܘܬܗ ܕܢܦܫܐ. ܘܚܝܠܐ ܗ ܗ̇ܝ ܡܫܡܫܢܐ ܘܢܚܬܐ ܒܡܫܘܚܬܗ܆ ܐܦ ܒܠܒܕ ܦܓܪܐ ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚܐ ܕܢܠܡܠܬܗ܆ ܘܠܘ ܐܝܟ ܚܫ̈ܘܬܐ ܕܒܕܡܘܬܗܝܢ ܐܬܬܝܕܥ ܚܫܘܬܗܝܢ.
[43] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.71 (Frankenberg:304:24-25). ܠܗ̇ ܒܗ̇ ܕܒܠܥܕ ܡܢ ܪ̈ܓܫܘܗܝ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܠܝܬ ܠܢܦܫܐ ܠܡܪܓܫܘ ܘܠܡܐܠܦ ܒܚܕ ܡܢ ܐܢܝ̈ܢ.
[44] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.85 (Frankenberg:312:34-:314:1). ܗܘܘ ܘܐܦ ܗܪܟܐ܆ ܕܡܬܒܥܝܢ ܪ̈ܓܫܐ ܦܓܪܐ ܠܢܛܘܪܘܬܗ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܘܒܗܘܢ ܒܪ̈ܓܫܐ ܒܝܕ ܥܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܡܝܬܪܘܬܐ܆ ܘܐܢܫ ܕܡܢ ܒܥܘܡ̈ܩܝ ܚܫܘܟܐ ܡܬܥܠܐ ܠܘܬ ܢܘܗܪܐ ܕܚܝ̈ܘܗܝ.

knowledge is even more explicit than it is for Evagrius. Free will directs anger and desire towards either virtuous ends that help stimulate spiritual knowledge or else towards evil ends that cause distraction in the soul and hinder the attainment of spiritual knowledge.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid the groundwork for a consideration of how Evagrius's anthropology influenced Isaac of Nineveh. Evagrius's anthropology was well received by Syriac authors and was seen as a useful tool for upholding the natural goodness of the soul. In particular, Babai uses Evagrius's anthropology in a polemical context to help prove that the human soul is not inherently evil. In order to make sure that Evagrius's anthropology could successfully withstand its polemical opponents, Babai supplied a more sophisticated explanation for the origin of evil, namely, free will. In addition, Babai also needed to show that not only is the soul exempt from inherently evil tendencies, but also that all three parts of the soul contribute to the virtuous pursuit of spiritual knowledge of God.

When Isaac appropriates Evagrius's anthropology, he builds on this tradition of training anger and desire to assist, rather than hinder, the achievement of spiritual knowledge. What separates Isaac from other authors is the degree of sophistication that he adds to Evagrius's anthropology. Isaac does not reiterate Evagrian anthropology, but he adds new levels of nuance and brings in details from other Syriac authors, like Pseudo-Dionysius, Pseudo-Macarius, and John the Solitary.

CHAPTER 2

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF ISAAC OF NINEVEH: THE IMPULSES OF THE SOUL IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE THREE DEGREES

Like Babai, Isaac uses Evagrius's anthropology as a tool for opposing heretics who deny the inherent goodness of the soul. Isaac retains Evagrius's and Babai's emphasis on the threefold division of the soul as well as the inherent usefulness of all three parts for fostering virtue, but what distinguishes him from his earlier predecessors is that he integrates this anthropology into a framework called the "three degrees," which he appropriates from John the Solitary's *Dialogue on the Soul and Passions*.[1] According to John, the ascetical life consists of three levels, or degrees (ܕܪܓܬܐ): the level of the body, soul and spirit. In the level of the body, the monk is subject to the material needs and desires of the body; in the level of the soul, the monk begins to adopt an attitude of repentance and to practice ascetical renunciation in order to quell the passions and acquire virtue; in the level of the spirit, the monk has acquired purity and has eliminated evil inclinations.[2] For John, moral perfection is only possible in the level of the spirit, as body and soul are continually subject to distractions.

The three degrees framework provides Isaac with a more nuanced defense of the inherent goodness of the soul than Babai because it supplies a better explanation for why the two passionate parts of the soul (i.e., anger and desire) fail to harmonize with the rational part. The degree of harmonization correlates with the degree of ascetical

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[1] For background on the scholarship concerning the identity of John the Solitary, see Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans forme: Introduction à l'étude de la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale* (Chevetogne: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1987), 95-97. I follow the most recent scholarship, which assigns one identity to the various texts attributed to John of Apamea and John the Solitary.

[2] For a thorough treatment of John the Solitary's "three degrees," see Paul Harb, "Doctrine spirituelle de le Solitaire," *Parole de l'Orient* 2 (1971): 225-60.

renunciation performed during each level of the ascetical life. When a monk operates in the bodily level, for example, limited ascetical renunciation means that the passionate parts of the soul become subject to material sensations that enter through the bodily senses, but when a monk moves to the level of soul, he begins to control and limit the influence of the bodily senses with improved ascetical renunciation. In the spiritual level, the monk experiences the payoff of ascetical renunciation as all three parts of the soul work together in perfect harmony.

The framework of the three degrees helps explain the complex relationship between the three parts of the soul, but Isaac still finds that the formulations of Evagrius and Babai fail to explain how the passionate parts of the soul inherently work towards virtue. In order to construct an anthropology that can fully withstand the arguments of the heretics who deny the natural goodness of the soul, Isaac introduces the notion of the soul's impulses. Already within the Syriac tradition, in authors like Ephrem and John the Solitary, as well as in the Syriac translation of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters*, there is mention of the soul's impulses (ܪܘܚܐ).[3] Isaac uses this notion of the impulses to provide an account for how the soul operates towards virtuous ends. The impulses, he explains, are natural operations of the soul that protect the soul from the distractions of the bodily senses and stimulate the highest degree of virtue, that is, contemplation of God. Each of the three parts of the soul, he says, has its own unique corresponding impulse: loving desire (ܪܘܚܐ ܕܪܚܡܐ) corresponds with desire, zeal (ܪܘܚܐ) with anger, and reason (ܪܘܚܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ)

[3] For background on the use of the word impulses (ܪܘܚܐ) in earlier Syriac literature, see *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part,' chapters IV-XLI*, ed. Sebastian Brock, CSCO 555, Scriptores Syri 225 (Louven: Peeters, 1995), n. 24.5, p. 74.

with the mind.[4] The impulse of zeal protects the soul from distractions caused by the bodily senses while the impulse of loving desire stimulates contemplation of God. Meanwhile, the impulse of reason processes divine insights in the mind during the spiritual level of the ascetical life.

Isaac's anthropology is not a mere reiteration of Evagrius's anthropology, but rather, a sophisticated reworking of elements borrowed from Evagrius, Pseudo-Dionysius, Pseudo-Macarius, and John the Solitary. Isaac appropriates the threefold division of the soul from Evagrius, but he turns to the Greek *eros* tradition — specifically to Pseudo-Dionysius and Pseudo-Macarius — in order to describe the impulse of loving desire. Finally, he situates his entire anthropology within the framework of John the Solitary's three degrees.

The rest of this chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section will show that Isaac, like Babai, uses Evagrius's threefold division of the soul to oppose heretics who deny the natural goodness of the soul. The second section will show how Isaac turns to the Greek *eros* tradition and, specifically, to Pseudo-Dionysius and Pseudo-Macarius in order to describe how the impulse of loving desire stimulates contemplation of God. Finally, the third section will show how Isaac places his discussion of the soul's impulses within the framework of John the Solitary's three degrees. Although Isaac forms his anthropology from a complex array of pieces from different authors, John's three degrees renders the system coherent.

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[4] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.19.1 (CSCO 554:92): "Every rational nature has been constituted to receive divine instruction from three simple parts, for the wisdom of that glorious creator has established [each one] separately. They are: loving desire, zeal, and reason." ܗܠܝܢ ܕܟܠܗ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܬܩܢܐ ܠܡܩܒܠ ܠܡܠܦܢܘܬܐ ܡܢ ܬܠܬܐ ܦܫܝܩܐ ܡܛܠ ܕܚܟܡܬܗ ܕܗܘ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܡܫܒܚܬܐ ܕܐܬܬܩܢ ܚܕ ܚܕ ܒܦܪܫܘܬܗ. ܐܝܢܘܢ ܗܢܘܢ ܕܪܚܡܐ ܘܪܓܫܐ ܘܡܠܬܐ. Page numbers refer to *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part,' chapters IV-XLI*, ed. Sebastian Brock, CSCO 554, Scriptores Syri 224 (Louven: Peeters, 1995).

2.1.1 ISAAC'S ACCOUNT OF THE NATURAL GOODNESS OF THE TRIPARTITE SOUL

Isaac follows Evagrius in positing a tripartite division of the soul.[5] He retains the terms "anger" (ܚܡܬܐ) and "desire" (ܪܓܬܐ) to designate the irascible and concupiscible parts of the soul.[6] He uses three different Syriac words, however, to designate the mind, all of which are interchangeable; following the Syriac translation of Evagrius's writings and Babai, he uses the term ܗܘܢܐ, but he also uses the cognate words ܪܥܝܢܐ and ܡܕܥܐ, following traditional Syriac usage. Like Babai, Isaac formulates this tripartite anthropology in response to certain philosophers who say that God has placed passions and sin in human nature.[7] He wants to show that this position is blasphemous. "Let no one blaspheme against God," Isaac states, by saying "that He has placed the passions and sin in our nature."[8] Accordingly, scholars have focused their discussions of Isaac's anthropology on the question of how he accounts for the presence of the passions in the soul despite his insistent belief that the soul is good. The current consensus is that Isaac

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[5] For background on Evagrius's influence on Isaac's anthropology, see Nestor Kavvadas, "Some Observations on the Theological Anthropology of Isaac of Nineveh and its Sources," in *Scrinium* 4*: Patrologia Pacifica: Selected papers presented to the Western Pacific Rim Patristics Society 3rd Annual Conference (Nagoya, Japan, September 29 — October 1, 2006) and other patristic studies*, ed. V. Baranov and B Lourié (Санкт-Петербург: Axiōma, 2008), 147-57 and "Der Geist Gottes und die Vergöttlichung des Menschen bei Isaak von Ninive," in *Syrien im 1.–7. Jahrhundert nach Christus. Akten der 1. Tübinger Tagung zum Christlichen Orient (15.–16. Juni 2007)*, ed. Dimitrij Bumazhnov and Hans Reinhard Seeliger, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 62 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 145-56.

[6] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.70 (Bedjan:485:5). Wensinck mistakenly confuses the word ܚܡܬܐ in Bedjan's edition for the word ܪܚܡܬܐ. His translation ("the natural affections of desire and love") is incorrect. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.20 (Bedjan:161:14). Page and line numbers refer to *Mar Isaacus Ninivita De Perfectione Religiosa,* ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris: Nihil Obstat, 1908; repr. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007).

[7] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:21:16-18): "There are no passions in the soul by nature, but the philosophers who are without do not believe this and neither do those have followed them in [their] opinion." ܠܢܦܫܐ ܡܢ܆ ܒܟܝܢܐܝܬ ܚܫ̈ܐ ܠܝܬ ܠܗ̇܀ ܦܝܠܘܣܘܦܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܠܒܪ܆ ܗܕܐ ܠܐ ܡܗܝܡܢܝܢ܂ ܘܗܘ ܒܗܕܐ܆ ܘܐܦ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܒܬܪܗܘܢ ܪܕܝܢ ܒܪܥܝܢܐ.

[8] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:26:2-3). ܠܐ ܐܢܫ ܢܓܕܦ ܥܠ ܐܠܗܐ܆ ܕܚܫ̈ܐ ܘܚܛܝܬܐ ܗܘ ܣܡ ܒܟܝܢܢ.

believes that the soul has good passions that are natural to it, but that they have become corrupted on account of the soul's union with the body. [9]

This scholarly position, however, does not preserve the same degree of nuance that Isaac maintains in his own discussion of the soul's inherent goodness. According to Isaac, the soul has what he calls powers (ܚܝܠܐ), but not passions.[10] In *Homily* 1.3, Isaac claims that scripture assigns "secondary meanings" to many things and, specifically, to the descriptions of the body and soul: "How many times," he says, "does [the scripture] apply the things of the body to the soul and the things of the soul to the body without distinguishing them?"[11] Isaac concludes that while scripture, in general, appears to say that passions exist in the soul, it does so only in a metaphorical way. In the same way that scripture generally attributes divine characteristics to Christ's human nature and human characteristics to Christ's divine nature without distinguishing them, for example, so too does scripture attribute the bodily passions to the soul and the powers of the soul to the body without clearly distinguishing them. What seem like passions of the soul are really traces of the influence that the bodily passions have on the soul.

Evil passions therefore originate from an unbalanced relationship between the body and soul. According to Isaac, human beings exist as a union between body and soul, which means that the body can affect the soul and vice versa. When the powers of

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[9] See E. Khalifé-Hachem, "L'âme et les passions des hommes d'après un texte d'Isaac de Ninive," *Parole de l'Orient* 12 (1984-1985): 215-16; Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita: Ricerche su Isacco di Ninive e la sua fortuna* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2002), 159-62; and Patrick Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75-81.

[10] Isaac's position resembles Nemesius of Emesa, who makes a similar distinction in *On the Nature of Man*. See Nemesius of Emesa, *de natura hominis* (PG 40:676a): "In as far as movements spring from the part of the soul where passion resides, they are in that sense activities, but in as far as they are inordinate and unnatural they are not so much activities as passions" (Telfer:349). English translation refers to *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, trans. William Telfer, The Library of Christian Classics 4 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955).

[11] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:24:5-8).

the soul order and direct the bodily senses, the natural goodness of the soul ensures that human actions are virtuous, but when the balance between body and soul becomes interrupted and the bodily senses order and direct the powers of the soul, human beings become distracted from their natural course and fail to perform virtuous actions. Isaac lays out this mutual influence of body and soul in *Homily* 1.3:

> The passions of the body are placed in [the body] by God for the benefit and growth of the body and the passions of the soul, that is, the powers of the soul, are placed in [the soul] for the growth and benefit of the soul. When the body is compelled to leave its passability through withdrawal from the [passions] and cleave to the soul, it is injured. Likewise, when the soul renounces the [passions] belonging to it [and cleaves to] the body, it is injured.[12]

The powers of the soul sometimes function as if they were passions whenever the soul is distracted by the bodily passions; likewise, the bodily senses act virtuously whenever the body is subject to the soul through ascetical renunciation.

Isaac's account of the union between body and soul is predicated on the assumption that the soul naturally generates virtuous actions and that the existence of evil occurs only when the soul becomes distracted from its natural course. Isaac's strongest affirmation of the natural goodness of the soul is in *Homily* 1.26, where he explains the difference between the powers of the soul when they act according to their nature and the powers of the soul when they succumb to demonic influence. In a properly functioning soul, the powers of the mind order the powers of the passionate parts of the soul (i.e., anger and desire), but when the soul becomes unbalanced from demonic distraction, the powers of the mind fall subject to anger and desire.

> Our mind, without mediation from the holy angels, is moved towards the good by itself without instruction, but the mind is unable to receive knowledge of evil things without

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[12] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:25:15-20). ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܡܬܝܗܒܝܢ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܠܛܒܘܬܗ ܘܠܪܒܝܘܬܗ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܘܕܢܦܫܐ ܗܝܢ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܡܬܝܗܒܝܢ ܠܛܒܘܬܗ ܘܠܪܒܝܘܬܗ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܘܕܢܦܫܐ ܗܝܢ ܕܚܝܠܬܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܕܡܬܚܝܠ ܠܡܦܪܩ ܡܢ ܬܚܘܡܗ ܘܡܬܕܒܩ ܠܢܦܫܐ ܡܬܦܓܥ ܗܘܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܗܝܢ ܕܡܬܦܪܫ ܡܢ ܦܓܪܐ ܘܡܬܕܒܩ ܠܦܓܪܐ ܡܬܦܓܥ ܗܘܐ.

> mediation from the demons or the senses, for [the mind] cannot be moved towards [evil things] by itself. Good is implanted in our nature, but not evil. Everything that is foreign as well as external instruction is in need of a mediator, but nature, which is implanted within and is without instruction, glides along [by itself], even if it does so in the dark.[13]

Even though the soul's natural powers operate "in the dark," they are still able to do so without mediation and without instruction. Isaac's point is that evil actions require the mediation from the demons or the senses because evil is always external to the soul.

Isaac's acknowledgment that the powers of the soul operate "in the dark" is a tacit admission that the powers of the soul require divine assistance to continue operating according to their natural tendencies. Isaac is more explicit, however, in *Homily* 1.64, where he explains that the power of desire needs to be awakened by divine help before it can flourish: "To choose what is good comes from the beautiful will of the one who wants this [good], but the ability to accomplish the choice of this virtuous will belongs to God and it requires much help on his part."[14] Divine grace helps the powers of the soul act in the way that they are supposed to act.

Divine grace is also required for divine contemplation, which is the pinnacle of the ascetical life. Even though the powers of the soul work naturally towards virtue, they are unable to produce divine contemplation in the mind. Since the soul is subject to the constraints of the material world, the immaterial nature of divine contemplation remains beyond the natural capacity of the soul and requires the assistance of divine grace.

> Although we do not naturally possess the power to be moved to divine contemplation, and [although] we possess this deficiency equally with all the heavenly beings, [then] for us and for those who do not [possess] discipline or consideration for [divine

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[13] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.27 (Bedjan:197:10-18). ܗܘܝܢ܆ ܘܟܠܗ̇ ܡܢ ܡܨܥܝܢܘܬܐ ܕܫܐ̈ܕܐ ܘܪ̈ܓܫܐ܆ ܡܢ ܠܘܬܗ ܡܬܬܙܝܥ ܗܘ ܥܠ ܒܝܫܬܐ܆ ܘܐܦ ܕܠܐ ܡܠܦܢܐ. ܡܬܚܫܚܢ ܕܝܢ ܕܢܘܟܪ̈ܝܬܐ܆ ܟܠܗ̇ ܡܨܥܝܢܘܬܐ ܕܐܟܣ̈ܢܝܐ ܐܘ ܕܝܘ̈ܠܦܢܐ ܠܡܨܥܝܐ܆ ܐܘ ܟܝܢܗܝܢ ܠܡܬܬܙܥܘ ܡܢ ܠܘܬܗ܆ ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܗܘܝܢ܀ ܒܟܝܢܢ܆ ܛܒܬܐ ܢܨܝܒܐ. ܒܝܫܬܐ ܕܝܢ܆ ܠܐ. ܘܟܠ ܕܢܘܟܪܝܬܐ ܗܝ܆ ܘܡܢ ܠܒܪ ܒܐܠܦܐ ܡܫܘܚܬܐ ܕܝܘܠܦܢܗ̇. ܥܠ ܡܨܥܝܢܐ ܣܢܝܩ. ܐܦ ܕܠܐ ܡܠܦܢܐ܆ ܪܕܝܐ ܗܘ ܟܝܢܐ܆ ܐܦܢ ܒܚܫܘܟܐ܀
[14] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.64 (Bedjan:441:11-14). ܠܡܓܒܐ ܡܢ ܛܒܬܐ܆ ܕܨܒܝܢܐ ܗܝ ܫܦܝܪܐ ܕܐܢܫܐ ܕܠܗܕܐ ܪܐܓ ܠܗ. ܠܡܫܠܡܘ ܕܝܢ ܠܓܒܝܬܐ ܕܗܕܐ ܨܒܝܢܐ ܡܝܬܪܐ܆ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܗܝ ܗܕܐ܆ ܘܥܠ ܡܥܕܪܢܘܬܐ ܣܓܝܐܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܓܒܘܗܝ ܣܢܝܩܐ

> contemplation], it is by grace alone that [divine contemplation] is moved in us [as] something naturally foreign to the human and angelic mind.[15]

We will say more about the process of achieving divine contemplation through grace in future chapters, but for the purposes of the present chapter, our findings are sufficient. We have shown that Isaac upholds the natural goodness of the soul by blaming the existence of evil on distractions that disrupt the natural harmony between body and soul. Despite the soul's natural capacity to act toward virtue, divine grace is necessary to help the powers of the soul perform their natural functions and to achieve divine contemplation.

2.1.2 The Role of the Senses in Isaac's Anthropology

The negative role of the bodily senses in Isaac's anthropology is a significant alteration from the anthropology of Babai, who, as we saw in the previous chapter, attributed positive functions to the bodily senses.[16] Although Isaac occasionally blames the disruption of the harmony between body and soul on either Satanic or demonic influence, he most often blames the bodily senses.[17] When the senses dominate the soul,

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[15] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.27 (Bedjan:198:6-10). ܕܒܪ ܬܘܒ ܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܐܠܗܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܡܢܐ ܗܘܝܢ ܒܛܝܒܘܬܐ ܚܝܠܐ ܠܡܬܬܙܝܥܘ ܒܠܚܘܕ: ܘܠܗܕܐ ܣܘܟܠܐ ܓܡܝܪܬܐ ܡܢܘ ܠܗ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܐܘܣܝܐ ܡܫܡܫܢܘܬܐ: ܐܦ ܠܗܘܢ ܕܠܐ ܕܡܪܢܐ ܘܡܫܝܚܢܘܬܐ ܕܒܠܚܘܕ: ܒܛܝܒܘܬܐ ܒܠܗܘܕ ܡܬܬܙܝܥܐ ܒܢ: ܡܛܠ ܕܗܘܐ, ܒܛܒܝܘܬ ܠܗܘܢܐ ܐܢܫܝܐ ܘܡܠܐܟܝܐ.

[16] For Babai's positive evaluation of the senses, see chapter one and Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.71 (Frankenberg:304:24-26) and *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.85 (Frankenberg:312:34-314:1). Page and line numbers refer to *Euagrius Ponticus*, ed. W. Frankenberg, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen Philologisch-Historische Klasse 13.2 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912).

[17] In *Homily* 1.64, for example, Isaac blames the corruption of desire on mediation from Satan. See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.64 (Bedjan:441:18-20): "There is a beautiful thing that a man might desire even though it is not helpful to him; this sort of desire falls [into the heart] from Satan, even though it is perceived to be helpful." ܐܝܬ ܗܘ ܫܘܦܪܬܐ ܕܪܓܐ ܠܗ ܐܢܫ: ܟܕ ܠܐ ܡܥܕܪܐ ܠܗ. ܢܦܠܐ ܘܐܦ ܗܝ ܡܢ ܣܛܢܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܗܕܐ ܪܓܬܐ: ܟܕ ܡܬܚܙܝܐ ܕܡܥܕܪܢܘܬܐ ܗܝ. Isaac also says that the demons use the senses to lead people into error. See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.27 (Bedjan:195:1-5) and *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.27 (Bedjan:195:17-196:3).

the passionate parts of anger and desire fail to perform their natural task of preparing the soul for contemplation of God; instead, they produce passions, which give rise to evil.

Isaac follows Evagrius in identifying the bodily senses (ܪ̈ܓܫܐ) as the source of the soul's distraction. In *Homily* 1.1, Isaac uses *The Practical Life* 4, where Evagrius states that the senses give birth to desire, as a proof text for the way that the senses distract the soul with material objects.[18] Throughout the rest of his homilies, Isaac continues to supply examples of how the senses distract the powers of the soul. In *Homily* 1.1, for example, he states that the soul forgets its natural powers when the senses present it with "visible matter."[19] In *Homily* 1.1, he says that the senses turn the heart away from the sweetness of God while he adds in *Homily* 1.3 that the senses "stir up commotion in the soul," and in *Homily* 1.28, he says that the senses are the source of both unnatural anger and desire.[20]

According to Isaac, the main problem with the senses is that they distort free will. Isaac agrees with Babai that free will, not human nature, is the cause of evil, yet at the same time, because of his strong insistence on the natural goodness of humanity, Isaac believes that the will, insofar as it operates freely and naturally, always works towards good.[21] When the senses present choices to the will that cause it to turn away from God

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[18] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.1 (Bedjan:4:10-13).
[19] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.1 (Bedjan:2:18-21): "Until the soul becomes intoxicated with faith in God in that it has received a sense of its powers, the weakness of the senses is not healed and it is not able to trample visible matter with power." ܥܕܡܐ ܓܝܪ ܕܬܪܘܐ ܢܦܫܐ ܪܘܝܘܬܐ ܕܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܕܒܐܠܗܐ܂ ܒܡܩܒܠܢܘܬܐ ܕܪ̈ܓܫܬܐ ܕܚܝ̈ܠܘܗ̇܂ ܠܐ ܡܚܝܠܘܬܐ ܕܪ̈ܓܫܐ ܡܬܐܣܝܐ܂ ܘܠܐ ܒܚܝܠܐ ܡܫܟܚܐ ܠܕܝܫ ܠܗܘܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܢܝܬܐ.
[20] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.1 (Bedjan:4:1), *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:21:2) and *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.28 (Bedjan:294).
[21] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.38 (Bedjan:293:22-294:3): "When a man is overcome with anger and desire, it is not what lies in nature that compels him to cross the border of nature and to be outside of what is proper, but it is an addition that we make to nature through the fruit of the will." ܐܡܬܝ ܕܡܙܕܟܐ ܐܢܫ ܡܢ ܚܡܬܐ ܘܡܢ ܪ̈ܓܬܐ܂ ܠܘ ܗܘ ܕܒܟܝܢܐ ܣܝܡܐ ܐܠܨܐ ܠܗ ܠܡܥܒܪ ܡܢ ܬܚܘܡܗ ܕܟܝܢܐ܂ ܘܠܡܗܘܐ ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܘܠܝܬܐ܂ ܐܠܐ ܬܘܣܦܬܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܡܘܣܦܝܢ ܥܠ ܗܘ ܟܝܢܐ܂ ܒܝܕ ܥ̈ܠܠܬܐ ܕܨܒܝܢܐ.

towards the material world, the senses violate the true freedom of the will, thereby enslaving the will to the senses.[22] Freedom that has not been trained to ignore the bodily senses, Isaac says, is "freedom at the wrong time that results in difficult slavery."[23] When the senses entice the will to follow the attractions of the material world, the will operates in a way that is against nature, thereby rendering the action one of slavery rather than true freedom. For this reason, Isaac advises the monks to "die to the senses" and to "subdue the senses."[24]

The affect that the senses have on the parts of the soul depends on whether or not a monk successfully "subdues the senses." The will of a monk who has succumbed to the slavery of the senses directs the parts of the soul towards evil ends, but the will of a monk who has successfully subdued the senses causes the powers of the soul to act towards virtuous ends, in keeping with the soul's natural tendencies. This affect of the will means that the parts of the soul have either virtuous or evil manifestations, depending on whether or not the senses are subdued. For example, in *Homily* 1.53, Isaac explains that the desiring part of the soul can act either towards virtuous or shameful ends: "If the memory of virtue renews in us the desire for virtue when we are in conversation with [the saints] in our thinking, then the memory of lasciviousness renews in our mind a shameful

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[22] Cf. See *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:21:2) where Isaac says that the senses cause the soul to be troubled by the touch of outward things.
For further background, see Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita: Ricerche su Isacco di Ninive e la sua fortuna* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2002), 179-80.
[23] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.30 (Bedjan:210:16-17).
[24] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.39 (Bedjan:270:13) and *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.40 (Bedjan:281:15). According to Isaac, maintaining true freedom of the will is essential to salvation, for Isaac asserts that God would have chosen to save humanity in a way that did not involve the laborious process of ascetical labor if God could have done so without violating human free will. See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.45 (Bedjan:323:17-19). Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.10.20 (CSCO 554:36).

desire when we remember them."[25] A soul may be either virtuous or evil, depending on whether or not the senses have caused the will to direct the parts of the soul according to their nature or against their nature.[26]

2.1.3 THE ROLE OF THE IMPULSES IN ISAAC'S ANTHROPOLOGY

As we have just seen, Isaac claims that the bodily senses cause the will to work against the soul's nature by causing the parts of the soul to operate in ways that hinder, rather than help, the monk achieve contemplation of God. At the same time, Isaac also speaks of impulses (ܙܘܥܐ) within the soul that counteract the bodily senses.[27] According to Isaac, God placed the impulses of reason, zeal, and loving desire in the soul for the

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[25] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.53 (Bedjan:380:7-10). ܐܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܥܘܗܕܢܐ ܕܡܪܓܪܝܬܐ ܡܣܝܥܬ ܡܢ ܪܓܬܐ ܕܡܪܓܪܝܬܘܬܐ ܐܡܪܬ، ܗܘ ܗܘ ܕܗܘܝܢ ܒܚܘܫܝ̈ܢ ܒܡܣܬܟܠܢ܆ ܐܦ ܒܥܘܗܕܢܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܡܣܝܥܬ ܠܬܪܬܝܢ ܪܓܬܐ ܡܥܪܢܘܬܐ ܐܡܪܬ، ܕܠܗܘܢ ܒܥܘܗܕܢ.

[26] According to Isaac, desire is the part of the soul that is most easily persuaded to operate towards either virtuous or evil ends. When the parts of the soul are turned towards the material world by the senses, they operate in an evil way. See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:227:1-2), where Isaac states that "the world is a whore and by the desire for its beauty, it persuades those who see it [to have] loving desire for it." ܙܢܝܬܐ ܐܝܬܘܗ̇ ܥܠܡܐ܆ ܘܒܪܓܬܐ ܕܫܘܦܪܗ̇܆ ܡܦܝܣ ܠܚܙܝܘܗ̇ ܠܪܚܡܬܗ̇. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:234:8-9) and *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.62 (Bedjan:401:18). Isaac even blames his own poor writing on desire that has led him astray in *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.77 (Bedjan:534:5-7): "Since [my] intellect runs toward the subject of desire with words, I have strayed from the intention that I mentioned above." ܡܛܠ ܕܪܗܛܬܐ ܥܠ ܨܒܘܬܐ ܕܪܓܬܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܒܡܠܬܐ܆ ܣܛܝܬ ܠܝ ܡܢ ܢܝܫܐ ܕܡܢ ܠܥܠ ܥܗܕܬ ܒܡܠܬܝ. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.77 (Bedjan:535:1).

Isaac also describes a desire that is better than desire for the allurements of the world. See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.62 (Bedjan:432:6-9): "The allurements [of things and of the world] will not enter into the heart of a man who has been made worthy of the divine intellect and has tasted and perceived what is better than those [allurements]. Desire for better things than those [allurements] takes control in the place of the allurements." ܒܪܢܫܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܐܫܬܘܝ܆ ܠܡܕܥܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ܆ ܘܛܥܡ ܘܐܪܓܫ ܒܡܕܡ ܕܡܝܬܪ ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ܆ ܠܐ ܥܐܠܝܢ ܒܠܒܗ ܪܓܝܓܬܐ ܕܨܒܘ̈ܬܐ ܘܕܥܠܡܐ. ܒܕܘܟܬܐ ܕܪܓܝܓܬܐ ܐܚܕܐ ܪܓܬܐ܆ ܕܡܝܬܪܬܐ ܡܢ ܕܠܗܘܢ.
Throughout the ascetical homilies, Isaac identifies proper objects of desire, such as the future world, future goods, virtuous things, and conversation with God. Concerning desire for the future world, see Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.6 (Bedjan:84:2). Concerning desire for future goods, see Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:230:19). Concerning desire for virtuous things, see Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:230:21). Concerning desire for conversation with God, see Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.29.7 (CSCO 554:120).

[27] For further background on the role of the impulses or "movements" that Isaac says are inherent to human nature, see André Louf, "L'homme dans l'histoire du salut selon Isaac le Syrien," *CPE* 88 (2002): 49 and Bouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (νοῦς): Pure Prayer according to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 15:2 (2011): 310-11.

purpose of protecting the soul against distractions introduced by the bodily senses and preparing the soul for contemplation of God. Whereas Babai, as we saw in chapter one, focuses on healing anger and desire so that they make positive contributions to the attainment of spiritual knowledge, Isaac shifts the focus instead to the protective role of the impulses. Babai, in other words, emphasizes healing while Isaac emphasizes protection and maintenance of the soul.

Isaac says that the job of the soul's impulses is to preserve the natural operations of the soul and to counter the activity of the bodily senses. The impulses of the soul are intimately united with the senses of the body and are the soul's means of interacting with the bodily senses.

> Due to the weakness of the flesh, insomuch as it is evil, [the soul] cannot be entirely freed from [the passions], for the nature [of the soul] participates in the suffering [of the flesh] on account of the union with the [soul's] impulses, which are entwined with the fleshly senses through inscrutable wisdom.[28]

Although Isaac says that the impulses of the soul will never be completely free from the bodily senses, he admits that the impulses can overcome the bodily senses and help recover the soul's natural virtue. In an important passage from *Homily* 1.2, he explains how the impulses of loving desire and zeal help purify desire and anger within the soul respectively.

> The service of the cross is twofold according to its twofold nature, which is divided into two parts: endurance during suffering of the body, which is accomplished through the operation of the anger of the soul and increases the intensity of the practice; and the subtle service of the mind in divine study, constant prayer, and so forth, which is done with that desiring part and is called contemplation. The one [anger] purifies the passionate part [of the soul] through the power of zeal, the other [loving desire] frees the

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[28] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:26:21-27:1-4). ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܒܝ ܡܬܚܝܢܐ ܟܠܗ ܡܢ ܛܒܥܐ ܕܒܝܫܐ ܗܘ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܪܪ ܠܗ. ܕܒܛܒܥܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܡܫܬܬܦ ܥܡ ܦܓܪܐ ܒܚܫܘܫܐ ܕܚܒܪܘܬܗ ܥܡ ܚܘܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܕܡܬܚܒܪܝܢ ܥܡ ܪܓܫܐ ܒܪܙܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܥܪܐ.

> intelligible part [of the soul] through the operation of the love of the soul, which is its natural longing.[29]

Zeal helps the passionate parts of the soul (i.e., anger and desire) to operate naturally by protecting them from distractions, while loving desire prepares the soul for divine contemplation.

In what follows, I will begin to examine Isaac's account of the impulses of the soul in further detail. The impulse of loving desire will be discussed below as a Syriac equivalent to the Greek *eros* tradition, so zeal will be considered first. The impulse of reason, associated with the mind, will be considered in future chapters.

Isaac says that zeal protects other impulses in the soul from weakness and from succumbing to temptations from the devil.[30] His most detailed account of the function of zeal occurs in *Homily* 2.17 (a duplicate of *Homily* 1.55), where he follows Evagrius in

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[29] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.2 (Bedjan:15:10-18). ܚܣܡܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ܆ ܦܘܠܚܢܗ ܕܙܘܗܪܐ. ܗܘܢܐ܆ ܠܘܬ ܚܣܝܘܬܗ ܕܢܦܫܐ. ܘܡܬܦܠܓ ܠܬܪ̈ܬܝܢ܆ ܬܪܝܨܐ. ܠܡܫܡܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܚܐ ܕܫܦܝܪܐ܆ ܘܠܘܬ ܚܘܒܐ ܒܡܫܡܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܚܘܒܬܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ܆ ܘܡܬܩܪܝܐ ܚܣܝܢܘܬܐ. ܘܠܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܩܢܝܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ܆ ܒܚܘܒܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ ܘܐܪܓܘܬܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ ܘܡܬܩܪܐ܆ ܕܡܬܦܠܚܢܐ ܫܘܒܬܐ ܗܝ ܪ ܠܟܘܠܗܝܢ܆ ܘܡܫܬܡܠܝܐ ܬܐܘܪܝܐ. ܘܚܕܐ ܡܢ܆ ܠܚܘܒܬܐ ܡܫܡܫܬܐ ܡܢܘܚܐ ܒܪ ܚܝܠܗ ܕܠܒܐ. ܘܐܚܪܬܐ܆ ܒܪ ܡܫܡܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ܆ ܕܐܬܝܠܝܕܬ ܡܬܐܡܪܢܘܬܐ ܒܚܘܫܒܐ܆ ܠܚܘܒܬܐ ܕܡܫܬܡܠܝܢܘܬܐ ܡܢ ܠܠܟܐ.

[30] Babai does not make zeal an impulse of the soul in the same way that Isaac does, but he establishes a precedent for making a distinction between zeal and anger, properly speaking. When Babai considers how anger works in the soul, he realizes that the Syriac translator of Evagrius occasionally uses two different words to describe the irascible parts of the soul. Sometimes the Syriac translator uses the standard technical term "anger," but at other points, he uses the word "zeal." Babai uses this divergence in language to establish a distinction between anger and zeal. When the irascible part of the soul acts according to reason, Babai labels this action "zeal," but when the irascible part of the soul succumbs to violence, Babai calls this action "anger." Still commenting on Evagrius's language in *Gnostic Chapter* 1.84, he says, "Love and hatred follow after zeal." In this instance, he uses [the term] "zeal" instead of "anger" because it is not violent as in the rest of the animals, but rather, operates rationally. See Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.84 (Frankenberg:120:37-122:2). Although zeal is not violent, Babai still says that it is an operation of the irascible soul that is subject to the will and therefore can succumb to evil. He continues, "Zeal that arises from impulses" is succeeded by two operations, love and hate: either virtue arises, as Paul says. . . . or else the opposite, as David warns us. . . . Natural zeal is neutral because it yields to free will." See Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.84 (Frankenberg:122:2-4).

calling zeal a "watchdog" for virtue.[31] Isaac then describes how the impulse of zeal acts as a "watchdog" by guarding and protecting the impulse of loving desire:

> There is a beginning of movement with every impulse of loving desire for the good, that is, a certain zeal, which resembles coals of fire in its warmth, accompanies [the impulse]. This [zeal] habitually encompasses that impulse of loving desire as fortification, driving it away from every obstacle and hindrance there may be. This [zeal] possesses great strength and unspeakable power in order to guard the entire soul from becoming weak and being shaken by onslaughts of all kinds of difficulties.[32]

The content of this passage is consistent with a number of other occasions where Isaac says that zeal protects the soul from desiring the wrong things.[33] Furthermore, Isaac explains that zeal protects the soul from succumbing to bodily temptations and temptations from the devil. In *Homily* 1.36, for example, he claims that Satan withdraws his temptation from those people who have zeal because he knows that he will be unsuccessful.[34] Zeal, therefore, is the impulse of the soul that protects the rest of the soul from the onslaughts of temptations that arise from the bodily senses and from the devil.

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[31] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.17.3 (CSCO 554:81). The Evagrian reference is to the supplementary material included in the Syriac translation of the *Gnostic Chapters*. For the text of Evagrius and Babai's commentary, see Babai, *Suppl. Kephalaia Gnostica* 10 (Frankenberg:430:10-20).

[32] Isaac of Nineveh, '*The Second Part'* 2.17.1 (CSCO 554:80). ܠܟܠ ܙܘܥܐ ܕܪܓܬܐ ܕܫܦܝܪܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܝܗ: ܒܟܘܢ ܕܥܒܪ، ܡܬܬܙܝܥܢܘܬܐ: ܢܦܩ ܠܗ ܠܘܬܗ ܚܕܐ: ܕܕܡܝܐ ܠܓܘܡܪܐ ܕܢܘܪܐ ܒܫܚܝܡܘܬܗ. ܘܗܝ ܗܢܐ ܚܕ ܗܕܪ ܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܫܘܪܐ. ܠܗ ܠܙܘܥܐ ܗܘ ܕܪܓܬܐ: ܘܛܪܕ ܡܢ ܘܡܢܗ ܟܠ ܣܘܟܠܐ ܘܟܘܠܝܐ ܕܐܝܬ. ܚܝܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܣܓܝܐܐ ܘܚܝܠܐ ܗܘ ܗܘܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠ: ܠܡܛܪܘ ܠܟܠܗ ܢܦܫܐ ܡܢ ܕܬܬܪܦܐ ܐܘ ܬܬܙܝܥ ܡܢ ܣܘܪ̈ܚܢܐ ܕܟܠ ܚܘܣ̈ܩܝܢ.

[33] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.37 (Bedjan:282:5-8) and *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.65 (Bedjan:447:11-16).

[34] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.36 (Bedjan:271:18-272:4). Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.17.2 (CSCO 554:81): "This is what makes the soul zealous, stirs it, enflames it, and occasionally makes it strong so that [a person] scorns the body [despite whatever] afflictions and fearsome temptations he may encounter in order to confidently hand himself over to death and encounters the power of the Rebel." ܗܢܐ ܕܡܛܢܢ ܘܡܙܝܥ ܘܡܫܠܗܒ ܘܡܚܝܠ ܠܢܦܫܐ ܒܙܒܢ ܙܒܢ: ܕܢܒܣܐ ܥܠ ܦܓܪܐ ܒܐܘ̈ܠܨܢܐ ܘܢܣܝ̈ܘܢܐ ܕܚ̈ܝܠܐ ܕܐܪ̈ܥܝܢ: ܠܡܫܠܡܘ ܢܦܫܗ ܒܬܘܟܠܢܐ ܠܡܘܬܐ ܘܠܡܐܪܥ ܚܝܠ ܡܪܘܕܐ.

2.2 Loving Desire: The Influence of Pseudo-Dionysius, Pseudo-Macarius, and the Greek *Eros* Tradition

This next section of the chapter will investigate the intellectual milieu that served as the background to Isaac's development of the impulse of loving desire. The Syriac word ܪܚܡܐ, translated here as "loving desire," is the word that Syriac authors used to translate the Greek word *eros*.[35] Secular Greek philosophers as well as Greek theologians prior to Isaac's time had already made the connection between erotic desire and contemplation and Isaac's development of loving desire manifests a dependence on these Greek sources.

Christian theologians as early as the second-century drew connections between *eros* and contemplation. Ignatius of Antioch famously said, "My *eros* is crucified," and this moniker would be repeated and developed into contemplative systems by both Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius.[36] Also relevant for understanding Isaac's conception of loving desire is Evagrius, who implicitly associates *eros* with contemplation. As Robin Darling Young has suggested, Evagrius draws a connection between the three levels of the monastic life and three different commentaries on the biblical text: he associates the practical life with Proverbs, natural contemplation with Ecclesiastes, and theological contemplation with the Song of Songs.[37] This pairing between theological contemplation

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[35] See Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans Forme*, 128.
[36] Ignatius of Antioch, *Ep. ad Rom.* 7.2. See John M. Rist, "A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius," *Vigiliae Christiane* 20 (1966): 239.
[37] Robin Darling Young, "The Influence of Evagrius Pontus," in *To Train His Soul in Books: Syriac Asceticism in Early Christianity*, ed. Robin Darling Young and Monica Blanchard (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 161.

and the Song of Songs implies that, for Evagrius, the theme of erotic love, which permeates the Song of Songs, is associated with contemplation.[38]

The possible influence of Pseudo-Dionysius is more intriguing, even though definitive connections between Isaac's conception of loving desire and Pseudo-Dionysian texts cannot be established with certainty. Scholars have already noted the prominent role that Pseudo-Dionysius assigns to *eros* in *Divine Names* 4.[39] In this section, he introduces two currents that may have influenced Isaac's conception of loving desire: the connection between *eros* and *ecstasy* and the connection between *eros* and the beautiful. Pseudo-Dionysius states, first of all, that God's ecstatic motion and creative impetus stems from the divine *eros*.[40] The correlative to this ecstatic motion, as René Roques first remarked, is that human beings also begin the process of ecstatic movement towards God through the impetus of loving desire.[41] Erotic love, in other words, stimulates ecstasy because it moves the mind to a state of unknowing that transcends nature.[42] The second current is that Pseudo-Dionysius associates loving desire with the Beautiful.

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[38] Jean Danièlou notes that Gregory of Nyssa makes a distinction between love (ܪܚܡܐ) and loving desire (ܪܚܡܢܘܬܐ), or *agape* and *eros* in Greek. See Jean Danièlou, *Platonisme et thélogie mystique: Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Aubier, Éditions Montaigne, 1944), 211-20. Danièlou says that *eros* is the passion of *agape*, that is, a "plus rare et représente un aspect particulier" of *agape* (218). Although *eros* is significant for Gregory of Nyssa, Robert Beulay has shown that Gregory is not cited very much by Syriac authors and many of the doctrinal points that can be traced back to Gregory were, in fact, transmitted through either Pseudo-Dionysius or Pseudo-Macarius. See Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans Forme*, 128-29.

[39] See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. P.S. Watson (London: S.P.C.K, 1953); John M. Rist, "A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius," 235-43; and Alexander Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Thessalonica: Patriarchikon Idruma Paterikon Meleton, 1994), 66-68. Unfortunately, the Syriac translation of the *Divine Names* remains unpublished.

[40] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 708B: "That yearning which creates all the goodness of the world preexisted superabundantly within the Good and did not allow it to remain without issue. It stirred him to use the abundance of his powers in the production of the world" (Luibheid:79-80). Translation is from *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

[41] René Roques, "Symbolisme et théologie negative chez le Pseudo-Denys," *Bulletin de'Association de Guillaume Bude* 1 (1957), 97-112.

[42] See Alexander Golitzin *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei*, 66; Charles M. Stang, "Dionysius, Paul, and the Significance of the Pseudonym," in *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite,* ed. Sarah Coakley and Charles

> So it is that all things must desire, must yearn for, must love, the Beautiful and the Good. Because of it and for its sake, subordinate is returned to superior, equal keeps company with equal, superior turns providentially to subordinate, each bestirs itself and all are stirred to do and to will whatever it is they do and will because of the yearning for the Beautiful and the Good.[43]

The connection between loving desire and ecstasy and loving desire and the Beautiful are two currents that permeate Pseudo-Dionysius's discussion of loving desire.

Isaac's understanding of loving desire reflects these two Pseudo-Dionysian currents. Throughout his homilies, Isaac, like Pseudo-Dionysius, associates loving desire with the mind's ability to go beyond knowledge and experience wonder — which is, for Isaac, the equivalent of ecstasy.[44] In *Homily* 1.24, for example, he says that loving desire moves the mind towards a "knowledge that is not part of nature."[45] Likewise, Isaac also echoes Pseudo-Dionysius's connection between desiring and the beautiful. In *Homily* 1.64, for example, Isaac states "We join the beautiful desire that is awakened in us with continual prayer."[46] Although, in this instance, Isaac associates desire (ܪܓܬܐ) with the beautiful rather than loving desire, his language nevertheless places him within the same *eros* tradition as Pseudo-Dionysius.

The most relevant Greek author in this discussion of background sources to Isaac's use of loving desire is Pseudo-Macarius, who uses the term *eros* frequently in his writings.[47] The Syriac translation of the Macarian corpus is a series of homilies and

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M. Stang (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 16-17; and Charles M. Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: "No Longer I,"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 163-66.

[43] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 708A. (Luibheid:79).

[44] See Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000), 242.

[45] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.24 (Bedjan:181:5). ܠܝܕܥܬܗ ܕܒܟܝܢܝ ܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܗ.

[46] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.64 (Bedjan:441:14-15). ܠܡܓܒܠܘ ܡܢ ܗܫܐ: ܕܘܒܪܐ ܡܫܠܡܐ
ܠܪܓܬܐ ܫܦܝܪܬܐ ܕܒܢ ܗܘܬ ܒ ܡܬܡܨܝܢ: ܥܡ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܐܡܝܢܬܐ.

[47] See Robert Beulay, La Lumière sans Forme, 63; Alexander Golitzin Et Introibo ad Altare Dei, 377; and Marcus Plested, The Macarian Legacy: The Place of Macarius-Symeon in the Eastern Christian Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 247.

letters attributed either to Macarius of Egypt or Macarius of Alexanderia and includes the earliest manuscript witness to the Macarian writings, dated to 534.[48] For the most part, the Syriac corpus seems to be an abbreviated summary of the Greek corpus, though Géhin has recently discovered a Greek manuscript that provides a partial basis for the form of the Syriac collection.[49] Beulay has also composed a list of parallels between the Syriac and Greek collections.[50] Nevertheless, the difficulty with the Syriac collection is that it does not correlate exactly to any of the four extant Greek collections.

Isaac refers to portions of the Syriac Macarian collection on two occasions. In *Homily* 1.72, he explicitly refers to both the Syriac rendition of the first letter attributed to Macarius of Alexandria and the first letter attributed to Macarius of Egypt.[51] Although he only refers to Macarius by name in this particular homily, Isaac may have been familiar with additional writings from the Syriac Macarian corpus under other pseudonyms. The first two homilies attributed to Macarius of Egypt, for example, are also attributed to Ephrem in some of the early manuscripts.[52] It is therefore possible that Isaac was familiar with larger portions of the Syriac Macarian corpus, albeit under the pseudonym of Ephrem rather than under the pseudonym of either Macarius of Egypt or Macarius of Alexandria.

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[48] Marcus Plested, *The Macarian Legacy*, 12.
[49] See Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans Forme*, 41-2: "En effet, les passages syriaques dont j'ai relevé la correspondance avec le grec vont, par rapport à celui-ci, de la traduction très à la véritable paraphrase ; souvent ils omettent des phrases du grec, ou bien, au contraire, en incluent d'autres qui lui sont étrangères." For Géhin's manuscript, see Paul Géhin, "Le Dossier Macarien de l'Atheniensis 2492," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 31 (1999): 89-147.
[50] For specific passages that correspond to the Greek Macarian corpus, see Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans Forme*, 40.
[51] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.72 (Bedjan:494-495) and (Bedjan:500-501). Dadisho also cites the first Egyptian letter. According to Beulay, this letter was accessible and enjoyed widespread currency. See Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans Forme*, 39.
[52] See Werner Strothmann, *Die Syrische Überlieferung der Schriften des Makarios*, Vol. 2 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981), X.

Scholars have already noted the influence that the Macarian corpus had on East-Syriac ascetical authors regarding erotic love.[53] Although Pseudo-Macarius speaks of a misguided loving desire for material pursuits such as money, power, and praise, he also has much to say about loving desire for God and the role that loving desire plays in acquiring union with God through contemplation.[54] This connection between erotic love and union with God is explicit in portions of the Syriac collection of Pseudo-Macarius's writings, especially, as we will consider here, the first three homilies ascribed to Macarius of Egypt.[55]

The first homily attributed to Macarius of Egypt is an abbreviated summary of Pseudo-Macarius's *Great Letter*.[56] This text, preserved in some manuscripts under the pseudonym of Ephrem, is a strong witness to the connection that Pseudo-Macarius makes between erotic love and contemplative union with God. In this homily, Pseudo-Macarius says that loving desire for God is necessary before a monk can advance to mature knowledge of God. Without loving desire, a person remains infantile in respect to spiritual knowledge.

> Just as when an infant is born, it does not remain in the stature of its infancy for a long time, but it grows daily by increasing its stature out of necessity and nature, until it arrives at the stature of perfection and the fullness of a human being, so too in the same way does a person who is born from above persist not in an infantile birth of the spiritual

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[53] For example, Beulay posits a definite connection between John Dalyatha (eighth-century) and Pseudo-Macarius regarding the theme of loving desire. See Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans Forme*, 60-3.
[54] For loving desire for money, see Pseudo-Macarius, *Aeg h.* 1.5 (Strothmann:10:81), *Aeg h.* 1.6 (Strothmann:12:118), *Aeg h.* 2.6 (Strothmann:41:68), and *Al h.* 7 (Strothmann:238:8). For loving desire for power, see Pseudo-Macarius, *Aeg h.* 1.5 (Strothmann:11:92), *Aeg h.* 2.6 (Strothmann:41:69), *Aeg h.* 1.6 (Strothmann:13:122), *Al h.* 3.3 (Strothmann:183:54), and *Al h.* 3.6 (Strothmann:187:11). For loving desire for praise, see Pseudo-Macarius, *Al ep.* 9 (Strothmann:257:182).
[55] See Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans Forme*, 63: "La dilection paraît donc être pour Macaire l'amour proprement mystique, caractérisé par le désir de l'union à l'être de Dieu, tandis que l'amour est esentiellement le don fervent de soi et la conformité de la volonté à celle de l'Aimé."
[56] Werner Strothmann, Die Syrische Überlieferung der Schriften des Makarios, X.

> intellect, but advances daily into the presence of the knowledge of loving desire for God by the workings of the Spirit that lead one to God.[57]

According to Pseudo-Macarius, loving desire is the prerequisite for the acquisition of mature, spiritual knowledge about God. He makes this position even more explicit later in the same homily: "It is necessary for those who yearn for and ardently desire truth and long to be deemed worthy to place this banner of life before their eyes to be immersed in love and loving desire for that ineffable vocation."[58] In short, loving desire is the first step of the ineffable vocation of discovering the truth about God.

Pseudo-Macarius continues his discussion on the role of loving desire in the second homily attributed to Macarius of Egypt, but also preserved as Ephrem in some early manuscripts.[59] In this homily, he compares loving desire for God with the appetite of thirst. A monk who is denied union with God possesses an insatiable (ܠܐ ܠܡܣܒܥ) loving desire for God in the same way that a thirsty person who is unable to consume water fails to be sated in respect to thirst.

> When a person who is thirsty and burdened by thirst begins to drink but is not permitted to satisfy [his longing for a drink], not only is his thirst not satiated (ܠܐ ܠܡܣܒܥ), but the opposite occurs and he becomes increasingly enflamed and burdened by thirst, in the same way this also happens to souls that are bound with loving desire for God, in so much as they are deemed worthy to receive the gift from [God], they are increasingly filled with desire and afflicted with hunger to such an extent that they do not know satiation.[60]

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[57] Pseudo-Macarius, *Aeg h.* 1.3 (Strothmann:7:43-50). ܘܐܝܟ ܗܢܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܡܬܚܫܠ܆ ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܣܘܟܠܐ ܕܥܒܕܘܬܗ ܡܬܚܫܠ ܒܠܚܘܕ܆ ܐܠܐ ܝܘܡ ܡܢ ܝܘܡ ܥܠ ܩܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܪܚܡܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ܆ ܒܝܕ ܡܥܒܕܢܘܬܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ܆ ܕܡܩܪܒܐ ܠܘܬ ܐܠܗܐ ܘܡܬܚܫܠܢܘܬܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܝܬܝܪ܆ ܗܘ ܡܬܚܫܠ ܒܬܚܘܬܐ ܐܦ ܗܘ ܕܡܬܚܫܠ ܡܢ ܠܥܠ܆ ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܠܚܘܕܘܬܐ ܕܥܒܕܘܬܐ ܕܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ. ܦܪܫ ܒܬܚܘܬܐ ܕܪܚܡܬܐ ܐܠܗܐ܆ ܐܠܐ ܝܘܡ ܡܢ ܝܘܡ ܡܬܬܘܣܦ ܠܩܘܒܠܗ܆ ܒܚܝܠܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܕܡܩܪܒ ܠܘܬ ܐܠܗܐ.

[58] Pseudo-Macarius, *Aeg h.* 1.9 (Strothmann:17:175-79). ܐܠܨ ܓܝܪ ܕܠܗܠܝܢ ܕܪܓܝܓܝܢ ܘܡܬܪܓܪܓܝܢ ܠܫܪܪܐ܆ ܘܡܬܚܦܛܝܢ ܕܢܫܬܘܘܢ ܠܡܣܡ ܗܢܐ ܐܬܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܩܕܡ ܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ܆ ܗܢܘ ܠܡܗܘܐ ܕܢܗܘܘܢ ܛܒܝܥܝܢ ܒܚܘܒܐ ܘܒܪܚܡܬܐ ܕܗܝ ܩܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠܐ.
Also see Pseudo-Macarius, *Aeg h* 1.16 (Strothmann:28:325-330): "[We are deemed worthy of God]. . .in loving desire of God" and Pseudo-Macarius, *Aeg h* 1.18 (Strothmann:29:343-44).

[59] Werner Strothmann, Die Syrische Überlieferung der Schriften des Makarios, X.

[60] Pseudo-Macarius, *Aeg h.* 2.1 (Strothmann:37:4-10). ܠܡܢ ܕܨܗܐ ܘܝܩܝܪ ܒܨܗܝܐ ܕܢܫܬܐ܆ ܕܫܪܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܢܫܬܐ ܠܡܫܬܝܘ. ܠܐ ܫܒܩܝܢ ܠܡܣܒܥ܆ ܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܨܗܝܘܬܗ ܠܐ ܡܣܬܒܥܐ܆ ܐܠܐ ܕܠܗܘܦܟܐ ܡܬܚܡܬܐ ܘܡܬܝܩܪܐ ܒܨܗܝܐ܆ ܗܟܢܐ ܐܦ ܥܠ ܢܦܫܬܐ ܕܐܣܝܪܢ ܒܪܚܡܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ܆ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܫܬܘܝܢ ܠܡܩܒܠ ܡܘܗܒܬܐ ܡܢܗ܆ ܒܨܗܝܐ ܗܟܝܠ ܝܬܝܪܐܝܬ ܡܬܡܠܝܢ ܘܡܬܛܪܦܝܢ ܒܟܦܢܐ܆ ܥܕܡܐ ܕܠܐ ܝܕܥܝܢ ܣܒܥܐ. ܘܠܡܣܒܥ ܠܐ ܝܕܥܝܢ. Pseudo-Macarius makes a similar analogy between thirst and loving desire for God in the first epistle ascribed to Macarius of Alexandria. Isaac, as discussed above, refers to this text in *Homily* 1.72. See Pseudo-Macarius, *Al. ep.* 2.2 (Strothmann:204:24).

This section of the homily, as Beulay notes, is dependent on the first two paragraphs of the tenth homily in the second Greek collection of Pseudo-Macarius's texts.[61] In the Greek version of the text, the emphasis on the insatiability (ἀκορέστος) of loving desire is even stronger than in the Syriac version.[62] Nevertheless, the main point is still present in the Syriac text: a monk must possess an insatiable loving desire for God in order to achieve contemplative union with God.

In the third homily ascribed to Macarius of Egypt, Pseudo-Macarius continues to unfold his understanding of the relationship between loving desire and knowledge of God. A soul that is wounded for God is insatiable in its need for the healing power of divine knowledge. "The soul that has a loving desire for God," he begins, "is such that it possesses upright knowledge."[63] He then explains that a soul that has been touched by knowledge of God is permanently wounded in that it will always yearn to taste intimacy with the Trinity once again: "A soul that is wounded and overcome with loving desire for God has tasted glorious and pleasing intimacy with the Trinity."[64] According to Pseudo-Macarius, loving desire should exist in the soul as a permanent wound that will always suffer for want of the healing power of divine knowledge.

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[61] Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans Forme*, 40.

[62] See Pseudo-Macarius, *Fifty Homilies* 2.10.1 (Dörries, Klostermann, and Kroeger:93:21). Page and line numbers refer to *Die 50 Geistlichen Homilien des Makarios*, ed. and trans. Hermann Dörries, Erich Klostermann, and Mathias Kroeger (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1964). Cf. Pseudo-Macarius, *Fifty Homilies* 2.10.4 (Dörries, Klostermann, and Kroeger:95:43) and *Fifty Homilies* 2.15.37 (Dörries, Klostermann, and Kroeger:149:529). Alexander Golitzin notes that the use of this term echoes polemical remarks made by Gregory of Nyssa in response to Origen's finite God. See Alexander Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei*, 377.

[63] Pseudo-Macarius, *Aeg h.* 3.5 (Strothmann:63:124-25). ܐܢܬܝܗܒ ܐܢܫܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܫܪܝܐ ܗܘܝ ܠܗ ܕܝܢܐ

[64] Pseudo-Macarius, *Aeg h.* 3.5 (Strothmann:65:149-150). ܐܢܫܐ ܕܐܬܦܓܥ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܛܥܡ ܛܒܐ ܘܫܦܝܪܐ ܕܫܘܬܦܘܬܐ ܕܬܠܬܝܬܐ Pseudo-Macarius repeats this reference to the "soul wounded by loving desire" in the first epistle ascribed to Macarius of Alexandria. See Pseudo-Macarius, *Al ep.* 1.5 (Strothmann:199:69).

This Macarian vision of loving desire provides a basis for Isaac's own formulation of how the impulse of "holy loving desire," as he calls it, operates within the soul.[65] As Chialà has aptly said, this specific application of desire plays an important role in Isaac's ascetical teaching:

> La via ascetica non è una via verso l'insensiblità, una sorta di anestetico che mira ad ottundere le potenze vitali che si agitano nell'uomo e che lo rendono un essere vivente, ma è piuttosto una via di conversione, di riorientamento di queste forze vitali; per cui Isacco non invita all'assenza di desiderio, ma a un desiderio più grande; non invita all'assenza di passione, ma a una passione più grande.[66]

In short, the impulse of loving desire is an essential part of Isaac's ascetic enterprise. Specific examples of Isaac's interest in the connection between loving desire and the ascetical enterprise include *Homily* 2.5, where Isaac prays that his loving desire for God will help him to renounce his life, and *Homily* 2.10, where Isaac claims that loving desire for God will help monks arrive at perfect love for other human beings.[67]

In particular, Isaac adopts Pseudo-Macarius's position that loving desire must be insatiable before it can foster union with God. Isaac, like Pseudo-Macarius, observes that a monk remains interested in spiritual pursuits so long as his loving desire for God remains unfulfilled, but when loving desire is sated, a monk will become interested in material distractions. Isaac explains this reasoning in *Homily* 1.11:

> The incorporeal faculties of the intellect, which are inclined towards loving desire for God through consideration of the scriptures, fence in the gates of the soul against foreign thoughts. They guard the intellect with fervent memories of future things so that [the intellect] is not given to the memory of [worldly] things through its idleness. If these things happened, the fervency of the impulses would be cooled and [the intellect] would fall prey to desires.[68]

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[65] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.17.1 (CSCO 554:80-81).
[66] Sabino Chialà, Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita, 193.
[67] See Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.5.10 (CSCO 554:8) and *The Second Part* 2.10.29 (CSCO 554:39).
[68] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.1 (Bedjan:123:14-19). ܗ ܚܝ̈ܠܐ ܠܐ ܓܘܫܡܢ̈ܝܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܕܪܚܡܬ ܐܠܗܐ ܒܗܘ̈ܓܠܐ ܕܟܬ̈ܒܐ܆ ܣܝܓܝܢ ܠܬܪ̈ܥܝܗ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܡܢ ܚܘ̈ܫܒܐ ܢܘܟܪ̈ܝܐ܆ ܘܢܛܪܝܢ ܠܗܘܢܐ ܒܥܘ̈ܗܕܢܐ ܚܡܝܡܐ ܕܥܬ̈ܝܕܬܐ܆ ܕܠܐ ܢܬܐܚܕ ܒܝܕ ܒܛܠܢܘܬܐ ܠܥܘ̈ܗܕܢܐ ܕܨ̈ܒܘܬܐ܆ ܘܐܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܬܬܦܫܓ ܚܡܝܡܘܬܐ ܕܙܘ̈ܥܘܗܝ܆ ܘܢܦܠ ܒܪ̈ ܠܪ̈ܓܝܓܬܐ.

An idle mind turns its attention to the material world, but a mind that constantly desires God will never have any need to find fulfillment in material things. Throughout the ascetical homilies, Isaac speaks to the importance of cultivating an insatiable loving desire directed towards God. In *Homily* 2.11, for example, he recommends an "insatiable loving desire" (ܪܚܡܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܝܐ) for the cross.[69] Elsewhere, in *Homily* 2.40, he identifies the insatiable desire of love as the source of eschatological unity. The saints, he says, united in purpose and mission, "will gaze towards God with the desire of insatiable love."[70] Isaac's language in these passages is reminiscent of Pseudo-Macarian teaching on the insatiability of loving desire.

In summary, Isaac's depiction of the impulse of loving desire is shaped by the Greek *eros* tradition and particularly Pseudo-Dionysius and Pseudo-Macarius. Like Pseudo-Macarius, he says that the impulse of loving desire should direct the mind towards knowledge, but, like Pseudo-Dionysius, he defines this knowledge as ecstatic and transcendent. In an important passage from *Homily* 1.1, Isaac identifies the impulse of loving desire as the impulse that directs the intellect towards thoughts of wonder (ܪܝܡܙܐ), which is, for Isaac, ecstatic knowledge.

> Even if the intellect is floating in its upper waters without being able to make its impulses delve deeper into this entire depth [of the sea] in order to see all the treasures that are at the bottom, study, with its loving desire, is [still] sufficient to bind the thoughts [of the mind] firmly to the thoughts of wonder.[71]

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[69] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.11.1 (CSCO 554:43).

[70] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.40.5 (CSCO 554:164). ܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܢ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܒܪܚܡܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܝܐ. Isaac further supports the connection between insatiable loving desire and eschatological unity in *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.53 (Bedjan:381:6-7), where he says that intellectual communion with the angels "kindles an intense fire of loving desire for virtue" within the saints. The phrase "intense fire of loving desire" is a typical Pseudo-Macarian theme, although Beulay notes that it is surprisingly absent from the Syriac collection. See Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans Forme*, 63.

[71] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.1 (Bedjan:5:8-11). ܐܦܠܘ ܕܡܬܪܘܡܡ ܥܠ ܡܝܐ ܥܠܝܐܝܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܨܠܝܢ ܠܡܚܦܪ ܟܠ ܥܡܩܐ ܕܟܠܗ ܕܡܢ ܬܚܬܝܬܐ ܕܢܚܙܐ ܟܠ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܝܩܪܐ ܕܡܬܚܙܝܢ ܠܗ ܒܪܚܡܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܝܐ ܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܡܚܫܒܬܐ ܕܝܩܪܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܒܚܕ ܒܡܫܟܢܬܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܒܗ ܒܪܝܡܘܬܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܒܗ ܒܪܝܡܘܬܐ.

As we will see in part three of this dissertation, this ability of loving desire to push the mind towards the ecstatic transcendence of wonder is an essential component to Isaac's portrait of the spiritual life and it will be the goal of the spiritual level of the three degrees hierarchy.

2.3 The Impulses of the Soul in the Framework of the Three Degrees

Isaac's strategy for explaining how evil arises from a soul that is inherently good involves the complex relationship between body and soul. Evil occurs when the bodily senses dominate the powers of the soul and overwhelm the will, but evil is avoided when the bodily senses are kept in check and when the impulses of the soul are free to operate according to their natural function, which is to protect the soul and stimulate contemplation of God. This basic explanation for the origin of evil, which uses elements from Evagrius, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Pseudo-Macarius, is an improvement on previous solutions to the problem of evil, yet there are still issues that remain unexplained. The biggest problem with Isaac's anthropology, as it has been presented so far, is that it fails to explain why the bodily senses dominate the soul at some points and not at others. Furthermore, since zeal and loving desire can work towards evil ends (for example, when a person is zealous and desirous for material possessions), an explanation is needed for why the impulses sometimes fail to perform their natural task of stimulating contemplation of God. What can a monk do to control the bodily senses and make the impulses work according to their nature?

Isaac finds the solution to this question in John the Solitary's system of the three degrees.[72] With this system, Isaac finds a ready-made explanation for why the bodily senses dominate the soul at some points and not at others and for why the impulses do not always do what they are supposed to do. Understood within the context of the three degrees, the proper balance between the bodily senses and the powers of the soul and the proper orientation of the impulses depends on the degree of ascetical labor being performed. In the bodily level of the ascetical life, a monk is just beginning to perform ascetical labor and has not yet done enough ascetical renunciation to subdue the senses. As a result, the senses overwhelm the soul and the impulses work towards unnatural ends. In the level of the soul, the monk has done enough ascetical labor to master the bodily senses, but has not yet achieved contemplation of God. Only in the level of the spirit, which will be discussed in the final chapters of this dissertation, does the monk achieve contemplation of God.

According to Isaac, the senses dominate when a monk is operating at the bodily level of the three degrees.[73] During this level of the ascetical life, the monk is unable to perform enough ascetical renunciation to subdue the bodily senses and, as a result, he is likely to become distracted by material perceptions from the senses. In *Homily* 1.46, Isaac compares the focus of the first two levels of the ascetical life, the levels of the body

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[72] For Isaac's use of the phrase "three degrees," see Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.12 (Bedjan:121:20-21): "There are three degrees that order the entire course of the human being." For the influence of the "three degrees" on Isaac, see Irénée Hausherr, *Dialogue sur l'Âme et les Passions des Hommes*, OCA 120 (Rome: Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies, 1939), 15-17 and Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans forme*, 105-108. We know that Isaac read John the Solitary because he explicitly cites him twice. See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.18 (Bedjan:152:1-2) and *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.46 (Bedjan:334:11).

[73] For an example of his association between the senses and the degree of the body, see Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.27 (Bedjan:195:7-9). Here, Isaac associates the senses with the most basic level of three human levels of perception of incorporeal beings, below the "sight of the soul" and "the natural force of the spirit."

and the soul, and concludes that the bodily way of life deals with the issue of the senses. "The bodily way of life," he says, "requires vigilance regarding the senses while the soulish way of life requires vigilance in the heart."[74] At the level of the body, the monk is most concerned with overcoming physical distractions that come from the bodily senses. It is not until the monk has moved into the level of the soul that he can begin to turn to matters of the heart.

Understanding which level of the ascetical life a monk is operating in helps explain why the impulses of the soul do not always work according to their nature. Despite Isaac's overall positive assessment of the role of the impulses of the soul, he recognizes that zeal and loving desire do not always successfully purify and protect the soul. As an example, I will focus on a lengthy passage from *Homily* 1.50, where Isaac states that a zealous man will never reach peace of mind because zeal is a "severe illness of the soul."[75] "Human beings do not count zeal as a form of wisdom," he says, "but as one of the illnesses of the soul, that is, a narrow mindedness and a great ignorance."[76] This negative assessment of zeal is difficult to fit into Isaac's conception of the impulses because, as we just saw above, Isaac claims that the impulses are naturally placed in the soul in order to safeguard it against evil and to aid the reception of divine instruction.[77]

Isaac's uncharacteristic criticism of zeal betrays his dependence on John the Solitary's *Dialogue on the Soul and Passions*. In this text, John analyzes the ethical

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[74] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.46 (Bedjan:331:17-18). ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܗܘ ܕܢܛܪ ܠܚܘܫܐ ܕܡܬܝܠܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܗܘ ܕܢܛܪ ܠܪܥܝܢܐ ܕܠܒܐ.

[75] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.50 (Bedjan:343:13-14).

[76] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.50 (Bedjan:343:21-344:2). ܠܐ ܡܢ ܒܢܝܢܫܐ ܕܢܬܚܫܒ ܕܚܟܡܬܐ ܐܠܐ ܡܢ ܚܠܝܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܕܠܝܬ ܗܘ ܕܡܬܝܠܐ ܕܚܫܘܟܐ ܘܕܣܟܠܘܬܐ ܣܓܝܐܬܐ.

[77] Like zeal, the impulse of loving desire may also suffer perversion and work towards evil ends. Isaac recalls that a loving desire for this life will seem like hell to the person who falls in this trap. See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:229:19-20). Elsewhere, Isaac speaks of a misdirected loving desire towards money. See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.53 (Bedjan:385:6).

usefulness of zeal in each of the three degrees and concludes that it is only a positive quality when it is used in a spiritual way. John's description of zeal in the bodily level is of an impulse ruled by envy for material objects.

> The zeal of the corporeal man is this: domination of others, [envy for] the riches of those who are richer than you, and [envy] for those who have a better life. The entire passion of zeal is instigated by envy, for it is envy that begins a loving desire for things that are seen.[78]

Although the person who is operating at the level of the soul has progressed beyond the base impulse of envy, his zeal is still evil because it is determined by pride. Someone who no longer performs evil deeds still judges others whom he perceives to be inferior to him and therefore harbors an attitude of disgust towards other people.

> Zeal begins to exist in the soulish [man] from this cause: since [the soulish man] has been elevated above evil deeds that are seen in the body and does not recognize anyone greater than himself, he believes that that he is perfect; and since everyone else is inferior to him in deeds that are seen, he begins to be moved by zeal and a sense of judgment towards their actions, and from the cause of his zeal, he harbors hatred.[79]

John therefore concludes that zeal inspired by both the levels of the body and soul is a zeal "directed towards murder" and the "destruction of human beings."[80]

John perceives zeal differently when it appears in the spiritual level of the ascetical life. Contrary to the two lower levels of the ascetical life, John says that zeal fosters a positive love for humanity when it is expressed in the spiritual level: "In the spiritual man there is no zeal for the destruction of humanity, as, for example, when our

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[78] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:20:21-25). Page and line numbers refer to *Ein Dialog über Die Seele und Die Affecte des Menschen*, ed. Sven Dedering (Leiden: Brill, 1936). ܒܪܢܫܐ ܗܟܝܠ ܦܓܪܢܝܐ ܗܘ ܛܢܢܗ. ܫܘܠܛܢܐ ܕܐܚܪ̈ܢܐ. ܥܘܬܪܐ ܕܗܢܘܢ ܕܥܬܝܪܝܢ ܡܢܟ. ܘܥܠ ܗܢܘܢ ܕܛܒ ܚܝܝܗܘܢ. ܟܠܗ ܕܝܢ ܚܫܐ ܕܛܢܢܗ ܡܬܥܝܪ ܡܢ ܚܣܡܐ. ܐܦ ܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܚܣܡܐ ܡܢ ܪܚܡܬܐ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܚܙܝܢ ܡܫܪܐ.

[79] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:21:6-12). ܡܫܪܐ ܗܟܝܠ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܛܢܢܐ ܒܢܦܫܢܝܐ ܡܢ ܗܕܐ ܥܠܬܐ ܡܛܠ ܕܐܬܬܥܠܝ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܥܒ̈ܕܐ ܒܝ̈ܫܐ ܕܡܬܚܙܝܢ ܒܦܓܪܐ. ܘܠܐܢܫ ܕܪܘܪܒ ܡܢܗ ܠܐ ܝܕܥ ܣܒܪ ܠܗ ܕܗܘ ܓܡܝܪ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ, ܟܕ ܗܘܘ ܒܣܢܝܢܘܬܐ. ܘܡܛܠ ܕܒܨܝܪܝܢ ܐܢܫܐ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܡܢܗ ܒܥܒ̈ܕܐ ܕܡܬܚܙܝܢ. ܡܫܪܐ ܠܗ ܕܢܬܙܝܥ ܒܛܢܢܐ ܘܒܕܝܢܐ ܥܠ ܥܒ̈ܕܝܗܘܢ.

[80] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:21:26-22:1): "The zeal of those two degrees: their thoughts are directed towards murder when at such time each one of the righteous is zealous for the destruction of human beings." ܛܢܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܬܪ̈ܝܢ ܕܪ̈ܓܝܢ. ܒܥܕܢܐ ܠܩܛܠܐ ܡܬܬܚܝܢ ܚܘܫ̈ܒܝܗܘܢ. ܐܝܟ ܗܝ ܕܐܦ ܐܢܫ ܐܢܫ ܡܢ ܟܐܢܐ ܛܢܐ.

Lord did not only have zeal, but also expressed rebuke towards his disciples because they were incensed with zeal against the Samaritans."[81] John's conclusion is that true zeal does not at all resemble the type of zeal one would associate with people in the levels of the body and soul. "As for the zeal of the spiritual man," he says, "if it is proper to call it zeal, his zeal is nothing other than the boiling up of divine zeal and in all loving passion for humanity."[82]

John's treatment of zeal is the basis for Isaac's seemingly ambivalent treatment of zeal in *Homily* 1.50. Although he does not explicitly specify the three degrees in the context of his negative assessment of zeal in *Homily* 1.50, Isaac's description of zeal in this homily should be understood as a description of zeal in the levels of the body and soul. A monk who has not yet achieved the level of the spirit will misuse zeal on occasion. The degree of ascetical renunciation performed by monks in each of the three levels of the three degrees hierarchy explains why the bodily senses dominate the soul at some points and not at others. The health of the soul is correlative to one's degree of ascetical renunciation.

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[81] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:22:3-6). ܡܠܒܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܪܘܚܢܐ ܠܗܕ ܛܢܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܝܐ ܕܐܝܬ. ܐܟܘܬܗ ܕܡܪܢ ܕܠܐ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܛܢܢܐ ܠܗ ܗܘܐ. ܐܠܐ ܐܦ ܟܐܬܐ ܐܚܘܝ ܠܬܠܡܝܕܘܗܝ، ܥܠ ܕܐܬܚܡܬܘ ܒܛܢܢܐ ܕܫܡܪܝܐ.

[82] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:22:13-15). ܛܢܢܗ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܒܢܐ ܪܘܚܢܐ ܐܢ ܘܠܐ ܕܢܬܩܪܐ ܛܢܢܐ. ܘܠܐ ܡܕܡ ܐܚܪܢ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܛܢܢܗ: ܐܠܐ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܪܬܚܐ ܕܛܢܢܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ ܘܒܟܠܗ ܪܚܡܬܐ ܕܒܢܝܢܫܐ. John also describes loving desire in terms of the three degrees. See John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:89:1-10): "Mutual love of bodily things is the possession of bodies with everything that is of the body. Mutual love of things of the soul is the discipline of instruction, that is, the exercise of wisdom. Mutual love of spiritual things is divine love, that is, the grandeur of their glory and the knowledge about their hope. [When] a man loves God for the sake of those things which are seen, his love is bodily. [As for] the man who loves for the sake of promises, his love is of the soul. [When] a man only loves God without an external cause, his love is spiritual. This love is reserved for us with the manner of life that is after the resurrection."

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that Isaac's anthropology is not just a rehearsal of Evagrius's anthropology, but rather, a complex synthesis of elements borrowed from Evagrius, Pseudo-Dionysius, Pseudo-Macarius, and, most importantly, John the Solitary. Isaac follows Evagrius (and Babai) in positing a threefold division of the soul and in using this division to help explain how evil exists despite the soul's natural goodness. According to Isaac, evil arises in the soul whenever the bodily senses disrupt the natural harmony between the body and soul. In order to counteract the bodily senses and prevent them from dominating the activity of the soul, God placed the impulses of zeal and loving desire in the soul. Zeal protects and fortifies the soul while the impulse of loving desire, which Isaac models after Pseudo-Dionsyius's and Pseudo-Macarius's descriptions of *eros*, prepares the soul for divine contemplation. Finally, Isaac places his anthropology in the context of John the Solitary's three degrees, which provide an explanation for why the impulses of the soul sometimes perform their natural functions and sometimes do not.

The next part of this dissertation will examine Isaac's eschatology. While Isaac updates Evagrius's anthropology with additions from Pseudo-Dionysius, Pseudo-Macarius and John the Solitary, he nevertheless preserves Evagrius's basic structure. Isaac's appropriation of Evagrius's eschatology, however, is an entirely different matter. Isaac rejects Evagrius's eschatology, which focuses on returning the soul to the original purity of creation, and instead posits an eschatology that is focused on the soul's existence in the world to come, a state that is even better than the original state. We will see that Isaac's eschatology owes more to John the Solitary than it does to Evagrius.

PART 2: THE ESCHATOLOGY OF ISAAC OF NINEVEH

CHAPTER 3

ISAAC'S ESCHATOLOGY: THE RETURN TO ORIGINAL PURITY OR A PERFECTION THAT SURPASSES ORIGINAL PURITY?

This chapter will show that Isaac's eschatology contains contradictory elements pertaining to the final state of the human soul. In some passages from his ascetical homilies, Isaac pays homage to Evagrius's fundamental eschatological belief that the final state is a return to the original pre-fallen state, but in other parts of his writings, Isaac contradicts himself and says that the final state is better than the original state.

This contradiction can be explained through a detailed summary of Evagrius's reception history in Syria, which begins with the first Syriac translation of Evagrius's influential text, the *Gnostic Chapters*. As Antoine Guillaumont has shown, Isaac and other Syriac authors did not read a literal translation of the *Gnostic Chapters*, but instead read an altered version that removed and corrected some of the controversial elements of Evagrius's thought.[83] The changes made by this first Syriac translator were further solidified by the first commentator of the *Gnostic Chapters*, Babai the Great. As a result, Isaac's understanding of the *Gnostic Chapters* was not true to Evagrius's original composition: some distinctive elements of Evagrius's eschatology remained, but others were lost completely. Although Isaac wanted to remain faithful to the teachings of Evagrius, many of the fundamental components of Evagrius's eschatological system were no longer accessible to him. In particular, Isaac inherits Evagrius's eschatology devoid

[83] Antoine Guillaumont, Les'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et le l'histoire de l'Origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962).

of its cosmological dimensions. As a result, Isaac's eschatology has different cosmological elements that distinguish it from Evagrius's eschatological system.

This chapter will be divided into three main sections. First, I will give an account of Evagrius's original eschatological system, which depends on his cosmology. Second, I will show how the first Syriac translator began to weaken the force of Evagrius's controversial statements by changing his text and how Babai further solidified the sense of these initial changes for subsequent Syriac authors, like Isaac. The result is a gradual separation between Evagrius's eschatology and his cosmology. Finally, I will show how Isaac, who inherits this less controversial form of Evagrius's eschatology, claims that the final state is not a return to the primordial paradise, but an entrance to a superior paradise, the attainment of which had been the initial intention of God when he created humanity. In other words, Isaac's eschatology is different from the eschatology of Evagrius in that the final state is superior, rather than identical, to the pre-fallen state. Isaac is operating with a different cosmological description of the final destiny of the human soul.

3.1 Evagrius's Eschatology and Cosmology

Although the precise nature of Evagrius's dependence on Origen's writings is uncertain, it is clear that Evagrius's eschatology builds on Origen's hypothesis concerning primordial creation. Older scholarship, stemming from the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Antoine Guillaumont, interpreted Evagrius's thought in light of an explicitly Origenist framework.[84] Guillaumont was the first to establish a close linguistic

[84] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Die Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus," *ZAM*, 14 (1939): 32, who criticizes Evagrius for being "origenistischer als Origenes." Also see Antoine Guillaumont, *Les 'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique*, 103, who uses the Origenist theory of double creation as the hermeneutical key for interpreting Evagrius's cosmology: "Tous les témoins de l'origénisme au IVe siècle

relationship between the *Gnostic Chapters* and the Origenist condemnations of 553 CE, and on the basis of this relationship, he anachronistically presumed that the Origenist philosophical principles found in the condemnations formed the basis of Evagrius's thought.[85] Recent scholarship has instead interpreted Evagrius's writings, not in light of the Origenist condemnations, but with a presumption of orthodoxy on Evagrius's behalf.[86] The strategy of these scholars is to interpret Evagrius's thought within the framework of his biblical commentaries and the monastic quest for understanding rather than within the rigid philosophical principles that were thought to have contaminated Origen's writings.[87] Despite these hermeneutical disagreements on the proper way to

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insistent sur la théorie de la préexistence des âmes. Cette théorie est liée à l'affirmation d'une double création. . .Cette conception est nettement formulée dans Evagre et forme l'une des bases de son système." Other critical studies include François Refoulé, "La christologie d'Évagre et l'Origénisme," *OCP* 27 (1961): 221-66; François Refoulé, "Évagre fut-il Origéniste?," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 47 (1963): 398-402; and François Refoulé "La mystique d'Évagre et l'Origénisme," *Supplément de la vie spirituelle* 66 (1963): 453-63. Also, in this same tradition, see Irénée Hausherr, *Les leçons d'un contemplative: le traité de l'orasion d'Évagre le Pontique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1960), 99, who arrives at a similar conclusion in his otherwise generous contribution to the study of Evagrius's ascetical theory. Hausherr says that Evagrius's Trinitarian theology suffers from the Origenist mistake of being "plus philosophique que théologique." Finally, see Antoine Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert: Évagre le Pontique* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2004), 337-42, especially n. 5 on pp. 340-41. This posthumous publication restates and endorses his earlier position and the viewpoints of Von Balthasar and Hausherr by concluding that Evagrius had some difficulty reconciling in God the unity and the Trinity and that his Trinitarian understanding was too influenced by Platonism and Origenism. Most recently, see Bouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (νοῦς): Pure Prayer according to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh," *ZAM* 15:2 (2011): 291-321.

[85] For the close linguistic relationship between Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* and the Origenist condemnations of 553 CE, see Antoine Guillaumont, *Les 'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique*, 158: "Ces multiples correspondances doctrinales et littérales obligent à conclure que les *Képhalaia gnostica* d'Evagre sont la source principale des quinze anathématismes antiorigénistes de 553."

[86] For a review of this literature, see Augustine Casiday, "Gabriel Bunge and the Study of Evagrius Ponticus," *SVTQ* 48:2 (2004): 249-97.

[87] See especially works by Gabriel Bunge: *Geistliche Vaterschaft: Christliche Gnosis bei Evagrios Pontikos* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1988); Gabriel Bunge, "Hénade ou monade? Au sujet de deux notions centrales de la terminologie évagrienne," *Le Muséon* 102 (1989): 69-91; Gabriel Bunge, "Mysterium Unitatis: Der Gedanke der Einheit von Schöpfer und Geschöpf in der evagrianischen Mystik," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 36 (1989): 449-69; Jeremy Driscoll: *The "Ad Monachos" of Evagrius Ponticus: Its structure and a Select Commentary*, Studia Anselmiana 104 (Rome: Benedictina Edizioni Abbazia S. Paolo,1991); Jeremy Driscoll, "The Fathers of Poemen and the Evagrian Connection," *SM* 42 (2000): 27-51; Robin Darling Young, "Evagrius the Iconographer: Monastic Pedagogy in the Gnostikos," *JECS* 9:1 (2001): 53-71; Robin Darling Young, "The Influence of Evagrius of Pontus," in *To Train his Soul in Books: Syriac Asceticism in Early Christianity*, ed. Robin Darling Young and Monica Blanchard (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 157-75; and Luke

read Evagrius's texts, most scholars do not deny the textual resemblance between the *Gnostic Chapters* and portions of Origen's *On First Principles*, especially concerning cosmology and eschatology.[88]

3.1.1 Evagrius's Cosmology: Double Creation and Redemption History

Evagrius's account of redemption history in the *Gnostic Chapters* is based on two assumptions, one cosmological and the other eschatological. The cosmological assumption is that there are two instances of creation and redemption history and the eschatological assumption adds that these two instances of creation and redemption history are designed to make the final state resemble the original primordial state of creation. In this section, I will examine Evagrius's assertion that cosmological history happens twice and, in the next section, I we will show how this cosmological assumption is the foundation for his eschatological assumption.

According to Evagrius, the history of the cosmos is a double history: there are two falls, two instances of God's providence in response to these falls, and two judgments. In *Gnostic Chapter* 6.75, he outlines this chronology from the very first fall of rational beings to the very last judgment of God.

Dysinger, "The Significance of Psalmody in the Mystical Theology of Evagrius of Pontus," *SP* 30 (1997): 176-82.

[88] See Francis Kline, "The Christology of Evagrius and the Parent System of Origen," *Cistercian Studies* 20 (1985): 155-83; Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 43-84; Michael O'Laughlin, "New Questions concerning the Origenism of Evagrius," in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 528-32. Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory: Mind, Soul and Body in the 4th Century* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009); Julia Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009). The one exception is Gabriel Bunge, "Origenismus-Gnostizismus: zum geistesgeschichtlichen Standort des Evagrios Pontikos," *VC* 40 (1986): 24-54.

> The first knowledge in the rational beings was that of the Blessed Trinity; then there was the movement of freedom, the providence of care, non-abandonment, and then the judgment. And again, [there was] a movement of freedom, providence, and judgment up until the Holy Trinity. Thus a judgment takes place between the movement of freedom and the providence of God.[89]

Evagrius describes here four distinct moments that occur within creation: union with the Trinity, movement away from God, providence, and finally judgment. What makes this account of cosmological history circular, as Evagrius himself notes, is the occurrence of a judgment that takes place after God's initial creation, but before the final eschatological judgment of God. This intermediary judgment is the occasion for God's second act of creation, which is designed to help rational beings return to knowledge of the Trinity, or, the first knowledge, as Evagrius calls it in this passage.

According to Evagrius, God created minds before he created bodies. He says that God's first act of creation brought about an assembly of disembodied minds united to the Trinity, which he refers to as the "unity" (ܚܕܘܬܐ) or "monad" (ܡܘܢܐܕܐ).[90] Since bodies had not yet been created, these minds interacted with God through knowledge alone. Evagrius says that the first piece of knowledge available to the created minds was their fundamental awareness of their union with the Trinity and it is this awareness that defines

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[89] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.75 (PO 28:249). Page numbers refer to *Les Six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique*, ed. Antoine Guillaumont, PO 28 (Paris: 1958). ܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܝܬܐ ܗܘܬ ܚܕܬܐ. ܡܢܗܢ ܐܬܥܒܪ ܐܬܪܘܚܐ ܕܚܘܠܡܢܐ. ܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܝܬܐ ܗܘܬ ܚܕܬܐ. ܐܬܥܒܪ ܐܬܪܘܚܐ ܕܚܘܠܡܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ. ܐܝܬ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܝܬܐ ܗܘܬ ܚܕܬܐ. ܐܬܥܒܪ ܐܬܪܘܚܐ ܕܚܘܠܡܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ. ܐܝܬ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܝܬܐ ܗܘܬ ܚܕܬܐ. ܐܬܥܒܪ ܐܬܪܘܚܐ ܕܚܘܠܡܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ. With the exception of a few Greek fragments, the text of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* remains extant only in its Syriac translation. All English translations of the *Gnostic Chapters* in this dissertation will come from the Syriac S_2 version in Guillaumont's edition of the *Gnostic Chapters*. W. Frankenberg composed a Greek retroversion of the *Gnostic Chapters* — a hypothetical Greek translation from the extant Syriac manuscripts — in the early twentieth-century, but due to inconsistencies, use of older manuscripts, and its hypothetical nature, I will avoid using this text. See *Evagrius Ponticus* ed. W. Frankenberg, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen Philologisch-Historische Klasse 13.2. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912), 8-471.

[90] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.3 (PO 28:61). For further background on the subtle distinctions between these two terms, see Gabriel Bunge, "Hénade ou monade? Au sujet de deux notions centrales de la terminologie évagrienne," *Le Muséon* 102 (1989): 69-91.

their created existence.[91] As members of this unity, these minds are naturally attracted to knowledge of the Trinity. Evagrius defines each mind, for example, as being "united to the knowledge of the Trinity," as a "seer of the Holy Trinity," and as being naturally attracted to knowledge.[92] This unity of disembodied minds in communion with the Trinity was the original state of God's first creation prior to the first movement away from God.

In Evagrius's system, this original creation is the sole state in which rational beings can experience complete fulfillment. Although God is not lacking in anything, created minds are incapable of fulfillment except through knowledge of their creator.[93] "All beings exist for the knowledge of God," Evagrius says, "but everything that exists for another is inferior to that thing for which it exists; for this reason, the knowledge of God is superior to everything."[94] The minds, therefore, only experience fulfillment when they are united to the Trinity, which is described as an "unspeakable peace" and as a time when the minds "constantly satiate their insatiability."[95] As we will see below when we examine Evagrius's eschatological assumption, the return to this state wherein the created minds enjoy peaceful union with the Trinity through knowledge is the ultimate goal of the minds after their movement away from God.

Despite being created free from sin, the minds began to lapse from primordial communion with God through the second distinct moment in Evagrius's progression of

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[91] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.19 (PO 28:69).
[92] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.6 (PO 28:101), 3.30 (PO 28:111), and 3.34 (PO 28:75). Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.3 (PO 28:2), 3.12 (PO 28:103), and 1.88 (PO 28:59).
[93] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.64 (PO 28:123-125).
[94] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.87 (PO 28:57). ܟܠܗܘܢ ܗܘܝܐ܆ ܡܛܠ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܗܘܘ. ܟܠܡܕܡ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܛܠ ܐܚܪܢܐ ܗܘܐ܆ ܒܨܝܪ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܗܘ ܡܕܡ ܕܡܛܠܬܗ ܗܘܐ. ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܡܝܬܪܐ ܗܝ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ. Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.89 (PO 28:135).
[95] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.65 (PO 28:47). ܡܣܬܒܥܝܢ ܡܢ ܠܐ ܡܣܬܒܥܢܘܬܗ. This theory of minds that can "satiate their insatiability" is what Pseudo-Macarius opposes with his use of the word insatiability. See Chapter 2, n. 62.

cosmology, that is, the movement (ܡܬܬܙܝܥܢܘܬܐ) away from God.[96] The result of this movement was an initial separation of the minds from their original union with God and a fall away from knowledge to ignorance. Evagrius says, “The monad is not moved in itself; rather, it is moved by the capacity of the mind which through carelessness turns its face away from it, and which through this deprivation begets ignorance.”[97] To account for the possibility of an initial movement away from God, Evagrius asserts the fundamental existence of free will inherent in the minds. He explains, “Whether the rational natures exist always or do not exist depends on the will of the Creator; but whether they are immortal or mortal depends on whether or not they follow their own will, as does whether or not they are yoked to one thing or another.”[98] The ultimate cause of the fall, therefore, was the capacity of the rational beings to freely choose to turn away from their union with God and to seek union with created things instead.

According to Evagrius, this movement of the minds away from God brought about a change in God’s response towards creation and was the occasion for the next moment in cosmological history, namely, God’s providence and non-abandonment. “Before the movement,” Evagrius says in *Gnostic Chapter* 6.20, “God was good, powerful, wise, creator of incorporeal beings, father of rational beings, and all powerful, but after the movement, he is the creator of bodies.”[99] God’s act of providence and non-abandonment towards the fallen minds was the cause for God’s second act of creation, in

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[96] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.39 (PO 28:35-37) and *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.51 (PO 28:41-43).
[97] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.49 (PO 28:41). ܝܚܝܕܝܘܬܐ܆ ܗ̇ܝ، ܠܐ ܡܬܬܙܝܥܐܝܬ ܠܗ̇ ܡܬܬܙܝܥܐ. ܡܬܬܙܝܥܐ ܕܝܢ ܒܡܫܟܚܢܘܬܗ ܕܗܘܢܐ܆ ܗܘ ܕܒܡܡܝܢܘܬܗ ܡܗܦܟ ܐܦܘ̈ܗܝ ܡܢܗ܆ ܒܝܕ ܚܘܣܪܢܐ ܕܗܢܐ ܝܠܕܐ ܠܠܐ ܝܕܥܬܐ. Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnotica* 3.22 (PO 28:107).
[98] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.63 (PO 28:47). ܢܗܘܘܢ ܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ ܡ̈ܠܝܠܐ ܒܟܠܙܒܢ܆ ܐܘ ܕܠܐ ܢܗܘܘܢ ܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ܆ ܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܒܨܒܝܢܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܕܒܪܘܝܐ. ܕܢܗܘܘܢ ܕܝܢ ܠܐ ܡܝܘ̈ܬܐ ܐܘ ܡܝܘ̈ܬܐ܆ ܒܨܒܝܢܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢ܆ ܘܕܢܬܕܒܪܘܢ ܘܕܠܐ ܢܬܕܒܪܘܢ ܒܐܝܟ ܗܢܐ ܐܘ ܒܐܝܟ ܗܢܐ.
[99] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.20 (PO 28:225). ܩܕܡ ܡܬܬܙܝܥܢܘܬܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܗܘܐ ܐܠܗܐ܆ ܛܒܐ ܘܚܝܠܬܢܐ. ܘܚܟܝܡܐ. ܘܒܪܘܝܐ ܕܠܐ ܦܓܪ̈ܢܐ. ܘܐܒܐ ܕܡ̈ܠܝܠܐ. ܘܐܚܝܕ ܟܠ. ܒܬܪ ܕܝܢ ܡܬܬܙܝܥܢܘܬܐ܆ ܗܘܐ ܒܪܘܝܐ ܕܦܓܪ̈ܐ.

which the fallen minds became souls and were placed in newly created bodies in order to help restore their knowledge and union with God through ascetical service.[100] Evagrius says in *Gnostic Chapter* 3.28: "The soul is the mind which, through negligence, fell from the monad and through its carelessness, descended to the rank of service."[101] According to Evagrius, ascetical service in the body helps the soul abandon the distractions of the material world and turn instead towards knowledge of the creator. Ascetical service, Evagrius says in *Gnostic Chapter* 1.67, "becomes a chariot for the reasoning soul, which is diligent about obtaining the knowledge of God."[102] Asceticism of the body is therefore the means for the restoration of knowledge, for after the second creation, the soul recovers its knowledge of God by learning about Him through creation.[103]

Evagrius sees the mind as superior to souls that have been placed in bodies because the embodied souls are a product of the fall. He says, "The glory and light of the mind is knowledge, but the glory and light of the soul is impassibility."[104] Since the soul is subject to the distractions of the body and therefore unable to attain knowledge of the Trinity, its glory is impassibility because only in the state of impassability can the soul mimic the undistracted posture of the mind focused on the Trinity.[105] Evagrius says in *Gnostic Chapter* 2.6: "The laboring soul, which has flourished by the grace of God and has been removed from the body, exists in those places of knowledge where the wings of

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[100] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.47 (PO 28:41), 1.50 (PO 28:41), 1.81 (PO 28:55), 2.48 (PO 28:81), and 2.46 (PO 28:79).

[101] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.28 (PO 28:109). ܕܢܐ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܢܐ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܫܒܬܐ ܡܢܐ ܡܘܢܐܕ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܫܡܫܢܘܬܐ ܠܐ ܡܬܝܗܒܬܐ ܠܐ.

[102] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.67 (PO 28:49). ܡܪܟܒܬܐ ܕܡܫܟܠܐ ܕܡܬܚܟܡ ܕܡܢ ܡܬܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܡܬܚܝܠ ܠܗ.

[103] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.57 (PO 28:121). Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.40 (PO 28: 155), and *Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.49 (PO 28:237).

[104] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.81 (PO 28:55). ܕܝ ܡܬܚܫܒܬܐ ܕܢܐ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܢܐ ܡܬܝܗܒܬܐ ܡܬܚܫܒܬܐ ܕܐܢܫܘܬܐ ܠܐ ܕܡܬܝܗܒܬܐ.

[105] See Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.6 (PO 28:101), 3.15 (PO 28:103), 3.53 (PO:119), and 4.86 (PO 28:173).

its impassability will lead it."[106] Although embodied souls can achieve a state of impassability through ascetical deeds, the future world will bring a return to the pure mind.[107] The soul, as the mind attached to a body, is a temporary measure.

The final movement in cosmological history is God's judgment. According to Evagrius, God's judgment determines what kind of body the fallen mind receives during the second creation.[108] The type of body depends on the extent of the mind's initial movement away from God. Evagrius says in *Gnostic Chapter* 3.38: "The judgment of God is the generation of the world, in which he gives a body to each one of the rational beings as a measure."[109] Evagrius, however, does not just use the term "world" to designate the cosmos; rather, "world" (ܥܠܡܐ) is a technical term for Evagrius that designates the level of the soul's closeness to God. He notes, for instance, that all worlds contain the four elements of physical creation, but that the worlds differ in quality.[110] By quality, as he explains in *Gnostic Chapter* 1.2, he means the characteristic trait existing in creatures that causes them to oppose God.[111] A quality, therefore, is an ethical measure of a rational being's movement away from God and it is this measure that distinguishes various worlds for Evagrius. Since each fallen soul differs in its degree of movement away from God, different worlds exist for different souls. Evagrius says in *Gnostic Chapter* 2.14: "Those who live in equal bodies are not in the same knowledge, but in the same world, while those who are in the same knowledge are in equal bodies and in the

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[106] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.6 (PO 28:63). ܗܘܢ ܕܥܒܕܝܢ ܒܦܓܪܐ ܕܡܬܩܪܒܝܢ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܐܬܝܐ ܠܗܘܢ ܕܢܗܘܘܢ ܒܚܕܐ ܒܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܬܩܪܒܝܢ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܒܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܢܝܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܕܢܗܘܘܢ ܒܦܓܪܐ ܚܕܐ ܒܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܬܩܪܒܝܢ ܠܐܠܗܐ.

[107] See Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.48 (PO 28:117).

[108] See Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.82 (PO 28:55).

[109] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.38 (PO 28:113). ܕܢܬ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܥܒܝܕܐ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܢܬܠܘܢ ܠܟܠ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܡܠܝܠܐ ܕܢܬܠ ܠܗ.

[110] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.23 (PO 28:107).

[111] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.2 (PO 28:2). Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.39 (PO 28:35-37).

[same] world."[112] Elsewhere, in *Gnostic Chapter* 2.75, he states, "Inasmuch as the judge has judged the condemned, so much also has he made worlds; and that one who knows the number of judgments also knows the number of worlds."[113] God's judgment, therefore, determines what type of body and world to accord to each soul.

These four moments in cosmological history, namely, the primordial communion of knowledge, the movement away from God, God's providence, and God's judgment, all took place, according to Evagrius, before the Biblical narrative of the fall and form the first cycle of creation and redemption history. In the second round of cosmology history, Evagrius claims that these four moments repeat themselves within the material creation. In the second round of distinct cosmological moments, Adam existed in contemplation with God, then there was movement away from God (i.e., the biblical fall), then God enabled human beings to return to him through ascetical practices, until the final eschatological judgment. The point of this second repetition of cosmological history is to help the rational beings return to their original union of knowledge with the Trinity. In other words, the material creation exists as a springboard for propelling rational souls back to the level of their initial satiated state of communion with the Trinity.

In summary, Evagrius says that God created minds before he created bodies and that these minds became souls and were placed in bodies after their initial movement away from God. After the creation of bodies, the distinct moments of cosmological history were repeated in order to assist the embodied souls in their return to their original disembodied existence as minds united to the Trinity through knowledge. Evagrius's

112 Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.14 (PO 28:67). ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܒܦܓܪܐ ܥܒܝܐ ܚܝܝܢ܆ ܠܐ ܒܗܘ ܒܪ ܒܗ̇ ܒܥܠܡܐ܂ ܐܠܐ ܒܗ ܒܪ ܒܗ ܒܥܠܡܐ ܐܬܬܣܝܡܘ܂

113 Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.75 (PO 28:91). Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.85 (PO 28:95).

description of this return journey forms the basis of his eschatological system, to which we now turn.

3.1.2 Evagrius's eschatology: The Return to Original Purity Through Ontological Worlds

This double repetition of cosmological history feeds Evagrius's primary eschatological assumption, that is, the belief that the end state will resemble the initial state. According to Evagrius, God's first act of creation brought about minds that were virtuous by nature, or as Evagrius says, contained the "seeds of virtue." After the first movement away from God, these minds became evil, but this evil is temporary and it lasts only until the final restitution. In a series of remarks in the first *Gnostic Chapter*, he makes the following comparisons between "seeds of virtue" and the "seeds of evil":

> When we existed in the beginning, the seeds of virtue were naturally constituted in us, but not the seeds of evil.[114]

and

> There was [a time] when evil did not exist and there will be [a time] when it no longer exists; but there was never [a time] when virtue did not exist and there will never be [a time] when it does not exist, for the seeds of virtue are imperishable.[115]

The goal of the ascetical life, therefore, is to gradually return to the original virtue of God's first act of creation, that is, knowledge of the Trinity.[116]

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[114] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.39 (PO 28:35). ܕܒܪܝܫܝܬܐ ܗܘܝܢ ܙܪܥܝ ܛܒܘܬܐ ܒܢܐ ܟܕ ܠܝܬ ܙܪܥܝ ܒܝܫܬܐ ܠܢ. Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.26 (PO 28:71).

[115] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.40 (PO 28:37). ܐܝܬܝܗ ܙܡܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܝܫܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ ܙܡܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܛܒܘܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ ܙܡܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܒܝܫܬܐ. ܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ ܙܡܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܛܒܘܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ ܙܡܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܝܫܬܐ. ܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ ܙܡܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܛܒܘܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ ܙܡܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܝܫܬܐ. ܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ ܙܡܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܛܒܘܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ ܙܡܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܝܫܬܐ. Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.41 (PO 28:37).

[116] Evagrius further explains how the end state resembles the beginning state in his letter addressed to Melania. In this text, he describes the astonishment that he feels when he considers the restoration of the fallen minds back to their original unity with the Trinity and he describes this process of restoration in terms of rivers flowing into a sea: "Anyone who stands on the seashore is seized by amazement at its limitlessness, taste, colour and all it contains, and at how the rivers, torrents and streams that pour into it become limitless and undifferentiated in it, since they acquire all its properties. It is likewise for anyone who considers the end of the intellects: he will be greatly amazed and marvel as he beholds all these

Although this fundamental belief, which holds that the end state will resemble God's original creation, was not uncommon among early Christian thinkers, Evagrius's development of the process of restoration was controversial to Syriac authors who read the *Gnostic Chapters*. The specifically controversial aspect of Evagrius's eschatology is his account of God's second act of providence. While God's first act of providence was the placement of fallen minds into bodies that would allow them to work their way back to unity with the Trinity, God's second act of providence — carried out by Christ — is to lead the minds back to the original state of perfect virtue through a series of different "worlds," or levels of closeness to God. In *Gnostic Chapter* 4.89, he says, "Who will investigate the reasons of providence and how Christ leads the rational natures to the unity of the holy monad by means of various worlds."[117] His metaphor for the progression through worlds to unity with the Trinity is the image of Jacob's ladder, which he employs in *Gnostic Chapter* 4.43. The ladder, Evagrius says, "is an allegory for all worlds."[118]

This ascension through various worlds involves an ontological change in that human beings become angels as they ascend to a higher world on the ladder of being.[119] Various texts support this reading. In *Gnostic Chapter* 1.23, Evagrius states that human beings who eat the "bread of angels (Ps. 78.25)" come to have spiritual understanding of

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various different knowledges uniting themselves in the one uniquely real knowledge and beholds them all become this one without end." Evagrius, *ep. Melaniam* (Frankenberg:619:191b) (Casiday:76-77). Page and line numbers refer to *Euagrius Ponticus*, ed. W. Frankenberg, *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen Philologisch-Historische Klasse* 13.2 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912). Translation refers to Augustine Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[117] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.89 (PO 28:175). ܡܢܘ ܢܥܩܒ ܠܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܦܪܢܣܘܬܐ܇ ܘܐܝܟܢܐ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܕܒܪ ܠܟܝܢܐ ܡܠܝܠܐ ܒܝܕ ܥܠ̈ܡܐ ܡܫ̈ܚܠܦܐ܇ ܠܘܬ ܚܕܝܘܬܐ ܕܝܚܝܕܝܘܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ.

[118] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.43 (PO 28:155).

[119] For further background on this concept in Evagrius, see Antoine Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre Le Pontique*, 249-251. For a general background, see Robert Grant, "Chains of Being in Early Christianity," in *Myths and Symbols: Studies in Honor of Mircea Eliade* ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Charles H. Long (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 275-89.

created things, just like the angels; in *Gnostic Chapter* 3.65, the angels will establish certain human beings in the world to come as "possessors of angelic administration;" and in *Gnostic Chapter* 4.74, Evagrius speaks of saints who, "at the present time have been released from bodies and have joined with the choir of angels."[120] For Evagrius, the saints who have been freed from their human bodies will exist next in angelic bodies as they inherit the angelic role of spiritual oversight and return to the world as angelic guides who offer help to those monks in lower levels of the spiritual life.[121]

The second act of God's judgment is the final eschatological resurrection, which Evagrius describes throughout the *Gnostic Chapters* as the "world to come." In the world to come, God will execute the last judgment, at which time souls that have been joined to bodies will be liberated from them and become minds once again, for according to *Gnostic Chapter* 1.58: "All those who have been yoked with a body will also necessarily be released [from the body]."[122] This liberation from the body implies a return to the original state, which means that the liberated minds will once again be able to contemplate God in an immaterial way, as Evagrius describes it in *Gnostic Chapter* 2.62, which states, "When the minds receive the contemplation that concerns them, then also the entire nature of the bodies will be taken away and the contemplation that concerns them will become immaterial."[123] Elsewhere, in *Gnostic Chapter* 5.3, Evagrius

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[120] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.23 (PO 28:27), 3.65 (PO 28:125) and 4.74 (PO 28:169).

[121] For further background on the role of angelic guidance in Evagrius's writings, see Alexander Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palams: On the Question of a 'Christological Corrective' and Related Matters," *SVTQ* 46 (2002): 175 and Jason Scully, "Angelic Pneumatology in the Egyptian Desert: The Role of the Angels and the Holy Spirit in Evagrian Asceticism," *JECS* 19:2 (2011): 287-305.

[122] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.58 (PO 28:45). Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.26 (PO 28:29), 2.59 (PO 28:85), 2.77 (PO 28:91), 3.9 (PO 28:101), 3.15 (PO 28:103), 4.34 (PO 28:151), 4.38 (PO 28:153), and 4.39 (PO 28:153).

[123] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.62 (PO 28:85). ܗܘܝ ܡܕܡ ܕܐܢܘܢ ܕܡܬܬܠܝܢ ܡܢܗ ܡܬܩܢܐ ܗܘ
ܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܐܢܘܢ ܕܡܢܗ ܡܬܩܢ ܠܗ ܗܘܝܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܐܦܠܐ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܕܡܬܩܢ

says that this immaterial contemplation includes a vision of the Trinity: "Those who are in the last world see something of the luminous rays of the Holy Trinity."[124] The "world to come" therefore signals, for Evagrius, a time when the created order will once again resemble the original state of creation.

3.2 The Reception History of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* in Syria

The first Syriac translator (S1) was alarmed with Evagrius's eschatology and cosmology. Even though he found nothing objectionable about Evagrius's anthropology, he believed that Evagrius's eschatology and cosmology were deeply rooted in Origenism and therefore needed to be reworked. When his corrected version (S1) is compared side by side with the later, more literal Syriac translation (S2), the changes made by the first Syriac translator of the corrected versions (S1) reveal that he had a specific agenda for correcting Evagrius's eschatological and cosmological system.[125]

Babai also rejected the Origenist elements in Evagrius's eschatological and cosmological system and further solidified the anonymous translator's interpretation of Evagrius's text.[126] Babai, who opposed Origenism in all of its forms, including polemical

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[124] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 5.3 (PO 28:177).

[125] The Syriac reception history of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* has not received much attention in the scholarly literature after the initial work of Guillaumont, who pointed out a number of the differences between the corrected (S1) and uncorrected (S2) versions of the Syriac translations of the *Gnostic Chapters* regarding cosmology and eschatology. See Antoine Guillaumont, *'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique*, 236-58. After Guillaumont's work, just one article by David Bundy has attempted to present a coherent synthesis the Syriac translator's theological system. See David Bundy, "The Philosophical Structures of Origenism: The Case of the Expurgated Syriac Version (S_1) of the *Kephalaia gnostica* of Evagrius," in *Origeniana Quinta* ed. Robert J. Daly (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 577-84.

[126] Guillaumont also discussed Babai's commentary on the *Gnostic Chapters*. See Antoine Guillaumont, *'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique*, 259-95. Most of the publications on Babai, however, have focused on his Christology and other doctrinal issues. Recent works on his commentary on the *Gnostic Chapters* include Till Engelmann, "Der Kephalaia-Kommentar Babais des Großen als Beispiel monastisch-mystischer Theologie," in *Mystik – Metapher – Bild. Beiträge des VII. Makarios-Symposiums, Göttingen 2007*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2008), 43-53 and Georg Günter Blum,

works against the Origenism of his contemporary, Henana of Adiabene, was the unofficial head of the school of Nisibis from 571 to c. 612.[127] His explicit aim in his commentary on the *Gnostic Chapters* is to correct those blasphemers who produced the literal S2 version of the text and who, according to Babai, thereby introduced Origenism into Evagrius's system.[128] He is aware of Evagrius's condemnation in 553, but he sees these attacks as calumnies from Satan since he says that even Evagrius himself refuted Origenism. Nevertheless, Babai recognizes that Evagrius's thought does have some resemblances to Origenism — even in the corrected S1 version — and he is forced to deal with them.[129] His attempt to explain away all traces of Origenism means that later Syriac writers, like Isaac, received knowledge of Evagrius through the lens of Babai's anti-Origenist interpretation of the first Syriac translator's rendition (S1) of the *Gnostic Chapters*.

In this section, I will argue that Babai, who bases his eschatology on the changes to Evagrius's text made by the first Syriac translator, made explicit corrections to Evagrius's cosmological and eschatological assumptions found in the *Gnostic Chapters*. In response to Evagrius's cosmological assumption — that there are two cycles of creation and redemption history — Babai argues that there is only one instance of creation, fall, and redemption and that this single instance accords with the biblical

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Die Geschichte der Begegnung christlich-orientalischer Mystik mit der Mystik des Islams, Orientalia Biblica et Christiana 17 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009).

[127] See Antoine Guillaumont, *'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique*, 183-86. For complete analysis of the secondary literature surrounding Henana's controversial reign as head of the school of Nisibis as well as his theological criticism, see Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2006), 197-203. Babai's strongest polemical statements against Henana occur in the *Book of Union*, but he also equates the heresy of Henana and Origen multiple times in his *Commentary on the Gnostic Chapters*. See, for example, Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.10 (Frankenberg:264:24) and *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.51 (Frankenberg:294:5).

[128] See Antoine Guillaumont, 'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique, 259-90.

[129] For remaining traces of Origenism in the corrected version (S1) of the *Gnostic Chapters*, see Guillaumont, *'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique*, 256-58.

narrative. In response to Evagrius's eschatological assumption — that the return to purity involves a journey through ontological worlds — Babai reinterprets Evagrius's concept of the return to purity by eliminating Evagrius's theory of ontological worlds and instead framing the return to purity in terms of an ascetical journey aimed at preparing human beings for life in the future world.

This strong emphasis on the important role that ascetical labor plays in the monk's journey into the future world implies a strong unity of body and soul that extends into the world to come.[130] According to Babai, any eschatological system that allows for the future separation of body and soul undermines the whole purpose of asceticism. In order to solidify his ascetical reinterpretation of Evagrius's cosmology and eschatology, he therefore makes a strong case for the eschatological unity of body and soul in the future world and in order to give authority to this interpretation, he frames his understanding of the unity between body and soul in terms of a Pauline conception of the future world. When he comments on the corrected version (S1) of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters*, Babai frequently relies on the teachings of Paul to help interpret the unclear passages from the *Gnostic Chapters* regarding the existence of the body in the future world. In Babai's hands, the eschatological system of the *Gnostic Chapters* becomes a vehicle of expression for ascetical labor and Pauline eschatology.

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[130] As Peter Brown has noted, true expression of asceticism stemming from the desert tradition relied on the fundamental union between body and soul. See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 253: "In the desert tradition, vigilant attention to the body enjoyed an almost oppressive prominence. Yet to describe ascetic thought as 'dualist' and as motivated by hatred of the body, is to miss its most novel and its most poignant aspect. Seldom, in ancient thought, had the body been seen as more deeply implicated in the transformation of the soul; and never was it made to bear so heavy a burden."

3.2.1 The Syriac Translator's and Babai's Reworked Cosmology: A Single Creation and Redemption History according to the Biblical Narrative

The Syriac translator of the *Gnostic Chapters* eliminates Evagrius's cosmological assumption — that cosmological history happens twice — by removing references to repeated moments in history. He executes this change by interpreting God's judgment in response to this initial movement as the final eschatological judgment rather than an intermediary judgment where minds are placed in bodies. As a result, the translator presents a cosmology with only one movement, providential act, and judgment, instead of two. The translator reveals this change in his alterations to *Gnostic Chapter* 6.75, in what was Evagrius's clearest description of his repeated cosmology. First recall Evagrius's original version of the text:

> The first knowledge in the rational beings was that of the Holy Trinity; then there was the movement of freedom, the providence of care, non-abandonment, and then the judgment. And again, [there was] a movement of freedom, providence, and judgment up until the Holy Trinity. Thus a judgment takes place between the movement of freedom and the providence of God.[131]

Now compare the Syriac translator's rendering of the same passage:

> The first knowledge in the rational natures was contemplation of the Holy Trinity; then there was a movement of freedom, the care of the providence of God through the discipline that restores one to life and through the learning that brings one back to the first contemplation.[132]

The Syriac translator has removed all mention of God's judgment in his rewriting of *Gnostic Chapter* 6.75 so that cosmological history occurs just once instead of twice.

This process of excising God's intermediary act of judgment also occurs in other passages, where the Syriac translator interprets all Evagrius's references to judgment as

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[131] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.75 (PO 28:249).
[132] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.75 (PO 28:248). ܝܕܥܬܐ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܗܘܬ ܒܟܝܢܐ ܡܠܝܠܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ̇: ܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܕܬܠܝܬܝܘܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ. ܒܬܪܟܢ ܕܝܢ ܗܘܬ ܡܬܬܙܝܥܢܘܬܐ ܕܚܐܪܘܬܐ. ܘܒܬܪܗ̇ ܒܘܝܐܐ ܕܒܛܝܠܘܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ: ܒܝܕ ܡܪܕܘܬܐ ܕܡܚܝܐ ܠܚܝܐ: ܐܘ ܒܝܕ ܡܠܦܢܘܬܐ ܕܡܦܢܝܐ ܠܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ.

references to the final eschatological judgment. For example, while Evagrius originally described the first judgment of God as the creation of the world and the placement of minds into material bodies in *Gnostic Chapter* 3.38, the Syriac translator instead interprets this judgment as the final eschatological judgment; his text reads: "The judgment of God is the just distinction that puts retribution and the pronouncement of judgment into the bodies of the rational beings according to the service of their actions; and this [judgment] is either glory or torment."[133]

In place of Evagrius's emphasis on God's multiple acts of judgment throughout cosmological history, the Syriac translator introduces, in *Gnostic Chapter* 6.75, an emphasis on contemplation (ܬܐܘܪܝܐ) as the original state of God's creation. According to the Syriac translator, God's first act of creation did not bring about a noetic union between disembodied minds and the Trinity, but rather, contemplation between embodied human beings and God.

Since the Syriac translator believes that God's first act of creation resulted in the creation of embodied human beings who are engaged in contemplation of the Trinity, he has no need for God's two acts of creation. Evagrius had said that God's second act of creation brought about the material world, but the Syriac translator eliminates the notion of any creation that took place before the material creation of the world. For example, Evagrius's original version of *Gnostic Chapter* 6.20 read, "Before the movement, God was . . . creator of incorporeal beings, father of rational beings . . . but after the

[133] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.38 (PO 28:112). ܕܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܬܘܗܝ܆ ܦܘܪܫܢܐ ܟܐܢܐ܇ ܗܘ ܕܒܦܘ̈ܠܚܢܐ ܕܡܠܝܠܐ ܣܐܡ ܦܘܪܥܢܐ ܐܘ ܓܙܪ ܕܝܢܐ܇ ܘܟܠ ܚܕ ܚܕ ܡܢܗܘܢ ܐܝܟ ܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܕܥܒ̈ܕܘܗܝ܂ ܗܘܐ ܕܝܢ ܐܘ ܫܘܒܚܐ ܐܘ ܫܘܢܩܐ.ܠ
Also see Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.43 (PO 28:112), where the Syriac translator replaces Evagrius's definition of judgment as a consideration of the "ordering of the rational beings" to a consideration of the "soulish way of life."

movement, he is the creator of bodies . . .”[134] The Syriac translator, however, removes Evagrius’s reference to God as the creator of incorporeal beings before the movement and creator of bodies after the movement and instead states simply that God was creator before the movement and judge after the movement.[135] God’s first and second acts of creation have been conflated as the Syriac translator understands God’s single act of creation to be the creation of the material world.

Similarly, the Syriac translator also removes Evagrius’s references to two movements away from God and instead interprets the one movement away from God as a movement away from the original state of perfect contemplation that existed between human beings and God. While Evagrius’s version of *Gnostic Chapter* 3.28 read, “The soul is the mind which, through negligence, fell from the monad and through its carelessness, descended to the rank of service,” the Syriac translator’s version reads, “The sinful soul is the pure mind that fell from contemplation of the holy unity through its negligence and, through much labor, is in need of being made worthy of the perfect image of the Blessed Trinity from which it had fallen.”[136] The Syriac translator understands the term movement as a movement away from contemplation of the Trinity, not a movement away from ontological unity with the Trinity.

Although the Syriac translator does not specifically associate the fall of Satan and Adam with the first and only primordial movement away from God, he leaves the door open for others after him to make this explicit connection, like Babai, who explicitly

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[134] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.20 (PO 28:225).

[135] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.20 (PO 28:224). ܩܕܡ ܡܬܬܙܝܥܢܘܬܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܗܘܐ ܐܠܗܐ܆ ܐܦ ܠܟܠ. ܐܦ ܫܠܝܛܐ ܐܦ ܡܚܝܢܐ. ܐܦ ܒܪܘܝܐ. ܘܐܦ ܐܒܐ.ܠ ܘܐܚܝܕ ܟܠ. ܒܬܪ ܕܝܢ ܡܬܬܙܝܥܢܘܬܐ܆ ܗܘܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܘܐܣܝܐ ܘܡܦܪܢܣܢܐ.

[136] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.28 (PO 28:109) and Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.28 (PO 28:108). ܢܦܫܐ ܚܛܝܬܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ܆ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܟܝܐ ܕܒܡܡܝܢܘܬܗ ܢܦܠ ܡܢ ܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܕܚܕܝܘܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ܆ ܘܣܢܝܩ ܕܒܥܡܠܐ ܣܓܝܐܐ ܢܬܬܫܘܐ ܠܨܠܡܐ ܓܡܝܪܐ ܕܬܠܝܬܝܘܬܐ ܡܒܪܟܬܐ ܗܝ ܕܡܢܗ ܢܦܠ.

frames the movement away from God in terms of the biblical account of the fall. For example, in his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 6.75, Babai goes one step farther than the Syriac translator and explicitly associates the movement away from God with the term "fall" (ܡܦܘܠܬܐ).[137] In *Gnostic Chapter* 6.20, where the Syriac translator had already conflated Evagrius's two accounts of creation, Babai furthers the implicit assumption that the first movement away was the fall of Satan and the subsequent deception of Adam.[138]

> [Evagrius's commentary] also mentions [God's] judgment. The righteousness of His justice is revealed in the fall of Satan who fell from heaven in a bolt of lightning as well as those who left the luxury of Paradise along with Adam.[139]

He reiterates this position in his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 1.58, when he describes the source of immaterial death.

> The one who fell from there like a lightning bolt first brought it upon himself. He became dark and made himself into the father of deception. He deprived himself of the service of virtue and of the knowledge of God, was diligent in evil artifice, and he begat for himself children of sin, our common ancestors. And these [children] renounced their natural glory and beauty and they became idle in their service for God.[140]

Babai understands the fall away from God not in terms of the mind's rejection of its unity with God, as Evagrius had said, but rather, in terms of the fall of Satan and then Adam.

In summary, the Syriac translator offers a reinterpretation of Evagrius's cosmological assumption. Whereas Evagrius had posited a cosmology that repeats itself, the first Syriac translator of his *Gnostic Chapters* eliminates Evagrius's references to a

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137 Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.75 (Frankenberg:410:7-8): "After their fall, [God], through the succor of his grace, did not turn away from his creation; instead he has restored them to life, that is, to knowledge of God, through discipline." ܘܡܟܝܠ ܒܝܕ ܒܥܘܕܪܢܐ ܕܛܝܒܘܬܗ ܠܐ ܐܗܦܟ ܡܢ ܒܪܝܬܗ ܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܡܦܘܠܬܗܘܢ܆ ܘܐܦܢܝ ܕܒܝܕ ܡܪܕܘܬܐ ܐܚܪܢܐ ܐܢܘܢ ܠܚܝܐ. ܕܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ.

138 Babai mentions Adam numerous times in his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter 6.43*; also see, for example, Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.43 (Frankenberg:388). Guillaumont makes this same point; see Antoine Guillaumont, *'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique*, 282.

139 Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.20 (Frankenberg:376:9-11). ܐܬܡܠܝ ܘܐܦ ܕܝܢܐ. ܘܐܬܓܠܝܬ ܟܐܢܘܬܐ ܕܕܝܢܘܬܗ܆ ܒܡܦܘܠܬܗ ܕܣܛܢܐ ܕܒܪܩܐܝܬ ܢܦܠ ܡܢ ܫܡܝܐ. ܘܒܗܢܘܢ ܕܥܡܗ ܕܐܕܡ܆ ܕܢܦܩܘ ܡܢ ܦܘܢܩܐ ܕܦܪܕܝܣܐ.

140 Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.58 (Frankenberg:98:3-7). ܗܘ ܕܒܪܩܐܝܬ ܢܦܠ ܡܢ ܬܡܢ܆ ܘܩܕܡܝܐ ܗܘܐ. ܘܐܬܚܫܟ ܗܘ ܕܥܒܕ ܢܦܫܗ ܐܒܐ ܕܛܘܥܝܝܐ. ܘܐܦ ܡܢ ܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܕܡܝܬܪܘܬܐ܆ ܘܡܢ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ. ܘܐܬܚܦܛ ܒܢܟܠܐ ܕܒܝܫܘܬܐ܆ ܘܐܘܠܕ ܠܗ ܒܢܝܐ ܕܚܛܝܬܐ܆ ܠܐܒܗܝܢ ܐܟܚܕܐ ܕܟܠܢ. ܗܢܘܢ ܕܐܦ ܗܢܘܢ ܒܝܕ ܡܫܡܠܝܘܬܗ܆ ܐܬܒܛܠܘ ܠܗܘܢ ܡܢ ܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ ܘܫܘܦܪܐ ܟܝܢܝܐ܆ ܘܒܛܠܘ ܡܢ ܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ. ܗܘܐ ܡܛܠܗ ܟܠ ܕܡܫܬܥܒܕ ܠܗ.

repeated cosmological history. There is only one movement away from God and only one final eschatological judgment according to this anonymous translator. Babai makes these changes to Evagrius's cosmology even more explicit by describing the movement away from God as the fall of Satan and subsequent fall of Adam.

3.2.2 The Syriac Translator's and Babai's Reworked eschatology: The Journey of Asceticism

Although the Syriac translator maintains the foundation of Evagrius's eschatological assumption — that the final state is a return to the initial state — he removes the controversial aspects due to his conflation of Evagrius's two historical sequences. Since he no longer understands the initial state to be an ontological union of incorporeal minds with the Trinity, he rejects Evagrius's system of multiple worlds and graduated steps towards the soul's reunion with the Trinity and instead places even more emphasis on various forms of ascetical actions — labor (ܥܡܠܐ), way of life (ܕܘܒܪܐ), and service (ܦܘܠܚܢܐ) — as preparation for the final eschatological judgment. Whereas Evagrius, for example, had used the ladder as a symbol for the gradual ascension throughout various worlds in *Gnostic Chapter* 4.43, the translator now understands the ladder to be a symbol of the quest for purity and virtue.[141]

This emphasis on the role of ascetical actions shows that the Syriac translator implicitly interpreted Evagrius's use of the term "world," not as an ontological measure of the soul's closeness to God, but as a measure of a person's ethical standing in the eyes of God. Various changes in the text manifest this interpretation. For example, in *Gnostic Chapter* 2.14, Evagrius had attributed equality to those who were in the same world:

[141] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.43 (PO 28:154).

"those who are in the same knowledge," he said, "are in equal bodies and in the [same] world."[142] The Syriac translator's version of this same text, however, views equality in a different sense: human beings are equal when they uphold the same level of the ascetical way of life. His text reads, "Those who are equal in the perfection of their way of life are also equal in the recompense of their labor."[143] For the Syriac translator, ascetical deeds are the measure of equality, not the ontological world in which one currently exists. In addition, Evagrius, in *Gnostic Chapter* 4.89, had asked, "Who will investigate the reasons of providence and how Christ leads the rational natures to the unity of the holy monad by means of various worlds."[144] The Syriac translator instead asks, "Who will investigate the reasons of administration and how Christ leads the rational natures to intimacy with the Holy Trinity by means of service to the holy commandments."[145] The translator makes "service to the holy commandments" the means for achieving intimacy with God instead of progression through various worlds that, for Evagrius, had led to union with Trinity. By replacing Evagrius's reference to various worlds with ascetical language, the Syriac translator turns Evagrius's eschatology into a description of the soul's journey towards God.

Babai is even more careful to eliminate what he perceives as an Origenist theory of multiple worlds by explaining that the term "world" must be understand in its basic sense as the created cosmos. Whereas Evagrius's original version of *Gnostic Chapter* 6.20, for example, had included an elaborate theory of multiple worlds, Babai's

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[142] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.14 (PO 28:67).

[143] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.14 (PO 28:66). ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܫܘܝܢ ܒܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ ܕܕܘܒܪܝܗܘܢ܆ ܗܢܘܢ ܫܘܝܢ ܐܦ ܒܦܘܪܥܢܐ ܕܥܡ̈ܠܝܗܘܢ.

[144] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.89 (PO 28:175).

[145] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.89 (PO 28:174). ܡܢܘ ܢܒܨܐ ܥܠ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ܆ ܘܐܝܟܢܐ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܝܕ ܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܕܦܘ̈ܩܕܢܘܗܝ ܩܕܝ̈ܫܐ܆ ܡܩܪܒ ܠܟܝ̈ܢܐ ܡ̈ܠܝܠܐ܆ ܒܩܪܒܐ ܠܒܝܬܝܘܬܐ ܕܬܠܝܬܝܘܬܗ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ.

commentary makes no mention of worlds as he works his way through the biblical history.[146] Babai's commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 3.36, however, is the most telling explanation of the way he understands the term "world." When he comments on the Syriac translator's rendition of this passage, he understands it to be a polemical statement aimed at the Valentinian understanding of multiple worlds.[147] Babai begins his commentary by stating, "There are not many worlds as [is reported by] the ungodliness of Valentinus, who speaks impiously of three-hundred masculine and feminine worlds, but there is one world whose constitution is the highest heaven and the earth."[148] Next, he elaborates on what he sees as Evagrius's rebuttal of this Gnostic teaching; according to Babai, the point of Evagrius's text was to describe how different natures could exist together in one world. He continues,

> In response to [this ungodliness of Valentinus], [Evagrius] calls every single thing that is made a nature, which means that its existence comes from God himself. There are no aeons or epochs by themselves, but natures that have aeons and epochs with them, for [God] makes known the many from the title, "one." The "one" is a literal and actual world, which is constituted from distinct bodies that do not resemble each other. [God] includes distinct rational beings according to their ranks within it: rulers, principalities, powers, and lords. [God] also [includes] humans in their ranks since these [people] who worked in [the world] every day through their many transformations are [the ones who] will receive an increase in their knowledge of God.[149]

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[146] See Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.20 (Frankenberg:375:30-377:16).

[147] In this chapter, Evagrius had originally said, "The world is a natural constitution that contains the different and separate bodies of the rational beings for the knowledge of God."Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.36 (PO 28:113). ܟܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܬܩܝܡܐ ܡܫܬܠܩܐ ܡܫܬܩܥܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܘܐܪܥܐ ܗܘ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܚܕ ܗܘ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ. The Syriac translator of S2 altered the sense of this passage. Whereas Evagrius had used the term "world" to describe a constitution that contained rational beings alone, the Syriac translator instead used the term "world" to describe a constitution of rational natures. See Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.36 (PO 28:112): "The world is a constitution of natures, constituted from different bodies and containing separate rational natures." ܟܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܬܩܝܡܐ ܡܫܬܩܥܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܘܐܪܥܐ ܗܘ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܚܕ ܗܘ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ.

[148] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.36 (Frankenberg:214:9-10). ܡܫܥܝܐ ܠܐ ܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܠܐ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ ܕܒܝܫܘܬܐ ܕܒܪ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܬܪܝܡܐܐ ܘܬܠܬܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ. ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܬܪܝܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ. ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܬܪܝܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ. ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܬܪܝܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ. ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܬܪܝܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ.

[149] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.36 (Frankenberg:214:10-16). ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܬܪܝܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ. ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܬܪܝܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ. ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܬܪܝܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ. ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܬܪܝܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ. ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܬܪܝܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ. ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܬܪܝܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ. ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܬܪܝܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܠܘ ܟܠܡܐ.

Babai explains that God created only one world containing many different types of natures, including angelic orders (Babai alludes to Paul's list of angelic orders in Eph. 6.12) as well as human beings who have attained different levels of knowledge of God. Unlike Evagrius, who originally held that different ranks of beings existed in different ontological worlds, Babai understands the term "world" to designate the entire cosmos, which contains rational and non-rational beings that differ in their closeness to God.

Since Babai understands the term "world" to designate the entire cosmos and not a series of ontological degrees on one's journey to God, he must reinterpret Evagrius's concept of the spiritual way, or journey (ܐܘܪܚܐ). In his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 2.14, he explains that equality in the eyes of God comes not from knowledge, but from ascetical labor. In this chapter, Evagrius had based equality on knowledge: "those who are in the same knowledge," he said, "are in equal bodies and in the [same] world."[150] The Syriac translator, however, had instead attributed equality to those who performed the same ascetical way of life and have achieved the same recompense for their ascetical labor.[151] Babai picks up on this change and explains that God measures equality in heaven — the "there" in the quotation that follows — based on one's ascetical labor in this world — the "here" in the quotation. "Those who are equal here in the perfection of their good way of life and have obtained in themselves many different sorts of spiritual virtue, love, temperance, etc. have become equal there in recompense for their labors on account of this dignity."[152] The main thrust of Babai's argument is to remind his readers

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[150] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.14 (PO 28:67).
[151] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.14 (PO 28:66).
[152] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.14 (Frankenberg:138:37-140:2). ܕܐܝܠܝܢ ܠܗ ܕܫܘܝܢ ܗܪܟܐ ܒܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ ܕܕܘܒܪܝܗܘܢ ܛܒܐ. ܘܩܢܘ ܒܢܦܫܗܘܢ ܙܢܝܐ ܕܡܫܚܠܦܬܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܬܐ: ܚܘܒܐ ܢܟܦܘܬܐ ܘܡܫܡܫܘܬܐ ܘܕܫܪܟܐ: ܗܠܝܢ ܗܘܝܢ ܡܛܠ ܫܘܝܘܬܐ ܗܕܐ: ܫܘܝܢ ܬܡܢ ܘܐܦ ܒܦܘܪܥܢܐ ܕܐܬܥܡܠܘܗܝܢ. Cf. Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.89 (Frankenberg:316:9-34).

that God judges different types of ascetical labor equally so long as they are performed with the proper motivation, that is, the desire for heaven, or as Babai calls it, the "city of life." He continues, "Even if the way of their labors is different (for instance, the way of humility, the journey of love towards strangers, or another [who lives the way of] the hermit, etc.), their labors are still equal to each other and they run to the city of life."[153] Unlike Evagrius, Babai does not base equality on levels of knowledge that designate the ontological status of the soul on its return journey to unity with God. Instead, he says that ascetical labor makes people equal during the final judgment in heaven, when God will judge people based on the motivations behind their ascetical labors.[154]

Finally, Babai explicitly denounces the idea that human beings can become angels. Although the Syriac translator had worked to eliminate Evagrius's notion of multiple worlds as ontological stages during the mind's return to original unity with the Trinity, he had done little to challenge Evagrius's belief that human beings can ontologically become angels. Babai leaves no room for confusion on this matter. In his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 5.11, for example, he states outright that human beings cannot become angels, as Origen wrongly teaches.[155] Elsewhere, in his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 5.19, he specifically warns against the temptation of interpreting the

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[153] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.14 (Frankenberg:140:2-4). ܐܦܝܢ ܕܥܒܕܝܗܘܢ ܫܘܝܝܐ ܐܦ ܟܕ ܡܢ ܫܘܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ. ܐܦ ܟܕ ܥܒܕܝܗܘܢ ܫܘܝܐ ܕܚܝܠܐ ܕܒܪܚܡܐ ܕܫܘܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܫܘܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܫܘܝܘܬܐ ܕܫܘܝܐ ܕܚܝܐ.

[154] In this context of discussing how ascetical labor will lead to recompense in heaven, Babai goes on to explain that the term "world" designates heaven, the place of the just judge. See Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.14 (Frankenberg:140:4-7): "They labor with their same power and if their recompenses are equal in the world of the judge, and 'those who are equal in spiritual knowledge' are freed from this world, and they call on account of the banner of their lives, and they understand the contemplations of being through their purity, then they will be equal also in the glory of their inheritance from this just judge." ܐܦܢ ܕܥܒܕ ܕܡܬܝ ܫܘܝ ܕܒܚܝܠܗ ܥܒܕ ܠܗ ܫܘܝܐ. ܕܡܢ ܕܥܒܕ ܕܡܬܚܝܢ ܥܒܕ ܕܐܢ ܕܥܒܕ ܕܡܬܚܝܢ ܕܒܪ ܫܘܝܐ ܕܒܚܝܠܗ ܕܐܢ ܥܒܕ ܥܒܕ ܥܠܝ ܕܩܪܝܢ ܒܫܘܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܚܝܢ ܒܪ ܕܡܬܚܝܢ ܕܡܬܚܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܐܢ ܕܡܬܚܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܐ ܕܡܬܚܝܢ.

[155] See Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 5.11 (Frankenberg:322:22-23).

"transformation of the body" as a transformation into an angel. Instead, Babai argues that the transformation of bodies in the resurrection is an ethical transformation away from a life of sin to a life of holiness.

> Against the rebuttal of those who deny the resurrection of bodies [Evagrius] shows that, during the transformation, the body does not undergo a change into something else, not even an angel. Rather, [the transformation] is from the fall of unchastity and fornication to holiness and [participation] in the mystery.[156]

For Babai, the resurrection brings new levels of holiness, but not a change in nature.

In his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 3.65, Babai clarifies the distinction between angels and human beings in the world to come by saying that human beings will participate in angelic honor rather than angelic nature. While Evagrius had said that human beings will have angelic administration in the world to come, the first Syriac translator had said that human beings will participate in the honor of the angels instead of administration.[157] Babai picks up on this change and explains that one should not understand participation in angelic honor as an ontological participation.

> We do not abandon our nature, which consists of the soul together with the body, and adopt the nature of the angels during the transformation that takes place during the resurrection. Those who are instructed in the Godly doctrine of the angels in this world, however, become partakers with [the angels] in their honor, not their nature. Our Lord did not say that we should be angels, but that we should be like [angels].[158]

With this distinction, Babai furthers his position that the world to come involves the completion of an ascetical journey through various levels of holiness, not the elimination of a human body and acquisition of an angelic body.

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[156] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 5.19 (Frankenberg:326:17-19). ܠܩܘܒܠ ܗܝ ܕܡܟܣܘ ܗܘܦܟܐ ܠܦܓܪ̈ܐ ܒܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܦܓܪ̈ܢܝ: ܐܠܐ ܘܐܦ ܗܘ ܗܝ ܕܒܗ: ܘܠܐ ܠܚܘܠܦܐ ܕܠܟܝܢ ܐܚܪܝܢ ܡܫܬܚܠܦ ܦܓܪܐ. ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܐܦܠܐ ܡܠܐܟܐ. ܐܠܐ ܡܢ ܡܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܢܟܦܘܬܐ ܘܕܙܢܝܘܬܐ: ܠܘܬ ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܘܐܚܝܢ ܕܐܪ̈ܙܐ.
[157] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.65 (PO 28:124).
[158] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.65 (Frankenberg:234:4-7). ܕܠܐ ܟܝܢܢ ܫܒܩܝܢ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܡܢ ܢܦܫܐ ܥܡ ܦܓܪܐ: ܘܟܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܐܟ̈ܐ ܗܘܝܢ ܒܫܘܚܠܦܐ ܒܩܝܡܬܐ. ܐܠܐ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܐܬܬܠܡܕܘ ܠܝܘܠܦܢܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ ܕܡܠܐܟ̈ܐ ܒܗܢܐ ܥܠܡܐ: ܫܘ̈ܬܦܐ ܗܘܝܢ ܒܐܝܩܪܗܘܢ ܘܠܐ ܒܟܝܢܗܘܢ. ܠܐ ܓܝܪ ܡܠܐܟ̈ܐ ܐܡܪ ܡܪܢ ܕܗܘܝܢ ܐܠܐ ܐܝܟ.

In summary, while the Syriac translator preserves Evagrius's belief in a final state that is also a return to the original state of God's creation, he alters both his description of the original state of God's creation and the mechanism that makes the return to this state possible. For Evagrius, the initial state was a unity of minds with the Trinity and the eschatological return to this state was accomplished through the mind's progression through various worlds that brought about the mind's physical liberation from the body in the world to come. For the Syriac translator, the original state was spiritual contemplation with God and it is ascetical labor that prepares each person to ultimately return to this same level of contemplation in the world to come.

Although the first Syriac translator kept his alterations to a minimum, Babai, who read his edition of the *Gnostic Chapters* instead of Evagrius's original, continued and even deepened the altered eschatological vision. Babai also believes that redemption implies a return to the original state of creation, but he follows the Syriac translator in painting a different picture of this state than Evagrius had done.[159] He characterizes this life as an ascetical journey designed to enable both body and soul together to return to their original honor in the life of the world to come. In the process of his description of this journey of body and soul, Babai eliminates Evagrius's use of the term "world" to designate various levels of ontological reunification with God and he opposes the notion that human beings can become angels. For Babai, ascetical actions prepare people to achieve higher levels of holiness until the perfection is attained in the world to come.

[159] Babai expresses his belief that we will return once again to our "heritage" in *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.28 (Frankenberg:206:17-18).

3.2.3 The Syriac Translator's and Babai's emphasis on the unity of the body and soul in the Context of pauline eschatology

The underlying motivation behind the first Syriac translator's and Babai's reinterpretation of the *Gnostic Chapters* is a strong desire to maintain the unity between body and soul, even in the world to come. According to the Syriac translator and especially Babai, Evagrius's emphasis on the future destruction of the body and soul rendered the ascetical enterprise meaningless, for bodily asceticism is what makes the soul worthy of the world to come.

The Syriac translator attempted to lessen Evagrius's emphasis on the future destruction of the body and soul and instead emphasize the future transformation of the fleshly body into a spiritual body. In some cases, the translator simply removed some of Evagrius's controversial statements regarding the liberation of fallen minds from bodies. In *Gnostic Chapter* 1.58, for example, he omitted Evagrius's remark that "all those who have been yoked with a body will also necessarily be released [from the body]."[160] In other places, he altered Evagrius's wording so as to reorient the sense of the passage. In *Gnostic Chapter* 4.74, Evagrius had spoken of saints who, "have been released from bodies and have joined with the choir of angels," but the Syriac translator instead rendered the passage to speak generally of those who "have been made complete in the fulfillment of the commandments of God and have left this world."[161] This altered version of the text avoids the question of the future state of the body altogether.

Despite these fixes, the Syriac translator did not successfully eliminate all of the controversial material from Evagrius's original text. One passage that remained

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[160] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.58 (PO 28:44) and Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.58 (PO 28.45).
[161] Evagrius, *Kephalaia* 4.74 (PO 28:169) and Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.74 (PO 28:168). ܟܠܗܘܢ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܒܥܘܕܪܝܢ ܕܦܘܩܪܢܘܗܝ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܬܓܡܪܘ. ܘܦܛܪܘ ܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ.

problematic was *Gnostic Chapter* 3.28. In this chapter, the Syriac translator tried to correct Evagrius's definition of the fall. While Evagrius had defined the fall as a movement away from a primordial union between God and the incorporeal minds, the Syriac translator instead defined the fall as a movement away from the original state of perfect contemplation.[162] Although this new definition of the fall as a loss of perfect contemplation helped soften the blow of this troublesome passage, the Syriac translator overlooked other offensive parts. This passage still implied that the creation of the soul took place after the creation of the mind since the text reads that "the soul is the mind that fell from contemplation." According to Babai, this posterior creation of the soul meant that the soul was inferior to the mind and that the soul's existence was temporary. In order to preserve the orthodox notion of the union between body and soul in the future world, Babai explicitly states that Evagrius had used the terms mind and soul interchangeably, thereby negating the question of whether or not the creation of the mind preceded the creation of the soul as well as the implication that the soul would cease to exist in the world to come.[163]

Another confusing passage for Babai was *Gnostic Chapter* 1.67. According to Evagrius, ascetical service (ܦܘܠܚܢܐ) performed by the body helps the soul abandon the distractions of the material world and turn instead towards knowledge of the creator. For this reason, he calls ascetical service "a chariot for the reasoning soul, which is diligent about obtaining knowledge of God."[164] The Syriac translator apparently felt uncomfortable with this formulation because it implied that ascetical service performed

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[162] See above, p. 19.
[163] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.28 (Frankenberg:206:20).
[164] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.67 (PO 28:49). ܡܪܟܒܬܐ ܦܠܘܚܬܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܠܢܦܫܐ ܡܠܝܠܬܐ ܕܣܦܝܩܐ ܕܬܬܡܢܝ ܠܘܬ ܡܕܥܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ.

by the body helped the soul acquire knowledge about God, but after the body completed its service on the soul's behalf, the soul could then shed the body and became a pure mind once again. The Syriac translator decided not to call ascetical service performed by the body the chariot, but instead designated the nebulous phrase "ascetical service of this instrument" as the chariot. He says, "who can know. . .the ascetical service of this instrument, how it becomes a chariot through ascetical service of the commandments and is elevated through a spiritual ascent to the Holy Trinity?"[165]

The Syriac translator's clumsy rearrangement of this sentence was too enigmatic for Babai, who desired a more explicit statement on the permanence of the body and soul. The Syriac translator had failed to supply a subject for the verb "is elevated," so Babai clarifies that the ascetical service of the body, even after it helps the soul arrive at knowledge of God, is the thing that is elevated to the Trinity along with the soul and that neither body nor soul are abandoned upon arrival.

> "The service of this living instrument" is the [service of the] body. Who understands how every part of the soul is essentially joined to [the body], and how wondrously [the soul] plays all sorts of tonal modulations and hymns in praise of God on [the body], and how the servant works all things in [the body] for virtue in every aspect of this worldly arrangement, and how [the soul] rides [the body] in the form of a chariot with four horseman and excites the resources of [the body] in this spiritual stadium until [the soul] enters with [the body] into that kingdom of the Jerusalem from above where they rest together from their ascents to the one knowledge of the Blessed Trinity and together are crowned with the crown of living righteousness?[166]

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[165] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.67 (PO 28:48). ܡܢܘ ܝܕܥ ܦܘܠܚܢܗ ܕܡܐܢܐ ܗܢܐ ܘܡܫܬܥܒܕܘܬܐ ܕܐܣܟܝ̈ܡܐ ܘܦܘܠܚܢܗ ܕܒܢܝܐ ܗܢܐ: ܐܝܟܢܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܪܟܒܬܐ ܒܝܕ ܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܕܦܘ̈ܩܕܢܐ ܘܡܬܥܠܐ ܒܡܣܩܬܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܬܐ ܠܘܬ ܬܠܝܬܝܘܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ.
[166] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.67 (Frankenberg:106:8-14). ܘܦܘܠܚܢܗ ܠܗ ܕܒܢܝܐ ܗܢܐ ܚܝܐ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܦܓܪܐ. ܘܐܝܟܢ ܡܬܚܝܕܐ ܠܗ ܢܦܫܐ ܒܟܠܗܝܢ ܡ̈ܢܘܬܗ. ܘܐܝܟܢ ܬܡܝܗܐܝܬ ܙܡܪܐ ܒܗ ܒܟܠ ܙܢ̈ܝ ܩܝܢ̈ܬܐ ܘܬܫܒ̈ܚܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ. ܘܐܝܟܢܐ ܦܠܚܐ ܒܗ ܟܠ ܚܕ̈ܐ ܕܡܝܬܪܘܬܐ ܒܟܠܗ ܐܣܟܡܐ ܗܢܐ ܥܠܡܝܐ. ܘܐܝܟܢܐ ܒܕܡܘܬ ܡܪܟܒܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܐܪܒܥܐ ܕܐܪܒܥܐ ܦܪ̈ܫܐ ܠܗ ܪܟܝܒܐ ܘܡܙܝܥܐ ܡܪ̈ܟܒܬܗ ܠܗ ܒܐܣܛܕܝܘܢ ܗܢܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ: ܥܕܡܐ ܕܥܐܠܐ ܥܡܗ ܠܗ، ܠܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܫܠܡ ܕܠܥܠ: ܕܬܡܢ ܡܬܬܢܝܚܝܢ ܐܟܚܕܐ ܡܢ ܥܠܝ̈ܢ ܡܣܩ̈ܬܐ ܠܘܬ ܚܕܐ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܬܠܝܬܝܘܬܐ ܡܒܪܟܬܐ: ܘܒܟܠܝܠ ܟܠܝܠܐ ܕܙܕܝܩܘܬܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܕܬܪܬܝܗܘܢ ܐܟܚܕܐ.

While the Syriac translator wanted to eliminate Evagrius's devaluation of the body and soul, Babai goes even further by insisting that a proper evaluation of the body requires its resurrection along with the soul.[167]

Despite the corrections rendered by the first Syriac translator of the *Gnostic Chapters*, Babai is not fully satisfied with the orthodoxy of the text. Although the corrected version did not promulgate heretical notions, it did not go far enough in providing an explicit teaching on the resurrection of the body and soul. For this reason, Babai turns to Paul in order to supply a stronger emphasis on the resurrection of the body and soul and to fully legitimize Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* as viable orthodox teaching. Babai believes that Evagrius would never have suggested that the body would be destroyed in the future world and he even praises Evagrius for his commitment to the fundamental goodness of the material creation.[168] By bringing the Syriac Translator's reworked version of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* in line with Paul's account of the resurrection of the body and soul, Babai ensures that no one can understood Evagrius in any way other than as a promoter of the resurrection of the body and soul.[169]

The first example of a text that Babai brings into conformity with Pauline teaching is *Gnostic Chapter* 3.48. In this passage Babai emphasizes the inner renewal that takes place in the soul of the believer over and against any change in the body that

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[167] Babai makes a similar point in *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.58 (Frankenberg:98:9-11), where he says that the separation of the soul from the body at death is a temporary measure until body and soul are united once again in the resurrection: "The soul is briefly separated from [the body] in the hidden places that are in paradise, or rather, it peacefully [waits] in the surrounding [places] with no effect until the resurrection." ܕܢܦܫܐ ܕܦܪܝܫܐ ܕܒܦܪܕܝܣܐ ܡܬܦܪܫܐ ܡܢ ܦܓܪܗ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܩܝܡܬܐ ܗܘܝܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܬܪܥܝܢ ܥܕ ܕܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܬܬܝܕܥ ܠܡܬܚܝܬܗ.

[168] See Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.15 (Frankenberg:198:11-13): "When [Evagrius] explains to us that the fullness of rational nature is not lacking from [its association with] created nature and that there is no damage in it from what is unnatural, [Evagrius] keeps the righteous deeds in all their parts." ܕܡܕ ܕܡܬܝܠܦ ܠܢ ܕܡܠܝܢܘܬܐ ܕܡܬܒܪܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܣܪ ܡܢ ܕܢܬܒܪܝ ܡܢ ܕܠܐ ܛܒܝܥܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܒܠ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܝܢܬܗ ܙܕܝܩܐ ܢܛܪ ܠܟܠ ܦܪܨܘܦܘܗܝ.

[169] According to Babai, only the heretical adherents of Origenism believe that the body is evil. See Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.53 (Frankenberg:224:25-29).

might imply its destruction. Evagrius had originally described an "exchange of the just," wherein bodies that perform ascetical service are exchanged for bodies that have a clearer understanding of divine knowledge.[170] The Syriac translator apparently found the term "exchange of the just" to be problematic because it implied that bodies would be destroyed and exchanged for different bodies in the world to come. Therefore, he replaced the word "exchange" (ܫܠܚܐ) with a similar sounding word in the Syriac language, "renewal" (ܫܚܪܬܐ).[171]

This slight shift in terminology and the presence of the word "renewal" signaled, for Babai, a reference to Rom 12.2, where Paul exhorts the Romans to "be transformed by the renewal of your minds." In light of this verse and other Pauline references to the new man of Eph 4.24 and the mention of inner renewal day by day in 2 Cor 4.16, Babai interprets his version of *Gnostic Chapter* 3.48 not in terms of an exchange of bodies, but in terms of an inward, spiritual renewal that occurs within the souls of the righteous. Moreover, he distinguishes this renewal from the physical resurrection of the body that will take place in the world to come.

> This "renewal, which the righteous have mystically attained here," is not like [it is] in the resurrection that [occurs] with every creature, in which everyone clothes their bodies in glory so that they are equal; rather, this is the renewal that they have attained in their souls from day to day and [in which] they gradually advance to their resurrections in a spiritual manner, i.e., the ascent from virtue to virtue or from knowledge to a knowledge that is more virtuous than before.[172]

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[170] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.48 (PO 28:117): "The change of the just is the passage from bodies of ascetical service and seeing to bodies that are seeing and seeing even better." ܫܠܚܐ ܕܨܕܝܩܐ ܗܝ ܥܒܪܐ ܡܢ ܦܓܪܐ ܕܦܠܚܘܬܐ ܘܠܚܙܝܢ ܠܦܓܪܐ ܕܚܙܝܢ ܘܠܚܙܝܢ ܝܬܝܪ

[171] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.48 (PO 28:116). ܕܫܚܝܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܫܠܚ ܗܘܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ ܕܫܘܝ ܫܚܪܬܐ ܕܫܚܝܬܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ ܒܫܚܪܬܐ ܕܫܚܪܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܫܚܝܬܐ.

[172] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.48 (Frankenburg:220:31-5). ܡܢ ܫܘܪܝܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ ܗܘ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ. ܐܠܐ ܗܝ ܗܘ ܕܫܚܪܬܐ ܕܫܚܪܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܫܠܚ ܫܘܪܝܐ ܕܫܚܪܬܐ ܕܫܚܝܬܐ ܕܫܚܝܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܫܠܚ ܫܘܪܝܐ ܕܫܚܪܬܐ ܕܫܚܪܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܫܚܝܬܐ.

Babai takes a text that once implied an exchange of bodies and turns it into a text that describes the inner renewal of righteous Christians. He also clearly states that the current bodies of the righteous will be clothed in glory in heaven, not destroyed or exchanged.

A second passage that reveals Babai's close association with Pauline biblical texts is his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 3.9. Evagrius's original version of the text had read, "In the world to come bodies of ignorance are turned away," but the Syriac translator had reworked the text to say, "In the world to come the ignorance of rational beings is terminated."[173] The Syriac translator had already moved the emphasis away from the destruction of bodies to an emphasis on the eschatological elimination of ignorance. When Babai comments on the Syriac translator's version of the text, he finds that it correlates with Paul's words in 1 Cor. 13.9-10: "For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end." In Babai's hands, the corrected version of Evagrius's text is a witness to Paul's prophecy of the termination of the foolishness of the heretics, who have only a partial understanding of the truth and whose claims will be proven wrong in the world to come.[174] Orthodox teaching will triumph over heretical teaching in the future world and the righteous, Babai notes, will rejoice in heaven because of their zeal for asceticism.[175]

A third example of Babai's attempt to bring the corrected version of Evagrius's text in line with Pauline eschatology is his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 3.38. In this passage, he alludes to Paul in order to substantiate the one final judgment of God, at which time the bodily resurrection will occur. In the original version of this text,

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[173] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.9 (PO 28:101) and Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.9 (PO 28:100). ܒܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ ܡܣܬܝܟܐ ܠܐ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܠܐ.
[174] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.9 (Frankenberg:194:9-21).
[175] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.9 (Frankenberg:194:16-21).

Evagrius had spoken of God's initial judgment as the generation of the world and the occasion when God gave a body to each rational being.[176] The Syriac translator had reworked the emphasis of Evagrius's text so that it spoke, not of a primordial judgment, but of the future, eschatological judgment when God will judge the bodily actions of each person. His text read "The judgment of God is the just distinction that puts retribution and the pronouncement of judgment into the bodies of the rational beings according to the service of their actions."[177] Babai, who is commenting on the Syriac translator's version of the text, associates it with 2 Cor. 5.10, which states, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil." Babai's point is that the resurrection of the body will accompany God's final act of judgment, which means that a text that once described the occasion when God first created bodies has now been reworked to describe God's final judgment. Ironically, Babai states that this text specifically refutes the Origenists who do not believe in the resurrection of the body.[178]

A fourth and final passage that Babai aligns with Pauline material is *Gnostic Chapter* 2.77. Building on the notion of the bodily resurrection that takes place during the final judgment of God, Babai shows that the body will not be eliminated, but instead will be transformed so that it is capable of recognizing spiritual insights. Evagrius's original version of the text had read, "The last judgment is not the transformation of bodies, but rather, it makes known their obliteration," but the Syriac translator hastened

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[176] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.38 (PO 28:113). Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.47 (PO 28:117).
[177] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.38 (PO 28:112). ܕܝܢܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ܂ ܦܘܪܫܢܐ ܟܐܢܐ܂ ܗܘ ܕܒܓܘ̈ܫܡܐ ܕܡܠܝ̈ܠܐ ܣܐܡ ܦܘܪܥܢܐ ܐܘ ܓܙܪ ܕܝܢܐ܂ ܘܟܠ ܚܕ ܚܕ ܡܢܗܘܢ ܐܝܟ ܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܕܥܒ̈ܕܘܗܝ܀
[178] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.38 (Frankenberg:214:25-28).

to eliminate this clear reference to the destruction of bodies.[179] He said, "The last judgment of the just judge does not make an exchange of the body, but rather, it lifts up their density from the middle."[180] Babai's commentary on the passage reflects the Syriac translator's emphasis on the lifting up of bodies from the middle. Babai says, "The justice of retribution on the last day does not involve the exchange of like bodies as the babbling of the heretics reports, but rather it lifts up this earthly density and abundance from the middle as a veil lies between them and the divine vision."[181] In order to avoid confusion regarding the meaning of bodies being lifted up from the middle and to assure an orthodox interpretation of the passage, Babai turns to 1 Cor. 15.54 — the perishable body puts on immortality — to explain how bodies are transformed from the middle. For Babai, the perishable part of the body is the material density, but during the final judgment, God transforms this perishable density from the core of the human person, that is, from the very middle, and refashions the body with immortality. The body is not destroyed and exchanged for an entirely different body, but transformed.

Babai makes this Pauline understanding of the transformation of the body even more explicit in his commentary on *Gnostic Chapter* 2.62. Evagrius had originally said, "When the minds receive the contemplation that concerns them, then also the entire nature of the bodies will be taken away and thus the contemplation that concerns them will become immaterial."[182] The implication of this statement, at least for the Syriac

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[179] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.77 (PO 28:91).
[180] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.77 (PO 28:90). ܕܝܢܐ ܐܚܪܝܐ ܕܕܝܢܐ ܟܐܢܐ܆ ܠܘ ܚܘܠܦܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܥܒܕ. ܐܠܐ ܥܘܒܝܗܘܢ ܫܩܠ ܡܢ ܡܨܥܬܐ.
[181] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.77 (Frankenberg:180:35-182:1). ܕܠܘ ܗܘ ܚܘܠܦܐ ܕܠܦܓܪ̈ܐ ܠܕ̈ܡܝܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܕܝܢܐ ܕܦܘܪܥܢܘܬܐ ܒܝܘܡܐ ܐܚܪܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܒܪܐ ܕܗܪ̈ܣܝܘܛܐ. ܐܠܐ ܗܕܐ ܥܒܝܘܬܐ ܐܪܥܢܝܬܐ ܘܡܬܝܪܘܬܐ ܫܩܠ ܡܢ ܡܨܥܬܐ܆ ܕܐܝܟ ܬܚܦܝܬܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ ܒܝܬ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗ̇ ܚܙܬܐ ܐܠܗܝܬܐ.
[182] Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.62 (PO 28:85). ܡܐ ܕܗܘ̈ܢܐ ܩܒܠܘ ܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܗܘܢ܆ ܗܝܕܝܢ ܐܦ ܟܠܗ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܦܓܪ̈ܐ ܢܫܬܩܠ. ܘܗܟܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܠܐ ܬܗܘܐ ܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܗܘܢ.

translator, was that knowledge in the future world will be "immaterial" because minds will exist without bodies. In dealing with this passage, the Syriac translator once again refers to the removal of the density of the body as characterizing a transformation from bodies that process knowledge from material data to bodies that are capable of spiritual vision.[183] Babai builds on this new understanding of the passage, but once again, in order to ensure an orthodox reading of an otherwise questionable passage, he interprets the possession of spiritual vision in terms of Pauline texts.

> When the minds of the saints have arrived at holy discernment through purity. . .then, at that time, the denseness of the bodies will be lifted up together with the middle part. Their vision is now spiritual and in it there is peace, rest, and incomprehensible light, as Saint Paul said in a manner of prayer, "the eyes of your hearts will be enlightened so that you may know the hope of its calling." Therefore the bodily eye does not see this hope and the corporeal ear does not hear it. [This hope] does not ascend to the natural heart of thoughts, but if one arrives at that contemplation of himself [just described by Paul] and sees that which is hidden inside of himself in a pure mirror, then God, in his openness, will manifest his delight [upon him].[184]

Babai's understanding of spiritual vision includes the body, but a body that no longer sees and hears in a material way, as Paul says in 1 Cor. 2.19. It is instead a body that sees with the eyes of the heart, as Paul says in Eph. 1.18. The transformation body is spiritual in its understanding as it fully comprehends the eschatological hope and turns away from the distractions of the material world.

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[183] See Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.62 (PO 28:84): "When the minds of the saints receive the contemplation of themselves, the density of the bodies will be taken away from the middle and from that time on their vision will be spiritual." ܡܕܡܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܢܣܒܘܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܦܢܝܗܘܢ ܡܢ ܕܟܝܐܘܬܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܢܬܪܡܡ ܡܢ ܡܨܥܬܐ ܘܡܢ ܗܝܢ ܙܡܢܐ ܕܚܙܘܬܗܘܢ ܗܝ ܪܘܚܢܝܬܐ ܘܒܗ ܫܠܝܡܘܬܐ ܘܢܝܚܐ ܘܢܗܝܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠ ܐܝܟ ܡܪܝ ܦܘܠܘܣ ܒܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܢܗܘܝܢ ܥܝܢܝ ܠܒܒܟܘܢ ܕܬܬܢܘܪ ܕܬܕܥܘܢ ܕܫܒܪܐ ܕܩܪܝܬܟܘܢ ܗܢܐ ܠܥܝܢܐ ܦܓܪܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܚܙܝܐ ܗܢܐ ܫܒܪܐ ܘܠܐܕܢܐ ܦܓܪܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܫܡܥ ܗܢܐ ܫܒܪܐ ܠܐ ܣܠܩ ܠܠܒܐ ܛܒܥܝܐ ܕܡܚܫܒܬܐ ܐܢ ܡܢ ܗܢܐ ܕܡܬܡܠܠ ܠܢܦܫܗ ܘܚܙܐ ܕܡܟܣܐ ܒܗ ܒܡܪܝܐ ܕܢܩܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܬܓܠܝ ܐܠܗܐ ܒܨܒܝܢܘܬܗ. Cf. Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.15 (PO 28:102), where the Syriac translator says that the perfection of the mind is "spiritual knowledge," not, as Evagrius had said, "immaterial knowledge."

[184] Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.62 (Frankenberg:174:9-17). ܡܕܡܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܢܣܒܘܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܦܢܝܗܘܢ ܡܢ ܕܟܝܐܘܬܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܢܬܪܡܡ ܡܢ ܡܨܥܬܐ ܘܡܢ ܗܝܢ ܙܡܢܐ ܕܚܙܘܬܗܘܢ ܗܝ ܪܘܚܢܝܬܐ ܘܒܗ ܫܠܝܡܘܬܐ ܘܢܝܚܐ ܘܢܗܝܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠ ܐܝܟ ܡܪܝ ܦܘܠܘܣ ܒܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܢܗܘܝܢ ܥܝܢܝ ܠܒܒܟܘܢ ܕܬܬܢܘܪ ܕܬܕܥܘܢ ܕܫܒܪܐ ܕܩܪܝܬܟܘܢ ܗܢܐ ܠܥܝܢܐ ܦܓܪܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܚܙܝܐ ܗܢܐ ܫܒܪܐ ܘܠܐܕܢܐ ܦܓܪܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܫܡܥ ܗܢܐ ܫܒܪܐ ܠܐ ܣܠܩ ܠܠܒܐ ܛܒܥܝܐ ܕܡܚܫܒܬܐ ܐܢ ܡܢ ܗܢܐ ܕܡܬܡܠܠ ܠܢܦܫܗ ܘܚܙܐ ܕܡܟܣܐ ܒܗ ܒܡܪܝܐ ܕܢܩܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܬܓܠܝ ܐܠܗܐ ܒܨܒܝܢܘܬܗ.

While the first Syriac translator removed the most explicit references to the destruction of the body and soul, his translation was still close enough to the original version of Evagrius's text to arouse suspicion of heretical beliefs. In order to prevent Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* from falling prey to heretical interpretations, Babai aligned problematic passages with Pauline teaching on the resurrection of the body and soul, thereby strengthening this position.

3.3 THE ESCHATOLOGY OF ISAAC OF NINEVEH

Even though contemporary scholars have noted the important influence that Evagrius had on Isaac and other East-Syriac authors, giving him titles such as "le docteur mystique par excellence" and "dottrina monastica," the distinctive elements of Evagrius's cosmology and eschatology were weakened by Isaac's time.[185] As a result, Isaac was influenced more by the first Syriac translator's rendering of the *Gnostic Chapters* and Babai's commentary on the translation than by authentic Evagrian teaching. Isaac is especially convinced by Babai's deference to Pauline authority and he follows Babai in emphasizing the Pauline relationship between body and soul and the fundamental importance of bodily asceticism. These positions lead Isaac to conclude that God created human beings with bodies so that they could perform ascetical actions as a springboard for an even better existence in the world to come.

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[185] See Antoine Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre Le Pontique*, 198, who says, "Évagre fut pour les Syriens le docteur mystique par excellence, ou, comme ils disaient eux-mêmes en usant de la terminologie évagrienne, 'le plus grand des gnostiques'." Also see Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita: Ricerche su Isacco di Ninive e la sua fortuna* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2002), 103, who says, "Per i siro-orientalia, il Pontico fu nella dottrina monastica." Finally, see Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans forme: Introduction à l'étude de la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale* (Chevetogne: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1987), 16, who notes, "L'auteur le plus cité par les mystiques nestoriens est incontestablement Évagre le Pontique."

3.3.1 THE SOUL'S NATURAL PURITY AND THE STATE THAT IS HIGHER THAN NATURAL PURITY: *KATASTASIS* VS. *EXSTASIS*

This section will address an apparent contradiction in Isaac's writings regarding the issue of original purity. In some passages from the first set of homilies, Isaac agrees with Evagrius's fundamental eschatological assumption that the end state is a return to the original purity of creation, but when he discusses God's love and mercy towards creation in the second and third set of homilies, Isaac suggests that bodily asceticism performed in this world makes life in the world to come even better than God's original creation. In these latter passages, he says that the fall was part of God's providential plan because it forces human beings to perform ascetical actions that prepare their soul for life in the world to come.

The explanation for this contradiction lies in Isaac's reception of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters*. While Evagrius held to the important cosmological assumption that creation and redemption history happened twice and that the union of body and soul was a temporary solution that occurred after God's initial judgment, Isaac does not inherent this cosmology on account of the changes that were made to the *Gnostic Chapters*. Not only did the first Syriac translator remove most of the elements from this controversial cosmological assumption from Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters*, but Babai replaced the excised pieces of Evagrius's cosmology with a Pauline presentation of the resurrection of the body and soul in the world to come.

Although Isaac inherited an eschatological system based on the return to original purity, this system, as presented by the first Syriac translator and Babai, lacked the

necessary cosmological components to render it coherent. As a result, Isaac reinterprets what it means for a soul to return to its original purity. Whereas the return to the original purity of creation was, for Evagrius, the first step in the mind's return to incorporeal union with the Trinity, for Isaac, the return to purity is the first step in propelling the soul to an existence that transcends the original state of creation, but it remains a process contained by the natural limitations of the created order. According to Isaac, human beings are ultimately destined to a state that is not a return to the original purity, but rather, an ecstatic existence that occurs once the soul has been freed from the stain of all maculation and the mind has been drawn into a state of wonder.

Scholarship has not always noted this difference between Evagrius's understanding of the return to purity and Isaac's understanding of the return to purity. Part of the problem is that Isaac himself is not always clear, but another explanation for this confusion is the gradual discovery of Isaac's texts. Isaac's positions resemble Evagrius's eschatology when he expounds his understanding of prayer and contemplation in the first set of homilies, published by Paul Bedjan in 1908, but Isaac distances himself from Evagrian eschatology in the second part, published by Sebastian Brock in 1995, and the third part, published by Sabino Chialà in 2011. As a result, scholars who wrote about Isaac's eschatology prior to 1995 carefully compared the similarities between Isaac's and Evagrius's notion of prayer and contemplation.

One example of this older scholarship is an article entitled, "Hèsychia et contemplation chez Isaac le Syrien" (1991) by Ysabel de Andia. She arrives at the following conclusion regarding the place of the intellect in Isaac's concept of prayer:

> [Isaac's] doctrine de l'intellect est plus évagrienne que dionysienne. En effect, il ne s'agit pas, pour Isaac, de dépasser l'intellect, mais de revenir à l'état primordial du νους, à sa pureté première, à sa limpidité ou à sa simplicité pour pouvoir voir Dieu.[186]

Although Andia admits that Isaac's interest in transcending nature during prayer comes from Psuedo-Dionysius rather than from Evagrius, she ultimately claims that the fundamentals of Isaac position on prayer are based on Evagrian eschatology.[187] She bases this conclusion on a passage from *Homily* 1.35, where Isaac reiterates Evagrius's eschatological assumption, namely, the belief that the end state resembles the beginning. Isaac says,

> I am of the opinion that purity is forgetfulness of those sorts of knowledge that are outside nature, that is, nature finds them in the world. As for its limit, this entire limit [is achieved when one] is set free from [these sorts of knowledge] and arrives at the simplicity and innocence that is originally of nature, that is, a childlike [state of simplicity and innocence].[188]

According to de Andia, Isaac's insistence that the mind must retrieve its original purity before it can be further illumined by the light of the Trinity is the heart of his theory of prayer and is derived from Evagrius.

De Andia further substantiates her claim that Evagrian eschatology influenced Isaac's theory of prayer with a passage from *Homily* 1.22, in which Isaac cites two passages from Evagrius's *Reflections*, found in the Syriac addendum to the *Gnostic Chapters*. The first quotation comes from *Reflections* 4 where Evagrius had said that "the stability of mind is the summit of intellectual perceptions, and [this summit] resembles the blue color of the sky on which the light of the Holy Trinity rises at the moment of

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[186] Ysabel de Andia, "Hèsychia et contemplation chez Isaac le Syrien," *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 53 (1991): 48.

[187] Ysabel de Andia, "Hèsychia et contemplation chez Isaac le Syrien," 35.

[188] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:250:17-21). Page and line numbers refer to *Mar Isaacus Ninivita De Perfectione Religiosa,* ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris: Nihil Obstat, 1908; repr. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007). ܕܟܝܘܬܐ ܡܬܪܥܐ ܐܢܐ ܕܐܝܬܝܗ̇: ܡܛܥܝܢܘܬܐ ܕܝ̈ܕܥܬܐ ܕܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܟܝܢܐ: ܗܠܝܢ ܕܒܥܠܡܐ ܐܫܟܚ ܟܝܢܐ. ܬܚܘܡܗ̇ ܕܝܢ: ܕܗܢܐ ܟܠܗ ܢܬܚܪܪ ܡܢܗܘܢ: ܘܢܐܬܐ ܒܪܝܐ ܠܦܫܝܛܘܬܗ ܘܬܡܝܡܘܬܗ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ.

prayer."[189] Isaac quotes this passage from Evagrius, but he realizes that it is incomplete because it does not explain what a monk must do to reach the summit of intellectual perception.[190] He finds that Evagrius answers his own question in *Reflections* 25 by explaining that the mind must return to its original purity before it can see the sapphire appearance of God.[191] Drawing a connection between these two passages, Isaac says:

> When the mind strips off the old man and clothes himself with the new one through grace, then he also sees his stability at the time of prayer because it resembles sapphire or the blue color of the sky, as the place of God was called by the holy ones of Israel, to whom [the place of God] appeared on the mountain.[192]

Since Isaac bases his theory of prayer on Evagrius's notion of pure prayer, de Andia concludes that Isaac also emphasizes an Evagrian return to the original purity that takes place during prayer.[193]

While de Andia's conclusions concerning Isaac's relationship to Evagrius's theory of prayer are not incorrect, we must remember the Evagrian inspired connection between contemplation and prayer is just one part of a broader system.[194] De Andia downplays Isaac's Pseudo-Dionysian interest in transcending nature as a matter of

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[189] Evagrius, *Skemmata* 4 (Frankenberg:426:15-16). ܬܩܘܡܬܗ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ̇܆ ܪܘܡܐ ܕܡܬܝܕܥܢܘܬܐ. ܗܘ ܕܡܬܕܡܐ ܠܓܘܢܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ. ܕܥܠܘܗܝ ܕܢܚ ܒܥܕܢ ܨ ܠܘܬܐ.

[190] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.22 (Bedjan:174:18-20): "When is one made worthy of this entire grace so that at the time of prayer he is raised to this majesty?" ܐܡܬܝ، ܡܫܬܘܐ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܠܗܕܐ ܟܠܗ̇ ܛܝܒܘܬܐ܆ ܕܒܥܕܢܐ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܠܗܕܐ ܪܒܘܬܐ ܡܬܬܥܠܐ.

[191] Evagrius, *Skemmata* 25 (Frankenberg:450:1-3).

[192] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.22 (Bedjan:174:20-175:3). ܡܐ ܠܡ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܫܠܚ ܠܒܪܢܫܐ ܥܬܝܩܐ܆ ܘܠܒܫܗ ܠܚܕܬܐ ܒܝܕ ܛܝܒܘܬܐ܆ ܗܝܕܝܢ ܐܦ ܩܘܝܡܗ ܒܥܕܢ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܚܙܐ܆ ܟܕ ܕܡܐ ܠܣܦܝܠܐ܆ ܐܘ ܠܓܘܢܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ. ܗܝ ܕܕܘܟܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܡܢ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܐܝܣܪܝܠ ܐܬܩܪܝܬ܆ ܠܗܘܢ ܐܬܚܙܝܬ ܒܛܘܪܐ.

[193] Isaac also speaks of the "the pure place of nature" (ܐܬܪܐ ܕܟܝܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ) in Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.18.3 (CSCO 554:84). Page numbers refer to *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part,' chapters IV-XLI*, ed. Sebastian Brock, CSCO 554, Scriptores Syri 224 (Louven: Peeters, 1995).

[194] For more recent comparisons between Evagrius and Isaac regarding contemplation, see Sebastian Brock, "Some Uses of the Term *Theoria* in the Writings of Isaac of Nineveh," *Parole de l'Orient* 22 (1996): 407-19; Sebastian Brock, "Discerning the Evagrian in the writings of Isaac of Nineveh: A Preliminary Investigation," *Adamantius* 15 (2009), 62-63; and Sabino Chialà, "Evagrio il Pontico negli scritti di Isacco di Ninive," *Adamantius* 15 (2009): 73-84.

secondary importance, but I would argue that Isaac's interest in transcending nature is more important and more foundational to his system than contemplation during prayer.

Scholars have used the terms *katastatic* and *exstatic* to classify the difference between the Evagrian emphasis on original purity and the Pseudo-Dionysian emphasis on ecstatic transcendence. According to Hausherr and others, Evagrius's thinking is *katastatic* because union with God takes place within the human mind that has re-established its original purity and Pseudo-Dionysius's thinking is *ecstatic* because union with God occurs after the mind has transcended its natural state.[195] This same distinction can be said about the difference between Evagrius and Isaac. For Evagrius, the contemplation that a monk achieves during prayer is the moment that God is mystically reflected in the human mind, but for Isaac, contemplative prayer is the means to something better, namely, ecstatic union with God experienced through wonder.

Although Isaac sees ecstatic union with God as the ultimate goal of the ascetical life, he recognizes that recovering the soul's natural purity is a preliminary first-step to achieving wonder. A monk cannot transcend nature until he has purified nature. Isaac is aware that the passions and material distractions in this world prevent the natural processes of the human soul from achieving purity and he therefore recognizes that human beings must examine their souls in order to remove these distractions that are preventing the soul and intellect from working naturally.[196] In *Homily* 1.6, Isaac states,

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[195] See Irénée Hausher, "Contemplation chez les Grecs et autres orientaux chrétiens," *DSp* 2, 1827; Nicholas Gendle, "Cappadocian Elements in the Mystical Theology of Evagrius Ponticus," in *SP* 16.2 (1985), 373-84. Alexander Golitzin argues that the difference between Evagrius's *katastatic* and Pseudo-Dionysius's *ecstatic* interpretations of mystical union with God has been exaggerated. See Alexander Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Thessalonica: Patriarchikon Idruma Paterikōn Meletōn, 1994), 338-39.

[196] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:30:6-9): "That [soul], which is neglectful in that it does not know how to hold fast, must fight to free itself from a perception once it has entered and

> Anxiety for worldly affairs disturbs the soul and distraction from work troubles the mind, causing [the mind] to fall away from its quietness and driving peacefulness from it. It is right for the solitary, who has enlisted his soul in heavenly service, to make his intellect constantly free from worldly affairs so that when he examines and considers his soul, he does not see in his soul any worldly affair from this labor and any concern for visible material. Due to his perfect suspension from our labors, he can meditate on the law of the Lord night and day, without distraction.[197]

It is this process of removing distractions in this life that Isaac refers to when he speaks of returning the soul to its original state.

This process of eliminating passions and material distractions so as to enable true prayer and contemplation is the first task of the ascetical life. Since Isaac defines true contemplation as a state of mind that is free from distractions, he associates it with the original state of creation, that is, with the time before distraction entered into the world through Adam's sin. The Syriac translator of Evagrius and Babai had both described the state of Adam's original creation as one of perfect contemplation and Isaac uses this notion of contemplation to frame his own conception of original purity before the fall.[198] In *Homily* 1.3, for instance, Isaac says that passions maculate the purity of the soul and implies that recovering the original purity means eliminating the passions from the soul.

> If sometimes the nature of the soul is limpid and a receptacle of the blessed light, then it will be found in this [state] when it arrives again at its original created [state]. But when [the soul] is moved by passions, every member of the clergy confesses that it has gone outside of its nature. Therefore the passions entered the nature of the soul afterward, for it is not right at all to think that the passions [are natural to] the soul.[199]

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destroyed what was there first, namely, limpidity and natural simplicity." ܗܪ ܕܡܢ ܕܐܬܗܠܟܐ ܒܗܘܢܐ ܕܐܬܚܫܒܘ ܕܠܐ ܬܬܕܥ: ܘܒܬܪ ܕܒܠܥ ܗ ܐܬܚܙܝܬ ܠܗܘܢܐ ܠܒܪ ܡܢܗ: ܡܚܒܠܐ ܠܩܕܡܝܬܐ. ܗܠܝܢ ܕܐܝܬܝܗܝܢ: ܫܦܝܘܬܐ ܘܬܡܝܡܘܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܟܝܢܐ.

[197]Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.6 (Bedjan:81:14-82:2). ܝܨܦܬܐ ܕܗܘܦܟܐ: ܡܕܘܕܐ ܢܦܫܐ. ܘܒܛܠܢܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ: ܡܫܓܫ ܗܘܢܐ: ܘܡܦܠ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܫܠܝܘܬܐ: ܘܛܪܕ ܡܢܗ ܫܝܢܘܬܐ. ܘܙܕܩ ܠܗ ܠܝܚܝܕܝܐ ܕܗܘ ܕܐܬܦܠܚ ܢܦܫܗ ܠܬܫܡܫܬܐ ܫܡܝܢܝܬܐ: ܕܐܡܝܢܐܝܬ ܕܠܐ ܝܨܦܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܗܘܢܗ ܒܨܒܘܬܐ ܥܠܡܢܝܬܐ. ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܟܕ ܢܒܨܐ ܘܢܬܒܩܐ ܒܢܦܫܗ: ܠܐ ܢܚܙܐ ܡܕܡ ܥܠܡܢܝܐ ܡܢ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ: ܘܪܢܝܐ ܕܐܦ ܡܢ ܨܒܘ ܡܬܚܙܝܢܐ: ܒܢܦܫܗ ܠܐ ܚܙܐ. ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܡܢ ܒܛܠܢܗ ܓܡܝܪܐ ܕܡܢ ܥܡܠܝܢ: ܢܗܓܐ ܒܢܡܘܣܐ ܕܡܪܝܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܒܠܠܝܐ ܘܒܐܝܡܡܐ: ܕܠܐ ܢܘܬܦܐ ܕܡܕܡ.

[198] See Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.28 (PO 28:108) and Babai, *Comm. Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.75 (Frankenberg:410:7-10).

[199] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:22:7-12). ܐܢ ܕܝܢ ܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܐܡܬܝ، ܕܟܝܢܗ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܫܦܐ ܗܘܐ: ܘܡܩܒܠܢܝܬܐ ܕܢܘܗܪܐ ܡܒܪܟܐ: ܘܐܡܬܝ، ܗܝܕܝܢ ܕܠܒܪܝܬܗ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ ܬܬܦܢܐ ܒܗ ܒܗܕܐ ܬܫܬܟܚ. ܟܕ ܕܝܢ ܕܒܚܫ̈ܐ ܡܫܬܘܕܝܐ: ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܟܝܢܗ ܡܫܬܘܕܝܐ ܕܢܦܩܬ ܡܢ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܒܢܝ ܥܕܬܐ. ܡܕܝܢ ܚܫ̈ܐ ܒܬܪܟܢ ܥܠܘ ܥܠ ܟܝܢܗ ܕܢܦܫܐ. One final example of a passage where Isaac discusses the soul's return to its original purity occurs in *Homily* 1.25. In

Isaac goes on to clarify that once the passions have been eliminated from the soul, it can receive "impulses from divine contemplation."[200] Divine contemplation occurs when a person has removed the passions that have entered into the soul after the fall.

Despite Isaac's acknowledgment of the importance of purifying the soul, he says that this return to the original purity of creation is not the final destiny or ultimate goal of human beings. The contemplation that a monk achieves during the return to purity is what enables monks to transcend nature and experience wonder (ܬܗܪܐ) in God. Wonder, for Isaac, is ecstatic experience of God and, as Isaac says in *Homily* 1.66, is a supernatural state that is higher than the original purity.

> When the mind has been drawn into wonder at this sight, night and day become one to it with wonder at the splendor of the works of God. From this time on, the sense of the passions is taken away from the soul by the delight of this sight, and by it, [the soul] enters the two degrees of intelligible revelations that lie in an order that comes after this [order of] purity and is higher [than purity].[201]

A person who exists in a state of wonder is in a state that is higher than the natural purity of the created order. This higher state transcends nature and looks to an existence that is better than the original state of creation, which is the life of the world to come.

Although Isaac's ascetical teaching is certainly dependent on Evagrius, due to the influence of Babai and the Syriac translator of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters*, Isaac

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this homily, Isaac considers the various ways that souls escape bodily deliberations in order to achieve contemplation within three different classes of created beings: angels, souls, and demons. Due to their purity, angels are capable of seeing other created beings with "real sight," that is, according to the nature of each being rather than according to the being's corporeal manifestation, whereas demons lack this ability. Human souls, by contrast, share "real sight" with the angels and are able to perceive angels and demons according to their nature, but only when their souls are purified and have returned to "the original state in which they were created." See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.25 (Bedjan:183:21) and *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.25 (Bedjan:184:12-13).

[200] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:23:2-3).

[201] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.66 (Bedjan:471:18-472:2). ܘܡܐ ܕܐܬܢܓܕ ܗܘܢܐ ܒܬܗܪܐ ܕܚܙܬܐ ܗܕܐ܆ ܠܠܝܐ ܘܐܝܡܡܐ ܚܕ ܗܘܐ ܠܗ܆ ܒܬܗܪܐ ܕܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܒܪ̈ܝܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ. ܘܡܟܝܠ܆ ܡܬܢܣܒ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܢܦܫܐ ܪܓܫܐ ܕܚ̈ܫܐ ܒܒܣܝܡܘܬܐ ܕܚܙܬܐ ܗܕܐ. ܘܒܗ ܡܥܠܐ ܠܬܪ̈ܬܝܢ ܕܪ̈ܓܝܢ ܕܓܠܝ̈ܢܐ ܡܬܝ̈ܕܥܢܐ܆ ܕܣܝܡܝܢ ܒܛܟܣܐ ܒܬܪ ܗܢܐ܆ ܡܢ ܕܟܝܘܬܐ ܘܠܥܠ.

relegates Evagrius's cosmological and eschatological systems to the realm of contemplative prayer. In many ways, Isaac is trying to follow Evagrius, but what was, for Evagrius, a full account of God's creation and the eschatological redemption destined for each created being is, for Isaac, a description of prayer. The ecstatic experience of wonder, which, as we will see in chapter six, echoes Pseudo-Dionsyian language as well as language found in Syriac sources such as the Syriac translation of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters*, Ephrem and John the Solitary, is more relevant for understanding the broader framework of Isaac's ascetical system. In the meantime, the rest of this chapter will investigate Isaac's reasons for assuming that human beings are destined for a life that surpasses the original purity.

3.3.2 *Felix Culpa:* THE FALL AS AN INHERENT PART OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

One underlying cosmological difference between Evagrius and Isaac is their position on the biblical fall: they both believe that the fall is part of God's providence for the world, but they disagree on whether the fall is an essential part of God's redemptive plan. While Evagrius interprets the fall as an unfortunate consequence of the primordial movement away from Trinitarian unity, Isaac views the biblical fall as an inherent and fundamentally good part of God's plan before the creation of the world. Isaac is part of a tradition, stemming back to Irenaeus, which views the incarnation as inscribed in the very design of creation and as the fulfillment of God's love and creative purpose.[202] Since the biblical narrative explicitly identifies the incarnation as a reaction to the fall, thinkers in

[202] For Isaac's place within this tradition, see Bogdan Bucer, "Foreordained from All Eternity: The Mystery of the Incarnation According to Some Early Christian and Byzantine Writers," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 62, ed. Alice-MaryTalbot (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009), 199-215.

this tradition, like Isaac, assume that death and the fall must have also been part of God's providential plan for creation, for without them, there would be no incarnation.[203] According to Isaac, God uses the fall in a positive manner in order to propel human beings into a supernatural state that is superior to the original state of creation.[204]

In what follows, I will cite three examples from Isaac's texts that testify to this understanding of providence. In all three of the following passages, Isaac expresses the view that human beings were created mortal with the potential to fall precisely so that God could reveal his all encompassing love through the redemptive act.

First of all, Isaac's clearest expression of this all-encompassing notion of providence is found in *Homily* 2.39. While past scholarship on this particular homily has focused on Isaac's theory of universal salvation and his teachings on Gehenna, my interest lies in what Isaac has to say about God's providence for creation.[205] In this

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[203] Scholars have already noted that Isaac sees death and the fall as an inherent part of God's plan for creation. Irénée Hausherr wrote a brief article on Isaac's *Gnostic Chapter* 4.78 and, on the basis of this text, identified Isaac as a precursor to the Scotist theory of the incarnation. Isaac, Hausherr points out, says that it is unacceptable to make sin the cause of the incarnation; rather, the incarnation would have happened without sin because God loves the world. See Irénée Hausherr, "Un précurseur de la théorie Scotiste sur la fin de l'incarnation: Isaac de Ninive," *OCA* 183 (1969): 1-5.

According to Nestor Kavvadas, Isaac's thesis that human beings were created mortal goes back to Theodore of Mopsuestia. Kavvadas points especially to Isaac's *Gnostic Chapter* 3.2, where Isaac states, "We are not mortal because we sinned; but because we are mortal, we fall into sin." (trans. Kavvadas). See Nestor Kavaddas, "Some Observations on the Theological Anthropology of Isaac of Nineveh and its Sources," *Scrinium* 4 (2008): 147-57 and "Der Geist Gottes und die Vergöttlichung des Menschen bei Isaak von Ninive," in *Syrien im 1.–7. Jahrhundert nach Christus. Akten der 1. Tübinger Tagung zum Christlichen Orient (15.–16. Juni 2007)*, ed. Dimitrij Bumazhnov and Hans Reinhard Seeliger, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 62 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 150.

[204] Isaac shows little interest in the historical sequence of the events of the fall, for, as Bettiolo has noted, Isaac is not interested in supplying reasons for the fall of God's created beings, either angels or human beings, beyond the simple explanation of free will. See Paolo Bettiolo, "Prigionieri dell Spirito: liberta creaturale ed eschaton in Isacco di Ninive e nelle sue fonti," *Annali di Scienze religiose* 4 (1999): 359-60.

[205] Past scholarship on Isaac's eschatology and especially *Homily* 2.39 has focused on what Isaac calls the "difficult matter of Gehenna," a phrase which comes from Brock's translation of *Homily* 2.39.1. See Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.39.1 (CSCO 554:151).

Scholars have noticed that Isaac presents a theory of universal salvation, which means that Gehenna is a "difficult problem" for him. Paul Bedjan first suggested that Isaac's viewpoints on Gehenna were the subject of ancient criticisms of his theology. See Paul Bedjan, *De Perfectione Religiosa*, xi-xii. Sebastian Brock has re-iterated this thesis. See Sebastian Brock trans., *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part," Chapters IV-XLI*, CSCO 555, Scriptores Syri 225 (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 162 n. 6.

homily, Isaac rejects Evagrius's eschatological assumption that the final eschatological state is a return to the original state of creation. The world to come, according to Isaac, is not a return to the original state of creation, but a more perfect world, the attainment of which had been the initial intention of God when he first created Adam.

Isaac explains that human death, which is the passageway into the world to come, was part of God's secret plan when he created the world. Even though it is difficult for human beings to accept, death exists, not as a punishment for sin, but as the necessary means for entering the world to come.

> When [God] decreed death to Adam under the appearance of a judgment for sin and demonstrated the existence [of sin] with punishment even though this was not his intention, he showed [death] to [Adam] as that which someone receives as retribution for his offence. However, [God] veiled the true mystery [of this retribution] and covered his eternal thought and wise intention concerning death under the likeness of something to be feared. This is true even if it seems to us grievous, despicable and a difficult fact [to accept] at first. But it is the passage for us to that wondrous and glorious world and, without it, there would be no crossing over from this [world] to being [present] in that one. When this Creator [demonstrated] the existence [of sin], he did not say "this [death] will become for you the cause of good things and lives greater than these [lives you know

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Also see Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita*, 62-63, where Chialà concludes that Isaac's teaching on God's infinite mercy and Isaac's eschatological vision were the subject of Daniel bar Tubanita's polemical work (no longer extant) refuting various points of Isaac's theology.

In a 1996 article, Waclaw Hryniewicz examined the notion of Gehenna in *Part 1* and concluded that Isaac says that hell has a pedagogical function in the economy of God's salvation in that it serves to help prepare all God's creatures for the world to come. Hryniewicz shows, on the basis of a number of passages from the *First Part*, that Isaac believes in universal salvation. See Waclaw Hryniewicz, "Hoffnung der Heiligen: Das Zeugnis Isaaks des Syrers," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 45 (1996): 21-41. After the publication of the *Second Part*, Hryniewicz returned to the issue of Isaac's position on Gehenna in a 2004 article with the goal of filling in the missing details from the newly discovered second part to Isaac's homilies. Hryniewicz devoted a large portion of this second article to *Homily* 2.39. See Waclaw Hryniewicz, "Das Geheimnis der Gehenna in den Meditationen des hl. Isaak des Syrers," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 53 (2004): 28-44 and Waclaw Hryniewicz, "Universalism of Salvation: St. Isaac the Syrian," in *Die Wurzel aller Theologie: Sentire cum Ecclesia. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Urs von Arx*, ed. Hans Gerny, Harald Rein, and Maja Weyermann (Berlin: Stämpfli, 2003), 139-50.

Patrick Hagman offers a re-evaluation of the issue of Gehenna in *Homily* 2.39 in the context of what Isaac's teaching on the subject means for the ascetical life. See *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 197-204. Other scholars that allude to the importance of Homily 2.39 are Sebastian Brock, "Humanity and the Natural World in the Syriac Tradition," Sobornost 12:2 (1990): 138; and Hilarion Alfeyev, The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000), 284-86; and Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita*, 273-74.

> have]." Rather, he demonstrated it as something that brings misfortune and corruption to us.[206]

According to Isaac, it is normal for God to veil the true meaning behind His actions towards the world. God "conceals his love for the sake of training," Isaac says elsewhere.[207] What appears as hardship to the human mind is really God working to better the human situation by teaching human beings how to live virtuously.

Isaac goes on to say that death was a necessary part of God's plan because he never intended for human beings to remain in the initial paradisiacal state of creation. Rather, the paradise of God's first act of creation was a temporary measure.

> And again, when he cast those in the house of Adam out from Paradise, he cast them out under the appearance of rage. As it is said, since "you have transgressed the commandment, you will exist outside [Paradise]," as if the dwelling in Paradise was taken away from them because they were unworthy. [However], inside all of this was standing [divine] providence, fulfilling and guiding [everything] towards these things which will come to pass according to the Creator's intention from the beginning. It was not disobedience that introduced death to the house of Adam, nor did transgressing the commandment cast them outside of Paradise, for it is clear that [God] created Adam and Eve not to be in Paradise, that is, a small portion of the earth. [Instead,] they were supposed to subdue the entire earth. For this reason, we do not say that he cast them out because the commandment had been transgressed, for it is not the case that if they had not transgressed the commandment, they would have been left in Paradise forever.[208]

Isaac's use of the word "providence" in this passage is a reworking of Evagrius's original notion of God's providence. For Evagrius, God's providence was a response to the fall and consisted of specific measures that enabled each mind to return to its original state of

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[206] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.39.4 (CSCO 554:153). ܐܝܟ ܕܓܙܪ ܥܠ ܐܕܡ ܡܘܬܐ ܒܦܪܨܘܦ ܓܙܪ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܛܠ ܣܟܠܘܬܐ: ܘܐܝܟ ܕܒܟܣܡ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܗܘ̣ ܕܐܬܐܘܬܗ. ܟܕ ܢܫܡܗ ܠܘ ܗܢܐ ܗܘܐ: ܠܗ ܕܝܢ ܗܘ̣: ܐܝܟ ܗܿ ܕܒܦܘܪܥܢܐ ܕܡܫܠܡܘܬܗ ܡܡܟܠ ܠܗ ܠܫܘܥܒܕܗ ܡܬܘܡܝܢܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܘܬܐ̈ ܘܢܫܡܐ ܕܫܚܡܬܗ ܕܟܠܗܘܢ. ܗܘ ܕܒܫܝܪܐ ܐܦ ܓܙܪ ܘܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܘܡܟܣܡ ܣܘܟܢܗ ܒܡܡܕܪܐ: ܐܠܐ ܡܒܪܟܬܐ ܗܘܬ ܠܝ ܠܚܠܡܐ ܗܘ ܬܡܝܗܘܬܐ ܘܡܫܝܚܐ: ܘܡܠܟܘܗܝ، ܠܒܬ ܠܡܒܕܪ ܡܢ ܗܢܐ ܘܠܡܒܕܪ ܡܢ ܗܢܐ ܘܠܡܗܘܐ ܒܡܗܦ. ܘܗܘ ܒܪܘܢܐ ܟܕ ܐܬܐܘܬܗ ܠܐ ܐܡܪ ܕܠܟܠܬܐ ܕܦܬܠܬܐ ܘܣܢܐ ܕܡܚܝܫ ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܗܦܟܐ ܠܒܘܢ ܗܢܐ. ܐܠܐ ܗܘ̣ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܠܒܫܬܐ ܘܣܘܟܠܐ ܕܝܠܟ ܡܫܬܐ ܠܗ.

[207] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.29 (Bedjan:205:18-19).

[208] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.39.4 (CSCO 554:153-54). ܘܬܘܒ ܡܐ ܕܐܦܩ ܐܢܘܢ ܠܗܠܝܢ ܕܒܝܬ ܐܕܡ ܡܢ ܦܪܕܝܣܐ: ܐܝܟ ܕܒܦܪܨܘܦܐ ܕܪܘܓܙܐ ܐܦܩ ܐܢܘܢ: ܐܝܟ ܗܿ ܕܡܛܠ ܕܥܒܪܬܘܢ ܠܗ ܥܠ ܦܘܩܕܢܐ. ܗܘܘܬܘܢ ܠܒܪ ܡܢܗ. ܐܝܟ ܗܿ ܕܒܥܠܬܐ ܕܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܫܘܝܢ ܡܫܬܩܠ ܡܢܗܘܢ ܒܥܡܪܐ ܕܦܪܕܝܣܐ. ܘܠܓܘ ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܟܠܗܝܢ ܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܩܝܡܐ ܗܘܬ: ܘܡܫܡܠܝܐ ܘܡܕܒܪܐ ܠܘܬ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܠܡܗܘܐ ܕܒܪܘܝܐ ܡܢ ܫܘܪܝܐ ܒܗܘ̈ܢܐ ܕܢܦܩܢ. ܟܕ ܠܘ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܡܥܢܘܬܐ ܐܥܠܬ ܠܡܘܬܐ ܥܠ ܕܒܝܬ ܐܕܡ: ܐܦ ܠܐ ܥܒܪ ܦܘܩܕܢܐ ܐܦܩ ܐܢܘܢ ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܦܪܕܝܣܐ. ܒܝܕܝܥܐ ܗܝ ܕܠܘ ܡܛܠ ܕܢܗܘܘܢ ܒܦܪܕܝܣܐ ܒܡܢܬܐ ܙܥܘܪܬܐ ܕܐܪܥܐ ܒܪܐ ܠܐܕܡ ܘܚܘܐ: ܐܠܐ ܠܟܠܗ ܐܪܥܐ ܥܬܝܕܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܠܡܟܒܫ. ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܐܦ ܠܐ ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܡܛܠ ܦܘܩܕܢܐ ܕܐܬܥܒܪ ܐܦܩ ܐܢܘܢ. ܡܛܠ ܕܠܘ ܐܠܘ ܥܠ ܦܘܩܕܢܐ ܠܐ ܥܒܪܘ ܒܦܪܕܝܣܐ ܠܥܠܡ ܡܫܬܒܩܝܢ ܗܘܘ.

creation. For Isaac, however, God's providential plan existed before the fall. God never intended humanity to remain in its original state of creation so He providently orchestrated the fall, which began a series of events that would help human beings achieve a superior state.

Isaac echoes these sentiments in a second passage, from *Homily* 3.5. Here, Isaac implies that even though God deliberately created Adam with imperfect knowledge — Adam does not even know his right hand from his left and he is gullible enough to believe Satan's lies — God intends to perfect Adam and grant him perfect freedom in the world to come.

> At the beginning of creation, God created Adam, who hardly even knew his right hand from his left and who immediately set out to desire the degree of the divinity, and Satan sowed [this idea] in him as an evil — "You will be as Gods" — and [Adam believed him] in his naiveté, but God, out of the immense love that He [has] for his creation, will perfect him by his work and a diadem of divinity will be given to him for the rest of his days.[209]

In this passage, Isaac does not say that Adam became stupid and gullible after the fall, but that these imperfections were part of God's initial creation. Adam's perfection is accomplished gradually with work. This gradual process of perfection, Isaac says, is a sign of God's providential love for the world. "If the degree of creation is greater in nature than what it [initially] received," he says, "then this should be enough to convince

[209] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 5.9 (CSCO 637:28). ܒܫܘܪܝܗ ܕܒܪܝܬܐ܆ ܟܕ ܒܪܝܗܝ ܐܠܗܐ ܠܐܕܡ܆ ܟܕ ܒܥܡܠ ܠܐ ܝܕܥ ܒܝܬ ܝܡܝܢܐ ܠܣܡܠܐ܆ ܡܚܕܐ ܪܓܐ ܕܐܬܥܒܕ܆ ܠܕܪܓܐ ܕܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܙܪܥ. ܘܠܗܝ ܕܣܛܢܐ ܙܪܥ ܒܗ ܐܝܟ ܕܠܒܝܫܬܐ܆ ܕܬܗܘܘܢ ܐܝܟ ܐܠܗܐ܆ ܘܗܘ ܐܫܪ ܒܦܫܝܛܘܬܗ܆ ܠܒܪܝܬܗ ܐܠܗܐ ܒܚܒܐ܆ ܘܒܣܘܓܐܐ ܕܪ̈ܚܡܬܐ ܐܬܝܗܒ ܠܗ ܠܗ ܬܓܐ ܕܐܠܗܘܬܐ܆ ܟܠܗ ܫܘܡܠܝܐ ܕܗܘ ܕܝܘܡܘܗܝ. Page numbers refer to *Isacco Di Ninive Terza Collezione*, ed. Sabino Chialà, CSCO 637, Scriptores Syri 246 (Louven: Peeters, 2011). Isaac seems to think that he is following biblical evidence for his position that Adam did not even know his right hand from his left. Chialà suggests Gen 4.9-11 as a possible source of inspiration. In these verses, Cain tells God that he does not know the location of his brother Abel, but God replies: "Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand" (NRSV). Isaac interprets Cain's confusion over Abel's location literally: even though the hand that killed Abel is covered with blood, Cain still does not know whether Abel's body is on his left hand or right hand side. Isaac presumes that God created Adam with this same confusion.

you, oh man, that it is a sign of the immensity of the love that God [has] for creation."[210] The truest expression of God's love for human beings is not found in the state of original creation, but in the degree of perfection that awaits human beings in the world to come.

Finally, Isaac supplies the metaphor of a farmer and his seed in order to describe how God uses death to generate the ultimate fruit of the world to come. Isaac spells out this metaphor explicitly in his *Gnostic Chapter* 3.2, but he alludes to it also in *Homily* 1.71.[211] In this homily, Isaac states that God has prepared a "different world" that is more astonishing than this world.

> Since [God] has prepared a different world, which is so astonishing, into which he shall introduce all rational beings and preserve them without distinction until in the life that is without end, what, then, is the reason why he made this [world] first. . .and placed many passions in it?[212]

In order to get to this different world, Isaac says, answering his own rhetorical question, that God reshapes us through death and mixes our image with the earth, like a seed.

> He placed us in this [world] first and implanted in our nature a strong loving desire for our own life, but then he takes it away from us little by little through death and preserves us for no short extent [of time] without sense perception, like stones and wood. [During this time] he destroys our image and scatters our constitution and mixes it into the earth.[213]

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[210] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 5.3 (CSCO 637:27). ܬܘܒ ܒܚܝܠܬܐ܆ ܕܪܓܐ ܪܒ ܗܘ ܗܢܐ ܕܢܫܟܚ ܒܪܝܬܐ܆ ܘܡܘܕܥܐ ܠܟ ܗܝ ܗܕܐ ܐܘ ܒܪܢܫܐ܆ ܠܐܬܐ ܕܪܘܪܒܘܬܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܠܘܬ ܒܪܝܬܐ. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 5.17 (CSCO 637:30), where Isaac says that God made the future world in order to reveal his love.

[211] André Louf discusses Isaac's *Gnostic Chapter* 3.2 in his article, "L'Homme dans l'histoire du salut selon Isaac le Syrien," *CPE* 88 (2002), 49. Also see Isaac's *Gnostic Chapter* 3.2: "Que Dieu ait voulu se servir d'une deuxième réalité, lui qui conduit les être égaux, l'a amené à susciter la réalité antérieure au monde actuel, caractérisé par une variété de différences, mais en vue d'un accomplissement que lui, en tant que semeur, avait d'avance consciemment visé. C'est ainsi qu'il a pu se mettre en mouvement, pour arriver diligemment au moment où il jetterait la semence, le regard fixé avec soin sur ce qui en serait l'issue, une issue que lui-même avait d'avance disposée pour qu'elle devienne un jour réalité." Translation is from *Œvres Spirituelles – II: 41 Discours récemment découverts*, trans. and ed. André Louf, *Spiritualité Orientale* 81 (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 2003), 157.

[212] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:255:6-11). ܟܕ ܥܠܡܐ ܐܚܪܢܐ ܕܗܟܢܐ ܬܡܝܗ ܡܛܝܒ ܗܘܐ ܠܗ܆ ܕܠܗ ܢܥܠ ܐܢܘܢ ܠܟܠܗܘܢ ܡܠܝܠܐ܆ ܘܢܛܪ ܐܢܘܢ ܕܠܐ ܦܘܪܫ ܒܚܝܐ ܕܠܐ ܣܘܦܐ. ܡܢܐ ܗܝ ܟܝ ܥܠܬܐ ܕܥܒܕ ܠܗܢܐ ܠܘܩܕܡ܆ ܟܕ ܪܘܚܗ ܘܦܪܝܫܘܬܗ ܒܡܫܚܠܦܘܬܐ ܡܫܟܚܬܐ ܕܒܢܝܐ܆ ܘܣܡ ܒܗ ܚܫܐ ܣܓܝܐܐ؟

[213] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:255:11-15). ܘܣܡܢ ܒܗ ܠܘܩܕܡ ܒܗܢܐ܆ ܘܩܒܥ ܒܟܝܢܢ ܪܚܡܬܗܘܢ ܡܚܒܬܐ ܕܚܝܝܢ܆ ܘܡܫܩܠ ܠܢ ܡܢܗ ܒܨܘܪܐ ܒܨܘܪܐ ܒܝܕ ܡܘܬܐ܆ ܘܢܛܪ ܠܢ ܙܒܢܐ ܠܐ ܙܥܘܪ ܕܠܐ ܪܓܫܐ ܐܝܟ ܟܐܦܐ ܘܩܝܣܐ܆ ܘܡܚܒܠ ܕܡܘܬܢ܆ ܘܡܒܕܪ ܠܗ ܠܗܕܡܝܢ ܘܡܚܠܛ ܒܗ ܐܪܥܐ.

Once God has used death to refashion the human image and prepare it for the life to come, He raises human beings up in a new image and introduces them into the world to come. Isaac concludes, "Then at the time appointed by his wisdom, according to his will, he raises us in a different image that he knows and introduces us into a different order."[214] Death and the fall are necessary in order for human beings to be raised into a life that is better than their original state of creation, just like a seed, once it is buried in the earth, ultimately grows into something greater than its original constitution.

3.3.3 ASCETICISM AS INHERENT IN CREATION

According to Isaac, death was part of God's original plan from the beginning and not a punishment for the fall. God created human beings mortal so that they could use their bodies to perform ascetical labors that prepare the soul for a life that supercedes the original purity and contemplation of Adam before the fall. In other words, the fall was part of God's original plan from the beginning because it gave human beings an excuse to perform ascetical labor, which is the primary mechanism for achieving a life that is better than the state of original creation.

Isaac says that God created human beings with bodies precisely for the task of performing ascetical service. He explicitly rejects Evagrius' notion of the soul's primordial creation, saying rather that the creation of the body preceded the creation of the soul. In *Homily* 1.4, he says, "Bodily labors precede the services of the soul, just as

[214] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:255:17-19). ܗܝܕܝܢ ܒܙܒܢܐ ܕܡܬܚܡ ܠܚܟܡܬܗ ܐܨܛܒܝ ܪ̈ܒܐ: ܡܩܝܡ ܠܢ ܒܕܡܘܬܐ ܐܚܪܬܐ ܕܗܘ ܝܕܥ: ܘܡܥܠ ܠܢ ܠܗܘ ܛܘܟܣܐ ܐܚܪܢܐ.

in generation the creation of the body preceded [the creation] of the soul."[215] He repeats this same statement again in *Homily* 1.46.[216] In Isaac's view of creation, God created human beings with bodies so that they might use their bodies for ascetical service.

Isaac derives his position regarding God's providential creation of the world and the inherent necessity of asceticism from his exegesis of the biblical text.[217] Due to the work of the Syriac translator and Babai, Isaac finds nothing distinctive about Evagrius's cosmology and he instead turns to the biblical material to formulate his opinion regarding the order of the body and soul in creation. Whereas Evagrius conceived the ordering of the body and the soul based on his cosmology and concluded that the body was created after the soul for the purposes of helping the soul return to its original unity with the Trinity, Isaac's conception of the ordering of the body and soul in creation depends on a literal reading of the Peshitta version of Gen 2.7: "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the earth and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." In his interpretation of this text, Isaac notices that God formed Adam's body before using His breath to fill it with a soul. Isaac is not only concerned to counter Origenist tendencies with this literal reading, but he also says that human beings were designed, from the very moment of their creation, to perform ascetical actions in the

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[215] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.4 (Bedjan:40:19-21). ܡܕܡܟܝ ܟܕ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܩܕܡ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܕܡܬܟܝܢ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܕܡܬܟܝܢ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܕܡܬܟܝܢ ܕܢܦܫܐ.

[216] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.46 (Bedjan:331:18-19). Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.4 (Bedjan:40:19-20): "Bodily labors are prior to service of the soul."

[217] Isaac's biblical exegesis reflects the exegesis of both Theodore Mopsuestia and Narsai. For similarities, see Arthur Vööbus, "Regarding the Theological Anthropology of Theodore of Mopsuestia," *Church History* 33 (1964): 115-24 and Arthur Vööbus, "Theological Reflections on Human Nature in Ancient Syrian Traditions," in *Scope of Grace: Essays on Nature and Grace in Honor of Joseph Sittler* ed. Philip J. Hefner (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 101-19. For explicit connections between the biblical exegesis of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Isaac, see Nestor Kavvadas, "On the Relations between the Eschatological Doctrine of Isaac of Nineveh and Theodore of Mopsuestia," in *SP* 44 ed. J. Baun and others (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 245-50. Kavvadas makes a strong case that Isaac used Theodore's partially extant *Contra defensores peccati originalis* to formulate his eschatological doctrine in *Homily* 2.39.

body.[218] Like Babai, Isaac believes that God intended the soul and body to work together towards the goal of the world to come, for as Isaac says in *Homily* 1.34, "The mind is not glorified with Jesus if the body does not suffer on account of Jesus."[219]

Since the body was created first, according to Isaac, ascetical actions were part of God's original plan for human beings who strive to enter the world to come through intellectual contemplation. Isaac states succinctly, in *Homily* 3.2, that "good mannerism of the body is necessary for virtue of the intellect."[220] Isaac elaborates on this notion that bodily asceticism is necessary for contemplation of God in a number of other passages. For example, in *Homiliy* 1.2, he says that God formed the body so that the soul could use it as a tool for ascetical service, which allows the soul to achieve contemplation.[221]

> Just as it is not possible for the soul to arrive at existence and birth without the complete formation of the body, so too is it impossible for contemplation, which is the second soul, the spirit of revelations, to be fashioned in the womb of the intellect. . .without the corporeal service of virtue, which is the dwelling of knowledge that receives revelations.[222]

Elsewhere, in *Homily* 1.28, Isaac says,

> In six days God ordered the existence of this world and [then] he established the elements and gave their existence motion without rest as their occupation [in the world], for they will not rest from their course until they are finished. It is from the power of these primordial elements that [God] established our body. He did not give these [primordial

[218] The translators of the Greek corpus of Isaac's first set of Isaac's homilies suggest that Isaac's position that the body is created before the soul is a refutation of Origenism. See *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, ed. Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Boston: 1984), n. 1, p. 29.
[219] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.34 (Bedjan:222:14-15). ܠܐ ܡܫܬܒܚ ܗܘܢܐ ܥܡ ܝܫܘܥ܆ ܐܠܐ ܚܫ ܦܓܪܐ ܚܠܦ ܝܫܘܥ܂
[220] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.2.2 (CSCO 637:8). ܠܘܬ ܡܝܬܪܘܬܐ ܕܪܥܝܢܐ ܠܒ ܣܢܝܩܐ ܒܣܟܡܘܬܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ܂ Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.16 (CSCO 637:4).
[221] John Climacus, a rough contemporary of Isaac, presents a similar view towards the body. According to John, the body contributes to the purification of the immortal spirit: "The immaterial spirit can be purified and refined by clay" (Luibheid/Russel:169). Translation refers to John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russel (New York: Paulist Press, 1982). Also see commentary by Kallistos Ware, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 28-30 and Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 235-40.
[222] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.2 (Bedjan:17:13-18). ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܨܝܐ ܕܬܐܬܐ ܠܗܘܝܐ ܘܠܡܬܝܠܕܘ ܢܦܫܐ ܕܠܐ ܫܘܡܠܝܐ ܕܡܬܓܒܠܢܘܬ ܓܒܝܠܬܗ ܕܦܓܪܐ܆ ܗܟܢܐ ܠܐ ܡܨܝܐ ܠܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܢܦܫܐ ܕܬܪܬܝܢ ܕܐܝܬܝܗ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܓܠܝܢܐ܆ ܕܬܬܪܨ ܒܪܚܡܗ ܕܡܕܥܐ ܡܫܡܠܝܐ ܕܠܐܠܐ ܙܪܥܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ܆ ܕܠܐ ܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܓܘܫܡܢܝܐ ܕܡܝܬܪܘܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܝܗ ܒܝܬ ܥܡܪܗ ܕܝܕܥܬܐ ܡܩܒܠܢܝܬܐ ܕܓܠܝܢܐ܀

elements] rest from their motions nor did he allow our body, their offspring, to rest from service.[223]

In both of these passages, Isaac states that God established the body as his first act in the creation of human beings so that the body could perform service (ܦܘܠܚܢܐ) for the soul.

Isaac goes on to interpret Gen 3.19, on Adam's curse, as the biblical mandate to perform ascetical actions, such as fasting. Even though God only cursed Adam after he sinned, Isaac understands the injunction of the curse as a paradigm for God's providence from the very first moment of creation. God intentionally created human beings with bodies that were capable of fasting so that through ascetical actions, human souls would be prepared for the future world.

He made rest the limit for those of us who follow our first ancestors in the dissolution of life. Thus he said to Adam, "You will eat bread by the sweat of your face." Until when? "Until you return to the ground from which you were taken. You will cultivate the ground and it will bring you thorns and thistles." This [quotation] signifies that this world is a world of service for as long as it exists.[224]

Isaac builds on this belief that the world was created to enable bodily service by equating the initial bodily service that Adam was required to perform with ascetical labor that takes place after the time of Christ. His point of connection is the word "sweat," which is found both in the curse of Adam in Gen 3.19 and in the gospel account of Jesus' agony before the crucifixion, in Luke 22.44. He says, still in *Homily* 1.28:

Our Lord, since that night when he sweated, has changed this sweat caused by service to the earth, which bears thorns and thistles, into sweat that arises at the same time as prayer and from the service of righteousness. For five thousand years he allowed [human beings] to work with this [sweat], for the way of the saints had not yet been revealed, as

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[223] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.28 (Bedjan:203:7-13). ܒܫܬܐ ܝܘܡܝܢ ܓܒܠܗ ܐܠܗܐ ܘܡܘܒܕܗ ܘܡܫܡܫܗ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ. ܘܐܩܝܡ ܐܣܛܘܟܣܐ. ܘܦܓܪܢ ܘܡܫܡܫܢܘܬܗܘܢ ܠܢܦܫܐ ܠܐ ܫܒܩܗ ܠܡܬܬܢܝܚܘܬܐ. ܘܠܐ ܕܢܫܠܘܢ ܡܢ ܕܗܠܟܐ ܡܢܗ ܕܢܬܬܪܘܢ. ܘܡܢ ܚܠܩܐ ܕܗܠܝܢ. ܗܘܐ ܕܝܢ ܐܣܛܘܟܣܐ ܐܪܒܥܐ. ܐܩܝܡ ܠܒܣܪܢ ܕܒܠ. ܘܠܐ ܠܗܘܢ ܒܗܘܢ ܫܒܩܐ ܕܡܢ ܙܘܥܝܗܘܢ. ܘܠܐ ܠܦܓܪܢ ܒܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܗܘܢ. ܕܢܢܘܚ ܡܢ ܦܘܠܚܢܐ.

[224] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.28 (Bedjan:203:13-18). ܣܡ ܠܚܠܡ ܕܡܢ ܬܫܡܫܬܐ ܠܢܘܚܐ. ܒܡܕܡ ܕܢܦܩܘܢ ܠܐܒܗܘܢ ܩܕܡܝܐ. ܕܐܬܐܡܪ ܢܦܫܐ ܕܐܒܗܬܢ. ܐܦ ܠܐܕܡ. ܗܟܢܐ ܐܡܪ. ܕܒܕܘܥܬܐ ܕܐܦܝܟ ܬܐܟܘܠ ܠܚܡܟ. ܒܡܕܡ ܠܐܡܬܝ؟ ܒܡܕܡ ܠܡ ܕܬܬܗܦܟ ܠܐܪܥܐ ܕܡܢܗ ܐܬܢܣܒܬ. ܘܐܬܦܠܚ ܒܐܪܥܐ. ܘܬܘܒܠ ܠܟ ܟܘܒܐ ܘܕܪܕܪܐ. ܕܐܬܘܗܝ، ܐܚܪܢܐ. ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܗܘ ܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ. ܒܡܕܡ ܕܚܝ܀

> the Apostle [says]. He came, however, with his grace in later days and ordered our freedom to replace its sweat with the [newer kind] of sweat.[225]

By comparing the sweat promised to Adam in the curse with the sweat of Jesus' agony, Isaac finds continuity between the original ascetical service that is inherit in the creation of Adam and the ascetical practices instituted after the time of Christ.[226] Since the creation of the world, God wants people to "sweat" by performing ascetical service.

Isaac also finds a basis for the necessity of fasting in God's commandment not to eat the fruit from the tree in Gen 2.17. Isaac says, in *Homily* 1.35,

> Since the first commandment that was imposed upon our nature from the beginning cautioned against the tasting of food and therefore resulted in the first corruption, athletes begin instruction in the fear of God from that [same] point when they begin observance of his laws.[227]

Isaac does not say that fasting is a temporary measure for the purpose of fixing a broken relationship with God; rather, the prohibition against eating was required even before the fall. Adam's failure to properly perform his fast for God means that human beings after him must fast in order to restore a state of allegiance to God's original commandment for human beings, which was the ascetical service of fasting. In short, God created human beings with bodies so that they could perform ascetical service that would propel them to a superior state, namely, life in the world to come.

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[225] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.28 (Bedjan:203:19-204:4). ܫܠܝܚܘܬܗ ܕܝܢ ܡܢ ܗܘ ܠܠܝܐ ܕܕܚܠ. ܠܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܕܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܕܒܐܪܥܐ ܡܦܩܕܬ ܒܟܘܒܐ ܘܕܪܕܪܐ: ܠܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܕܒܠܘܬܐ ܐܟܝܢ: ܘܕܒܕܬ ܒܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܕܕܘܥܬܐ. ܣܡܝܐ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܫܟܝܚ ܒܗ. ܫܒܩܗ ܕܢܦܠ. ܒܕܒܒܠ ܠܗ ܐܦ ܠܚܘܒܬ ܗܘܬ ܐܦܪܥܐ ܕܦܪܫܝܐ: ܐܝܟ ܫܠܝܚܐ. ܐܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܒܛܝܒܘܬܗ ܒܚܪܬܐ ܕܝܘܡܬܐ: ܦܩܕܗ ܠܚܐܪܘܬܢ: ܕܬܫܚܠܦ ܠܕܘܥܬܗ ܒܕܘܥܬܐ.

[226] For further references to the positive affect of sweat, see Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:258:22): "sweat is sweeter [than bread]" and *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.43 (Bedjan:316:9-12): "Those who are deprived of the divine love are still eating the bread of sweat until the moment of their service, even though they serve in righteousness, as was commanded to the head of our race when he lost it in the fall." ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܚܘܒܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ ܚܣܝܪܝܢ: ܠܚܡܐ ܕܕܘܥܬܐ ܐܟܠܝܢ ܒܪܓܥ ܒܦܘܠܚܢܗܘܢ: ܐܦ ܒܟܐܢܘܬܐ ܦܠܚܝܢ: ܗܘ ܕܐܬܦܩܕ ܪܫ ܓܢܣܢ ܒܡܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܚܛܗ.

[227] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:239:22-240:5). ܡܛܠ ܕܝܢ ܕܦܘܩܕܢܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ ܕܐܬܬܣܝܡ ܠܟܝܢܢ ܒܫܘܪܝܐ: ܥܠ ܛܥܡܬܐ ܕܡܐܟܘܠܬܐ ܙܗܪܗ: ܘܡܢ ܬܡܢ ܢܦܩ ܚܒܠܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ. ܒܕܘܟܬܐ ܗܝ ܡܢ ܐܝܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܫܘܠܡܐ ܡܬܚܝܐ: ܡܢ ܬܡܢ ܡܫܪܝܢ ܒܝܘܠܦܢܐ ܕܕܚܠܬ ܐܠܗܐ: ܐܝܟ ܕܡܫܪܝܢ ܫܘܪܝܐ ܠܢܛܘܪܘܬܐ ܕܢܡܘܣܘܗܝ.

CONCLUSION

In the first two chapters I showed that Isaac inherited the basic tripartite structure of Evagrius's anthropology, but that he supplemented it with material from the writings of John the Solitary, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Pseudo-Macarius. Evagrius's influence on Isaac's eschatology is another matter. Although Isaac wants to follow the authority of Evagrius, the Syriac translator of Evagrius's *Gnostic Chapters* and Babai's commentary on the same text both made enough changes to Evagrius's texts to render his eschatological system incoherent. Specifically both the Syriac translator and Babai excise the chronological beginning of Evagrius's system, which was the unity of disembodied minds with the Trinity and the primordial fall prior to the creation of the material world, as well as the chronological end of Evagrius's system, which was the return of the minds to the original unity with the Trinity. This editing process left Evagrius's system with only the chronological middle part of the system, that is, the return to purity through asceticism.

When Isaac appropriates this excised version of Evagrius's system, he needs to add a new beginning and a new ending to the kernel of Evagrius's now-broken system. His new beginning is the framework of God's providence that oversaw the creation of the world as a place in which to enact ascetical actions with the body. Isaac says that death and the fall were part of God's providential intentions for the world because the world to come is only made available to humanity as a result of death and the fall. Since the fall is part of God's plan for the process of redemption, Isaac sees every aspect of the fall as crucial for salvation. In particular, he says that the bodily labor assigned to Adam after the fall represents the initial ascetical labor that enables human beings to become worthy

of entering the world come. Since the time of Christ, this bodily labor has taken on the form of monastic asceticism. Likewise, Isaac's new ending is the vision of a future world that is superior to the original state of creation. Entering into this state requires human beings to make use of ascetical actions to propel the soul towards divine contemplation, but also ultimately, to go beyond prayer and transcend nature through the ecstatic experience of wonder.

Since Isaac did not get his eschatology from Evagrius, we must look elsewhere for sources that influenced his eschatology. The next chapter will examine John the Solitary as an important source for Isaac's eschatological emphasis on the world to come.

CHAPTER 4

ISAAC'S FUTURE ORIENTED ESCHATOLOGY: THE INFLUENCE OF JOHN THE SOLITARY

The past three chapters have examined Isaac's dependence on Evagrius's anthropology and eschatology. Isaac's acceptance of Evagrius's anthropology coupled with his rejection of Evagrius's eschatology is surprising, since Evagrius formulated his anthropology to serve his eschatology. According to Evagrius, the passionate parts of the soul are supposed to help return the mind to its original incorporeal purity, but Isaac posits an eschatological system where the future state surpasses the original purity. While Isaac believes that the passionate parts of the soul help restore original purity, this restoration does not propel human beings to their eschatological future state. Isaac says that the soul must transcend its nature by entering into an ecstatic state of wonder before it can experience the future world. Even though Isaac shares some of the basic elements of Evagrius's anthropology, he does not share Evagrius's eschatology.

This chapter will examine the background to Isaac's eschatology and will shed further light on why he developed an eschatology that focuses on the attainment of the future kingdom of heaven instead of an eschatology that focuses on the recovery of Adam's original purity. The thesis of this chapter will be that Isaac bases his eschatology on John the Solitary's obsessive interest in the life of the world to come, which is itself based on a selective reading of Pauline biblical passages.[1] Isaac's selection and use of Pauline phrases, such as "hope to come," "way of the new life," and "inner man,"

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[1] Another source for Isaac's eschatology is Theodore of Mopsuestia, whose importance for Isaac's eschatology has already been noted by Chialà. According to Chialà, Isaac's emphasis on growth towards perfect obedience and immutability in the age to come is dependent on Theodore of Mopsuestia. See Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita: Ricerche su Isacco di Ninive e la sua fortuna* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2002), 94-100.

depends on John's eschatological formulations.[2] This future-oriented eschatology that Isaac derives from John stands in contradistinction to the return to original purity model of Evagrius.

Scholars, beginning with Irénée Hausherr's 1969 designation of John as the "mystic of hope," have already noted the emphasis that John places on hope for the world to come.[3] A large number of John's writings are either on the subject of hope for the world to come or the new life that human beings will experience after the resurrection. Many of the dialogues edited by Werner Strothmann, for example, have the theme of life in the world to come incorporated into the their titles: John supplies the subject heading of "hope to come" for his first dialogue with Thomas while his second dialogue takes the heading of "the transformation that human beings will receive in the life to come."[4] Other dialogues receive similar titles. In his first letter to Theodulos, edited by Lars Rignell, John supplies the subject heading of "mystery of the new life according to the resurrection."[5] Unedited writings on the future life include two treatises on the world to come, a text on promises of the future and promises of the new life, and two texts on the end of the world.[6]

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[2] See Sebastian Brock trans., *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part," Chapters IV-XLI*, CSCO 555, Scriptores Syri 225 (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), xxxviii-xxxix.

[3] See Irénée Hausherr, "Un grand auteur spiritual retrouveé: Jean d'Apamée." *OCP* 14 (1948): 35; Werner Strothmann, *Johannes von Apamea*. Patristische Texte und Studien 11 (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1972), 74-8; Bruce Bradley, "Jean le Solitaire (d'Apamée)," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, ed. Marcel Viller (Paris: G. Beauchesne et Fils, 1937-67) 8.765-72; and René Lavenant, *Dialogues et Traités*, SC 311 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1984), 35-44.

[4] John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 1 (Strothmann:1:2). ܡܬܚܕܬܐ ܕܚܝܐ and *Gespräche* 2 (Strothmann:13:13). ܡܬܚܕܬܐ ܕܚܠܦܘܬܐ ܕܩܢܝܐ ܕܢܫܬܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܕܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܢܦܠ ܒܢܦܫܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܕܩܝܡܬܐ Page and line numbers refer to Werner Strothmann, *Johannes von Apamea*. Patristische Texte und Studien 11 (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1972).

[5] John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:3:3-4). ܪܙܐ ܕܡܬܩܢܝܢ ܠܬܠܡܝܕܝ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܕܩܝܡܬܐ Page and line numbers refer to Lars Gösta Rignell, *Briefe von Johannes dem Einsiedler* (Lund: Håken Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1941).

[6] See the list in Werner Strothmann, *Johannes von Apamea*, 61.

John's interest in the future life stems from his admiration for Paul. Like other mystics and ascetics of his time, he looked to Paul as the exemplar for how to conduct one's life according to the standards of the world to come. Even though the spiritual life of the world to come is normally outside of the nature of most mortal human beings, John states that God granted Paul a special dispensation of grace that helped him lead the spiritual way of life while he was still on this earth.[7] Even though John structures his portrait of the ascetical life around Pauline imagery, his use of the Pauline corpus is nevertheless selective. According to John, Paul's description of the spiritual life centers on the world to come and, as a result, he focuses on Pauline passages that emphasize the transformation that human beings will undergo in the world to come. The promise of future glory in Rom 8.18, the distinction between the inner and outer man from various Pauline passages (Eph 3.16, Rom 7.22, and 1 Cor 4.16), and Paul's distinction between the old man and the new man (Rom 6.6, Eph 2.15, Eph 4.22-24, and Col 3.9-11) all figure in John's picture of the future life of the world to come

John's writings on the world to come emphasize the transformation that human beings will undergo when they enter the world to come. This transformation, which takes place after the resurrection, represents the fulfillment of God's promise of future glory. When this transformation is complete, human beings will shed the way of life of the corporeal man and the outer man and assume the glorious way of life of the spiritual man or the inner man. It is this promise of future glory — the transformation in the world to

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[7] See John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:24:16-18): "In this life, the gift [of the spiritual way of life] is given by God alone to those who know, like Paul, who [God] brought to this measure with the other disciples." ܡܢܗ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܦܠܘܣ ܗܘ ܕܝܕܥ ܠܗ ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܕܥܡ ܫܠܝܚܐ ܐܚܪܢܐ ܕܗܘ ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܕܒܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܒܥܠܡܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܗܘ ܕܝܠܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܒܗ ܡܫܬܡܫ ܒܗ ܫܘܪܝܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ. Page and line numbers refer to *Ein Dialog über Die Seele und Die Affecte des Menschen*, ed. Sven Dedering (Leiden: Brill, 1936). Also see Lars Gösta Rignell, *Drei Traktate von Johannes dem Einsiedler* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup: 1960), 9, who says of this passage: "Ganz besonders hat Johannes sich in die Briefe des Paulus vertieft. Dass er mit seiner Grundeinstellung sich für die Äusserungen des Paulus über seine hohen Gesichte interessiert, ist natürlich."

come — that forms the basis of the hope that should define the life of the monk. Descriptions of the world to come permeate John's writings because John thinks they will provide hope to monks who are struggling with the ascetic life in this world.

The rest of this chapter will determine the nature of Isaac's dependence on John's discussion of this transformation that will occur in the world to come and the hope associated with it. In some places, Isaac's dependence is straightforward and obvious, such as when Isaac copies John's analogy of a snake shedding its skin. In other places, there exists a common use of linguistic phrases.

I will examine Isaac's dependence on John regarding the following themes: the hope to come that defines the life of the monk, the way of the new life in the world to come, and the transformation from the outer man to the inner man. First I will summarize John's Pauline based formulation of each of these themes and then I will show how Isaac builds on John's formulation. This examination of the relationship between Isaac and John will show that while John encouraged monks to obtain knowledge of the world to come in order to provide them with hope amidst their struggles with the monastic life, Isaac goes one step further in his use of language of the world to come. Isaac wants to provide an explanation for how perfect Christians can experience the transformation of the world to come while still in this world. Isaac turns what is a hope for John into a present reality. As a result, he says that knowledge of the world to come can be experienced by the intellect during prayer, even while a person remains in this world.

4.1.1 The Hope to Come According to John the Solitary

John follows Pauline language (i.e., Rom 6.6, Eph 2.15, Eph 4.22-24, and Col 3.9-11) that emphasizes the “hope to come” (ܣܒܪܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ) based on the transformation that human beings will undergo after the resurrection.[8] Since this hope requires a reorientation of the mind away from hope based on temporal things to hope based on a desire for the world to come, he wants monks to be aware of what they should expect in the future world. Monks should pursue knowledge of the world to come.

John recognizes the difficulty in understanding the content of hope based on things that are not fully comprehensible to the human mind, which filters data from sensations of the physical world. He says that human beings in this world are like young children who do not know the physical qualities of the secret gifts that their fathers will someday give to them. Since the gifts are unknown, these children lack the vocabulary to describe the gifts.[9] When Christians describe their hope, they need to use a different vocabulary and a different set of categories than people who do not yet know about the future world. Many people, like the Greek poets whom John uses as an example, mistakenly base their hope on a deep understanding of this world instead of the future world. As a result, their hope is a misguided hope in the things of this world.

> If hope is outside this world, then it is exalted above every [way] of naming [things in] this world. [Therefore, if the Greek poets were to] interpret the things that [Christians] say about the hope of good deeds, [then the Greek poets] would know that they themselves do not speak of what is outside this world.[10]

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[8] In addition to the material cited below, other references to the phrase “hope to come” in John the Solitary’s writings occur in *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:35:21), *Briefe* 2 (Rignell:51:9), and *Gespräche* 1 (Strothmann:6:142-43).

[9] See John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 3 (Dedering:73:1-8).

[10] John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 1 (Strothmann:5:110-14). ܐܢܕܝܢ ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ ܗܘ ܣܒܪܐ܆ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܫ̈ܡܗܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܡܬܥܠܐ. ܐܢܕܝܢ ܡܢ ܫܡܗܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ܆ ܦܫܩܝܢ ܕܢܐܡܪܘܢ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܐܡܪܝܢ ܥܠ ܣܒܪܐ ܕܛܒ̈ܬܗ ܠܫ̈ܐܠܬܐ܆ ܝܕܥܝܢ ܕܗܢܘܢ ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ ܠܐ ܐܡܪܘ.

Christians, by contrast, should describe their hope with the categories of the world to come instead of the categories of the physical world.

In addition to the difficult task of comprehending the gifts of the world to come, John recognizes that this lack of comprehension leads people into evil habits. In an extended commentary on Rom 8.18, John points out that since Paul said that present sufferings should not be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us, an inability to understand the future glory means that a person remains focused on the sufferings of the present world.

> The apostle says that even though he is amazed at the understanding of this great future, [other] human beings do not consider the mystery of the glory and are only aware of his name. Since they only know the title of the promises and for this reason do not wonder at the richness of God, they are not amazed at the beauty of his promises and their intellect does not become fervent and they do not love him, even on account of the gift.[11]

John goes on to say that this inability to understand God's future promises leads to moral failures in this life. Human beings who lack hope for the world to come turn against each other and "treat each other with contempt since they do not know their hope."[12] Failure to know the world to come means that a person becomes overwhelmed by the suffering of the world and, as a result, commits evil actions.

John's implicit assumption in his commentary on Rom 8.18 is that people base their hope on what is familiar to them. A person who does not know the world to come will not hope for it. Therefore John says that monks have a duty to properly know, insofar as they are able, the "hope to come." He continues his commentary on Rom 8.18 by saying that Paul's discussion of future glory concerns the hope to come.

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[11] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 3 (Dedering:73:10-16). ܫܠܝܚܐ ܟܕ ܡܬܕܡܪ ܒܣܘܟܠܐ ܕܗܝ ܪܒܘܬܐ ܕܥܬܝܕܐ ܐܡܪ. ܒܢܝܢܫܐ ܕܝܢ ܒܪܙܐ ܕܫܘܒܚܐ ܐܦ ܓܒܗ ܒܠܚܘܕ. ܒܗ ܕܝܢ ܒܢܝܐ ܕܐܬܡܫܘܚܘܬܐ ܠܐ ܡܬܡܗܝܢ ܥܠܗ. ܘܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܢܕܥܝܢ ܐܠܐ ܐܢ ܒܠܚܘܕ: ܥܘܬܪܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ. ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܠܐ ܒܫܘܦܪܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܬܗܪܝܢ: ܘܠܐ ܒܥܘܬܪܐ ܕܫܘܘܕܝܘܗܝ، ܐܦ ܠܒܗ. ܕܪܬܚ ܪܥܝܢܗܘܢ ܘܢܚܒܘܢܗܝ، ܐܦ ܡܛܠ ܡܘܗܒܬܗ.

[12] See John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 3 (Dedering:73:16-17).

> Since this [matter of knowing the greatness of the world to come] concerns the hope to come, you must be concerned to understand. . .You ought to exercise your intelligence in these things, my beloved, since they are profitable to your life, for his wisdom will carry you to God more so than the wisdom of [these] times.[13]

The phrase "hope to come" is a technical phrase in John's description of the world to come and, as we shall see, Isaac also makes extensive use of this phrase.

Even though it is impossible to know the entirety of the hope to come, some Christians can still have a dim understanding of what constitutes life in the future world.[14] This dim understanding of the hope to come is made possible by the work of Christ, whose own life was a foretaste of the future world. John says that human beings should look to Christ for the content of the hope to come.[15]

> He [Christ] is for us a banner of the new world, such that we look to him and learn the greatness of our hope. At the time of his manifestation, God will raise our bodies to incorruptible life according to His image, or, in other words, the old man gives way to the new man. He will perfect us in that knowledge of the truth so that we will become a new man without the mind of the flesh.[16]

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[13] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 3 (Dedering:73:17-21). ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܥܠ ܣܒܪܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ ܡܬܒܥܐ ܠܟܘܢ ܠܡܣܬܟܠܘ. ܘܗܘܐ ܘܟܝܬ ܐܢܬܘܢ ܚܒܝܒܝ ܕܬܣܬܟܠܘܢ. ܒܗܠܝܢ ܢܗܘܐ ܕܘܪܫܐ ܕܬܪܥܝܬܟܘܢ ܚܒܝܒܝ. ܕܡܢ ܐܢܝܢ ܡܘܬܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܚܝܝܟܘܢ. ܗܝ ܡܢ ܝܬܝܪ ܡܢ ܚܟܡܬܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ. ܚܟܡܬܗ ܗܕܐ ܡܩܪܒܐ ܠܟܘܢ ܠܘܬ ܐܠܗܐ.

[14] See John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 3 (Dedering:60:10-17): "Just as it is impossible for a human being to sense and see the colors of this creation unless he is not first born from the membrane that envelopes the fetus, so too is it impossible for a human being to sense and perceive the mysteries of the spiritual world unless he is first purified from all of his corruption by leaving the purity of labors and occupying himself with the life of knowledge. Since few are those who are have been made worthy through divine assistance to be purified from the corruption of evil deeds, for this reason, few are those who sense the wisdom of the new world." ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܒܪܢܫ ܐܘ ܢܚܙܐ ܒܓܘܢܐ ܕܗܕܐ ܒܪܝܬܐ: ܐܠܐ ܠܡܥܒܕ ܐܬܝܠܕ ܡܢ ܫܠܝܬܗ. ܗܟܢܐ ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܒܪܢܫ ܘܡܣܬܟܠ ܐܪ̈ܙܘܗܝ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ. ܐܠܐ ܠܡܥܒܕ ܐܬܕܟܝ ܡܢ ܟܠܗ ܚܒܠܗ. ܘܫܒܩ ܠܕܟܝܘܬܐ ܕܥܒ̈ܕܐ. ܘܥܢܐ ܒܚܝܐ ܕܝܕܥܬܐ. ܘܡܛܠ ܕܙܥܘܪܝܢ ܐܢܘܢ ܕܫܘܘ ܒܥܘܕܪܢܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ: ܕܢܬܕܟܘܢ ܡܢ ܚܒܠܐ ܕܥܒ̈ܕܐ ܒܝ̈ܫܐ. ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܙܥܘܪܝܢ ܐܢܘܢ ܕܪܓܫܝܢ ܒܚܟܡܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ.

[15] Even before the coming of Christ, John admits, those who took notice of God's providence could discern the hope to come, but with Christ, this hope is now even more accessible. See John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:21:14-17): "Before the manifestation of Christ came with the commandment of life, the hope of the world to come was not proclaimed openly, but it was known through the understanding of God's providence to those who took notice of it." ܥܕܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܢܗܘܐ ܓܠܝܢܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܠܦܘܩܕܢܐ ܕܚܝܐ. ܠܐ ܐܬܟܪܙ ܣܒܪܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ ܓܠܝܐܝܬ. ܐܠܐ ܒܣܘܟܠܐ ܕܡܦܪܢܣܘܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܡܬܝܕܥ ܗܘܐ ܠܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܒܩܝܢ ܗܘܘ.

[16] John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:29:18-30:2). ܘܗܘ ܗܘܐ ܠܢ ܢܝܫܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ. ܕܒܗ ܚܝܪܝܢ ܘܝܠܦ ܪܒܘܬܗ ܕܣܒܪܢ. ܕܒܙܒܢܐ ܕܓܠܝܢܗ ܢܩܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܦܓ̈ܪܝܢ ܠܚܝܐ ܕܠܐ ܚܒܠܐ. ܒܕ ܡܬܬܚܠܦ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܥܬܝܩܐ ܒܚܕܬܐ. ܒܕ ܒܪ ܐܢܫܐ ܚܕܬܐ. ܘܢܓܡܪ ܠܢ ܒܗ ܒܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܫܪܪܐ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܕܠܝܬ ܠܗ ܬܪܥܝܬܐ ܕܒܣܪܐ.

Since the content of Christ's life has been recorded in the Gospel, John can provide descriptions of what constitutes the content of the hope to come.[17] In his letter to Theodulos, he states that "the belief in the hope to come means the following: we believe in the resurrection from the dead and eternal life, that we should receive, in the true knowledge and in the way of life without sins."[18] In *Treatise* 11, he supplies an even fuller list of categories on which monks can build their portrait of the hope to come:

> When we speak of the hope to come, we do not see in it just one banner, one mystery, or one sense, but it contains in it the resurrection from the dead, communion with God, a manner of life [shared] with the angels, a variety of recompenses, ineffable beatitudes, promises, life, a variety of revelations, spiritual knowledge, the wisdom that we will receive, peace that does not have strife from thoughts, true repose that does not have a battle against sins shaking within it, and all the other things that we do not perceive.[19]

Knowledge of the hope to come helps monks overcome their daily struggle against sin.

This brief overview of John's interest in the hope to come shows that it is based on the conviction that knowledge of the world to come will affect one's actions in this world. Since an outline of this hope to come has been made available through the life of Christ and is now contained in the Scriptures, it is the monk's duty to orient his hope in conformity with the Christian portrait of hope, which transcends the physical limitations

[17] See John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:6:4-11): "The way of life of the Gospel keeps a person away from all of these things so that he adheres to [the Gospel] and can exist as if he is in the new life, which is exalted above all of these things and resembles the life of Christ. This word [of the Gospel] is capable of piercing a whole host of [other] words because, just as the life of Christ is exalted above the entire intellect of human beings, so too does the new life introduce in this way of life what our Lord manifests in the service of his good tidings." ܕܕܒܪܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܐܘܢܓܠܝܘܢ ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܡܪܚܩ ܠܒܪܢܫܐ ܕܢܩܦ ܠܗ. ܘܢܫܟܚ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܒܚܝܐ ܚܕܬܐ. ܗܠܝܢ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܟܠܗܝܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܡܬܪܝܡܝܢ. ܘܡܫܬܘܝܢ ܒܚܝܘܗܝ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ. ܕܡܫܟܚܐ ܗܢܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܠܡܦܣܩ ܙܒܢܐ ܬܠܝܢ. ܕܐܝܟ ܕܡܬܪܝܡܝܢ ܚܝܘܗܝ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܢ ܟܠܗ ܬܪܥܝܬܐ ܕܒܢܝ̈ܢܫܐ. ܗܟܢܐ ܡܥܠܝܢ ܚ̈ܝܐ ܚܕ̈ܬܐ ܒܗ ܒܕܘܒܪܐ ܗܘ ܕܒܪܐ ܕܗܘ ܡܪܢ ܒܬܫܡܫܬܐ ܕܣܒܪܬܗ. ܕܗܢܘܢ ܡܢ ܕܒܠܥܕܗ ܠܐ ܫܟܝܚ ܒܗ.

[18] John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:29:14-17). ܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܣܒܪܐ ܥܬܝܕ ܗܕܐ ܗܝ. ܕܡܗܝܡܢܝܢ ܚܢܢ ܒܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܡܝ̈ܬܐ. ܘܒܚ̈ܝܐ ܕܠܥܠܡ ܕܢܩܒܠ ܕܠܐ ܫܘܠܡ ܒܗ. ܒܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܫܪܪܐ ܘܒܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܚܛܗ̈ܐ.

[19] John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 11 (Strothmann:133:175-184). ܕܟܕ ܐܡܪܝܢ ܣܒܪܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ. ܠܘ ܚܕ ܢܝܫܐ ܗܘ ܐܘ ܚܕ ܐܪܙܐ. ܐܘ ܚܕ ܣܘܟܠܐ ܚܙܝܢ ܒܗ. ܐܠܐ ܒܗ ܡܫܟܚܐ ܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܡܝ̈ܬܐ ܘܫܘܬܦܘܬܐ. ܐܠܗܝܬܐ ܘܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܥܡ ܡܠܐܟ̈ܐ ܘܫܘ̈ܚܠܦܐ ܕܦܘܪ̈ܥܢܐ. ܛܘ̈ܒܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠܝܢ. ܘܡܘܠܟ̈ܢܐ ܘܚ̈ܝܐ. ܘ ܫܘ̈ܚܠܦܐ ܕܓܠܝ̈ܢܐ. ܘܝܕܥܬܐ ܪ̈ܘܚܢܝܬܐ. ܘܚܟܡܬܐ ܕܥܬܝܕܝܢ ܕܢܩܒܠ. ܘܫܝܢܐ ܕܠܝܬ ܒܗ ܬܟܬܘܫܐ ܕܚܘܫ̈ܒܐ. ܘܢܝܚܐ ܫܪܝܪܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܬܙܝܥ ܒܗ ܩܪܒܐ ܕܠܘܩܒܠ ܚܛܗ̈ܐ. ܒܗ ܐܚܪ̈ܢܝܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܪ̈ܓܫܢ ܠܢ ܒܗ.

of this world. The monk who lives according to the hope to come will move beyond a life ruled by the passions and instead focus on the spiritual realities of the future world.

4.1.2 THE HOPE TO COME ACCORDING TO ISAAC OF NINEVEH

Isaac also emphasizes the importance of hope for the world to come. “There is nothing else capable of liberating the intellect from the world,” Isaac states in *Homily* 3.1, “like the toil of hope.”[20] In particular, Isaac assimilates John’s Pauline understanding of the phrase “hope to come.”[21] The main difference between Isaac and John, however, is that Isaac specifically locates the origin of knowledge concerning the hope to come within prayer. While John said that knowledge of the hope to come may be derived from one’s reading of the Gospel, Isaac instead emphasizes the reception of knowledge of the hope to come during prayer. In *Homily* 1.35, for example, Isaac defines prayer as an entrance into a state of existence that resembles life in the world to come. Prayer, he says, “is a mystery for the existence of that way of life to come, such that nature is elevated and desists from all impulses of the memory of the things that are here [in this world].”[22] Elsewhere, in *Homily* 1.74, he incorporates the phrase “hope to come” into his

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[20] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.1.16 (CSCO 637:6). ܠܝܬ ܡܕܡ ܕܫܠܝܛ ܠܚܪܪܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ܂ ܐܝܟ ܥܡܠܐ ܕܣܒܪܐ܂ Page numbers refer to *Isacco Di Ninive Terza Collezione*, ed. Sabino Chialà, CSCO 637, Scriptores Syri 246 (Louven: Peeters, 2011). Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.3.5 (CSCO 637:28), where Isaac speaks of the “hope for things to come.”

[21] Although he does not cite specific biblical passages, Waclaw Hryniewicz notes Isaac’s Pauline emphasis on the hope to come. See Waclaw Hryniewicz, “Hoffnung der Heiligen: Das Zeugnis Isaaks des Syrers,” *OS* 45 (1996), 29: “Isaak beruft sich immer wieder auf die Autorität des Apostels Paulus, auch dann, wenn er von der Hoffnung auf die endgültige Vollendung der Welt in Gott spricht.”

[22] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:260:4-6). ܐܪܙܐ ܗܘ ܕܗܘܝܐ ܗܘ ܕܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ܂ ܒܡܬܬܥܠܝܢܘܬܐ ܘܫܠܐ ܟܝܢܐ܆ ܡܢ ܟܠܗ ܙܘܥܐ ܕܥܘܗܕܢܐ ܕܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܗܪܟܐ܂ Page and line numbers refer to *Mar Isaacus Ninivita De Perfectione Religiosa*, ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris: Nihil Obstat, 1908; repr. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007). Also see Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.63 (Bedjan:438:3-6), where Isaac states that reflection on the hope to come leads to a limpid mind during prayer. A mind in such can focus on spiritual thoughts rather than thoughts concerning the attributes of the physical world. He states, “In so much as the intellect dismisses the reflections on those things that are seen, my beloved, and reflects on that

definition of prayer. Prayer, he says, "is the freedom of the intellect from everything that is here and a heart that turns its gaze completely towards a longing for that hope to come."[23] According to Isaac, prayer is the occasion when the intellect frees itself from the distractions of the material world and discovers the hope to come.

Isaac also credits knowledge of the hope to come as the means for reversing moral failures, which consume the monk who places his hope in this world. In *Homily* 1.61, he states that perception of the hope to come helps a person advance beyond the deficiencies of the soulish level of the ascetical life, which is dominated by the bodily passions.

> When [a person] perceives that hope to come and turns his intellect to the things of this world so that he [considers] how defective the soulish life is in comparison with the hope preserved for the world in the new life, he becomes dead to all transitory things and anxiety for them and all passions of the body and soul die in him.[24]

Likewise, in *Homily* 2.29, he says that once a monk frees his intellect from the concerns and passions of the physical world and begins to meditate on the hope to come, then he becomes free to order his life towards ascetical labor and service.

> The intellect of the person who is occupied with the Scriptures for the sake of truth continually dwells in heaven. He makes conversation with God at every moment and his thoughts become absorbed in desire for the world to come. This world is continually disdainful to his eyes and his intellect muses on that hope to come and throughout all his life he does not chose any other deed, labor, or service that is greater than this one.[25]

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hope to come, in accordance with the measure of its elevation above bodily thoughts and intercourse with them, then [to the same extent the intellect] will become accustomed to subtleties and become limpid during prayer." ܟܠ ܕܡܟܐ ܕܥܫܡ ܪܚܡܐ: ܗܟܢܟܢ: ܪܢܝܐ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܚܙܝܢ: ܘܪܢܐ ܒܗܘ ܣܒܪܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ: ܠܦܘܬ ܡܫܘܚܬܐ ܕܡܬܥܠܝܘܬܗ ܕܡܢ ܪܢܝܐ ܕܦܓܪܢܝܐ ܘܚܘܠܛܢܗ ܕܥܡܗܘܢ: ܗܟܢܐ ܡܬܗܪܓܠ ܘܗܘܐ ܥܫܝܫܐ ܒܨܠܘܬܐ.

[23] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.74 (Bedjan:508:4-5). ܫܦܝܘܬܐ ܕܬܪܥܝܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܟܠ ܕܬܡܢ: ܘܠܒܐ ܕܐܗܦܟ ܚܝܪܗ ܒܟܠܗ ܠܘܬ ܪܓܬܐ ܕܗܘ ܣܒܪܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ.

[24] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.61 (Bedjan:397:7-12). ܗܢܐ ܚܘܫܒܐ ܒܡܬܬܝܕܥܢܘܬܐ ܕܕܡܟܘܬܐ ܡܚܠܝ ܒܒܪܢܫܐ: ܗܟܢܐ ܕܚܙܐ ܠܗ ܒܗܘ ܣܒܪܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ: ܘܦܢܐ ܒܪܢܝܗ ܥܠ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ. ܕܟܡܐ ܚܣܝܪܝܢ ܚܝܐ ܢܦܫܢܝܐ: ܡܢ ܗܘ ܣܒܪܐ ܕܢܛܝܪ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܒܚܝܐ ܚܕܬܐ. ܘܒܗܢܐ ܡܝܬܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܢܗ: ܠܟܠܗܝܢ ܒܪܘܢܝܬܐ ܘܝܨܦܬܐ ܕܒܗܘܢ. ܘܡܝܬܝܢ ܒܗ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܚܫܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܘܕܢܦܫܐ.

[25] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.8.16 (CSCO 554:24). ܐܝܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܬܗܓܐ ܫܪܪܐ ܚܠܦ ܒܟܬܒ̈ܐ: ܐܡܝܢܐܝܬ ܒܫܡܝܐ ܡܕܡܪ ܗܘܢܗ. ܘܥܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܟܒܪ ܡܡܠܠܐ ܒܟܠܙܒܢ. ܘܡܢ ܚܠܦ ܟܠ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ ܦܫܝܩ ܡܚܫܒ̈ܬܗ: ܘܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ ܡܒܣܪܐ ܒܥܝܢܘ̈ܗܝ: ܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ ܘܡܗܪܐ ܗܘ ܥܠܡܐ ܗܪ ܠܗ ܗܘܢܗ. ܘܟܠܗ ܚܝ̈ܘܗܝ ܘܗܟܢܐ ܕܝܬܝܪ ܡܢ ܗܢܐ ܠܐ ܓܒܐ ܥܒܕܐ ܥܡܠܐ ܘܦܘܠܚܢܐ.
Page numbers refer to *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part,' chapters IV-XLI*, ed. Sebastian Brock, CSCO 554, Scriptores Syri 224 (Louven: Peeters, 1995).

Finally, in *Homily* 1.62, Isaac says that once a person is "confirmed in the hope to come, he is struck with love.[26] In short, knowledge of the hope to come reorients a person from a life ruled by the passions to a life ruled by love and ascetical actions.

Isaac, like John, places his understanding of the hope to come within the context of monastic living. He believes that it is necessary to know the content of the hope to come in order to successfully ward off the passions. Knowledge of the hope to come is a reorientation of one's mind away from the distractions of this world towards the mysteries of the world to come. The main difference between John and Isaac is that Isaac places the reception of knowledge of the world to come within prayer.

4.2.1 The Inner and Outer man: Knowledge in the New World According to John the Solitary

A second Pauline motif in John's theology of future hope is the distinction between the inner and outer man, based on 2 Cor 4.16. According to John, the human being who takes up ascetical labor in this life will undergo a transformation from the outer man to the inner man that is made complete in the world to come.

In the *Dialogue on the Soul and Passions*, John quotes a number of Pauline biblical passages, including Eph 3.16, 2 Cor 4.16, and Rom 7.22, which show that one's way of life differs based on whether knowledge is derived from either the senses of the inner man or the outer man.[27] When the monk frees himself from the corporeal ways of

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[26] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.62 (Bedjan:430:5-7): "When he reaches true knowledge by the motion of the perception of the mysteries of God and is confirmed in the hope to come, he is struck with love." ܟܕ ܕܝܢ ܠܗܘ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܫܪܪܐ ܢܡܛܐ܆ ܒܡܬܬܙܝܥܢܘܬܐ ܕܡܪ ܓܫܢܘܬܐ ܕܐܪ̈ܙܘܗܝ ܕܐܠܗܐ܆ ܘܡܫܬܪܪ ܒܣܒܪܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ܆ ܒܚܘܒܐ ܡܬܒܠܥ.

[27] John lists all of these passages together in support of his distinction between the inner and outer man in John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:8:7-20).

knowing associated with the outer man, John says, the senses of his inner man become free to obtain spiritual knowledge.

> [When he has freed himself] from the renunciation of the passion of loving desire for money, as I have said, [this person] begins the way of life of the inner man, which generates limpidity of soul. Next, [when he has achieved] limpidity of soul and beyond, he begins the way of the new life with an increase in continual knowledge.[28]

The transformation from the outer man, who is dominated by the passions and desire for things of this world, gives way to the inner man, whose life is ruled by a new way of life that is based on knowledge.

In addition to these biblical passages, John also uses the metaphor of a snake to describe the transformation from the outer man to the inner man. Just as a snake sheds his outer skin in order to re-clothe himself with his inner skin, so too does the monk shed his outer skin in order to clothe himself with the inner man.

> As for this sense, [see what] our Lord has given to us in the example of the serpent's prudence: just as the serpent knows that he is unable to shed his old habit in a vast, wide-open space, but when he brings himself into an enclosed (ܐܠܝܨܘܬܐ) space and narrow edges, he stretches out his flesh and emaciates himself with suffering (ܐܘܠܨܢܐ) [because he knows that] while creeping out his old skin will be re-clothed [as he creeps] through the edges, then he will go out and when he newly arises his skin will be left behind.[29]

In this passage, John uses a paronomasia to exploit the double meaning of the similar sounding words ܐܠܝܨܘܬܐ and ܐܘܠܨܢܐ in Syriac. In addition, to their similar pronunciations (almost homophonic), they both have similar double meanings: both words can mean either "suffering" or "narrow." By using these two words in parallel structure, John intends to say that the enclosed, narrow space where monks shed their

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[28] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:7:26-8:7). ܕܠܬܪܥ ܕܝܢ ܐܝܟ ܠܬܪܥܝܬܐ ܕܡܬܬܣܝܡ ܠܝ ܒܡܠܬܐ ܐܚܪܢܐ. ܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܬܬܣܝܦ ܒܗܢܐ ܕܗܒܪܐ ܕܐܡܪܬ. ܡܟܐ ܕܫܪܐ ܐܘܪܚܐ ܕܢܬܠ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܡܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܕܟܠܗܝܢ. ܐܝܟ ܗܟܐ ܕܫܩܠ ܠܡܡܠܠ ܒܡܠܝ ܫܝܢܐ. ܡܢ ܡܫܪܪܘܬܐ ܗܟܝܠ ܕܚܫܐ ܕܪܚܡܬ ܟܣܦܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪܬ: ܫܪܐ ܒܐܘܪܚܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܕܒܪܢܫܐ ܓܘܝܐ. ܗܘ ܕܡܘܠܕ ܠܫܦܝܘܬܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ. ܡܢ ܫܦܝܘܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܘܠܥܠ. ܫܪܐ ܒܐܘܪܚܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܒܬܘܣܦܬܐ ܕܝܕܥܬܐ ܐܡܝܢܬܐ.

[29] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 2 (Dedering:41:11-17). ܕܐܝܟ ܗܢܐ ܗܘܫܐ ܝܗܒ ܠܢ ܡܪܢ ܒܕܘܡܝܐ ܕܚܟܝܡܘܬܗ ܕܚܘܝܐ. ܕܐܝܟ ܚܘܝܐ ܕܝܕܥ ܕܠܐ. ܕܒܐܪܝܟܘܬܐ ܘܦܬܝܘܬܐ ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܫܠܚ ܐܣܟܡܗ ܥܬܝܩܐ: ܐܠܐ ܟܕ ܒܐܘܠܨܢܐ ܐܠܝܨܘܬܐ ܘܒܩܛܢܐ ܕܦܘܪܣܐ ܥܠ ܢܦܫܗ: ܘܡܬܚ ܒܗ ܒܣܪܗ ܘܡܬܢܨܝܐ ܒܥܩܬܗ ܘܒܐܘܠܨܢܐ ܘܐܠܘܨ ܠܦܘܡܐ: ܡܬܡܟܝܢ ܫܠܚܐ ܠܡܫܟܗ ܥܬܝܩܐ ܒܝܬ ܩܛܢܐ: ܘܗܘ ܢܦܩ ܒܗ ܚܕܬܐܝܬ ܘܡܫܬܒܩ ܫܠܚܗ.

outer man is the suffering and affliction of ascetical labor. He goes on to say, "Through the discipline of sufferings and the labor of intellectual endurance, the inner man will shed from [his old habit] the way of life of the old man and when he sheds all of his old habit, he will produce from his body every sort of purity."[30] This imagery of the shedding of the snakeskin is a distinctive manner of depicting the transformation from the outer man to the inner man that occurs after the resurrection.

John reiterates his Pauline image of the transformation from the outer man to the inner man in the first dialogue. In this text, he makes a distinction between a mode of knowing that depends on the physical senses of the body and a mode of knowing that depends on the spiritual senses. The mode of knowing that depends on the physical senses describes the outer man, while the mode of knowing that depends on the spiritual senses describes the operation of the spiritual man.

> Just as in the corporeal world, our outer man has thoughts in corporeal forms, such that all his reflections are a corporeal image since, in the corporeal life, it is impossible to think about things that are outside [the realm of] color, shape, and structure. Therefore, in our world of the true man, this corporeal man would not be like [the spiritual man] because [the spiritual man] would not be moved by things that are outside our spiritual man. Just as the inner [man] clothes himself with the forms of outside things in the corporeal world, so too does the outside man clothe himself with the forms of the inner man in the spiritual world.[31]

John's use of the phrase outer man in this passage serves the purpose of describing the way that that material human beings register knowledge. This way of knowing is associated with the physical senses and leads to knowledge of the physical world. The

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[30] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 2 (Dedering:41:17-20). ܗܟܢܐ ܐܦ ܗܢ ܒܝܕ ܕܘܪܫܐ ܕܐܘܠܨܢܐ ܘܒܥܡܠܐ ܕܡܣܝܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܪܥܝܢܐ· ܢܗܘܐ ܫܠܚ ܡܢܗ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܓܘܝܐ ܟܠܗ ܕܘܒܪܗ ܕܒܪܢܫܐ ܥܬܝܩܐ. ܘܡܐ ܕܫܠܚ ܠܗ ܠܟܠܗ ܥܝܕܘܬܐ. ܢܗܘܐ ܡܦܩ ܡܢ ܦܓܪܗ ܟܠܗ ܕܟܝܘܬܐ.

[31] John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 1 (Strothmann:10:249-58). ܐܝܟܢܐ ܓܝܪ ܕܒܥܠܡܐ ܦܓܪܢܝܐ ܒܪܢܫ ܓܘܝܐ ܒܐܣܟܡܝܗܘܢ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ ܒܡܫܓܚܬܗ· ܗܘ ܕܟܠܗܝܢ ܡܬܪܥܝܢܘܬܗ ܨܠܡܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܐܝܬܝܗܝܢ· ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܡܨܐ ܐܢܫ ܡܬܪܥܐ ܒܚܝܘܗܝ ܕܦܓܪܐ· ܡܕܡ ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܓܘܢܐ ܘܐܣܟܡܐ ܘܬܘܪܨܐ· ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܒܥܠܡܢ ܕܒܪܢܫ ܫܪܝܪܐ· ܗܢܐ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܦܓܪܢܝܐ ܐܝܟܘܬܗ ܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ· ܒܕ ܠܐ ܡܬܬܙܝܥ ܒܗ ܡܕܡ ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܒܪܢܫ ܪܘܚܢܐ. ܐܝܟܐ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܠܓܘ ܗܢܐ ܠܒܫ ܐܣܟܡܝܗܘܢ ܕܗܢܐ ܕܠܒܪ· ܒܥܠܡܗ ܕܗܢܐ ܦܓܪܢܝܐ· ܗܟܢܐ ܠܒܫ ܗܘܐ ܕܠܒܪ ܐܣܟܡܝܗܘܢ ܕܗܢܐ ܕܠܓܘ ܒܥܠܡܐ ܕܗܢܐ ܪܘܚܢܐ.

inner man, on the other hand, registers knowledge with the spiritual senses, which come from the spiritual body that human beings will receive in the world to come.

Since, according to John, the corporeal senses obscure spiritual knowledge, they are a hindrance to the inner man. He says that spiritual images are "sick in the body" and that the inner man is "imprisoned" in the body.[32] John describes the difference between the two modes of knowing in the following passage:

> This inner man is the nature of the soul because he accomplishes everything that is in the creation [of the soul] with his senses: the understanding, knowledge, etc. But just as one is imprisoned in the body, and is not separated from it [the body] through knowledge, one is not able to be moved in his senses inside the body, but therefore goes forth from within the inner part of the body to the spiritual world.[33]

John does not mean that the soul is imprisoned in the body in the same way that Evagrius saw the body as a temporary location for the soul until the soul could acquire knowledge; rather, John means that the body's way of registering knowledge prevents the spiritual man from receiving knowledge according to the spiritual senses. Human beings can have spiritual knowledge only when they have a spiritual body that provides the inner man with spiritual insights.

John also discusses the relationship between the inner and outer man in his second letter, addressed to Eutropios and Eusebius. In this text, he takes up the issue of "education" (ܬܪܒܝܬܐ) for the knowledge of the inner man."[34] As we will see below, this concern for the "education" of the inner man will influence Isaac, who shares this terminology. When John uses the phrase, he implies that the education of the inner man primarily consists of the renunciation of possessions. He says outright that "the

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[32] See John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 1 (Strothmann:10:239-32).

[33] John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 1 (Strothmann:9:226-31). ܗܟܢܐ ܐܦ ܗܢܐ ܒܪܢܫ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܒܢܝܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ܆ ܒܗ̇ ܡܫܡܠܐ ܒܪ̈ܓܫܘܗܝ، ܟܠܗܘܢ ܒܒܪܝܬܗ̇. ܕܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ ܣܘܟܠܐ܆ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܥܡ ܫܪܟܐ܆ ܐܠܐ ܒܡܟܐ ܕܒܦܓܪܐ ܚܒܝܫ܆ ܘܠܐ ܐܬܦܪܫ ܡܢܗ ܒܝܕܥܬܗ܆ ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܡܬܬܙܝܥ ܒܪ̈ܓܫܘܗܝ، ܒܓܘ ܦܓܪܐ܆ ܐܠܐ ܠܗܕܐ ܢܦܩ ܡܢ ܓܘ ܓܘܝܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܪܘܚܢܐ.

[34] John the Solitary, *Briefe* 2 (Rignell:41:18-19).

renunciation of possessions is the beginning of the way of life of the inner man."[35] John means that the person who stops introducing sensations from the physical world into the intellect will begin the process of freeing the inner man from the bond that the passions have on him. The monk operates with the way of life of the inner man only when he frees himself from the distractions introduced into the intellect by the outer man.

> When a person grows in the hope of faith for the life to come, he begins to scorn things that are seen, and when he neglects the things which are placed before the vision of his eyes, then he also begins to [hold] in contempt the things that are moved in his intellect: I mean the evil passions, which begin inside [a person] but are seen in manifest actions.[36]

John goes on to say that when the soul is freed from the passions, the monk is free to live the way of the new life.[37] The education of the inner man is the path to this freedom.

In summary, John exhibits a strong interest in what he calls the "education of the inner man," that is, the transformation from the outer man to the inner man that is begun in this world with ascetical labor, but is not fully completed until the world to come. The outer man is the part of the human being that receives and processes stimuli from the physical world while the inner man processes spiritual stimuli contained within the human intellect. Since the stimuli that one receives from the outer man are the fodder for the passions, John characterizes the abandonment of desire for physical things in terms of liberation from prison. The monk who focuses on stimuli received by the inner man alone is free to move beyond the passions and obtain knowledge of the heavenly realm. Although he normally bases this transformation from the outer man to the inner man on citations from Pauline texts, John's most striking example is the non-biblical image of the

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[35] John the Solitary, *Briefe* 2 (Rignell:64:18-65:1). ܡܣܪܩܘܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܩܢܝܢܐ܆ ܫܘܪܝܐ ܗܘ ܕܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܒܪ ܐܢܫܐ ܓܘܝܐ.

[36] John the Solitary, *Briefe* 2 (Rignell:56:4-10). ܡܐ ܕܪܒ ܕܐܢܫ ܐܬܬܪ ܒܣܒܪܐ ܕܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܕܥܬܝܕܝܢ܆ ܡܫܪܐ ܠܗ ܕܢܒܣܐ ܒܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܚܙܝܢ. ܘܡܐ ܕܫܒܩ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܣܝܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܚܙܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܘܗܝ، ܗܝܕܝܢ܆ ܡܫܪܐ ܐܦ ܒܡܫܝܛܘܬܐ ܕܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܬܙܝܥܢ ܒܡܕܥܗ. ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܥܠ ܚܫܐ ܒܝ̈ܫܐ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܠܓܘ ܡܫܪܝܢ܆ ܘܡܕܝܢ ܡܬܚܙܝܢ ܒܣܘܥܪܢܐ ܓܠܝܐ.

[37] See John the Solitary, *Briefe* 2 (Rignell:56:10-20).

snake, who sheds his outer skin in a narrow place so that the inner skin will manifest itself. The narrow place in this metaphor represents ascetical service, which is required in order to free the inner man from bondage to the outer man.

4.2.2 The Inner and Outer man: Knowledge in the New World According to Isaac of Nineveh

Scholars have already noted Isaac's general interest in the distinction between the inner and outer man.[38] In particular, Isaac, like John, shows concern for the "education of the inner man." Evidence for this concern comes from *Homily* 2.3, which Isaac entitles with John's exact phrase, "On the education of the inner man."[39] In this homily, Isaac characterizes the education of the inner man in similar terms to the way John had described the transformation from the outer man to the inner man. He begins the homily by contrasting the difference between knowledge that comes through the senses and leads to the way of life of this world and true knowledge that is separate from the senses.

> Insofar as a person approaches knowledge of the truth, he withdraws from the operation of the senses and he continually leans towards the silence of separation [from the senses], but insofar as he approaches the way of life of this world in his service, he acquires the vehemence and wakefulness of the senses.[40]

Isaac goes on to describe the mystical transformation that occurs when the monk abandons service to the physical senses and fully yields to spiritual operations. Since the senses are incapable of perceiving the mysteries of heaven, they impede full perception of the

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[38] See André Louf, "L'homme dans l'histoire du salut selon Isaac le Syrien," *CPE* 88 (2002): 49-54 and Sabino Chialà, "Le péché de l'homme et la miséricorde de Dieu dans l'enseignement d'Isaac de Ninive," *Buisson Ardent: Cahiers Saint-Silouane l'Athonite* 16 (2010): 67-79.

[39] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.13 (CSCO 554:55). ܐܝܟ ܕܡܢ ܕܥܒܕ ܡܬܚܙܐ ܠܗ

[40] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.13.1 (CSCO 554:55). ܟܕ ܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܕܝܢܐ ܕܥܒܕ ܡܬܦܪܫ ܡܢ ܦܥܠܐ ܕܚܘܫܐ ܘܡܬܬܝܠ ܠܫܬܩܐ ܕܦܪܘܫܐ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܕܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܗܢܐ ܒܦܠܚܢܘܬܗ ܡܬܩܢܐ ܠܗ ܚܝܠܐ ܘܡܨܝܐ ܕܚܘܫܐ ܕܦܪܘܫܐ ܕܥܠ ܕܟܝ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܡܥ ܠܗ ܡܕܡ ܕܥܠ ܪܙܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܡܬܚܙܐ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܕܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܗܢܐ ܒܦܠܚܢܘܬܗ ܡܬܩܢܐ ܠܗ ܚܝܠܐ ܘܡܨܝܐ ܕܚܘܫܐ ܕܦܪܘܫܐ ܕܥܠ ܕܟܝ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܡܥ ܠܗ ܡܕܡ ܕܥܠ ܪܙܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܡܬܚܙܐ ܠܗ

mysteries. Once a person learns to ignore impulses that derive from the senses, the inner man begins to obtain knowledge of the world to come.

> The way of life and the manner of this life yield to the administration of the senses, but the way of the life to come [yields] to spiritual operation. Whenever a person is deemed worthy of that knowledge, his limbs suddenly cease [to function] and he falls into stillness and silence, for all use of the senses come to an end in that mode of the new life. The senses cannot endure to encounter that mystery in this world, even though they cease from their activity at the time of repentance as though they are in some kind of sleep; nevertheless it is not they [the senses] who encounter [the mystery], but the inner man. "May God grant you to know the power of the world to come," and you will immediately cease from all use of life here.[41]

Like John, Isaac believes that the inner man is the part of a human being that is capable of receiving spiritual stimuli that lead to knowledge of the mysteries of the world to come, but this knowledge is only available once one sheds the outer man, that is the administration of the senses.

Isaac resembles John, not only in his understanding of the education of the inner man, but also in his conception of the imprisonment of the inner man and in his use of John's image of the snake as a metaphor for the shedding of the outer man. Isaac, however, does not just repeat John's teachings verbatim; rather he adapts them to fit within his entire ascetical system. While John did not say that human beings could participate in the world to come in this life, Isaac believes that participation in the world to come is possible in this life through the mental faculties. For this reason, he associates the inner man not with the spiritual body that human beings will receive after the resurrection, but with the mind (ܡܕܥܐ) or intellect (ܪܥܝܢܐ). In *Homily* 2.8, he says,

> The way of life of the inner man is a symbol of that way of life that is after the resurrection. This [way of life] is not made complete by bodily actions, but is perfected

[41] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.13.2 (CSCO 554:55). ܕܘܒܪܐ ܘܗܘܦܟܐ ܕܚܝ̈ܐ ܗܠܝܢ: ܠܬܫܡܫܬܐ ܕܪ̈ܓܫܐ ܡܫܬܥܒܕ. ܘܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܥܬܝܕ ܠܡܥܒܕܢܘܬܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܬܐ. ܘܟܠ ܐܡܬܝ ܕܠܗ̇ܝ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܡܫܬܘܐ ܐܢܫܐ. ܘܡܚܕܐ ܒܛܠܝܢ ܗܕ̈ܡܘܗܝ ܘܢܦܠ ܒܫܠܝܐ ܘܫܬܩܐ. ܡܛܠ ܕܒܗܘ ܗܘܦܟܐ ܕܚܝ̈ܐ ܚܕ̈ܬܐ ܟܠܗ̇ ܚܫܚܬܐ ܕܪ̈ܓܫܐ: ܟܠ ܕܐܦ ܠܐ ܒܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ ܡܫܟܚܝܢ ܪ̈ܓܫܐ ܠܡܦܓܥ ܒܗܘ ܐܪܙܐ: ܐܦ ܐܢ ܕܒܥܕܢܐ ܕܬܝܒܘܬܐ ܦܢܝܢ ܡܢ ܣܘܥܪ̈ܢܝܗܘܢ ܒܕܡܘܬ ܫܢܬܐ. ܒܪ ܕܠܐ ܠܗ ܗܢܘܢ ܗܘ ܕܦܓܥܝܢ. ܐܠܐ ܗܘ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܕܠܓܘ. ܢܬܠ ܠܟ ܠܟ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܬܕܥ ܚܝܠܗ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ: ܘܦܬܟܡ ܐܢܬ ܡܒܛܠ ܡܢ ܟܠܗ ܚܫܚܬܐ ܕܚܝ̈ܐ ܕܬܢܢ.

> and perceived by the impulses of the mind. Here, because it is still a symbol of that true [way of life], it is made complete by numerous reflections. Beyond, as in that which is the limit of all things, it is reduced to a single reflection, if it is right to call it that, for it is, rather, delightful sight and vision without distraction.[42]

According to Isaac, the transformation from the outer man to the inner man frees the mind to pursue truths of the heavenly world, which is a proleptic taste of direct vision of God reserved for the world to come.

In *Homily* 1.14, Isaac compares the relationship between the inner man and the outer man by using John's imagery of the imprisonment. According to Isaac, the outer man engages in ascetical labors that are appropriate to this world, but the inner man engages in activities that are more appropriate to the new world. Like John, he refers to the condition of this world as a prison for the inner man, although he softens John's controversial statement that it is the body that is the prison by instead identifying this world as the prison. He then notes that the intellect (ܗܘܢܐ) pursues the journey towards the new world once it is freed from the prison of this world.

> You have labored with the outer man in service to God, but the inner man is still without fruits. . .When you have reached the place of tears, then it is understood that the intellect (ܗܘܢܐ) has left the prison of this world and has set its foot on the journey towards the new world.[43]

For Isaac, the intellect represents the inner man that is freed from the prison of the corporeal world when it begins its journey to the new world.

In addition to the prison image, Isaac also adopts the snake metaphor to describe the transformation from the outer man to the inner man. Once again, Isaac centers this

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[42] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.8.2 (CSCO 554:21). ܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܒܪܢܫܐ ܠܗܠ ܐܝܟ ܐܪܙ ܡܩܦܐ ܗܘ ܕܒܥܠܬܐ ܡܫܬܡܠܝܐ. ܗܘ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܣܘܟܠܐ ܠܡܫܬܚܠܦܘܬܐ ܡܫܬܥܠܝܢܐ ܐܠܐ ܒܚܕܘܬܗ، ܕܗܕܐ ܡܠܬ ܠܡܐܡܪ ܘܡܬܐܡܪ ܠܗ. ܗܪܟܐ ܕܝܢ ܡܛܠ ܕܐܪܙܐ ܗܘ ܕܒܥܠܡ ܕܗܘ ܫܪܝܪܐ ܡܢ ܣܘܓܐ ܗܦܟܝܐ ܡܫܬܡܠܝܐ. ܠܗܠ ܕܝܢ ܐܝܟ ܡܢ ܕܣܟܐ ܗܘ ܕܟܠܗܘܢ: ܠܚܕ ܗܘ ܪܢܝܐ ܫܪܝܢ ܐܢ ܐ ܠ ܗܪܟܐ ܙܒܢ ܕܢܬܐܡܪ. ܡܛܠ ܕܝܢ ܚܙܬܐ ܒܣܝܡܬܐ ܘܚܙܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܦܘܢܝܐ.

[43] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.14 (Bedjan:125:16-19). ܒܒܪܢܫܐ ܠܒܪ ܒܪܝܐ ܥܡܠܬ ܐܢܬ ܒܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܕܠܘܬ ܐܠܗܐ ܘܒܪܢܫܐ ܕܠܓܘ ܥܕܟܝܠ ܕܠܐ ܦܐܪ̈ܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ.. ܒܡܐܪ̈ܘܗܝ، ܡܢ: ܡܢ ܐܡܬܝ ܕܠܐܬܪܐ ܡܛܝܬ. ܡܟܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܐܬܪܐ ܕܕܡ̈ܥܐ ܡܛܝܬ: ܗܝܕܝܢ ܐܣܬܟܠ ܕܢܦܩ ܠܗ ܗܘܢܐ ܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܚܒܘܫܝܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ: ܘܣܡ ܪܓܠܗ ܒܡܪܕܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ.

imagery on the intellect, which, as the true inner man, develops knowledge of "heavenly things" as a result of the transformation. Like John, Isaac associates the shedding of the external man with freedom from bodily disturbances and the increase of joy and gladness that comes from shedding the weight of the outer man. In *Homily* 2.8 he says,

> The beginning of the restoration of the inner person is therefore the constant study and reflection on things to come. By this means a person is little by little purified from the habitual distraction of earthly things. He takes the form of a serpent that has shed off its old skin and is gladdened and renewed. In a similar manner, insofar as bodily thoughts and the anxiety over [these bodily thoughts] diminish in the intellect, then reflection on heavenly things and the sight of things to come increases and awakens in the soul. Delight in the service of these things overcomes the sweetness of bodily thoughts and prevails over them.[44]

Isaac's use of this idiosyncratic analogy is a firm witness to his dependence on John for imagery concerning the transformation from the outer man to the inner man.

In summary, Isaac demonstrates an awareness of John's insistence on the education of the inner man when he includes the imprisonment of the inner man motif and the snake metaphor within his homilies. Isaac's familiarity with this material explains why he develops such a strong interest in the world to come and the way of life associated with the world to come. For Isaac, the renunciation of physical distractions through ascetical labor frees the intellect from its bondage to the outer man so that it can focus instead on acquiring knowledge appropriate to the inner man.

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[44] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.8.16 (CSCO 554:24).

4.3.1 The Way of Life of the New World and the Way of the New Life According to John the Solitary

A third important motif in John's theology of future hope is the transformation from the way of life of the corporeal man, who, according to John, was given a soulish body during creation, to the future way of life of the spiritual man, who lives according to what John calls either the "way of the new life" or the "way of life of the new world." John derives the details of this transformation from 1 Cor 15.43-44, where Paul says that human beings are sown a soulish body during creation, but given a spiritual body after the resurrection. According to John, this spiritual body enables human beings to live according to the future way of life of heavenly existence. In his commentary on 1 Cor 15.43-44, John states,

> If the body undergoes transformation from a bodily state to a spiritual state, as the apostle says, then [God] will transform the body of our humiliation: "it is sown a soulish body, it is raised a spiritual [body]." When, as we have said, a person undergoes transformation into a spiritual [state], he will not be in the form of his body but in the nature of our spiritual man. It is therefore evident that the corporeal man will receive everything else pertaining to the spiritual man in the world of the spiritual [man].[45]

As John explains elsewhere in his writings, and as we shall see below, everything else that pertains to the spiritual man signifies the way of the new life (ܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܚܕ̈ܬܐ) or the way of life of the new world (ܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ).

The origin of John's phrase "way of the new life" comes from Rom 6.4, where Paul says that the Christian believer will live according to new life just as Christ rose to new life after his death.[46] John builds on this verse by saying that insofar as Christ

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[45] John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 1 (Strothmann:10:257-11:266). ܐܢܗܘ ܕܢܦܠ ܦܓܪܐ ܫܘܚܠܦܐ܆ ܡܢ ܦܓܪܢܘܬܐ ܠܪܘܚܢܘܬܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܫܠܝܚܐ܆ ܢܫܚܠܦ ܦܓܪܐ ܕܡܘܟܟܢ܆ ܘܡܙܕܪܥ ܠܗ ܦܓܪܐ ܢܦܫܢܝܐ ܘܩܐܡ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ܆ ܐܡܬܝ ܗܘ ܗܟܝܠ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪܢ ܗܘ ܕܢܦܠ ܫܘܚܠܦܐ ܒܪܘܚܢܘܬܐ ܠܐ ܗܘܬ ܒܐܣܟܡܗ ܕܦܓܪܗ܆ ܐܠܐ ܒܟܝܢܐ ܕܒܪܢܫܢ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ܆ ܝܕܝܥܐ ܗܟܝܠ ܕܐܦ ܫܪܟܐ ܕܒܠܚܘܕ ܕܠܘܬ ܕܗܘܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ܆ ܡܩܒܠ ܗܘܐ ܦܓܪܢܝܐ܆ ܒܥܠܡܗ ܕܗܘ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ.

[46] "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (NRSV).

himself ascended from the detestable way of life of this world to the way of the new life through his resurrection, so too do human beings ascend from the way of life of this world to the way of the new life through baptism.[47] In the *Dialogue on the Soul and Passions*, he explains that Christ's incarnation and resurrection empower other human beings to live according to the way of the new life. Since Christ did not himself participate in the "detestable way of life" of this world (Paul's terminology from Col 1.21), he demonstrates what it looks like to exist as a human being who is not prone to the detestable way of life of the corporeal man.[48]

> [Paul] did not say that he "cast out," since from the beginning this detestable way of life was wholly affirmed in the entire nature of human beings and there is not [anyone] who can reconcile [this detestable way of life] with the way of the new life and exist outside [the detestable way of life]. Our Lord, when he was born in our world, was not able to stick his face into this hindrance of the evil way of life, but he perceived it with the strength of his knowledge [even though] he was outside [the detestable way of life] from the moment of his birth. Through the rift [between the detestable way of life and the way of life of the new world] that was manifest in him, he gave hope to all human beings that they will be outside of [the detestable way of life] after the resurrection and, through the rift that he made in [the detestable way of life], he will shine forth light inside of our world from the light of that world, which is the hope of God.[49]

The nature of the incarnation supplies the hope that someday human beings will exist without the detestable way of life of this world. Although this transformation remains incomplete prior to the resurrection of bodies, Christians can begin their ascent to this way of life through baptism, which is modeled after Christ's own death and resurrection.

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[47] For further background, see Werner Stothmann, *Johannes von Apamea,* 74: "Dieser in sich abgerundete christologische Aufriß erweist sich als Stütze auch seiner Eschatologie. Hier ist so sehr der Schwerpunkt seines Denkens, daß Johannes Christi Botschaft und Wierken allein auf dieses Ziel ausrichtet."

[48] See also John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 3 (Dedering:60:27-61:2): "In the true spiritual [level] no human being since the world was created has led [a truly spiritual life] except for Jesus Christ our Lord." ܒܪܘܚܢܘܬܐ ܓܝܪ ܓܝܪ ܫܪܝܪܬܐ. ܘܠܐ ܐܢܫ ܡܢ ܕܐܬܒܪܝ ܥܠܡܐ ܐܬܕܒܪ܆ ܐܠܐ ܠܚܘܕ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܪܢ.

[49] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 3 (Dedering:62:17-63:1). ܠܐ ܐܡܪ ܕܫܕܐ. ܡܛܠ ܕܡܢ ܫܘܪܝܐ ܡܫܪܪܐ ܗܘܬ ܒܟܠܗ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܒܢܝ ܐܢܫܐ. ܘܠܝܬ ܕܐܫܟܚ ܕܢܬܪܥܝܘܗܝ، ܘܢܗܘܐ ܠܒܪ ܡܢܗ ܒܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܚܕܬܐ. ܡܪܢ ܕܝܢ ܟܕ ܐܬܝܠܕ ܒܥܠܡܢ. ܠܐ ܐܫܟܚ ܕܢܨܡܘܕ ܐܦܘܗܝ، ܗܢܐ ܗܘܠܟܐ ܕܕܘܒܪܐ ܒܝܫܐ. ܐܠܐ ܐܪܓܫܗ ܒܚܝܠܐ ܕܝܕܥܬܗ܆ ܘܗܘܐ ܠܒܪ ܡܢܗ ܡܢ ܪܫܝܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܕܗ. ܘܒܝܕ ܬܪܥܘܬܐ ܕܗܘܬ ܒܗ. ܝܗܒ ܣܒܪܐ ܠܟܠܗ ܐܢܫܐ. ܕܒܬܪ ܢܘܚܡܐ ܢܗܘܘܢ ܠܒܪ ܡܢܗ ܒܬܪ ܢܘܚܡܐ. ܘܒܝܕ ܬܪܥܘܬܐ ܕܥܒܕ ܒܗ. ܐܢܗܪ ܢܘܗܪܐ ܠܓܘ ܥܠܡܢ ܡܢ ܢܘܗܪܐ ܕܗܘ ܥܠܡܐ. ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܣܒܪܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ. Cf. John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:8:6).

John goes into much more detail on both the way of the new life and the way of life of the new world in his first letter to Theodulus, which he explicitly says will deal with the subject of how to speak about the way of life of the new world.[50] As he did in the *Dialogue on the Soul and Passions*, John explains how Christ's incarnation and resurrection introduce human beings to the way of life of the new world. First, he says that Christ's incarnation was his introduction into the way of life of this world, but that Christ entered into the way of life of the new world through his resurrection and ascension (John uses the way of the new life and way of life of the new world interchangeably in this passage).

> [Christ's resurrection] is not like his generation from the womb, which introduces him to his way of life in this world, nor does his generation from Sheol happen so that he can exist in the life of this world. Rather, he ascends from death to the ways of the new life so that he exists in life, [but] not in this life, which is seen in the body, but in the life of those who have been perfected in the spirit. When he departs from inside the womb, he is introduced to the life of this world upon his exit from the womb and is seen in the way of life of human beings. His resurrection occurs when he departs from Sheol and ascends from the place of the dead to the way of life of the new world.[51]

John next addresses the important role of baptism, which receives its efficacy from Christ's incarnation and resurrection, and enables human beings to live according to the way of the new life or the way of life of the new world. Just as birth from the womb generates a corporeal body that naturally follows the way of life of this world, so too does

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[50] See John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:9:6-8): "How should we. . .speak to you concerning the way of life of the new world?" Cf. John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:4:8-9). For a detailed summary of this letter, see See Irénée Hausherr, "Un grand auteur spiritual retrouveé," 9-14.

[51] John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:23:14-23). ܒܗ ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܐܝܟ ܡܘܠܕܗ ܕܡܢ ܒܛܢܐ. ܕܠܕܘܒܪܗ ܕܗܢܐ ܥܠܡܐ ܐܥܠܗ ܗܘܐ. ܐܦ ܡܘܠܕܗ ܕܡܢ ܫܝܘܠ. ܕܒܚܝܐ ܕܗܢܐ ܥܠܡܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܒܗ. ܐܠܐ ܠܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܣܠܩ ܡܢ ܡܘܬܐ. ܕܢܗܘܐ ܒܚܝܐ. ܠܐ ܒܚܝܐ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܚܙܝܢ ܒܦܓܪܐ. ܐܠܐ ܒܚܝܐ ܕܓܡܝܪܝܢ ܒܪܘܚܐ. ܒܗ ܒܙܒܢ ܥܒܪ ܓܘ ܒܛܢܐ ܒܡܦܩܗ ܕܡܢ ܒܛܢܐ. ܠܚܝܐ ܕܗܢܐ ܥܠܡܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܬܥܠܠ. ܘܐܬܚܙܝ ܒܗ ܒܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܒܢܝܢܫܐ. ܒܗ ܕܝܢ ܥܒܪ ܒܫܝܘܠ ܘܣܠܩ ܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܡܝܬܐ ܠܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܗܘܐ ܗܘܬ ܢܘܚܡܗ. See also John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:14:1-5): "Christ revealed himself after the resurrection, not in the manner of his former habit, but in the spiritual way of life of the glory of God. In a similar manner, we also transform our former bodily way of life after baptism in accordance with knowledge of the way of life of the new world." ܐܬܚܙܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܬܪ ܢܘܚܡܐ: ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܘܬܐ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ ܐܠܐ ܒܕܘܒܪܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ ܕܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ. ܐܟܢܐ ܕܐܦ ܚܢܢ ܡܫܚܠܦܝܢܢ ܐܦ ܚܢ. ܕܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܡܥܡܘܕܝܘܬܐ: ܢܫܚܠܦ ܕܘܒܪܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ: ܒܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ. Cf. John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:32:6-22).

baptism generate a spiritual body that naturally follows the way of the new life or the way of life of the new world.

> The generation from baptism is for us the growth in knowledge of the new world, for just as [our] generation from the womb was for us growth in this world in a mortal body, so too does the generation from baptism offer us growth in the new life in the spiritual [condition]. . .The bodily birth sends [us] to the bodily world, while the spiritual birth sends [us] to the spiritual world. The generation in the flesh [sends us] to the way of life of this mortal world while the generation from baptism [sends us to] the way of the new life.[52]

Although the full extent of the transformation is completed in the world to come, the transformation begins in this world at the occasion of one's baptism.[53]

An important element of John's understanding of the way of life of the new world is his association of this way of life with the way of life of the angels.[54] John states, "The root of the way of the new life is a removal from everything that is seen such that one begins [to live] in the way of life of the angels of light."[55] He goes on to say that the way of the new life does not merely resemble the way of life of the angels, but that it is actually the same way of life.

> As the Apostle says, "Just as Jesus Christ is resurrected from the dead in the glory of His father," so too do we ascend from baptism, not in this life in which we proceed to be enslaved to sins, but in the way of the new life that is after the resurrection, which is [a life] in which we resemble the way of life of the heavenly hosts. Our life after the resurrection will not be [a life] in which we resemble [the angels], but it will be in the way of life of the angels.[56]

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[52] John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:9:17-10:3). ܡܘܠܕܐ ܓܝܪ ܕܡܢ ܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܐ ܠܬܪܒܝܬܐ ܕܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܡܘܠܕ ܠܢ. ܐܝܟܢܐ ܓܝܪ ܕܡܘܠܕܐ ܕܡܢ ܒܪܚܡܐ ܠܬܪܒܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ ܒܦܓܪ ܡܝܘܬܐ ܠܢ܆ ܗܟܢܐ ܡܘܠܕܐ ܕܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܐ. ܠܬܪܒܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܒܪܘܚ ܡܩܪܒ ܠܢ. . .ܝܠܕܐ ܦܓܪܢܝܐ ܡܫܕܪ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܦܓܪܢܝܐ. ܘܝܠܕܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ ܡܫܕܪ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ ܡܘܠܕܐ ܕܡܢ ܒܣܪܐ ܠܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ ܡܝܘܬܐ. ܡܘܠܕܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܐ܆ ܠܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܡܩܪܒ.

[53] For further background on the importance of baptism in John the Solitary's eschatology, see Lars Rignell, *Briefe von Johannes Dem Einsiedler*, 13.

[54] For further background, see Werner Strothmann, *Johannes Von Apamea*, 75: "Diese neue Welt ist für Johannes die Welt der Engel. Seine Eschatologie ist within Engellehre."

[55] John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:10:1-8). ܡܘܠܕܐ ܕܡܢ ܒܣܪܐ ܠܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ ܡܝܘܬܐ. ܡܘܠܕܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܐ܆ ܠܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܡܩܪܒ. ܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܓܝܪ ܒܢܝܢ܆ ܐܝܟ ܕܒܚܝܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܐܠܦ ܫܠܝܚܐ ܕܢܗܠܟ. ܘܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܪܫܝܬܐ ܕܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܚܕܬܐ܆ ܡܪܚܩܘܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܟܠܡܕܡ ܕܡܬܚܙܐ. ܒܗ ܕܫܪܐ ܒܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܡܠܐܟܐ ܢܘܗܪܐ܆ ܫܪܝܢ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܗܘܫܟܠܘܗܝ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܡܪܘܡܐ܆ ܘܡܢ ܥܠܡܗܘܢ ܚܝܐ ܒܡܠܐܟܐ ܘ̈ܥܠܝܐ ܢܗܝܪܐ.

[56] John the Solitary, *Briefe* 1 (Rignell:10:17-11:1). ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܫܠܝܚܐ܆ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܩܡ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܡܝܬܐ ܒܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ ܕܐܒܘܗܝ܆ ܗܟܢܐ ܐܦ ܚܢ ܣܠܩܝܢ ܡܢ ܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܐ. ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܒܚܝܐ ܕܡܫܥܒܕܝܢ ܠܚܛܗܐ ܢܗܠܟ. ܐܠܐ ܒܕܘܒܪܐ

According to John, the new life that accompanies the transformation of the corporeal man to the spiritual man brings with it a new way of life, which is the way of life of the heavenly angels. Human beings begin to execute the new way of life though baptism, which instills a new ability to participate in the angelic way of life of the world to come. Baptism brings the way of life of the resurrection into this world.

In summary, John manifests a strong interest in the transformation from the way of life of this world to the way of life of the new world, or as he also calls it, the way of the new life. This transformation is made possible by the incarnation and resurrection of Christ and the beginning of this transformation occurs during baptism. As much as possible, monks are expected to mold their ascetical way of life according to the future way of life of the world to come. Since this way of life is the way of life of the heavenly kingdom, it is the same way of life of the heavenly angels.

4.3.2 The Way of life of the New World and the Way of the New Life according to Isaac of Nineveh

Isaac exhibits a similar interest in the future way of life by incorporating the phrases "way of the new life" and "way of life of the new world" into his discussion of the ascetical life.[57] Just as he had done before with John's phraseology concerning the hope to come and the transformation into the inner man, Isaac reorients these two phrases so that they fit within the larger context of his ascetical system. Even more so than John,

ܕܚܝ̈ܐ ܚܕ̈ܬܐ ܕܒܬܪ ܩܝܡܬܐ: ܗܢܘܢ ܕܡܫܡܫܝܢ ܒܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܫܡܠܝܘܬܐ ܟ̈ܠܝܐ. ܟܠܗܝܢ ܕܝܢ ܕܢܗܘܘܢ ܚܝ̈ܝܢ ܒܬܪ ܩܝܡܬܐ: ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܫܡܫܝܢ: ܐܠܐ ܕܐܬܬܣܝܡܘܢ ܒܚܝܐ ܕܡ̈ܠܐܟܐ ܩ̈ܕܝܫܐ.

[57] Isaac uses a similar phrase, "way of life of the world to come" in Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.1.1 (CSCO 637:3): "The life of the solitaries cast them beyond this world and their way of life resembles the way of life of the world to come." ܚܝܝܗܘܢ ܕܝܚܝ̈ܕܝܐ ܪܡܝܢ ܐܢܘܢ ܡܢ ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ. ܘܕܘܒܪܗܘܢ ܕܝܢ ܠܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ ܠܡܗܘܐ.

Isaac describes the future way of life as taking place in the mind. The way of life of this world is composed of bodily labor, but the way of life of the new world takes place in the mind. As a result, Isaac consistently connects the way of life of the new world/way of the new life with intellectual perception and with prayer. He says that human beings abide by the way of life of the new world while in a state of wonder because only in wonder can the mind perceive true knowledge of God. While John focused on baptism as the beginning of the transformation to the way of life of the new world, Isaac places the beginning of the transformation to the way of life of the new world in the wonder that monks experience after prayer.

To begin with, Isaac appropriates John's use of the phrase "way of the new life" into his understanding of the operation of the mind in the world to come. As he indicates in the title, Isaac devotes *Homily* 2.38 to the subject of "way of the new life."[58] In this homily, Isaac implies that the way of the new life is an existence where the mind is astonished at the divine love. His description of the way of the new life is as follows:

> In the new world the love of the creator governs all rational nature. Astonishment at the mysteries, which will be revealed, will captivate the mind of rational beings, whom He has created so that they might have delight in him.[59]

The way of the new life is an operation of the mind and it is lived out when the mind enters into a state of astonishment at the divine love.

Isaac also uses John's phrase "way of life of the new world," but he orients it in the context of prayer. An example of this new orientation occurs in *Homily* 2.14, where Isaac contrasts two different approaches to prayer. The first approach places a high level

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[58] See Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.38 (CSCO 554:148).

[59] See Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.38.2 (CSCO 554:148-49). ܒܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܚܘܒܐ ܕܒܪܘܝܐ ܡܕܒܪ ܠܗ ܠܟܠܗ ܟܝܢܐ ܡܠܝܠܐ. ܘܬܗܪܐ ܕܐܪ̈ܙܘܗܝ ܕܡܬܓܠܝܢ: ܫܒܐ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢܐ ܕܡ̈ܠܝܠܐ: ܗܢܘܢ ܕܒܪܐ ܐܢܘܢ ܡܛܠ ܕܢܬܒܣܡܘܢ ܒܗ.

of importance on rhetorical form and precision of syntax while the second approach downplays syntax and instead considers the meaning of each word. Isaac condemns the former approach to prayer as a childish and pagan pursuit, but he praises the latter approach, which investigates the meaning of words, as a way of praying that instills the "way of life of the new world."

> The mindset of children attends to and investigates the order of words and it especially fails to present the meaning [of the words] before the intellect, from which springs forth prayers, requests, and virtuous reflections, which are suited to the way of life of the new world.[60]

True prayer involves the contemplation of the meaning of words so as to arrive at spiritual understanding of the mysteries of God. As such, prayer brings about a transformation of the monk, whose way of life begins to resemble the way of life of the new world rather than the way of life of the current world.

Since Isaac identifies the way of the new life and the way of life of the new world with the intellect's activity during prayer, he characterizes the way of life of the new world primarily in terms of knowledge of spiritual insights rather than ascetical actions of the body. In *Homily* 2.20, he compares the knowledge of the new world with the knowledge that the body produces in this world. While knowledge in this world requires the mediation of thoughts and the ascetical observance in order to arrive at truths about God, knowledge in the new world is direct and requires no mediation.

> The spiritual way of life is a different kind of knowledge because its service is not moved by, nor does it subsist in, the labors of body and soul. Reflection accompanies those who serve in [these] ways of life, but as for the spiritual way of life, it is without reflection and without thought and it is without movement and without agitation. Thoughts are put into motion in the level of the soul, whereas in the level of the spirit there is not thought, in

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[60] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.14.39 (CSCO 554:69). ܗܘܢܐ ܠܒܪ ܪܥܝܢܐ ܗܘܦܟܐ܆ ܕܟܠ ܣܘܪܐ ܕܡ̈ܠܐ ܢܚܙܐ ܘܢܬܒܠ ܠܗܘܢ܆ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܪܐܬ ܣܘܟܠܗܘܢ ܢܫܘܚܢ ܢܦܩܐ ܠܪܥܝܢܐ܆ ܘܡܢܗ ܢܒܥܢ ܨ̈ܠܘܬܐ ܘܡܫܐܠܬܐ ܘܪ̈ܢܝܐ ܡܝ̈ܬܪܐ. ܕܫܘܝܢ ܠܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ.

> that the mind has been raised above the form of this world and subsists in a different kind of knowledge.[61]

Like John, Isaac associates the way of the new life or the way of life of the new world with the reception of knowledge that is not ordered by the bodily senses.

For this reason, Isaac, like John, associates the way of life of the new world with the way of life of the angels, who exist in heaven and whose way of life consists in possessing unmediated spiritual insights. He goes on to say in *Homily* 2.20,

> The knowledge that belongs here by all means contains the stirring of thoughts within it, but that [spiritual] way of life is exalted above all other things. Within [this spiritual way of life], the manner of our existence will be like when we will arise from the dead and when we will [live] with the holy angels. This is [the way of life that] the angels already [experience] at the present.[62]

Since knowledge that is perceived with the spiritual way of life is a knowledge that arises without any mediation of thoughts, Isaac states that the reception of this spiritual knowledge represents the way of life of the angels.

Although Isaac uses John's phraseology and builds on John's notion of the way of life of the new world, he also reorients this notion of the future way of life into his ascetical system. In particular, Isaac says that the mind in this world perceives unmediated, spiritual revelations — the content of the way of the new life and new world — through wonder. In *Homily* 2.8, Isaac states that revelations of the new world "concern each aspect of the level to come as it is made known to the mind through the

[61] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.20.6 (CSCO 554:97). ܕܗܟܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܪܘܚܢܐ ܡܕܒܪܬܐ ܗܝ ܐܚܪܬܐ܆ ܕܠܐ ܒܡܫܘܚܬܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܘܕܢܦܫܐ ܡܬܩܢ ܐܘ ܡܬܬܕܪܟ ܦܠܚܘܬܗ. ܠܗܠܝܢ ܓܝܪ ܦܠܚܝ ܕܗܟܢܐ ܐܦ ܪܘܚܐ ܢܦܫ. ܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܕܗܟܢܐ ܕܪܘܚ܆ ܕܠܐ ܪܘܚܐ ܗܘ ܘܠܐ ܚܘܫܒ܆ ܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܪܘܫܡܐ. ܚܘܫ̈ܒܐ ܕܝܢ ܒܝܕܥܬܐ ܢܦܫܢܝܬܐ ܡܬܬܙܝܥܝܢ. ܒܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܪܘܚ ܠܝܬ ܚܘܫܒܐ܆ ܒܕܐܬܟܠܠ ܠܗ ܗܘܢܐ ܡܢ ܐܣܟܡ̈ܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ ܘܒܡܕܒܪܬܐ ܐܚܪܬܐ ܩܐܡ.

[62] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.20.6 (CSCO 554:97). ܡܕܒܪܬܐ ܕܬܢܢ܆ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܦܘܪܣ ܪܦܬܐ ܕܚܘ̈ܫܒܐ ܐܝܬ ܒܗ. ܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܕܗܟܢܐ܆ ܡܥܠܝ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܟܠܗܝܢ ܗܠܝܢ. ܒܗܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܗܘܝܢ ܡܢܐ ܕܡܢܚܝܢ ܒܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܐܬܝܗܘܢ ܘܗܘܝܢܐ ܗܘܢ ܡܠ̈ܐܟܐ.

revelation of insights."[63] The reason why these revelations are unmediated and require no process of thoughts is because they arise during a state of wonder in the mind. Isaac goes on to say that "wonder at the divine nature is a revelation of the new world" and "revelations of the new world are wondrous stirrings concerning God."[64]

Wonder is essential to the reception of spiritual revelations because, according to Isaac, the mind receives wonder directly. He explains that, although care is required to move the mind into a state where it is capable of experiencing direct spiritual insights, once this care has been taken, the mind undergoes a transformation that allows it to perceive spiritual insights through wonder.

> The intellect accepts thought concerning the world to come without any obstacles and more luminously than it [accepts] insights concerning the corporeal world. As for [insights concerning the corporeal world], the process needs greater purity and good soundness of mind, whereas [the process of accepting thoughts concerning the world to come] requires a little more care, and then the intellect suddenly receives a wondrous transformation and is easily made luminous along with the reflection.[65]

Through the transformation of the mind in wonder, the monk possesses the reflective powers of the angels, that is, the way of the new life of the world to come.

In summary, Isaac uses John's phrases to speak about the new world. John spoke of the transformation of the corporeal man into the spiritual man and the new way of life associated with the spiritual man. This way of life, which he called the way of the new life or the way of life of the new world, begins in this life during baptism, but is fully realized in the world to come as the angelic existence. Isaac borrows this framework and employs John's terminology, but he instead makes the activity of the mind the beginning

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[63] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.8.7 (CSCO 554:22). ܥܠ ܚܕ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܐܢܝ̈ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ: ܕܡܓܠܝܢܐ ܕܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ ܡܬܝܗܒ ܠܗܘܢ. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.15.8.scholia (CSCO 554:22).
[64] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.8.4 (CSCO 554:22) and *The Second Part* 2.8.5 (CSCO 554:22).
[65] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.8.15 (CSCO 554:23). ܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܠ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ ܬܐܪ̈ ܡܫܟܚܢܐܝܬ ܡܩܒܠ ܪܥܝܢܐ ܘܕܠܐ ܦܓ̈ܥܐ. ܡܢ ܣܘ̈ܟܠܘܗܝ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܓܫܡܢܝܐ. ܒܗܠܝܢ ܓܝܪ ܥܠ ܕܢܗܘܬܐ ܡܬܒܥܝܐ ܫܦܝܘܬܐ ܝܬܝܪܬܐ ܘܥܠ ܚܘܠܡܢܐ ܫܦܝܪܐ ܕܪܥܝܢܐ. ܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܒܨܝܪܘܬܐ ܗܘ ܝܬܝܪܬܐ ܒܥܐ. ܘܡܠܠܐܝܬ ܡܩܒܠ ܪܥܝܢܐ ܫܘܚܠܦܐ ܬܡܝܗܐ: ܘܡܫܬܢܐܝܬ ܡܬܢܗܪ ܥܡܗ ܕܪܢܝܐ.

of this transformation to the way of life of the new world. The culmination of this transformation occurs when the mind moves into a state of wonder that supersedes conscientious reflection.[66] The mind's transformation in wonder is the pinnacle of Isaac's ascetical system and will be the subject of chapters six and seven.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an explanation for why Isaac is so interested in describing the ascetical life in terms of imagery from the world to come. The explanation is that Isaac derives this imagery from the writings of John the Solitary. The pervasive presence of the themes of knowledge of and hope for the world to come in John's writings influenced Isaac, who does not frame the ascetical life in terms of a return to original purity, but rather, in terms of the world to come.

Although Isaac borrows the framework of the world to come from John, he also explains how knowledge of the world to come is available in this world, even though full experience of the world to come is normally reserved for the righteous in heaven and requires a bodily transformation. While John describes the transformation in the world to come in order to provide hope to Christians in this world who do not yet experience it, Isaac wants to provide an explanation for the manner in which Christians experience this eschatological transformation even in this world. Isaac transforms John's hope into a reality that can be experienced in this world through prayer and, ultimately, through the mind's experience of wonder.

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[66] Patrick Hagman has pointed out that Isaac understands ecstasy as a kind sacrament. See Patrick Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 180-81. In this case, Isaac correlates wonder with John's understanding of baptism as one's initiation into the way of life of the new world.

The next chapter will examine Isaac's theory of perfection. The term "perfection" (ܫܠܡܘܬܐ) was used by Syriac authors as a technical term in order to describe the manner in which a person participates in eschatological life of the world to come. According to Isaac, perfection occurs when the mind of a monk experiences knowledge of the world to come while living in this world.

CHAPTER 5

ISAAC'S UNDERSTANDING OF ASCETICAL PERFECTION: ITINERANCY OF THE MIND AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD TO COME

The last chapter showed that Isaac derived his intense interest in the world to come from John the Solitary. This chapter will show that Isaac believes that the goal of the monk is to attain an experience of the world to come in this life.

While John is not explicit on whether or not the monk can taste the next world in this life, he is clear that monks should pursue knowledge of the world to come. For this reason, he defines perfection as knowledge of the world to come. Isaac follows John in associating perfection with knowledge of the world to come, for since the world to come is a spiritual reality, experience of it occurs in the mind because the mind alone is capable of processing spiritual insights. While the body and soul are capable of processing material insights concerning the nature of the created order, Isaac says that they are incapable of comprehending spiritual realities.

Isaac distinguishes himself from John in seeking to assimilate traditional Syriac notions of perfection into John's image of mental perfection that allows the monk to experience the world to come even in this life. In the traditional Syriac milieu, as described early on by the *Acts of Thomas* and the Pseudo-Clementine *Letters to Virgins*, perfection is tied to physical itinerancy.[1] For a monk to be perfect, he needs to be free to be itinerant: in practical terms, he needs to be celibate. John's association of perfection with knowledge, however, leads Isaac to redefine the itinerancy necessary for perfection.

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[1] For more on early itinerant monasticism in Syria, see Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 57-77.

No longer does perfection depend on physical itinerancy and the celibacy necessary to support it, but now, for Isaac, perfection depends on mental itinerancy. Isaac continues the Syriac connection of itinerancy with perfection but he says that this necessary itinerancy is itinerancy of the mind, not the body.

This redefinition of perfection from physical itinerancy to mental itinerancy is found clearly in Isaac but is also apparent in his contemporary Dadisho. Dadisho, who associates perfection with *both* physical and mental itinerancy, shows that the mental definition of itinerancy began to replace the physical definition of itinerancy in the seventh-century, during the time of both Isaac and Dadisho. Isaac is the first Syriac writer to consistently and cohesively present this new understanding of perfection and to fully integrate John's definition of perfection as knowledge of the world to come with the traditional association between perfection and itinerancy.

The first part of this chapter will show that Isaac continues his dependence on John by conceiving of perfection in terms of knowledge of the world to come, although Isaac specifically associates perfection with the activity of the mind. The second part will show how Isaac assimilates this new conception of perfection with the traditional Syriac conception through his redefinition of itinerancy. In order for a monk to experience the world to come in this life he must achieve the perfection of an itinerant mind. The third part will compare Isaac's understanding of perfection with two other Syriac texts: the *Book of Steps*, an anonymous Syriac text written sometime around the late fourth- or early fifth-century, and Dadisho's *Commentary on Abba Isaiah*.[2] While the *Book of Steps* represents an older model of perfection that defined itinerancy in terms

[2] For further background on Dadisho's commentary on *Abba Isaiah*, see Luise Abramowski, "Dadisho Qatraya and his Commentary on the Book of Abbas Isaiah," *The Harp* 4 (1991): 67-83.

of celibacy and made a strict demarcation between perfect Christians and Christians who have not yet achieved perfection, Dadisho's text marks the beginnings of a switch to an understanding of perfection as the mind's itinerant ascent into heaven because it incorporates elements from the older model of perfection associated with the *Book of Steps* and the newer model associated with Isaac, whose ascetical homilies represent the culmination of the newer understanding of perfection.

5.1 PERFECTION AS KNOWLEDGE: JOHN THE SOLITARY'S INFLUENCE ON ISAAC'S MODEL OF PERFECTION

John derives his understanding of the relationship between knowledge and perfection from his interpretation of 1 Cor 2.6 where Paul says that the wisdom of the perfect is not of this world. In an extended commentary on this verse in *On the Soul and Passions*, John explains that perfection involves more than what can be observed in this world; rather, it requires knowledge of the world to come.

> When the Corinthians did many wondrous things with glossolalia and their interpretation of languages, with prophecies in which they predicted things to come in [this world], and with other admirable things, they were not able to understand the mystery of the wisdom concerning that world. The apostle accuses them, saying that not only when he came to them was he unable to speak with them about the wisdom of that world, which he called "perfect food", but [he says that] "they were unable to receive at that time" [1 Cor 3.2]. However, we speak of the wisdom among the perfect: a wisdom that is not of this world.[3]

According to John, the attainment of perfection requires the possession of wisdom but this wisdom is not always found among those who perform visible Christian actions, such as miracles. He explains, "Numerous are those who have performed admirable miracles,

[3] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:10:27-11:9). ܩܘܪܢܬܝܐ ܟܕ ܬܕܡܪ̈ܬܐ ܣܓܝ̈ܐܬܐ ܥܒܕܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܒܡܡܠܠܐ ܕܠܫ̈ܢܐ ܘܬܘܪܓܡܗܘܢ ܕܠܫ̈ܢܐ ܒܢܒܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܬܢܒܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܥܬܝ̈ܕܬܐ ܡܢܗ ܕܐܬܝܐ ܕܗܘܝܐ ܒܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ ܘܥܡ ܬܕܡܪ̈ܬܐ ܐܚܪ̈ܢܝܬܐ. ܐܪܙܐ ܕܚܟܡܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܗܘ ܥܠܡܐ ܐܦܠܐ ܕܢܣܬܟܠܘܢ ܡܫܟܚܝܢ ܗܘܘ. ܟܐܪ ܠܗܘܢ ܓܝܪ ܫܠܝܚܐ ܘܐܡܪ. ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܟܕ ܥܠ ܠܘܬܗܘܢ ܠܐ ܐܫܟܚ ܕܢܡܠܠ ܥܡܗܘܢ ܚܟܡܬܐ ܕܗܘ ܥܠܡܐ: ܕܩܪܐ ܠܗ ܡܐܟܘܠܬܐ ܓܡܝܪܬܐ. ܐܠܐ ܐܦܠܐ ܠܗ ܗܫܐ ܡܫܟܚܝܢ ܐܢܬܘܢ ܠܡܩܒܠܘ. ܐܠܐ ܚܟܡܬܐ ܡܡܠܠܝܢ ܚܢܢ ܒܓܡܝܪ̈ܐ: ܚܟܡܬܐ ܗܘܬ ܠܐ ܕܗܢܐ ܥܠܡܐ. Page and line numbers refer to *Ein Dialog über Die Seele und Die Affecte des Menschen*, ed. Sven Dedering (Leiden: Brill, 1936).

cast out demons, purified leprosy, and healed diseases and yet are still unaware of the wisdom of that world, for it is greater than everything that is admirable in this world."[4] The knowledge of the heavenly world, therefore, is a special sort of wisdom that is unrelated to the ability to perform miracles.

John uses this understanding of wisdom in 1 Cor 2.6 to make a distinction between people who have obtained both wisdom and perfection and people who are still operating in the soulish or bodily stages of the spiritual life. People who are in the soulish stage are capable of performing miracles, but they do so without knowledge of the mysteries, that is, the wisdom of heaven.[5] Their science is a science of this world. According to John, the ability to perform miracles requires the soulish person to have an acute awareness of the physical world, but this awareness does not necessarily extend into the heavenly realm, or to the spiritual stage of the ascetical life.

> The gift that the soulish person receives heals the infirmities of the body through his miracles by virtue of the faith of [those] who see [them]. [Knowledge] of the affairs of scandals and of wars are revealed to him, [but they know these things because they have had experience] just like a captain [knows how to make predictions] about sea breezes or like [the way] a doctor [knows how to heal] infirmities of the body.[6]

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[4] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:10:24-27). ܩ̈ܕܝܫܐ ܓܝܪ ܐܝܟ ܕܫܠܝܚܐ ܐܬ̈ܘܬܐ ܬܕܡܪ̈ܬܐ. ܐܦܩܘ ܫܐ̈ܕܐ ܘܕܟܘ ܓܪ̈ܒܐ ܘܐܣܝܘ ܟܘܪ̈ܗܢܐ. ܘܚܟܡܬܐ ܕܗܘ ܥܠܡܐ ܠܐ ܐܫܬܘܕܥܘ. ܡܛܠ ܕܪܒܐ ܗܝ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܕܐܬܕܡܪܬܗ ܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ ܒܗܢܐ ܥܠܡܐ.

[5] See John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:11:14-20): "The power of all these miracles is teaching concerning God and it is not [the case] that the one who does [these miracles] and the one who sees them will also know by them what is understood in life after the resurrection. This [teaching] is more interior in its strength than the gift of miracles in the same way that the soul is more interior than the body. If performing miracles was greater than the wisdom concerning the life of the world to come, then why, after the resurrection, does [God] not give the righteous powers to perform [miracles] instead of the wisdom of mysteries?" ܚܝܠܐ ܓܝܪ ܕܟܠܗܝܢ ܐܬ̈ܘܬܐ. ܡܠܦܢܘܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܐܠܗܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ̇. ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܢܕܥ ܒܗܘܢ ܗܘ ܕܥܒܕ ܠܗܘܢ܆ ܘܗܘ ܕܚܙܐ ܠܗܘܢ. ܡܕܡ ܕܡܬܝܕܥ ܒܚܝ̈ܐ ܕܒܬܪ ܢܘܚܡܐ. ܗܕܐ ܓܝܪ ܓܘܝܐ ܗܝ ܒܚܝܠܬܢܘܬܗ̇ ܡܢ ܡܘܗܒܬܐ ܕܐܬ̈ܘܬܐ. ܐܝܟ ܕܓܘܝܐ ܢܦܫܐ ܡܢ ܦܓܪܐ. ܐܢ ܕܝܢ ܪܒܐ ܗܘܬ ܣܘܥܪܢܐ ܕܐܬ̈ܘܬܐ ܡܢ ܚܟܡܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܚܝ̈ܐ ܕܥܬܝܕܐ. ܠܡܢܐ ܒܬܪ ܢܘܚܡܐ ܚܠܦ ܚܟܡܬܐ ܕܐܪ̈ܙܘܗܝ܆ ܠܐ ܝܗܒ ܠܙܕܝ̈ܩܐ ܕܢܣܥܪܘܢ ܚܝ̈ܠܐ.

[6] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:10:14-18). ܡܘܗܒܬܐ ܓܝܪ ܕܡܢ ܢܦܫܢܐ. ܠܟܘܪ̈ܗܢܘܗܝ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܡܐܣܝܐ ܒܐܬ̈ܘܬܗ ܒܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܕܚܙܝܐ. ܘܥܠ ܨ̈ܒܘܬܐ ܕܬܩ̈ܠܬܐ ܘܕܩܪ̈ܒܐ ܡܬܓܠܝܢ ܠܗ. ܐܝܟ ܕܐܦ ܒܢ̈ܘܬܝܐ ܡܢ ܢܫ̈ܒܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܗܘ ܡܕܒܪܢܐ ܐܡܪܝܢ. ܐܝܟ ܘܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܥܠ ܐܐܪ̈ܘܗܝ ܕܝܡܐ. ܘܐܝܟ ܐܣܝܐ ܥܠ ܟܘܪ̈ܗܢܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ. Cf. John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:11:23-12:3): "Since the power of miracles is, as it were, the soulish stage for human beings such that the soul is constituted between the bodily [stage] and the spiritual [stage] in that it is neither like the body nor the perfect spiritual existence of the angels in this life, the power of miracles exists between error and truth in order to distance oneself from error and come closer to

The ability to accurately predict events in this world is in no way connected to the possession of heavenly wisdom.

Due to their deep awareness of the physical world, John says that many soulish people who perform miracles mistakenly think that they have achieved perfection. For example, false zeal begins in the soulish monk precisely when he begins to realize that he no longer commits sinful actions and therefore mistakenly thinks that he has achieved perfection. "Zeal begins to exist in the soulish person for this reason," John explains, "when [the monk] is elevated above the evil deeds that are seen in the body but is unaware of those who are greater than him, he becomes convinced that that thing that is in him is perfection."[7] Elsewhere, John speaks of people who are in the soulish stage of the spiritual life who have the "pretension of being in perfection."[8] Authentic wisdom regarding the heavenly mysteries is reserved for the few and those who think they understand the heavenly mysteries may be deceiving themselves.

Like John, Isaac also defines perfection as the possession of heavenly knowledge. Isaac makes the point that perfection is defined in terms of knowledge quite explicitly in *Homily* 3.13: "The place of perfection is knowledge," but he also correlates the life of perfection with the attainment of heavenly knowledge.[9] Isaac speaks of this noetic

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truth. For this reason, the life of that world, since it is more sublime than error, is also more sublime than miracles since there is no one there who needs to be freed from error." ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܚܝܠܐ ܕܐܬܘ̈ܬܐ ܐܝܟ ܠܓܢܣܐ ܗܘ ܢܦܫܢܝܐ ܠܒܢܝ̈ܢܫܐ. ܕܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܣܝܡܐ ܢܦܫܐ ܒܝܬ ܦܓܪܢܘܬܐ ܠܪܘܚܢܘܬܐ: ܕܠܐ ܐܝܟ ܦܓܪܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ̇: ܘܠܐ ܐܝܟ ܪܘܚܢܘܬܐ ܕܡ̈ܠܐܟܐ ܠܓܢܣܐ ܒܗܠܝܢ ܫ̈ܢܐ. ܗܟܢܐ ܐܦ ܚܝܠܐ ܕܐܬܘ̈ܬܐ ܒܝܬ ܡܨܥܝܘܬܐ ܠܛܥܝܐ: ܕܡܦܢܐ ܡܢ ܛܥܝܘܬܐ ܘܡܦܢܐ ܠܛܥܝܐ. ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܚ̈ܝܐ ܕܗܘ ܥܠܡܐ: ܡܛܠ ܕܪ̈ܡܝܢ ܡܢ ܛܥܝܘܬܐ. ܪ̈ܡܝܢ ܐܦ ܡܢ ܐܬܘ̈ܬܐ: ܡܛܠ ܕܠܝܬ ܕܣܢܝܩ ܕܢܦܘܩ ܬܡܢ ܡܢ ܛܥܝܘܬܐ.

[7] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:21:6-10). ܡܫܪܐ ܗܟܝܠ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܛܢܢܐ ܒܢܦܫܢܝܐ ܡܢ ܗܕܐ ܥܠܬܐ. ܡܛܠ ܕܐܬܬܥܠܝ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܒܝ̈ܫܬܐ ܒܥܒܕ̈ܐ ܕܡܬܚܙܝܢ ܒܦܓܪܐ: ܘܒܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܝܬܝܪܢ ܡܢܗ ܠܐ ܐܪܓܫ. ܦܣܩ ܠܗ ܕܗܘ ܡܕܡ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܒܗ ܗܘܝܘ ܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ.

[8] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 3 (Dedering:66:27). ܡܣܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ

[9] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.13.1 (CSCO 637:105). ܐܬܪܗ̇ ܕܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܗܝ. Page numbers refer to *Isacco Di Ninive Terza Collezione*, ed. Sabino Chialà, CSCO 637, Scriptores Syri 246

perfection in *Homily* 2.40 in its future, eschatological state, when God will someday bring all people to an "equal state of perfection. . .in [a state] in which the holy angels are now, in perfection of love and an intellect without passions. . .for all are going to exist in a single love, a single intellect, a single will, and a single perfection of knowledge."[10] In the world to come, the angels and saints in heaven will achieve perfection and acquire perfect knowledge of the heavenly mysteries.

At the same time, Isaac implies that perfection can be obtained in this life in a more explicit fashion than John does. Although he warns against the common mistake of thinking perfection has been achieved when it really has not, Isaac explicitly says that some people do achieve perfection in this world.[11] In *Homily* 1.18, for example, he describes a certain solitary who would assume the habits of sin in order to maintain humility and he says that this sort of behavior is not profitable for all men, but for the "great and perfect only."[12] According to Isaac, perfect knowledge of heaven is available to those monks who, through ascetical labors, have prepared their minds to receive it.[13]

(Louven: Peeters, 2011). Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.13.13 (CSCO 637:108), where Isaac says that the greatest thing of all is the perfection of knowledge.

[10] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.40.4-5 (CSCO 554:164). Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.12 (Bedjan:122:18-123:1): "If he [the monk attempting to achieve perfection] dies in this expectation [not yet having been perfected], without having seen that [promised] land nearby, I think that his inheritance will be with the ancient righteous, who waited for perfection, according to the word of the Apostle, but did not see it, yet labored for all of their lifetime in confidence that they [would obtain] it until they fell asleep." ܐܢܫ ܗܘ ܒܗܢܐ ܣܒܪܐ ܘܣܘܟܝܐ ܡܐܬ: ܟܕ ܠܐ ܚܙܗ̇ ܠܐܪܥܐ ܗܝ ܡܢ ܩܘܪܒܐ: ܣܒܪ ܐܢܐ ܕܝܪܬܘܬܗ ܥܡ ܟܐܢܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ ܗܘܝܐ: ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܣܟܝܘ ܠܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ: ܐܝܟ ܡܠܬܗ ܕܫܠܝܚܐ: ܘܠܐ ܚܙܘܗ: ܘܥܠ ܣܒܪܗ̇ ܥܡܠܘ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܩܘܡܬܐ ܘܕܡܟܘ. Page numbers refer to *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part,' chapters IV-XLI*, ed. Sebastian Brock, CSCO 554, Scriptores Syri 224 (Louven: Peeters, 1995).

[11] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.82 (Bedjan:578:5-20) and *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.72 (Bedjan:495:15-20). Page and line numbers refer to *Mar Isaacus Ninivita De Perfectione Religiosa*, ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris: Nihil Obstat, 1908; repr. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007).

[12] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.18 (Bedjan:143:14).

[13] Also see Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.12 (Bedjan:122:10-17), where he states that if a monk "heightens his natural fervor. . .[God] will open His gate before him," thus implying that heavenly knowledge is available to monks in this world.

The difficulty of achieving perfection in this life is a constant but attainable struggle. In *Homily* 1.12, Isaac says that there is an intermediate stage between the novitiate on the left, and perfection on the right, but he acknowledges the difficulty of moving from the intermediate stage to the stage of perfection.[14]

> But what shall we say when someone does not reach [the stage that enables him] to enter the promised land, which is the stage of the perfect, and to find truth openly in so far as nature is capable? Shall he then remain and for this reason [exist] in that low stage, which converses entirely with the left hand?[15]

In this passage, Isaac presents the paradox surrounding the question of obtaining perfection in this world. The goal of every monk is to move from the intermediate stage to the stage of perfection, but this goal is impossible to attain through natural means. Since heavenly knowledge is spiritual, it cannot be processed through the natural capabilities of human beings in the same way that human beings process material knowledge. Yet, Isaac is explicit: human beings can achieve perfection in this world.

Since Isaac believes that perfection is attainable in this life, he must find a way to account for how a person moves beyond the intermediate stage and acquires the heavenly knowledge appropriate to the stage of perfection. His solution is to say that monks who advance into the highest stage of the ascetical life attain perfection through knowledge and awareness of the heavenly wisdom, even though this heavenly knowledge is only attainable with the assistance of divine grace. While still on this earth, monks enter the perfect stage of the ascetical life and comprehend the heavenly mysteries because divine grace makes their minds wander (ܦܗܐ) into heaven. Still in *Homily* 1.12, Isaac says,

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[14] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.12 (Bedjan:122:2-4): "The second [stage] is the middle: [it lies] between the passionate [stage] and the spiritual [stage]. Thoughts of the right hand and of the left hand equally move it." ܕܬܪܝܢ: ܡܨܥܝܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ: ܒܝܬ ܚܫܝܫܘܬܐ ܠܪܘܚܢܘܬܐ. ܘܚܘܫܒܐ ܕܝܡܝܢܐ ܘܕܣܡܠܐ: ܫܘܐܝܬ ܡܙܝܥܝܢ ܠܗ.

[15] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.12 (Bedjan:123:2-5). ܐܠܐ ܡܢܐ ܢܐܡܪ: ܐܢ ܠܐ ܢܡܛܐ ܐܢܫ ܠܗܪ ܕܢܥܘܠ ܠܐܪܥܐ ܕܡܘܠܟܢܐ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܛܟܣܐ ܕܓܡܝܪܐ: ܘܢܫܟܚ ܠܫܪܪܐ ܒܝܢ ܟܠܗ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܡܨܐ ܟܝܢܐ: ܢܦܘܫ ܡܟܝܠ ܘܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܒܛܟܣܐ ܗܘ ܬܚܬܝܐ: ܕܟܠܗ ܒܣܡܠܐ ܥܢܐ.

> Even though he is not deemed worthy of the entirety of that grace here, his mind shall wander around [there] by virtue of its intimacy with [that grace, even though he remains] far away. Through the provocation that comes from [that grace] he will eliminate and fly away from evil thoughts for as long as he lives. In this hope, while his heart is filled with God, he departs from this world.[16]

Though the body and soul cannot, the mind is capable of "flying into heaven" with the assistance of divine grace. This interior ascent enables the monk to participate in the heavenly life with the angels and saints.

This emphasis on interior ascent, or rather, the ability of the mind to wander into heaven when it is moved by divine grace, is a hallmark of Isaac's ascetical system.[17] In *Homily* 3.2, he also describes perfection in terms of the mind's ability to take flight and enter into the heavenly realm in order to receive knowledge.

> This stage of perfection requires the banner of the solitary way of life in stillness and hermetical labor in one's cell. The body must be humbled while the intellect is invigorated, the senses must grow weak while knowledge is exalted, the limbs [of the body] must be brought low while the thoughts are lighted in splendor, then the mind will take flight and ascend to divine contemplation.[18]

The flight of the mind into heaven allows a person to receive heavenly knowledge while still remaining in the material world.

The occasion that inspires the mind to take flight and wander into heaven is, for Isaac, the moment of prayer. During prayer, God opens up a passageway (ܡܥܒܪܬܐ) through which the wandering human mind can enter into heaven. In *Homily* 2.35, he details how monks receive knowledge of the heavenly mysteries during prayer and how their minds pass from the boundaries of this world and wander into the heavenly realm through a passageway: "These are the things [supplication of God during prayer] that

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[16] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.12 (Bedjan:123:9-13). ܐܦܢ ܠܐ ܢܫܬܘܐ ܠܗܪ ܟܠܗ̇ ܠܛܝܒܘܬܐ ܛܐܦ. ܐܠܐ ܒܚܘܒܐ ܕܥܡܗ̇ ܟܕ ܪܚܝܩ. ܢܦܩܐ ܗܘܐ ܗܘܢܗ. ܘܒܓܘܪܓܝܐ ܕܠܘܬܗ̇ ܒܗܕܐ ܕܚܝ ܢܦܫܗ ܢܦܪ ܡܢ ܚܘܫܒܐ ܒܝܫܐ. ܘܒܗܢܐ ܣܒܪܐ. ܟܕ ܡܠܐ ܠܒܗ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ. ܢܦܩ ܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ.

[17] See also Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.15.5 (CSCO 554:74-75).

[18] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.2.17 (CSCO 637:9). ܗܢܐ ܠܓܡܪܐ ܕܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ ܬܒܥ ܢܝܫܐ ܕܕܘܒܪܐ ܫܝܢܐ ܕܫܠܝܐ ܘܥܡܠܐ ܠܚܘܕܝܐ ܕܩܠܝܬܐ. ܦܓܪܐ ܡܬܡܟܟ. ܘܗܘܢܐ ܡܬܚܝܠ. ܪ̈ܓܫܐ ܡܬܬܚܫܠܝܢ. ܘܡܬܪܘܡܐ ܝܕܥܬܐ. ܗܕ̈ܡܐ ܡܬܡܟܟܝܢ. ܘܡܚ̈ܫܒܬܐ ܡܬܢܗܪܢ ܒܫܘܒܗܪܐ. ܗܝܕܝܢ ܦܪܚ ܗܘܢܐ. ܘܡܬܥܠܝܐ ܠܘܬ ܐܠܗܝܐ ܬܐܘܪܝܐ. Cf.

open up for us the door to that knowledge of truth, which is exalted above all [other knowledge] and provides the mind with a passageway across to the glorious mysteries of the adored divine nature."[19] During prayer, the Holy Spirit supplies the mind of perfect Christian with a passageway to heaven so that it can access the heavenly mysteries.

Once a passageway for the mind has been opened, Isaac says that the Holy Spirit instills perfect knowledge into the mind of the praying monk, who experiences this knowledge in the form of sudden inspirational stirrings. Just as a praying monk experiences joy when he feels a sudden burst of inspiration that originates from his own mind, so too does he rejoice when he receives inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

> [The same joy is felt] with other stirrings that are in the constitution of prayer, which the Holy Spirit sets into motion in the saints, in whose utterances are ineffable mysteries and insights. When the form of prayer provides some sign of their insights, this is an indication of the mysteries and perfect knowledge that [the saints] have received mingled into [their prayers], through wisdom from the Spirit.[20]

During prayer, the intellects of monks who have achieved perfection ascend to heaven and receive knowledge through stirrings that are set in motion by the Holy Spirit.[21]

Isaac does not emphasize visible perfection of the itinerant life because he focuses instead on the monk's reception of knowledge during prayer. Ascetical actions, such as the celibacy required for physical itinerancy, are part of the bodily, lower stage of the ascetical life and are a means to achieving knowledge. Perfection is knowledge of the future world while ascetical actions are the means to perfection. Isaac therefore presents

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[19] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.35.5 (CSCO 554:125). ܗܠܝܢ ܐܢܝܢ ܕܦܬܚܝܢ ܠܢ ܬܪܥܐ ܕܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܫܪܪܐ ܗܝ ܕܡܥܠܝܐ ܡܢ ܟܠ܆ ܘܝܗ̈ܒܢ ܡܥܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܠܗܘܢܐ ܠܘܬ ܐܪ̈ܙܐ ܫܒܝ̈ܚܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ ܡܣܓܕܐ ܘܐܠܗܝܐ.

[20] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.14.43 (CSCO 554:70-71). ܥܡ ܫܪܟܐ ܕܡܬܬܙܝܥܢܘܬܐ ܕܒܢܝܢܐ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܡܙܝܥܐ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܒܩܕ̈ܝܫܐ܆ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܡ̈ܠܝܗܘܢ ܐܪ̈ܙܐ ܘܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠܝܢ. ܘܟܕ ܐܣܟܡܗ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܡܬܚܘܐ܆ ܢܝܫܐ ܕܣܘ̈ܟܠܝܗܘܢ܆ ܒܗܕܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܪ̈ܙܐ ܘܝܕܥܬܐ ܓܡܝܪܬܐ ܕܒܚܟܡܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܪܘܚܐ ܡܩܒܠܝܢ ܡܚܠܛܐ ܒܗܝܢ.

[21] See also Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.3.9 (CSCO 637:12): "The [sort of] prayer that is fitting for perfection is such that those who choose [perfection] as their life long for heaven and they receive the perfect commandments. . .[Once] the intellect [has risen above] all these earthly things, it will be brought into perfection." ܨܠܘܬܐ ܗܝ ܕܠܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ ܠܫܡܝܐ܆ ܕܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܓܒܝܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܚܝ̈ܐ ܒܗ ܠܗܘܢ ܘܠܫܡܝܐ ܐܬܪܓܪܓܘ܆ ܘܦܘܩ̈ܕܢܐ ܓܡ̈ܝܪܐ ܡܩܒܠܝܢ. . ܘܟܕ ܥܠ ܗܠܝܢ ܐܪ̈ܥܢܝܬܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܠܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ ܕܡܬܩܪܒܐ.

a subtle polemic against the notion that perfection is achieved with visible ascetical actions. In *Homily* 1.51, he states that the soul desists from service during the perfect stage of knowledge and that this desisting is a symbol of the future when the soul will find delight in intellectual occupations alone.[22] Ascetical actions are no longer necessary in the future world and since perfection in this world mirrors perfection in the future world, visible ascetical actions cannot be the measure of perfection.

To summarize, Isaac's concern to define perfection in terms of the mind's ability to wander into heaven and acquire knowledge of the world to come demonstrates that he understands perfection in terms of John the Solitary's definition. John distinguishes perfect Christians from imperfect Christians according to wisdom: perfect Christians have obtained heavenly wisdom while imperfect Christians only have knowledge of creation. Isaac follows John in classifying perfection in terms of knowledge rather than celibacy and physical itinerancy, but he still describes the attainment of knowledge with language that emphasizes itinerancy. In particular, he describes how the mind wanders or flies into heaven in order to receive knowledge. This language reveals Isaac's concern to define perfection, in accord with the Syriac tradition, in terms of itinerancy. The next section of this chapter will show that Isaac is the one of the first Syriac authors to present a coherent model of perfection with this revised definition of itinerancy.

[22] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.51 (Bedjan:275:7-9). ܦܘܫܐ ܗܘ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܡܢ ܦܘܠܚܢܐ܆ ܘܛܘܦܣܐ ܗܘ ܕܗ̇ܘ ܕܥܬܝܕܐ܆ ܕܒܪܝܐ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܕܡܕܥܐ ܡܬܒܣܡܢܘܬܐ܆ ܒܐܪ̈ܙܐ ܕܠܬ̈ܠܬܐ ܕܥܬܝܕܝܢ܀ Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.81 (Bedjan:573:19-574:1).

5.2 Dadisho as Historical Marker: Two Syriac Traditions of Perfection Collide

We turn now to an examination of how the concept of perfection changed during the seventh-century, when Isaac was composing his ascetical homilies. In order to understand how Isaac's conception of perfection relied on earlier Syriac conceptions of perfection, I will compare Isaac's model of perfection with the model proposed by the anonymous author of the *Book of Steps* and with Isaac's contemporary, Dadisho of Qatar, who writes about perfection in his *Commentary on Abba Isaiah*. During the course of this comparison, I will respond to two currents in the scholarship on early Syriac Christianity that require further examination. The first is the call for more study on the nature and extent of the interrelationship between Isaac and Dadisho. Scholars such as Sebastian Brock and Sabino Chialà assume that these two authors knew each other since they were both seventh-century contemporaries from Qatar and since they both had associations with the influential monastic school of Rabban Shabur.[23] The second current is a standard-scholarly position that the anonymous *Book of Steps*, written sometime in the early fifth-century, was an isolated expression of asceticism.[24]

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[23] See Sebastian Brock, *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part'*, xxxix-xl and Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla miseriocrdia infinita: Ricerche su Isacco di Ninive e la sua fortuna* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2002), 42-43.

[24] Scholars have often emphasized the singularity of the *Book of Step's* ascetical system in comparison to other Greek and Syriac notions of asceticism. See Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 35, who emphasizes the "isolated character" of the *Book of Steps* and concludes that it has hardly any relationship with the asceticism of Aphrahat and Ephrem. Also see Robert Kitchen, "The Gattung of the Liber Graduum: Implications for a Sociology of Asceticism," in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984. Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, *OCA* 229, ed. H.W.J. Drijvers et al. (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientale, 1987), 173: "Syriac literature, at its heart, is an ascetical literature and the *Liber Graduum* appears to be a singular form of this ascetical ethos." Finally, see Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 108, who also draws the same conclusion: "The author's division of Christian society into two stages or ranks . . . was not a radical proposition in the Syrian milieu . . . The *Book of Steps*, however, differs from anything we have seen so far . . . in its stark vision of ascetic poverty and frank discussion of what this meant in actual practice."

In studying the relationship between the *Book of Steps*, Dadisho, and Isaac on the theme of perfection, I will formulate a thesis that responds to both of these scholarly currents. This thesis will be that Dadisho's *Commentary on Abba Isaiah* exists as a historical marker for the transition from an older itinerant model of perfection associated with the *Book of Steps* to a new understanding of the relationship between itinerancy and perfection within the model of perfection associated with Isaac and the monastic school of Rabban Shabur. This thesis responds to the first current by exposing definite points of connection between Dadisho's *Commentary on Abba Isaiah* and Isaac's *Ascetical Homilies*. The response to the second current is a re-evaluation of the isolated nature of the *Book of Steps*.[25] While older ascetical tradition preserved in the *Book of Steps* influenced some authors, including Dadisho, this influence was short and soon overshadowed by the influence of the newer understanding of itinerancy and perfection championed by Isaac.[26] Isaac's complete abandonment of some elements from the older model of perfection preserved in the *Book of Steps*, due to their incompatibility with his

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[25] Another approach to scholarship on the *Book of Steps* emphasizes the similarities between the *Book of Steps* and other ascetical texts. See, for example, the pair of articles by Aelred Baker, who examined the influence of the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Diatetessaron* on the *Book of Steps*: Aelred Baker, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Syriac Liber Graduum," *New Testament Studies* 12 (1965/1966): 49-55; Aelred Baker, "The Significance of the New Testament of the Syriac Liber Graduum," *Studia Evangelica* 5, *Texte und Untersüchungen* 103 (1968): 171-75. Also see Columba Stewart, *Working the Earth of the Heart* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), who finds common ground between the Greek Ps.-Macarian Homilies and the *Book of Steps* in that both utilize a distinctive vocabulary to describe a way to Christian perfection and to portray parallels between the church and the soul. Finally, see Alexander Golitzin, "Recovering the 'Glory of Adam', 'Divine Light' Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Ascetical Literature of the Fourth-Century Syro-Mespotamia," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity* ed. James R. Davila (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 275-308.

[26] Although scholars are unable to identify the exact time and location of the *Book of Steps*, internal evidence suggests a date somewhere around the late fourth- or early-fifth century and a location somewhere within the Persian Empire, but possibly in the region known classically as the Adiabene. This dating and location would make it reasonable to assume that the *Book of Steps* was part of the ascetical milieu that Dadisho inherited when he spent time at Rabban Shabur's monastery in Bet Huzzaye during the second half of the seventh-century, in the neighboring region of Elem, to the southeast. For dating and background of the *Book of Steps*, see Robert Kitchen and Martien F. G. Parmentier, *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2004), xlix-l.

own ideals of perfection, marked the end of this older way of understanding what itinerancy means within the life of perfection.

The thesis that Dadisho exists as a historical marker for the beginning of the transition from the older model of perfection to the newer model reveals the moment when mental definitions of perfection began to enter into mainstream Syriac notions of perfection. Since Dadisho and Isaac both emphasize a model of perfection based on the mind's ability to wander into heaven and acquire knowledge, they both must have learned this idea together from a common source. I argue that they both acquired an interest in knowledge as the ultimate requirement of perfection from their common association with Rabban Shabur's monastery.

Dadisho and Isaac both supply internal evidence that they spent time in Rabban Shabur's monastery. Dadisho explicitly cites portions of Rabban Shabur's teaching, indicating that he spent time in the monastery as a student of Rabban Shabur. In his *Commentary on Isaiah*, for example, he quotes Rabban Shabur's advice for putting on vestments with modesty and he summarizes specific aspects of Rabban Shabur's policy regarding the selection of hymns during the "holy manner of life."[27] He also speaks of Rabban Shabur's death and service to the "rest of the other [monks]" of the monastery, thus placing himself within the community.[28] These comments concerning practical life in the monastery indicate that Dadisho was familiar with the daily activities of the monks in Rabban Shabur's monastery and that he himself spent time there.

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[27] Concerning Rabban Shabur's advice on vestments, see Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 5.3 (Draguet:94:8-10) and *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 5.3 (Draguet:94:8-10). Page and line numbers refer to *Commentaire du livre d'Abba Isaïe,* CSCO 326-27, Scriptores Syri 144-45, ed. René Draguet (Leuven: CSCO, 1972). For Rabban Shabur's policy regarding the selection of hymns, see Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 13.5 (Draguet:183:27-185:2).

[28] Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 15.37 (Draguet:299:17-300:2).

Although Isaac supplies fewer details than Dadisho about his relationship to Rabban Shabur, we can still trace his connection to the monastery. We know that Isaac retired to Rabban Shabur's monastery after he became blind, though he composed his ascetical homilies before he moved to the monastery.[29] Prior to his arrival, Isaac lived in the mountains surrounding the monastery and he visited Rabban Shabur for periodic advice. In a story recorded in *Homily* 1.53, Isaac recounts a narrative between an anonymous saint and an "old, honored solitary."[30] The saint goes to visit the solitary in order to ask for his advice because he is weary from temptation. The old solitary tells the younger saint that it took him thirty years before he himself was able to overcome temptation. We know that the old solitary in this story is Rabban Shabur because one of Isaac's contemporaries, Simon Tabyutha, relates this same story verbatim and identifies the old solitary as Rabban Shabur.[31] It is possible that the anonymous saint is Isaac himself and that this sort of periodic interaction was typical of the relationship between Isaac and Rabban Shabur.

Although the precise nature of the connection between Dadisho and Isaac is not concrete, their respective texts do share enough in common to merit a comparison between the two authors regarding the notion of perfection.[32] While Dadisho retains

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[29] Both of Isaac's biographical accounts, Ishodenah's *Book of Chastity* and the anonymous text preserved by the West Syrians, indicate that Isaac retired and was buried in the monastery of Rabban Shabur. See Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, lxv-lxvi and lxx-lxxi.
[30] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.53 (Bedjan:387:21-22).
[31] See Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, lxiv.
[32] In addition to their connection to the monastery of Rabban Shabur, Dadisho and Isaac also exhibit linguistic and theological similarities. In his introduction to the English translation of Isaac of Nineveh, Sebastian Brock draws attention to a number of linguistic similarities between Isaac and Dadisho, including phrases such as, "vision of the cross" (ܚܙܬܗ ܕܨܠܝܒܐ), "purity of thoughts" (ܕܟܝܘܬ ܚܘܫܒܐ), "vision of revelation" (ܚܙܬܐ ܕܓܠܝܢܐ), "continual delight" (ܒܣܡܬܐ ܐܡܝܢܐ), and "vision of our Lord (ܚܙܬܐ ܡܪܢ). See *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part'*. For "sight of the cross," see Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 8.3 (Draguet:177:21-24) and Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.11.17 (CSCO 554:48); for "purity of thoughts," see Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 11.5 (Draguet:152:7) and 14.17 (Draguet:227:8-9) and Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.15.9 (CSCO 554:76); for "vision of

some remnants from the older model of perfection associated with the *Book of Steps*, Isaac fully advances a new model of perfection, which is based on the reception of heavenly knowledge as articulated by John the Solitary.

5.2.1 The Redefinition of Perfection: Itinerant Perfection in *The Book of Steps* and Dadisho's *Commentary on Abba Isaiah*

I have already demonstrated that Isaac defines perfection in terms of the mind's ability to wander or fly into heaven and acquire heavenly knowledge and that he stresses the activity of the mind over ascetical actions when he defines perfection. I will now compare the way the author of the *Book of Steps* and Dadisho discuss the relationship between itinerancy and perfection. The author of the *Book of Steps* characterizes the itinerant life primarily in terms of celibacy and, while Dadisho agrees in the importance of the itinerant life over and against the anchoritic life, he, like Isaac, also associates the itinerant life specifically with the itinerant ability of the mind to wander into heaven and receive knowledge concerning the heavenly mysteries. This similarity between Dadisho and Isaac regarding the mental nature of itinerant perfection reveals that the connection between perfection and the knowledge of heaven was common in the seventh-century, when Isaac and Dadisho were composing their respective texts on the ascetical life.

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revelation," see Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 15.23 (Draguet:283:24-25) and and Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.20.23 (CSCO 554:101); for "continual delight," see Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 14.27 (Draguet:239:14) and Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.29.7 (CSCO 554:120); and for "vision of our Lord," see Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 1.17 (Draguet:25:19-21) and Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.14.30 (CSCO 554:66). In addition to these shared linguistic phrases, both authors follow Evagrius in calling zeal a dog and both authors refer to the Canon 54 of the seventy-three canons of Nicaea to support the seven hours of prayer. For use of Evagrius's characterization of zeal as a dog, see Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 8.19 (Draguet:197:17-19) and Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.17.3 (CSCO 554:81); for reference to canon 54, see Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 5.6 (Draguet:95:23-28) and Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.14.35 (CSCO 554:67-68).

Turning first to the *Book of Steps*, we see that the author stresses the importance of the itinerant life for those Christians who have achieved perfection.[33] In general, the author defines perfection as strict adherence to a series of moral commandments and admonitions given by Jesus in the gospels, but included in this list are admonitions such as "I have no support for my head on earth," and "whoever does not leave everything, take up his cross and follow me, is not worthy of me."[34] On the basis of these admonitions, the author concludes that the way to perfectly follow all of Jesus' commandments is to lead a life of itinerancy. In *Homily* 15, for example, he states that perfect Christians should not "take wives, nor work the land, nor acquire possessions, nor have a place to lay their head on earth, like their teacher."[35] Perfect Christians undertake these commandments that require a life of itinerancy so that they are free to concern themselves with the spiritual welfare of others. "The perfect giver," he says, "has renounced his wealth and attends to those who are lacking the knowledge of our Lord."[36]

Further support for the itinerant life occurs in *Homily* 25, where the author chastises some of the perfect Christians for being convinced that they need to build little dwellings so that they can host other travelers and that they need to plant vegetable gardens so that they can provide food for the poor.[37] The author not only explicitly declares these sentiments as a return to the minor commandments followed by inferior Christians, but he also implies that perfect Christians who build huts and plant gardens

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[33] See Arthur Vööbus, "*Liber Graduum:* Some Aspects of its significance for the History of Early Syrian Asceticism," in *Charisteria Johanni Kôpp*, Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile 7 (Stockholm: 1954), 124-28.

[34] See Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 2.2-5 (Kmosko:28:12-36:25). Page and line numbers refer to *Liber Graduum*, ed. Michael Kmosko, Patrologica Syriaca 1 (Paris: 1926).

[35] Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 15.13 (Kmosko:365:26-368:2). ܐܝܟ ܕܠܐ ܥܒܕܝܢ ܠܗ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܠܚ ܠܗ ܡܢܟܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܘܩܕ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܘܩܕ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܡܠܦܢܗ ܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܠܡܢ ܕܠܐ ܝܕܥ ܡܕܥܐ ܕܡܪܢ.

[36] Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 3.7 (Kmosko:60:17-209). ܐܝܟ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܘܩܕ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܘܩܕ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܠܦܢܗ ܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܠܡܢ ܕܠܐ ܝܕܥ ܡܕܥܐ ܕܡܪܢ.

[37] See Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 25.5 (Kmosko:741:24-744:2).

are abandoning Jesus' commandment to lead a life of itinerancy.[38] He asserts that these sentiments are devised by Satan as tricks to fool perfect Christians into abandoning the itinerant life.

In order to preserve the life of itinerancy, the author of the *Book of Steps* advocates the essential connection between celibacy and perfection. The life of celibacy ensures that a monk has no ties to the world that would prevent him from maintaining an itinerant lifestyle. "If [a person] empties himself and is celibate," the author states, "he will quickly be perfected."[39] According to the author, the desire for marriage originated from the lies that Satan told Adam and Eve in the garden just before the fall, so the monk who overcomes the desire for marital union reverses the effects of the fall and successfully lives according to God's original design for creation.[40] By urging upright Christians who are on the path to perfection to abandon marriage and sever their ties to other people, the author of the *Book of Steps* makes celibacy the main requirement for the itinerant life, which is the life of perfection.

Although the author of the *Book of Steps* emphasizes the importance of celibacy and physical itinerancy in connection with perfection, he still recognizes that celibacy ultimately leads to an itinerancy of the mind. In *Homily* 15, he states that perfect Christians who engage in celibate itinerancy experience heaven in their minds. "While he is standing on the earth in his body," the author states as he describes the perfect

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[38] See Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 25.5 (Kmosko:741-745).

[39] Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 24.7 (Kmosko:728:20-21). ܐܢܬܘܢ ܕܡܬܟܢܝܢ ܘܥܒܕܝܢ ܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܕܢܬܟܠܠܘܢ ܗܘ ܐܝܟ Cf. Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 15.11 (Kmosko:361:13-15) and 25.4 (Kmosko:740:25-26).

[40] The author states that God's initial plan was for Adam and Eve to procreate without sexual intercourse, but Satan persuaded Adam and Eve to get married and procreate through sexual union. See Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 15.6 (Kmosko:348:): "Adam wanted to rebel and imitate the intercourse of the animals, but Adam did not know that if they had kept the commandments they would have been fruitful and multiplied, as he had made Eve fruitful by the word of our Lord, without lust." ܐܕܡ ܨܒܐ ܕܢܡܪܕ ܘܢܡܛܠ ܥܠ ܙܘܓܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܠܐ ܝܕܥ ܐܕܡ ܕܐܢ ܢܛܪܘܢ ܦܩܕܝܗܝ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܗܘܝܘ ܢܦܪܝܢ ܘܢܣܓܝܢ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܦ ܗܘ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܢܬܬܐ ܒܡܠܬܗ ܕܡܪܝܢ ܠܐ ܒܬܐܘܐ Cf. Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 15.8 (Kmosko:353:15-17).

Christian, "his intellect lives every day in spirit in heaven and our Lord speaks with him there as the father with his son."[41] This vision of God in heaven is not merely a future promise, but, as Alexander Golitzin has pointed out, it is a reality that can be experienced now, "in this world."[42] Golitzin points to a passage from *Homily* 15 where the author states that a person who humbles himself will hear the voice of God in this world: "If [a person] significantly humbles himself, the Lord will be revealed to him in this world and he will hear the voice of God."[43] A monk who has humbled himself through celibacy may experience the heavenly words of God through his intellect, which lives in heaven while his body remains in this world.

The author of the *Book of steps* defines perfection predominately in terms of a celibate, physical itinerancy, but in *Homily* 15 he does imply that celibacy leads to an itinerancy of the mind at which time the mind obtains heavenly knowledge from the Lord while still living "in this world." Isaac and Dadisho, both writing sometime after the author of the *Book of Steps* developed his model of perfection, highlight this notion that the mind can enter into heaven while the body remains in this world.[44] We have already seen how Isaac develops a model of perfection that emphasizes the itinerancy of the mind; now, we will examine how Dadisho builds his model of perfection on the notion of the itinerant mind.

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[41] Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 15.8 (Kmosko:381:14). ܗܘܐ ܕܡܬܚܫܚ ܠܗܘܢ ܒܪܘܚܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܘܡܪܢ ܡܡܠܠ ܥܡܗ ܐܝܟ ܐܒܐ ܥܡ ܒܪܗ.

[42] See Alexander Golitzin, "Recovering the 'Glory of Adam'," 302.

[43] Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 15.8 (Kmosko:373:12-13). ܐܢ ܡܫܬܚܪܪ ܠܗ ܡܪܝܐ ܒܗܕܐ ܥܠܡܐ ܘܢܫܡܥ ܩܠܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ.

[44] The notion that the monks can achieve proleptic experience with God is an important current in early Greek literature as well. Alexander Golitzin has pointed to Pseudo-Dionysius, who says that certain holy ascetics are "already with God" even in this life, and Pseudo-Macarius, who direct encounter with God is available "right now" with "all perception and assurance." See Alexander Golitzin, "Revisiting the 'Sudden': Epistle III in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*," *SP* 37 (2001), 484 and "Heavenly Mysteries: Themes from Apocalyptic Literature in the Macarian Homilies and Selected Other Fourth Century Ascetical Writers," in *Apocalyptic Themes in Early Christianity*, ed. Robert Daly (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 189-91.

Like the author of the *Book of Steps,* Dadisho emphasizes the relationship between itinerancy and perfection, but he is much more interested, like Isaac, to define perfection in terms of inner knowledge. Dadisho resolves this tension between the outward action of physical itinerancy and inner knowledge by redefining itinerancy in terms of a spiritual itinerancy that affects the disposition of the mind. According to Dadisho, itinerancy involves much more than physically wandering on this earth; rather, the primary meaning of itinerancy is the ability of the mind to wander into heaven and receive spiritual insights. In other words, Dadisho, in his definition of perfection, tries to unify the tradition of physical itinerancy associated with the *Book of Steps* with Isaac's definition of perfection that emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge through mental wandering into heaven.

While the author of the *Book of Steps* primarily associated perfection with physical itinerancy, Dadisho redefines itinerancy by ironically declaring that internal itinerancy of mind and spirit depends on "rest" (ܫܠܝܐ).[45] In a section devoted to the shortcomings of the anchoritic life in *Homily 1* of the *Commentary on Abba Isaiah,* Dadisho describes the inability of monks, including John the Baptist, who attempted to find rest by staying in one place. This description reads as follows:

> Even John the Baptist was not perfect in his love for human beings during his entire life in the desert, nor were those erring saints of the desert, men of whom the world was not worthy, according to the witness of the blessed apostle, and nor were the anchorites and

[45] See Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 1.18 (Draguet:27:15-22): "He who covets his [life] according to the spirit and wants to become perfect in constant and vigilant rest until the end will embrace that which delights him, for spiritual love is better acquired mysteriously in the soul and with the spiritual way of life in the midst of rest. Also when the fruits [of this spiritual love] summon the words and the necessary deeds, he will openly demonstrate his love for human beings and for exterior deeds more than others, since he had previously acquired love and was perfected spiritually." ܐܝܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܠܕܘܒܪܘܬܗ ܕܪܓܐ ܠܗ ܘܡܫܡܠܠ ܗܦܟܐ ܕܢܬܠ ܠܓܒܪ ܠܫܠܝܐ ܐܡܝܢܐ ܘܬܓܝܪܐ ܢܣܒ ܕܒܣܝܡܘܬܗ ܢܛܘܪܝܗ: ܒܗ̇ ܕܡܬܩܢܝܐ ܒܢܦܫܐ ܠܗ ܘܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ ܕܒܓܘ ܫܠܝܐ ܡܛܠ ܡܬܩܢܝܐ ܚܘܒܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ: ܘܡܐ ܕܦܐܪ̈ܐ ܕܩܪܝܢ ܠܡܠ̈ܠܐ ܠܥ̈ܒܕܐ ܘܠܣܘܥܪ̈ܢܐ ܐܢܢܩܝܐ: ܒܓܠܝܘܬ ܡܚܘܐ ܚܘܒܗ ܕܠܘܬ ܒܢܝܢܫܐ ܐܦ ܒܥ̈ܒܕܐ ܒܪ̈ܝܐ ܝܬܝܪ ܡܢ ܫܪܟܐ ܕܐܚܪ̈ܢܐ ܡܛܠ ܗܿ ܕܩܕܡ ܩܢܝܗ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܘܐܬܓܡܪ ܒܗ ܪܘܚܢܐܝܬ.

> the perfect recluses. Therefore for these reasons, it has been made known that the best way to make one perfect in spiritual love is with rest.[46]

Dadisho implies that the anchorites were unable to achieve perfection because they were never at rest. Their devotion to staying in one place occupied their minds to such an extent that they were unable to rest peacefully. Due to this particular shortcomings of the anchoritic life, Dadisho says that only as an itinerant can a monk truly rest from all distractions, even the distraction of being tied to a specific place.

True to the spirit of the *Book of Steps*, however, Dadisho teaches that the rest necessary for internal itinerancy is best found, not in external rest, but in external itinerancy. In other words, external wandering allows the mind the necessary rest to pursue mental itinerancy. For this reason, Dadisho makes a distinction between the life of the anchorite and the life of the itinerant: the itinerant, he says, can wander to heaven with his mind.

> In the former times of the Egyptian fathers, there was one special way of life that was either wandering or itinerancy. [This way of life] differs slightly from the life of the anchorite and was performed only by the great men and the perfect. Men say that they are called wanderers and itinerants because they continually depart from the earth and ascend to heaven with their intellects. . .They also go up and down with their thoughts in order to converse with the angels and to meditate on the knowledge of the new world.[47]

Dadisho would have been familiar with the sayings of the Egyptian fathers since he composed an extensive commentary on ‘Enanisho‘’s *Paradise of the Fathers*. In particular, he may have Abba Bessarion in mind, who at the point of his death, stated that

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[46] Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d’abba Isaïe* 1.18 (Draguet:28:1-7). ܐܝܠܝܢ ܢܘܚܝ ܡܫܡܫܢܐ ܠܚܒܪ ܗܘܐ ܒܪܘܚܬ ܒܫܝܢܐ ܥܠܘ ܕܟܠܐ ܕܠܐܦܫܪ ܕܡܕܒܪܢܐ: ܐܝܠܝܢ ܗܢܘܢ ܩ̈ܕܝܫܐ ܠܟܠܗ ܕܡܕܒܪܢܐ ܐܢܫ̈ܐ ܕܠܐ ܥܡܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܗܘܢ ܒܠܒܐ ܐܝܟ ܫܦܝܪܘܬܗ ܕܥܠܝܡܐ ܠܡܒܥܐ: ܐܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܪܓܠܝܢ ܘܡܫܬܡܥܐ ܠܚܒܪܐ. ܡܛܠ ܗܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܐܬܝܕܥܬ ܕܒܫܠܝܐ ܛܒ ܬܪܝܨ ܗܘ ܕܡܫܡܠܐ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ.

[47] Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d’abba Isaïe* 2.1 (Draguet:53:4-12). ܒܙܒܢ̈ܐ ܗܢܘܢ ܩ̈ܕܡܝܐ ܕܐܒܗ̈ܬܐ ܡܨܪ̈ܝܐ ܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܕܒܪܐ ܚܕ ܦܪܝܫܐ ܕܬܘܪܣܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܫܢܝܘܬܐ ܘܡܬܟܪܟܢܘܬܐ: ܘܡܫܚܠܦ ܩܠܝܠ ܡܢ ܕܘܒܪܗ ܕܐܝܚܝܕܝܘܬܐ ܘܒܠܚܘܕ ܡܢ ܐܢܫ̈ܐ ܪܘܪ̈ܒܐ ܘܓܡܝܪ̈ܐ ܘܡܬܕܒܪܐ ܗܘܬ. ܐܢܫ̈ܝܢ ܓܝܪ ܐܡܪܝܢ: ܕܡܫܢܝܢܐ ܘܡܬܟܪܟܢܐ ܡܬܩܪܝܢ ܒܠ ܕܐܡܝܢ ܟܐܡܝܢ ܡܢ ܐܪܥܐ ܘܣܠܩܝܢ ܠܫܡܝܐ ܒܪ̈ܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ ܠܥܠܐ ܐܟܘܬܐ ܘܠܬܚܬ ܒܡܦܩܢܘܬܗܘܢ, ܘܒܡܥ̈ܠܢܝܗܘܢ: ܡܬܟܪܟܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܒܡܡܠܠܐ ܕܡܠܐܟ̈ܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ.

a "monk ought to be as the Cherubim and the Seraphim: all eye."[48] Scholars have noted that this saying, along with statements by Ammonas and Pseudo-Macarius, recalls the *merkavah* ascent of Ezek 1.[49] The implication is that when a monk is not attached to a specific location, he ascends into heaven where he is free to meditate on heavenly objects. Like the angels, the monk who has achieved interior itinerancy of the mind becomes "all eye."

According to Dadisho, physical itinerancy leads to spiritual itinerancy and enables the monk to wander into heaven through visions and revelations. In his analysis of Abba Isaiah's commentary on various biblical passages where Christ says that the kingdom of heaven is approaching, he explains that Abba Isaiah and the fathers interpret the coming of the kingdom of heaven in two ways: first, in a literal manner wherein the dispensation of the kingdom of heaven chronologically follows the course of earthly history, but second, in a spiritual manner wherein the kingdom of heaven becomes immediately available in the hearts of the perfects.[50] He says in *Homily* 14,

> Although this [biblical passage about the kingdom of heaven approaching] is understood as the kingdom to come by the teachers when they preserve the order of history, the father solitaries interpret it in a spiritual way: it is the grace of the spirit that the saints receive from the labors so that after the service of the commandments, the power of the kingdom of heaven is revealed to them within their heart. They say concerning it: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven draws near." [In other words], if you repent as it is right to do, very quickly in the immediate future, there will be joy in your midst [because] those of you who are here on earth are in the kingdom of heaven in a manifestation of light by the power of the Spirit of Holiness.[51]

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[48] See the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 42. At the very least, Dadisho's position recalls the familiar monastic theme of apocalyptic ascent that occurs in connection with *anachoresis*.

[49] See Alexander Golitzin, "Heavenly Mysteries: Themes from Apocalyptic Literature in the Macarian Homilies and Selected other Fourth-Century Ascetical Wrtiers," in *Apocalyptic Through in Early Christianity*, ed. Robert J. Daley, Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 187.

[50] Biblical passages that mention the coming kingdom of heaven include Matt 4.17, Matt 10.7, and Luke 17.21.

[51] Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 14.5 (Draguet:210:9-18). ܗܕܐ ܕܐܡܝܪ ܥܠ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܥܬܝܕܐ
ܡܬܝܕܥܐ ܡܢ ܡܠܦܢܐ ܟܕ ܢܛܪܝܢ ܛܟܣܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܐܠܐ ܐܒܗܬܐ ܝܚܝܕܝܐ ܪܘܚܢܐܝܬ ܡܦܫܩܝܢ܆ ܥܠ ܛܝܒܘܬܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ

Perfect Christians who obey the commandments receive the future kingdom of heaven in the hearts while they are still in this world. With this new definition of itinerancy, Dadisho preserves a conception of perfection that is associated both with itinerancy and with an internal disposition of the mind.

With Isaac, but especially with Dadisho, we see an explicit emphasis on itinerancy of the mind. Both of these authors define perfection in terms of the acquisition of heavenly knowledge, but at the same time, both authors maintain the traditional connection between itinerancy in perfection. By reshaping the concept of physical itinerancy into mental itinerancy, Dadisho and Isaac ushered in a new understanding of perfection that was based more on the acquisition of knowledge than it was on outward signs of asceticism.

5.2.2 The Redefinition of Perfection: The Division of the Ascetical Life into Two or Three Stages?

A comparison between the *Book of Steps*, Isaac's *Ascetical Homilies*, and Dadisho's *Commentary on Abba Isaiah* further reveals the nature of the transition from the older model of perfection preserved in the *Book of Steps* to the newer knowledge-based model of perfection advocated by Isaac and Dadisho. In the older model of perfection of the *Book of Steps*, the Christian life is divided into two groups, the upright and the perfection and perfection involves the gift of the Holy Spirit as Paraclete. In the newer model of Isaac and Dadisho, which is associated with the school of Raban Shabur,

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ܡܬܚܠܝ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܝ ܢܚܕܐ ܕܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܫܠܝܡܘܬܐ ܕܡܬܩܪܒܝܢ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠܗ ܠܒܐ ܕܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܕ

the Christian life is separated into three divisions and perfection comes from the help of the Holy Spirit as pledge rather than as Paraclete. Dadisho incorporates elements from these two models of perfection in a contradictory manner because his understanding of perfection is in the process of undergoing a shift from the older model to the newer model expressed in a fully coherent manner by Isaac. The transitional nature of Dadisho's text, which combines older and newer models of perfection, further highlights that a knowledge-based understanding of perfection was beginning to infiltrate Syriac thinking on perfection during the seventh-century.

Turning first to the question of how to divide the Christian life, we see that the author of the *Book of Steps* distinguishes between two categories of Christian ascetics, the upright, who follow the commandments of God in an incomplete way, and the perfect, who completely follow the commandments of God. One of the author's biblical cues for this division is the commissioning of the apostles in Matt 10, wherein Jesus tells the apostles that he is sending them out as lambs among wolves and warns them not to enter the city of the Samaritans. He introduces this story by saying,

> This is the perfect way: "I am sending you out as lambs among wolves." But the path that leads you away from [perfection] is this: "Do not enter the city of the Samaritans." This is intended to the ones who are lacking lest they enter with just anyone until they receive the power from on high. When they are perfected in Christ, it will be acceptable for them to be with anyone and to travel with whomever they wish.[52]

The author of the *Book of Steps* sees two sets of instructions within the story of the sending out of the apostles: the first, in Matt 10.5, is directed towards upright Christians, who must "not enter the city of the Samaritans" because they are too easily swayed away

[52] Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 13.7 (Kmosko:504:11-18). ܠܐܘܪܚܐ ܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ ܗܕܐ ܗܝ܇ ܕܫܕܪ ܐܢܐ ܠܟܘܢ ܐܝܟ ܐܡܪܐ ܒܝܢܝ ܕܐܒܐ. ܫܒܝܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܣܬܡܟܐ ܠܟ ܡܢܗ ܗܘ܇ ܕܠܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܫܡܪܝܐ ܠܐ ܬܐܙܠܘܢ. ܗܕܐ ܠܒܨܝܪܐ ܐܡܝܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܢܥܠܘܢ ܠܘܬ ܟܠܢܫ܇ ܥܕܡܐ ܕܢܩܒܠܘܢ ܚܝܠܐ ܡܢ ܪܘܡܐ. ܘܡܐ ܕܓܡܪܘ ܒܗ ܓܡܝܪܝܢ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ܇ ܫܦܝܪ ܠܗܘܢ ܕܥܡ ܟܠܢܫ ܢܗܘܘܢ܇ ܘܠܘܬ ܡܢ ܕܨܒܝܢ ܢܐܙܠܘܢ.

from the path of renunciation while the second, in Matt 10.16, is directed towards perfect Christians, who are strong enough to resist temptations and can live safely amongst sinners as “lambs among wolves.” Jesus’ instruction to his disciples, therefore, contains two sets of commands aimed at two groups of Christians: the upright and the perfect.

Turning next to Dadisho’s *Commentary on Abba Isaiah*, we see that he contradicts himself by dividing the Christian life into two groups in some places and three stages in others. Like the author of the *Book of Steps*, Dadisho uses the commissioning of the disciples in Matt 10 to make a sharp distinction between two sets of ascetics, which he calls the novices and the perfects. His commentary on the passage is similar to material found in the *Book of Steps*:

> [Isaiah] cites the mission of the blessed apostles, when they were sent out by our Lord to the village of Judea and the commandments that kept them safe and the words that He said to them until they [the apostles] returned to Him, and compares them with the way of life of the solitary life and interprets them spiritually according to two solitary ways of life: the first in the labor of the those who are just beginning and the other in the quietness of perfection.[53]

Like the author of the *Book of Steps*, Dadisho determines that Christians who lack the ability to completely follow the commandments need extra precautions to protect them from falling back into a life of sin. Both Dadisho and the author of the *Book of Steps* have appropriated the same current within the Syriac ascetical tradition in which Christians are delineated into one of two categories depending on how well they follow the commandments of God.

Although Dadisho sometimes divides the ascetical life into two groups in a similar manner to the author of the *Book of Steps*, in other places he posits a threefold

[53] Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d’abba Isaïe* 15.42 (Draguet:311:5-11). ܘܡܥܗܪ ܐܫܠܝܚܘܬܐ ܕܛܘܒܢܐ ܐܡܪ܆ ܗܝܟ ܬܫܪܝܬܐ ܕܫܠܝܚܐ ܠܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܟܕ ܐܫܬܕܪܘ ܡܢ ܡܪܢ ܠܩܘܪܝܐ ܕܝܗܘܕ ܘܦܘܩܕܢܐ ܕܢܛܪܘ ܐܢܘܢ ܘܡܠܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܠܗܘܢ ܥܕ ܕܗܦܟܘ ܠܘܬܗ܆ ܘܡܦܚܡ ܠܗܘܢ ܥܡ ܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܝܚܝܕܝܘܬܐ ܘܡܦܫܩ ܠܗܘܢ ܪܘܚܢܐܝܬ ܥܠ ܬܪܬܝܗܘܢ ܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܝܚܝܕܝܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ ܕܒܥܡܠܐ ܕܡܫܪܝܢܘܬܐ ܘܐܚܪܢܐ ܕܒܫܠܝܐ ܕܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ ܘܐܡܪ.

division of the Christian life.[54] In *Homily* 11, Dadisho explains that the ascetical way of life is divided into three parts: "He [Isaiah] wants to teach us that the entire way of life of the solitaires is divided into three parts: the bodily labors, the intellectual way of life, and spiritual contemplation."[55] In passages such as this one, Dadisho chooses not to follow the tradition of interpretation surrounding Matt 10, which divides the ascetical life into two distinct groups, but rather, he divides the ascetical life into three stages.

This confusion in Dadisho's *Commentary on Abba Isaiah* about whether the ascetical life contains two divisions or three reveals the transitional nature of this text. Dadisho has assimilated some of the same biblical traditions that shaped the distinctive twofold division of the ascetical life of the *Book of Steps*, but at the same time, he has also assimilated an ascetical tradition that divides the ascetical life into three stages according to an anthropological division of the soul. The presence of these two traditions remains in tension throughout his *Commentary on Abba Isaiah*.

Turning to Isaac, we see that he has eliminated this confusion concerning the division of the ascetical life. Unlike Dadisho, Isaac bases his division of the ascetical life entirely on John the Solitary's threefold division of the ascetical life. Like John, Isaac also speaks of three "stages" (ܐܪܚܐ) in the Christian life. In *Homily* 1.12, he states that "there are three stages (ܐܪܚܐ) that order the entire course of the human being: the stage of the novitiate, the intermediary [stage], and perfection."[56] Although in this passage Isaac refers to these three stages in terms of experience and success with the Christian life, he still correlates each stage with the part of the human person that initiates the

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[54] See p. 1 of Chapter 2.

[55] Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 11.17 (Draguet:153 :1-3). ܗܘܝܢ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܬܚܙܝܢ ܠܢ ܕܟܠ ܐܪܚܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܕܝܚܝܕܐܝܐ ܡܬܦܠܓ ܠܬܠܬ ܦܠܓܐ ܦܠܓܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܦܠܓܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܦܠܓܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܘܡܬܬܝܡܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܪܘܚܢܝܬܐ.

[56] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.12 (Bedjan:121:21-22). ܗܠܝܢ ܬܠܬ ܐܪܚܐ ܕܡܬܩܢܢ ܟܠܗ ܡܬܬܐ ܕܒܪܢܫܐ ܐܪܚܐ ܕܡܬܬܐ ܘܡܨܥܬܐ ܘܡܫܠܡܘܬܐ.

actions in each of the stages. Isaac states that "ascetical way of life is the body, prayer is the soul, and reflective vision is the stage of the spirit."[57] Isaac's understanding of perfection therefore represents the culmination of the transition from a commitment to a twofold division of the ascetical life to a threefold division of the ascetical life. Dadisho and Isaac both replaced the older twofold division with a threefold division of the ascetical life in their respective seventh-century texts, but only Isaac fully excised the remnants of the older twofold division.

5.2.3 The Redefinition of Perfection: The Holy Spirit as pledge or Paraclete?

The author of the *Book of Steps* pairs his division of the Christian life into two groups with a corresponding distinction between two dispensations of the Spirit. While upright Christians, on the one hand, receive the Spirit in the form of a "pledge" (ܐܪܒܘܢܐ), perfect Christians receive a fuller dispensation of the Spirit as Paraclete.[58] The author states, "There are people in whom there is a little of our Lord [in the form of] a minor blessing, that is, the minor portion, which is called the pledge from God, but there are [also] those who receive the greatest of all our gifts, that is, what is called the Spirit [in

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[57] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.9.5. (CSCO 637:63). ܡܬܚܙܝ ܕܝܠܗ ܕܡܪܝܐ ܕܥܠ ܒܣܪܐ ܘܕܡܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܪܚܝܩ ܡܢ ܥܒܝܕܬܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ. Isaac distinguishes the stage of perfection from the other stages by virtue of it "ruling over flesh and blood" or being "far away from bodily toil." Perfection rules over flesh of blood in Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.68 (Bedjan:478:15-20) and perfection is "far from bodily deeds" in Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.81 (Bedjan:568:20-569:3).

[58] The author derives the term "pledge" from an interpretation of Paul's phrase "pledge of the Spirit" in 2 Cor. 1.22 and 5.5. The Peshitta text of these two verses contains the Syriac word ܪܝܫܝܬܐ, based on the root ܪܝܫ and is often translated as "first fruits." The author of the *Book of Steps* uses a similar word, ܐܪܒܘܢܐ, derived from the same root. Although the word ܐܪܒܘܢܐ literally means "intermingling," translators, following Antoine Guillaumont, have taken it to refer to some sort of pledge. See Antoine Guillaumont, "Les 'arrhes de l'Esprit' dans le Livre des degrés," in *Memorial Mgr Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis. 1898-1968: Fondateur et directeur de l'Orient syrien, 1956-1967*, Revue d'etude et de recherches sur les eglises de langue syriaque (Louven: 1969), 107-113.

the form of] the Paraclete."[59] The Paraclete represents a full dispensation of the Spirit for ascetics who have achieved perfection while the minor or limited pledge represents a partial dispensation of the Spirit for upright Christians who still lack perfection.

Dadisho shares much in common with the author of the *Book of Steps* regarding the twofold dispensation of the Spirit, but once again, his position is inconsistent, since he associates both the work of the Spirit as Paraclete and the Spirit as pledge with perfection. On the one hand, Dadisho, like the author of the *Book of Steps*, implies that the Spirit as Paraclete works in the lives of ascetics in pursuit of perfection, while a lesser dispensation of the Spirit works with novice Christians. Dadisho's primary biblical cue for this twofold dispensation of the Spirit is Luke 3.16, where John the Baptist states that Jesus will baptize people with the Spirit of holiness and of fire. Seeing that there are two types of Spirit, holiness and fire, he deduces that the Spirit must operate differently depending on the needs of different people. Dadisho calls the fiery power of the Spirit the "Spirit of repentance," while he terms the power of the Spirit that ushers God's holiness into the world the "Spirit of the Paraclete." For the monks who are not yet capable of complete renunciation, he recommends the fiery Spirit of repentance, but for monks who are already perfect, Dadisho recognizes the work of the Spirit of holiness in them in the form of the Paraclete. He says in *Homily* 13,

[59] Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 3.12 (Kmosko:72:6-12). ܐܝܬ ܒܗܘܢ ܡܢ ܪܗܒܘܢܐ ܕܪܗܒܘܢܐ܆ ܗܘܐ ܗܘ ܡܫܘܚܬܐ ܕܪܗܒܘܢܐ ܡܬܩܪܝܐ ܒܡܘܗܒܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ܆ ܘܐܝܬ ܕܡܫܘܚܬܐ ܕܪܒܐ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܫ̈ܘܚܢ ܡܠܝܐ܆ ܗܕܐ ܗܝ ܕܡܬܩܪܝܐ ܪܘܚܐ ܦܪܩܠܝܛܐ. Cf. Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 3.13 (Kmosko:72:20-73:7) and *Liber Graduum* 3.14 (Kmosko:76:18-23). Later on, he identifies the Paraclete as a superior dispensation of the Spirit in Anonymous, *Liber Graduum* 28.3 (Kmosko:789:23-792:5): "Although the Holy Spirit of God and the Paraclete are one, [Scripture] speaks of the Paraclete and the Holy Spirit in order to distinguish the greater gifts from the lesser ones. Whoever receives the great gift is perfected, but those who have received the lesser gifts are not perfected since they are lacking; unless the great gift comes, they are not fulfilled." ܚܕܐ ܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܘܦܪܩܠܝܛܐ. ܘܡܛܠ ܕܢܦܪܫ ܡܘ̈ܗܒܬܐ ܪ̈ܘܪܒܬܐ ܡܢ ܕܙ̈ܥܘܪܬܐ܆ ܗܢܐ ܪܡܙ ܦܪܩܠܝܛܐ ܘܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ܆ ܗܘ ܕܡܢ ܡܘܗܒܬܐ ܪܒܬܐ ܢܣܒ ܡܢ ܕܡܫܡܠ ܠܗ. ܗܢܘܢ ܕܝܢ ܡܘ̈ܗܒܬܐ ܙ̈ܥܘܪܬܐ ܠܐ ܡܢ ܢܣܒܝܢ ܡܫܬܡܠܝܢ܆ ܡܛܠ ܕܚܣܝܪܝܢ ܐܢܘܢ. ܘܐܠܐ ܐܬܬ ܗܝ ܡܘܗܒܬܐ ܪܒܬܐ܆ ܠܐ ܡܠܝܢ.

> The spirit of repentance and the Spirit of the Paraclete, which are not spoken of as two Spirits, are one Holy Spirit in person. . . However, since the righteous way of life is constituted by labors and by knowledge of what is right . . . the fathers call the labors of righteousness by the name "penitent way of life" and they have given the title "spiritual way of life" to the Spirit of the Paraclete.[60]

For Dadisho, as for the author of the *Book of Steps*, the Paraclete is the more complete gift of the Spirit given to perfect Christians.[61]

On the other hand, Dadisho contradicts this usage found in the *Book of Steps* when he, like Isaac, uses the word "pledge" to refer to a superior dispensation of the Spirit for perfect Christians. Whereas the author of the *Book of Steps* referred to the pledge as a partial reception of the Spirit for upright Christians, Dadisho instead interprets the pledge as a proleptic taste of the complete perfection that awaits human beings in the world to come.[62] In *Homily* 1, he states that a "pledge of perfection" is "prepared for the saints in the kingdom of heaven" and in *Homily* 7 he explains that the pledge of the kingdom of heaven is available to monks in this life. He continues in *Homily* 14:

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[60] Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 13.2 (Draguet:172:16-173:7). ܕܪܘܚܐ ܠܗܢܐ ܕܬܝܒܘܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܣܬܪܝܢ ܒܟܠܗ ܡܬܬܠܝܢ ܠܬܪܬܝܢ ܡܕܒܪܢܘ̈ܬܐ ܡܫܚܠܦܢ܆ ܠܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܘܠܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܬܐ܆ ܘܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܒܪܘܚܐ ܕܬܝܒܘܬܐ ܡܬܩܠܝܢ ܠܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܕܝܢ ܪܘܚܢܝܬܐ ܘܠܡܫܝܚܘܬܐ ܐܠܗܝܬܐ ܪܘܚܐ ܦܪܩܠܝܛܐ ܡܟܢܐ ܘܡܬܩܪܝܐ. ܪܘܚܐ ܕܝܢ ܬܪܝܢ ܕܡܬܒܥܢܘܬܐ ܪܘܚܐ ܦܪܩܠܝܛܐ ܕܐܫܬܘܕܥ ܠܗ ܒܟܠ ܐܬܪ ܪܘܚܐ܆ ܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܒܩܢܘܡܗ ܒܪ ܚܝܘ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܚܕ ܪܘܚܐ ܗܘ ܐܝܬ ܚܕ ܪܘܚܐ ܢܦܫ ܘܡܢ ܐܝܟܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܛܠ ܕܢ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܘܡܬܕܒܪܢܘܬ܆ ܐܠܐ ܡܛܠ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܙܕܝܩܘܬܐ ܡܢ ܥܡܠܐ ܘܡܢ ܝܕܥܬ ܡܫܪܢܘܬܐ ܡܬܩܝܡ. . . ܠܥܡܠܐ ܡܢ ܕܙܕܝܩܘܬܐ ܒܫܡܐ ܕܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܬܝܒܘܬܐ ܩܪܝܢ ܐܒܗ̈ܬܐ ܘܠܕܘܒܪܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ ܠܪܘܚܐ ܦܪܩܠܝܛܐ ܝܗܒܘ ܫܘܡܗܐ ܡܫܡܠܝܐ.

[61] Although Dadisho agrees with the author of the *Book of Steps* about the twofold dispensation of the Spirit, he uses different criteria for distinguishing between them. While the author of the *Book of Steps* distinguished between the two operations of the Spirit in terms of a partial dispensation — the limited pledge — and a full dispensation — the Paraclete — Dadisho instead says that the two dispensations differ by virtue of their "power" (ܚܝܠܐ). See Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 13.3 (Draguet:176:13-22) : "Although they are one Spirit, these two different operations work separately: with the novices in [times of] suffering, distress, and anxiety, and [with] the perfects [in times of] quietness, gladness, and comfort. For this reason the fathers call the measure of labor for the novice the spirit of repentance. . .referring to the type of burning and fiery power that inflicts pain and they name the other measure of perfection the Spirit of the Paraclete, that is, the comforter, referring to the type of power that is illuminating and gladdening of fire." ܗܠܝܢ ܕܝܢ ܬܪܬܝܢ ܡܕܒܪ̈ܢܘܬܐ ܡܫܚܠ̈ܦܬܐ ܐܦ ܕܚܕ ܪܘܚܐ ܐܢܘܢ ܐܠܐ ܦܪܝܫܐܝܬ ܡܬܚܙ̈ܝܢ܆ ܥܡ ܫܒܪܐ ܡܢ ܒܐܘܠܨܢܐ ܘܒܥܩܬܐ ܘܒܨܝܪܘܬܐ ܥܡ ܓܡܝܪ̈ܐ ܕܝܢ ܒܫܝܢܐ ܘܒܚܕܘܬܐ ܘܒܒܘܝܐܐ. ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܠܡܫܘܚܬܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܫܒܪܘܬܐ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܬܝܒܘܬܐ ܩܪܝܢ ܐܒܗ̈ܬܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܠܦܘܚܡܐ ܐܚܪܝܬܐ ܡܢ ܠܟܠ ܠܦܘܚܡܐ ܕܚܝܠܐ ܡܟܐܒܢܐ ܘܡܘܩܕܢܐ ܘܢܘܪܢܐ܆ ܠܡܫܘܚܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܐܚܪܬܐ ܕܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ ܒܗ ܪܘܚܐ ܦܪܩܠܝܛܐ ܗܢܘ ܡܒܝܐܢܐ ܩܪܝܢ ܠܦܘܚܡܐ ܕܚܝܠܐ ܡܢܗܪܢܐ ܘܡܦܨܚܢܐ ܕܢܘܪܐ.

[62] Dadisho retains the biblical the biblical term "pledge" (ܪܗܒܘܢܐ) rather than the term adapted term "pledge, (ܡܥܪܒܢܐ) found in the *Book of Steps*.

> This is what Aba Isaiah says and all the other fathers that it is right for the solitaries to abstain from all the passions of sin and to be made complete in the service of righteousness so that they will take delight in the "here" as a pledge of the kingdom of heaven through the power of the Spirit of holiness until the time comes to delight in heaven.[63]

The pledge of the Spirit is the means through which the perfect Christians obtain a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven in this world and it represents the true gift of the Paraclete to perfect Christians. In this way, Dadisho combines his notion of the Paraclete, as the Spirit of holiness, with his understanding of the pledge of the Spirit.

Isaac, by contrast, completely reverses the author of the *Book of Step's* hierarchy of the Spirit. Isaac says that knowledge of the future world is a gift of the Spirit, but unlike the author of the *Book of Steps*, who associated the pledge of the Spirit with inferior Christians and the Paraclete with perfect Christians, Isaac downplays the work of the Spirit as Paraclete and instead favors the pledge as the ultimate dispensation of the Spirit within the life of perfect Christians.[64] According to Isaac, the pledge of the Spirit represents the mystical foretaste of heavenly knowledge that is directly presented to the mind of perfect monks who engage in prayer.[65] When Isaac uses the word "pledge," he consistently does so in the context of the future kingdom. For example, in *Homily* 2.10, Isaac says that whoever has found spiritual enjoyment of Christ has received "the pledge

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[63] Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 14.5 (Draguet:210:1-5). ܗܕܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܐܒܐ ܐܫܥܝܐ ܘܟܠ ܐܒܗܬܐ ܐܚܪܢܐ ܕܫܪܝܪܐ ܠܗܘܢ ܕܢܬܪܚܩܘܢ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܚܛܝܬܐ ܕܚܛܝܐ ܘܢܫܠܡܘܢ ܒܫܘܬܦܘܬܐ ܕܙܕܝܩܘܬܐ ܕܢܗܘܘܢ ܡܬܚܕܝܢ ܒܗܢܐ ܐܝܟ ܪܘܗܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܒܚܝܠ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܥܕ ܕܢܬܐ ܕܢܬܚܕܝܢ ܒܫܡܝܐ ܥܕ ܕܢܬܐ ܕܢܬܚܕܝܢ. Cf. Dadisho, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 14.6 (Draguet:212:5-8) : "The pledge of the [perfects] and their principle part work spiritually from this time onward in the hearts of the perfects so that they will be certain of those things that are to come, scorn fully everything of the time, and love God until death." ܗܘ ܕܡܬܬܐ ܕܐܒܗܬܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܒܠܒܐ ܕܡܫܠܡܝܢ ܡܢ ܗܢܐ ܙܒܢܐ ܠܥܠ ܕܢܗܘܢ ܒܕܝܩܝܢ ܕܠܐ ܢܬܛܪܦܘܢ ܡܕܡ ܕܟܠ ܙܒܢܐ ܘܢܪܚܡܘܢ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܥܕ ܕܡܘܬܐ. ܗܢܘ ܕܡܬܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܬܬܠ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܥܕ ܕܢܬܐ ܕܢܬܚܕܝܢ.

[64] Isaac mentions the Paraclete in *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.9 (Bedjan:91:8) and *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:259:10), but not in connection with perfection.

[65] For further background on Isaac's use of pledge language, see André Louf, "L'homme dans l'histoire du salut selon Isaac le Syrien," *CPE* 88 (2002), 49-54.

from this world of those things which are to come."[66] Isaac understands the pledge of the Spirit as the primary way that Christians comes to possess knowledge of the future kingdom of heaven.

This foretaste of the future kingdom of heaven that Christian ascetics receive as a pledge becomes, for Isaac, the primary way in which monks achieve perfection. In *Homily* 1.80, Isaac details the connection between the pledge and perfection, which takes place during prayer.

> In [prayer], pledges of the goods of the life to come and the presentation of the gifts whose mysteries are inscribed in the holy scriptures are given. On this account, our fathers did not neglect this labor from the time of the beginning of their training until the measure of perfection.[67]

According to Isaac, the labor of prayer brings about the pledge of the future life and brings ascetics to the measure of perfection.

The second part of this chapter has shown that a shift took place among East-Syriac authors regarding the notion of perfection. The *Book of Steps* represents an older view of perfection in which monks achieve perfection through a strict itinerant form of asceticism that is accompanied by the gift of the Paraclete. Dadisho exhibits a number of similarities to this understanding of perfection including his account of a twofold dispensation of the Spirit and the important role that he assigns to physical itinerancy in acquiring heavenly knowledge. Although Dadisho begins to distance himself from the model of perfection associated with the *Book of Steps* by introducing other contradictory themes of perfection, Isaac fully parts ways with the understanding of perfection found in

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[66] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.10.40 (CSCO 554:41-42). Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.12.2 (CSCO 554:54), where he prays that he would be made worthy, "as though in a pledge" of the "delight at the good things that are to come."

[67] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.80 (Bedjan:560:14-18). ܒܗ ܡܬܝܗܒܝܢ ܪ̈ܘܚܘܢ ܛܘ̈ܒܐ ܕܚܝ̈ܐ ܕܥܬܝ̈ܕܐ. ܘܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܡܘܗܒܬܐ ܕܒܟܬܒ̈ܐ ܩܕܝ̈ܫܐ ܪܫܝܡܝܢ ܐܪ̈ܙܝܗܘܢ. ܘܡܛܠܬܗܢܐ. ܠܐ ܡܗܡܝܢ ܗܘܐ ܐܒܗ̈ܝܢ ܡܢ ܥܡܠܐ ܗܢܐ ܡܢ ܪܫܝܬܐ ܕܫܘܪܝܗܘܢ. ܘܥܕܡܐ ܠܡܫܘܚܬܐ ܕܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ.

the *Book of Steps*. Isaac consistently divides the ascetical life into three stages and he does not define the final stage of perfection in terms of physical itinerancy and the work of the Paraclete, but rather, in terms of mental itinerancy for the purpose of attaining heavenly knowledge, which is received through a pledge of the world to come. Dadisho and Isaac both inherited a notion of perfection from the monastery of Rabban Shabur and both authors began to introduce this notion into their writings during the seventh-century. Dadisho's inclusion of material from both traditions marks him as the end of the *Book of Step's* notion of perfection and the beginning of a new understanding of perfection that was rendered fully coherent by Isaac.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that Isaac develops a model of perfection that he understands to be a proleptic eschatological experience of the world to come. While John the Solitary emphasized the themes of hope for the world to come and the acquisition of heavenly knowledge, Isaac turns these themes into real possibilities that are obtainable in this world through the pursuit of perfection. The novelty of Isaac's new model of perfection is demonstrated by comparing it to Dadisho's *Commentary on Abba Isaiah*, which contains an assemblage of themes from both the older and newer models of perfection and therefore reveals the moment in history when the older model of perfection began to yield to the newer model of perfection. Isaac's ascetical homilies represent a coherent model of perfection based on the acquisition of heavenly knowledge and proleptic eschatological experience of the world to come.

The final part of this dissertation (chapters six and seven) will further explore Isaac's notion of proleptic experience of the world to come through wonder. Isaac uses the concepts of wonder and astonishment to explain how a person who is subject to the limitations of material creation processes the spiritual and immaterial knowledge of heaven.

Part 3: Wonder as the Union Between Anthropology and Eschatology

Chapter 6

Sources for Isaac's Development of Wonder and Astonishment

Wonder is the culmination of Isaac's ascetical system because it is what unites his anthropology and eschatology. In the previous chapter, we saw that Isaac reworks John the Solitary's emphasis on hope for the world to come into a proleptic eschatological experience of perfection. In order to make this account of proleptic eschatological experience coherent with the rest of his ascetical system, Isaac realizes that he must provide an explanation of how human beings appropriate knowledge of the world to come through the cognitive structures of material substance. The difficulty in this endeavor lies in what Isaac understands to be a strict division between knowledge of the world to come and knowledge derived from the material world. He recognizes that human beings acquire knowledge of the material world though bodily sensations, which are processed according to a temporal sequence of logic, but knowledge of the world to come, he says, comes from an entirely different mode of apprehension. According to Isaac, knowledge of the world to come is a spiritual and therefore cannot be understood through the structures of temporal reasoning; rather, spiritual knowledge is understood only by the mind in a state of wonder. Since the human mind is inseparable from the soul and body, Isaac must account for the effect that spiritual knowledge has on the body and soul as well as the ways that the body and soul help prepare the mind to receive spiritual knowledge.

Isaac uses two different terms to describe how human beings react to knowledge of the world to come. The first term, ܬܝܡܗܐ, is usually translated as "wonder" or "ecstasy," while the second term, ܬܡܗܐ, often signifies a state of "astonishment," or "amazement." I have chosen to translate ܬܝܡܗܐ as "wonder" and ܬܡܗܐ as "astonishment." Although earlier Syriac authors like Ephrem and John the Solitary used the two terms interchangeably, Isaac assigns very specific technical meanings to each of them. Wonder, he says, is the way that human beings successfully comprehend revelations from the world to come while astonishment represents the opposite, i.e., human inability to comprehend revelations from the world to come.[1]

While the following chapter will provide a detailed portrait of how wonder and astonishment function to unite anthropology and eschatology in Isaac's ascetical system, this chapter will examine the sources that Isaac used to formulate his understanding of wonder and astonishment. I will argue that Isaac's conception of wonder and astonishment is an original synthesis constructed from a wide range of sources.[2] While the terms themselves come from the Syriac translation of the Bible, Isaac gets the close

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[1] I claim that Isaac posits a real semantic difference between the words wonder and astonishment, but he is not always consistent and, as a result, other scholars have chosen to regard the terms as synonyms in Isaac's writings. See, for example, Patrick Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 174-75.

[2] This dissertation has already commented on the relationship between Isaac and Dadisho. A comparison between Isaac on Dadisho on the subject of wonder further reveals the special import that Isaac assigns to the phenomenon of wonder. While the term appears regularly throughout all three collections of Isaac's ascetical homilies, Dadisho rarely uses the term in his *Commentary on Abba Isaiah* [the term appears only once; see *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe* 2.10 (Draguet:59:5), where Dadisho says that observance of the spirit is wonder at God]. Page and line numbers refer to *Commentaire du livre d'Abba Isaïe,* CSCO 326-27, Scriptores Syri 144-45, ed. René Draguet (Leuven: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1972). Chapter five already showed how Isaac and Dadisho developed a common notion of perfection over and against the older attitude of perfection. Both authors present an account of the ascetical life wherein the monk enters heaven with his mind and the pledge of the Spirit transports the future kingdom of heaven into his heart. Although both authors arrive at a similar understanding of perfection, they differ in their incorporation of wonder. While Isaac describes the reception of the future kingdom of heaven as a state of wonder, Dadisho rarely refers to wonder. This difference, I contend, is significant because it proves that the important role that Isaac assigns to wonder is his own unique development. The concept of wonder is what makes Isaac's ascetical system different from Dadisho's.

connection between wonder and astonishment from Ephrem, who uses wonder and astonishment as synonyms; he gets the idea of using wonder and astonishment for describing how human beings receive knowledge of the world to come from John the Solitary; and finally, he derives his definition of the terms from two unexpected sources: Pseudo-Dionysius and Evagrius. Isaac's use of Pseudo-Dionysian and Evagrian material is surprising because the term wonder does not appear in the extant Syriac translation of Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* and because Evagrius never even used the term. Isaac draws a correlation between the Pseudo-Dionysian language of light and darkness and the Syriac terminology of wonder and astonishment without any cues from the Syriac rendition of the text. Likewise, he derives his understanding of wonder from an Evagrian passage that originally described the human reception of Trinitarian light, but was altered by the Syriac translator to include the word wonder. On the basis of this interpolation, Isaac derives his theory of how wonder operates in the mind and, to even things out, he associates astonishment with other Evagrian notions.

The rest of this chapter will be divided into two sections. In the first section, I will examine Isaac's use of Syriac sources. Ephrem was the first Syriac author to bring the terms wonder and astonishment into widespread currency while John the Solitary situated wonder and astonishment within the framework of the world to come. The second section will look at how Isaac attached meanings derived from Greek sources to the Syriac notions of wonder and astonishment. Isaac turns to Pseudo-Dionysius and Evagrius in order to construct his definitions for wonder and astonishment. This complex synthesis of multiple Syriac and Greek sources demonstrates the originality of Isaac's

thinking. He did not just copy ideas from any one author verbatim, but he took bits and pieces from many different predecessors and wove them together into a coherent theory.

6.1.1 Wonder in the Syriac Tradition: The Bible and Ephrem

Although the terms wonder and astonishment appear throughout the Syriac translation of the Bible, including verses such as Deut 28.28, 1 Kgs 22.19, Luke 8.56, and Acts 10.10, Isaac does not refer to these passages.[3] On the contrary, his biblical reference to wonder comes from the account of Paul's rapture into the third heaven, from 2 Cor 12.2-3. Although this passage contains neither the word wonder nor astonishment, Isaac still sees Paul's rapture as the prototype for all subsequent experiences of wonder.[4] Otherwise, Isaac's conception of wonder and astonishment has little dependence on the Syriac translation of the Bible.

The first Syriac author to make significant use of both wonder and astonishment was Ephrem.[5] While Ephrem elevates the concept of wonder to a new level of importance in Syriac theology, his use of wonder only serves as a general inspiration for the way Isaac uses the concept. Nevertheless, two points are worth mentioning. First, Ephrem is the first author to establish a close connection between wonder and astonishment, as he often uses the two words synonymously. His frequent pairing of the

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[3] For further background on the concept of wonder in the Syriac Bible and in Syriac authors, see Robert Beulay, "De l'émerveillement à l'extase: Jean de Dalyatha et Abou Sa'id al-Kharraz," in *Youakim Moubarac: Dossier dirigé par Jean Stassinet*, Cahiers d'Orientalisme 20 (Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 2005), 333-43. Also see Serafim Seppälä, *In Speechless Ecstasy: Expression & Interpretation of Mystical Experience In Classical Syriac & Sufi Literature*, Studia Orientalia 98 (Helsinki: Finnish Acad of Sci & Letters, 2003), especially pp. 331-42 for background on Ephrem's use of wonder and astonishment.
[4] See Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.5.15 (CSCO 637:30) and *Terza Collezione* 3.13.5-6 (CSCO 637:106). Page numbers refer to *Isacco Di Ninive Terza Collezione*, ed. Sabino Chialà, CSCO 637, Scriptores Syri 246 (Louven: Peeters, 2011).
[5] Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 69.

two words solidified their close connection for subsequent authors, like Isaac. Second, Ephrem states that the mind stands in wonder at God after meditating on the Scriptures. As we will see in the next chapter, Isaac also uses wonder in this sense.

Ephrem frequently pairs wonder and astonishment together in his writings. Throughout the *Hymns on Faith,* for example, he uses the two words together as synonyms to express one concept.[6] "An astonishment and wonder in our generation!" he says, as he refers to the incarnation.[7] Elsewhere, he exclaims, "astonishment, wonder, and trepidation!" as he ponders the biblical story of Mariam.[8] In these passages as well as others, he uses two or even three words to emphasize the importance of biblical events. While this rhetorical technique succeeds in establishing the degree of importance that Ephrem wishes to assign to these biblical stories, it does not allow him to determine distinctions between wonder and astonishment in terms of a definition. For this reason, later authors would see the two terms as closely related concepts.

Ephrem's most frequent use of the term wonder is as a synonym for another Syriac word, "marvel" (ܕܘܡܪܐ). According to Ephrem, the miracles of the Bible are great marvels, but he often substitutes the word wonder for marvel when he speaks of miracles. In the first *Hymn on the Nativity*, for example, he calls the incarnation a marvel on the basis of Is 9.5, which states that the birth of a child will be called a marvel. "It is a great marvel," he says, "that the Son, who dwelt entirely in a body, inhabited [the body]

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[6] In addition to the two examples cited below, see also Ephrem *hymnen de fide* 4.8 (Beck:12), 26.6 (Beck 90), 37.17 (Beck 123), 41.7 (Beck 134), and 42.7 (Beck 137). Page numbers refer to *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*, ed. Edmund Beck, CSCO 154, Scriptores Syri 73 (Louven: L Durbecq, 1955).

[7] Ephrem *hymnen de fide* 5.19 (Beck:23). ܬܡܗܐ ܘܬܡܗܪܐ ܒܕܪܢ

[8] Ephrem *hymnen de fide* 28.10 (Beck:98). ܬܡܗܐ ܘܬܗܪܐ ܘܪܗܝܒܘܬܐ

entirely and [the body] was sufficient for him."[9] Yet elsewhere, in *Hymn on the Nativity* 23.2, Ephrem paraphrases Isa 9.5 and uses the word wonder instead of the word marvel to refer to the incarnation. He says, "Today a child is born and he is called wonder, for it is a wonder that God reveals himself as an infant."[10] Therefore, when Ephrem calls the miracle of the incarnation a wonder, he imagines it as a wonder in the same sense as a marvel or spectacle.[11]

Ephrem uses wonder as a synonym for marvel in other writings as well. In the *Hymns on Faith*, for example, he refers to the miracle of the incarnation with the following exclamation: "It is a wonder that God descended to dust!"[12] He also describes other miracles as wonders with this same sense. John the Baptist leaping in his mother's womb is a wonder.[13] Likewise, Jesus' footprint in the water is a wonder, as is the piece of earth on which Jesus spat.[14] This meaning of wonder as a synonym for the word marvel is Ephrem's most common way of using the term.

Ephrem also uses the term astonishment as a synonym for the word marvel. For example, in the *Hymns on Faith*, he calls the Old Testament reference to the speech of Balaam's donkey both a wonder and an astonishment.[15] Likewise, Jesus' cursing of the

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[9] Ephrem *hymnen de nativitate* 23.2 (Beck:117). ܡܢ ܡܢ ܐܬܐ ܬܘܠܕܐ ܕܟܠܗ ܡܢ ܬܘܠܕܐ ܬܘܡܗ ܬܘܡܗ ܕܐܝ ܐܢ ܬܘܠܕܐ ܕܠܗ ܡܫܟܚ. Page numbers refer to *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate: (Epiphania)*, ed. Edmund Beck, CSCO 186, Scriptores Syri 82 (Louven:Secretariat du CorpusSCO, 1959).

[10] Ephrem *hymnen de nativitate* 1.9 (Beck:2). ܬܡܗܐ ܕܒܪ ܐܢ ܬܘܠܕܐ ܬܘܠܕܐ ,ܡܬܩܪܐ ܫܡܗ ܕܦܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ [ܬܗܘܐ] ,ܐܢ ܬܗܘܐ [ܬܗܘܐ].

[11] Ephrem calls the incarnation a wonder in other passages of the *Hymns on the Nativity*. See, for example, Ephrem *hymnen de nativitate* 12.1 (Beck:71) and *hymnen de nativitate* 21.7 (Beck:106).

[12] Ephrem *hymnen de fide* 46.11 (Beck:148). ܬܘܡܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܬܗܘܐ ܐܢ ܬܘܡܗ .

[13] See Ephrem *hymnen de virginitate* 28.10 (Beck:98) and *hymnen de nativitate* 6.18 (Beck:54). Page numbers refer to *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate*, ed. Edmund Beck, CSCO 223, Scriptores Syri 94 (Louven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1962).

[14] See Ephrem *hymnen de fide* 10.20 (Beck:52) and *hymnen de virginitate* 35.3 (Beck:127).

[15] See Ephrem *hymnen de fide* 41.7 (Beck:134).

fig tree as an astonishment, as is the righteousness of Mary and Joseph.[16] In short, throughout the *Hymns on Faith* and the *Hymns on the Nativity*, Ephrem equates both wonder and astonishment with marvels.

More specifically related to the way that Isaac employs the terms wonder and astonishment is Ephrem's use of the term wonder in the *Hymns on Paradise*. In *Hymn* 6.2, he states that meditation on the scripture brings his mind into a state of wonder and astonishment as he contemplates the perfection of the original state of creation, namely, the Garden of Paradise.

> Scripture brought me to the entrance of Paradise and while the mind, which is spiritual, stood in astonishment and wonder, the intellect became distracted and grew weak as the senses were no longer able comprehend its glorious treasures or to discern its tastes and find any comparison for its colors or assemble its beauties and speak of its history.[17]

Although Ephrem's reference to wonder as a state that the mind enters into from meditation on the scriptural account of Paradise is unique among his many other references to wonder, where he often uses the word as a synonym for the word marvel, it is in this sense that Isaac most often employ the concept of wonder. As we shall see, Isaac also claims that human beings apprehend spiritual knowledge through wonder.

While Ephrem's most common usage of the terms wonder and astonishment is to describe biblical miracles, or marvels, Isaac's use of these terms is more nuanced in that he refers specifically to a subjective state of mind that monks experience when confronted with the mysteries of scripture and the reality of the world to come, but he does follow Ephrem in drawing a connection between the terms wonder and astonishment

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[16] See Ephrem *hymnen de fide* 25.15 (Beck:87).

[17] Ephrem *hymnen de Paradiso* 6.2 (Beck19-20). ܟܬܒܐ ܠܬܪܥ ܬܪܥܗ ܡܩܠܝܢ ܕܦܪܕܝܣܐ ܘܗܘܢܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ ܗܘ ܟܕ ܟܠ ܬܡܗܬ ܘܬܗܪܬ ܗܘܐ ܟܪܝܐ ܘܐܬܪܦܝ ܕܠܐ ܐܬܡܟܟܝ ܗ̄ ܪ ܡܕܥܐ ܕܪܓܫܐ ܠܡܒܠܥ ܓܙܘܗܝ ܡܝܩܪܐ ܘܦܪܫܘ ܠܛܥܡܘܗܝ ܘܢܫܟܚܘܢ ܠܓܘܢܘܗܝ ܘܢܐܣܘܢ ܫܘܦܪܘܗܝ ܘܢܡܠܠܘܢ ܫܪܒܗ. Page numbers refer to *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradiso und contra Julianum*, ed. Edmund Beck, CSCO 174, Scriptores Syri 78 (Louven: Secretariat du CorpusSCO, 1957).

themselves. Isaac is also more influenced by Ephrem's use of the term wonder in the *Hymns on Paradise* — where he states that the mind will stand in wonder before the perfection of the new world — than by Ephrem's use of the term in other works, such as the *Hymns on Faith*, *Hymns on Virginity*, and *Hymns on the Nativity*.

6.1.2 Wonder in the Syriac Tradition: John the Solitary

While Ephrem elevates the concept of wonder to a new level of importance in Syriac theology, his use of wonder is only a general inspiration for the way Isaac uses the concept. John the Solitary also uses the concept of wonder, but his framing of the term had a more specific influence on Isaac than Ephrem's. Although John retains Ephrem's general use of wonder to describe biblical miracles, he also incorporates two nuances into the concept of wonder that influence Isaac's understanding.[18] First, John specifically associates wonder with the spiritual level of the ascetical life, and second, he understands the phenomenon of wonder primarily as a subjective state that is experienced in the world to come.

First of all, John associates wonder with the spiritual level of the ascetical life in the *Dialogue on the Soul and Passions*.[19] He states that a person who is subject to the corruption of the body is incapable of experiencing wonder and astonishment at God.

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[18] John describes the miracles of the disciples as "wondrous" (ܡܬܬܡܗܐ). See John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 1 (Dedering:10:1-12:5). Page and line numbers refer to *Ein Dialog über Die Seele und Die Affecte des Menschen*, ed. Sven Dedering (Leiden: Brill, 1936). Elsewhere, he refers to the powers of Jesus as "wonderful." See John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 2 (Strothmann:20:185). Page and line numbers refer to Werner Strothmann, *Johannes von Apamea*. Patristische Texte und Studien 11 (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1972).

[19] The *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel* — a text that is roughly contemporary to Isaac's writings — also uses the term wonder in a monastic setting. Alexander Golitzin has argued that the term ܡܬܡܗܐ is part of a monastic vocabulary shared by Isaac and the author of the apocalypse. For comparisons, see Alexander Golitzin, "A Monastic Setting for the *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*," in *To Train His Soul in Books: Syriac*

> We are bound to flesh and blood and we are subject to the corruption of the body; [therefore] we dismiss [the ability] to be astonished and wonder at hidden and concealed riches that are in every world and in the heavenly assemblies, the glorious and perfect beauties, and every rational and spiritual work.[20]

Although John admits that monks who operate at the level of the body may experience wonder, it is a misplaced wonder that is directed at the things of this world rather than God.[21] A person must therefore advance beyond the level of the body and soul in order to experience true wonder at God. In a discussion of the three levels of the ascetical life, he cites examples of what sort of actions take place during the bodily, soulish, and spiritual levels. Wonder is a ministry that occurs during the spiritual level alone:

> Bodily ministration for God is the [the giving of] vows and oblations, as was the custom of the law of Israel, which was bound to bodily ministration. Soulish ministration for God is the psalmody of passion, which are pure considerations in a clean intellect. Spiritual ministration for God is wonder at God.[22]

While monks may perform other useful ministries during the bodily and soulish levels of the ascetical life, such as vows, oblations, and psalmody, they cannot engage in wonder at God, which according to John, is the ministry of the world to come. Wonder is the activity that the saints and angels engage in when they are confronted with the direct presence of God in the world to come and therefore it is an activity that is reserved for the spiritual level of the ascetical life.

Asceticism in Early Christianity, ed. Robin Darling Young and Monica J. Blanchard (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 74-84.

[20] John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 3.11 (Strothmann:128:44-5). ܡܢ ܕܒܣܪܐ ܘܕܕܡܐ ܐܢܘܢ ܡܬܚܒܠܝܢ ܘܠܡܬܚܒܠܘܬܐ ܕܒܟܠ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܟܣܝܢ ܘܕܒܫܡܝܐ ܕܫܪܝܪܐ ܘܫܦܝܪܐ ܕܫܦܝܪ ܟܠ ܥܒܕܐ ܕܪܘܚܢܝܐ ܘܡܬܩܢܝܢ ܕܡܬܩܢ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܥܒܕܐ ܕܪܘܚܢܝܐ ܘܡܬܩܢ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܥܒܕܐ ܕܪܘܚܢܝܐ.

[21] For example, see John the Solitary, *Briefe* 3 (Rignell:116:25-117:3): "The one who seeks out the depravity of this world is prideful in his discoveries. It seems right [for him] to wonder at the cross of that shameful [concern] for creation, for he places wonder in the leaders of the world." ܡܢ ܕܒܥܐ ܕܫܘܫܝܢܐ ܕܗܕܐ ܥܠܡܐ ܡܬܪܡܐ ܗܘ ܒܚܟܡܬܗ. ܡܬܩܢ ܠܗ ܕܫܝܪ ܕܢܬܡܗ ܥܠ ܨܠܒܐ ܕܗܘ ܒܙܝܢܐ ܕܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܣܝܡ ܗܘ ܡܬܩܢ ܒܪܫܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ. Page and line numbers refer to Lars Gösta Rignell, *Briefe von Johannes dem Einsiedler* (Lund: Håken Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1941).

[22] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 3 (Dedering:87:18-22). ܡܕܡ ܕܢܬܠ. ܡܠܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܕܫܘܫܝܢܐ ܕܒܫܡܝܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܕܫܘܫܝܢܐ ܕܒܥܠܡܐ. ܡܕܡ ܕܠܐ ܕܫܘܫܝܢܐ ܕܒܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܕܫܘܫܝܢܐ ܕܒܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ.

In a similar manner, John also describes how the spiritual person is alone capable of entering into a state of astonishment in order to receive divine revelations. The spiritual man is not prideful on account of the knowledge he possesses because he knows that he is incapable of understanding divine revelations apart from divine intervention. Since divine revelations surpass human capabilities for understanding, a spiritual person only receives them in a state of astonishment at what is beyond human understanding. John provides the following explanation:

> Concerning the knowledge of the spiritual man, why is he not puffed up by the opinion of his wisdom, even though he understands little of what I say? It is because his knowledge is increased by a mystery that is superior to [the knowledge of] bodies and souls, for he perceives the mystery through revelation because there is no nature of movements that comprehend the truth in his soul. However that mystery is more sublime than he thinks, for what he knows to be too sublime is revelation. Furthermore, this [mystery] is unable to be known to him except for when it is revealed because this sickness of the soul is shut in by the body. On account of these things, [this revelation] continually rules over him with astonishment that [instills] a profundity of the wisdom of God, which [causes him to consider] how this life is inferior to the mystery to come and [how] it is [impossible] for the nature of human beings to arrive at this these [future mysteries] without the grace of God.[23]

According to John, the spiritual person receives divine revelations that surpass material modes of understanding. Since these divine revelations transcend human structures of knowledge, they are received through astonishment. While Isaac says that it is wonder, not astonishment, that "instills a profundity of the wisdom of God," he nevertheless preserves this framework of receiving divine knowledge during the spiritual level of the ascetical life as the appropriate occasion for both wonder and astonishment.

[23] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 3 (Dedering:71:9-20). ܥܠ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܒܪܢܫܐ ܪܘܚܢܐ܆ ܕܡܛܠ ܡܢܐ ܠܐ ܐܬܬܥܝܗܝ، ܫܬܪܐ ܒܡܣܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܚܟܡܬܗ. ܒܙܥܘܪܬܐ ܐܣܬܟܠܘ ܡܕܡ ܕܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ. ܡܛܠ ܕܒܐܪܙܐ ܕܥܠܝ ܡܢ ܦܓܪܐ ܘܢܦܫܐ ܡܬܝܪܒܐ ܝܕܥܬܗ. ܠܗ ܕܝܢ ܠܐܪܙܐ ܡܪܓܫ ܠܗ ܒܓܠܝܢܐ. ܕܠܝܬ ܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܙܘܥܝܗܘܢ ܕܢܫܟܚܘܢ ܫܪܪܗ ܒܢܦܫܗ. ܐܠܐ ܪܡ ܗܘ ܗܿܘ ܐܪܙܐ ܡܢ ܗܿܝ ܕܡܬܪܥܐ. ܕܗܿܝ ܕܝܕܥ ܕܪܡ ܗܘ. ܕܓܠܝܢܐ ܗܘ. ܗܿܝ ܕܝܢ ܕܠܐ ܫܟܝܚ ܕܬܬܝܕܥ ܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܡܐ ܕܐܬܓܠܝ ܠܗ. ܕܟܘܪܗܢܐ ܗܘ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܕܐܣܝܪܐ ܒܦܓܪܐ. ܘܒܗܠܝܢ ܐܡܝܢܐܝܬ ܡܫܠܛ ܒܗ ܬܗܪܐ ܕܥܘܡܩܐ ܕܚܟܡܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ. ܕܐܝܟܢܐ ܒܨܝܪܝܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܚܝܐ ܡܢ ܐܪܙܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ. ܘܕܠܝܬ ܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܒܢܝܢܫܐ ܕܢܡܛܘܢ ܠܗܠܝܢ ܒܠܥܕ ܡܢ ܛܝܒܘܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ.

John further explains the difference between divine revelations and human modes of receiving knowledge in *Dialogue* 5. In this dialogue, Thomas, John's interlocutor, asks him whether angels learn about God through the order of salvation that took place on earth, or whether they receive knowledge of God in some other way.[24] John's response clarifies his understanding of the difference between human modes of knowledge and divine revelation. He tells Thomas that the angels know God directly, through wonder at the holy mysteries, rather than indirectly, through the observation of events that take place on earth. He concludes that spiritual beings who receive divine revelation through wonder have no need of learning about God through the natural world, even the saving work of the incarnate Christ: "If the person who elevates himself above bodily deeds into the spiritual mysteries has wonder at God, then why would spiritual [beings] even need considerations about God in the things of our world?"[25] According to John, knowledge that comes through the natural world is inferior because it requires sensual perception. Wonder at God, on the other hand, transcends the bodily senses and therefore represents a way of knowing God that is unique to spiritual beings.

Since John believes that wonder is a form of knowing available to spiritual beings who receive divine revelation about God through a state of wonder, he concludes — and this is the second important way that John frames wonder — that wonder is a phenomenon that is experienced by beings who dwell in the world to come. John states, for example, that the experience of wonder is "too powerful for this life and it is

[24] See John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 5 (Strothmann:66:207-67:209).
[25] See John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 5 (Strothmann:68:236-39). ܐܢ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܕܡܥܠ ܡܢ ܣܘܥܪ̈ܢܐ ܦܓܪ̈ܢܝܐ ܒܐܪ̈ܙܐ ܪ̈ܘܚܢܝܐ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܬܗܪܐ ܥܠ ܐܠܗܐ܇ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܪ̈ܘܚܢܝܐ ܒܟܠܡ ܕܒܥܠܡܢ܇ ܣܢܝܩܝܢ ܣܘܟܠܐ ܕܥܠ ܐܠܗܐ.

preserved for us in the life that is after the resurrection."[26] Once free from distractions that originate from the body and soul, spiritual beings in the world to come apprehend direct revelation of God's mysteries through wonder.

Although angelic beings are the quintessential example of heavenly beings who experience wonder on account of dwelling in the world to come, John says that human beings are also capable of experiencing wonder in the same way that angels experience it. In one of his letters, he explains that monks who draw near to the way of life of the angels experience an existence that is devoid of fear and the passions because, like the angels, monks in this advanced state will exist in an "exalted place" (ܐܬܪܐ ܡܪܘܡܐ).

> When we hear that these exalted [angels] stand in fear, then [we should understand this to mean that] they are kept from relying on the terror that comes from the fear of evil things. Since we draw near to them with our words about the new life, we have advanced in our understanding of their way of life. There is no fear in the glory of the holy power, for when fear swells in the heart, there is suffering in a person. Therefore these passions do not exist in that exalted place of the angelic hosts. While we take delight in intimacy with God through love and gladness, they are in [a state] of perpetual wonder in which there is not stillness.[27]

What is particularly striking about this passage is John's reference to the "exalted place" wherein the angels exist in a perpetual state of wonder. The term "place" (*maqom* in Hebrew) was used throughout the Hebrew Bible to signal the locus of divine manifestation and in rabbinic-era apocalyptic texts to signal the heavenly original of the earthly temple.[28] Aphrahat, a fourth-century Christian author who lived in the

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[26] John the Solitary, *Ein Dialog* 3 (Dedering:87:24-5). ܕܗܝ ܗܕܐ ܚܠܝܘܬܐ ܗܝ ܕܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܚܝܐ܇ ܘܒܚܝܐ ܕܒܬܪ ܩܝܡܬܐ ܢܛܝܪܐ ܠܢ.

[27] John the Solitary, *Briefe* 2 (Rignell:47:7-15). ܡܐ ܕܫܡܥܝܢ ܕܗܢܘܢ ܥܠܝܐ ܒܕܚܠܬܐ ܩܝܡܝܢ܇ ܗܝ ܒܗܘܢ ܒܣܘܪܕܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܚܠܬܐ ܡܢ ܒܝܫܬܐ ܢܛܠܝܢ. ܡܛܠ ܕܝܢ ܕܠܘܬܗܘܢ ܕܚܝܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܩܪܒܝܢ ܒܡܠܝܢ܇ ܝܬܝܪ ܣܘܟܠܐ ܕܕܒܪܘܬܗܘܢ ܐܣܬܩܠܢ. ܕܠܝܬ ܕܚܠܬܐ ܒܗ̇ ܒܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ ܕܚܝܠܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ. ܕܚܠܬܐ ܓܝܪ ܡܐ ܕܪܒܝܐ ܒܠܒܐ ܚܫܐ ܗܘ ܠܒܪܢܫܐ. ܠܗܠ ܗܟܝܠ ܗܠܝܢ ܚܫܐ ܒܗܘ ܐܬܪܐ ܡܪܘܡܐ ܕܡܫܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܐܟܐ. ܐܠܐ ܚܢܢ ܒܚܘܒܐ ܘܚܕܘܬܐ ܡܬܒܣܡܝܢ ܒܩܘܪܒܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ܇ ܒܬܗܪܐ ܕܠܝܬ ܠܗ ܫܠܝܐ.

[28] For specific examples, see Alexander Golitzin, "Heavenly Mysteries: Themes from Apocalyptic Literature in the Macarian Homilies and Selected other Fourth-Century Ascetical Wrtiers," in *Apocalyptic Through in Early Christianity*, ed. Robert J. Daley, Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 180.

Mesopotamia of the Persian Empire and wrote in Syriac, also used this term in his *Demonstration* 14. In this epistle, addressed to the entire Persian church, he explains that the Christian sage can experience in his mind the same "place of God" that the angels experience in heaven. Once the sage experiences this "place of wisdom," Aphrahat states, he receives wonders in the midst of his heart.[29] His full description of this interior experience of the place of God is as follows:

> [The King] carries his mind to the heights, and his thought flies to his sanctuary; he shows him all kinds of treasure. His intellect is absorbed with vision, and his heart is captivated by all its senses. [The King] shows him that which he did not know. He gazes on that place and examines it; his mind marvels at all that he sees: all the watchers pursue [the King's] service, and the seraphim sanctify his glory, flying on their swift wings with white and beautiful garments. They hide their faces from his brightness, and their course is more swift than the wind. There the throne of the kingdom is set up, and the Judge is preparing the court. Seats are set up for the righteous to judge the wicked on the day of judgment. When the wise man sees in his mind the place of his many treasures, then his thought is elevated, and his heart conceives and gives birth to all good things, and he meditates on all that has been commanded. His form and his vision are on the earth, but the senses of his intellect are above and below.[30]

John composed his letters just one generation after Aphrahat. If we understand John's account of advanced monks who draw near to the "exalted place" of the angels in terms of Aphrahat's account of the Christian sage who experiences the place of the angels in his mind, then John is saying that wonder results from an experience of the heavenly realm and that human beings, like the angels, can experience this wonder when they assume the angelic way of life, which is the spiritual level of the ascetical life. Monks in this advanced stage will experience a direct vision of the heavenly mysteries, which occurs in the "exalted place" of heaven.

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[29] Aphrahat, *Dem.* (PS 1:661:14). Page and line numbers are from *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Emonstrationes*, ed. Jean Parisot, Patrologia Syriaca 1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894).

[30] Aphrahat, *Dem.* (PS 1:661:17-664:20) (Leito:338). Translation is from *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage*, trans. Adam Lehto, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 27 (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010).

John presents a similar understanding of what it means for a monk to assume the way of life of the angels in one of his dialogues with Thomas. In this text, he states that God endeavors to show human beings the "greatness from the new world" by offering monks a foretaste of this greatness as a gift that can be received through prayer. After receiving this gift, John says, human beings will exist in a state of wonder:

> [God] is teaching us about the deficiency of our creation through the greatness that is the greatness from the new world. If we are raised up in the greatness that is the greatness from the new world, then it is urgent that he show us what is excellent from [the new world]. He will endeavor to offer it to us through prayer so that His gift will be [given] in rectitude and [we will exist in a state of] wonder that will not be stillness.[31]

John notes that the sort of wonder that human beings will receive during prayer is a "wonder that will not be stillness" (ܬܗܪܐ ܕ ܠܐ ܫܠܝܐ ܗܘܝܐ). Later on in the same dialogue, he again refers to the "unstillness" (ܠܐ ܫܠܝܐ) of the Seraphim described in Is. 6.2-3.[32] According to this passage, the Seraphim use their wings to fly around as they praise God with the Trisagion and, as John understands it, this act of praise is eternal and ongoing. In other words, the angels exist in a state of "unstillness" (ܠܐ ܫܠܝܐ) because they are eternally praising God.[33] This reference to "unstillness" is John's way of saying that the wonder that human beings receive in prayer is the same wonder that the angels experience in the world to come. This wonder is the "unstill" worship of God that will exist for eternity in the world to come.

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[31] John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 3 (Strothmann:22:34-23:39). ܒܨܝܪܘܬܐ ܕܒܪܝܬܢ ܡܠܦ ܗܘܐ ܠܢ. ܘܐܠܘ ܬܘܒ: ܒܪܒܘܬܐ ܕܪܒܐ ܡܢ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ: ܐܬܥܠܝܢ: ܬܘܒ ܕܡܬܝܬܪܐ ܡܢ ܗ̇ܝ ܐܠܝܨܐ ܗܘܬ ܕܢܚܘܐ ܠܢ: ܕܒܝܕ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܢܒܥܐ ܕܠܗ ܢܬܛܫܩܠ. ܕܬܗܘܐ ܡܘܗܒܬܗ ܒܬܟܝܢܘܬܐ: ܘܬܗܪܐ ܕܠܡܥܠܘܗܝ ܕܠܐ ܫܠܝܐ ܗܘܝܐ.

[32] "Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory'" (NRSV).

[33] John concludes that the "unstillness" of the angels is what constitutes wonder at God. See John the Solitary, *Gespräche* 3 (Strothmann:27:163-5): "The unstillness is wonder because they know God in continual glory." ܠܐ ܫܠܝܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܬܗܪܐ ܕܝܕܥܝܢ ܗܘܢ ܕܟܠ ܐܠܗܐ ܒܫܘܒܚܐ ܐܡܝܢܐ.

We know that Isaac was influenced by John's reading of Isa 6.2-3 because Isaac explicitly says so. In *Homily* 3.13, Isaac alludes to the wonder experienced by the Seraphim who chant the Trisagion and tells us that "Saint John, the solitary from Apamea" reminds us of their wonder.[34] Although he does not cite any specific passages from John's writings, Isaac may have had in mind this passage from John's *Dialogue with Thomas*. As we will see in the next chapter, Isaac, like John, also draws connections between angelic worship and the wonder that human beings experience in the spiritual level of the ascetical life.

In summary, John's understanding of the phenomenon of wonder is different than Ephrem's understanding. According to John, wonder at God is a spiritual enterprise that transcends the modes of knowledge that come through body and soul. For this reason, he associates wonder with the eternal praise that the angels offer to God in heaven and with the reverence for God that human beings receive once they have achieved the spiritual level of the Christian life. Like John, we will see that Isaac also places the phenomenon of wonder and astonishment within the framework of heavenly worship in the world to come and the spiritual level of the Christian life.

6.2.1 Wonder in the Greek tradition: Pseudo-Dionysius

Isaac appropriates the words wonder and astonishment as well as their framework from Syriac sources, but he also derives his definitions for wonder and astonishment from Syriac translations of Greek sources. An examination of the way Isaac correlates the terms wonder and astonishment with Greek concepts reveals the moment of his

[34] See Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.13.15 (CSCO 637:108-109).

originality because these correlations are not in the Greek texts. For example, Isaac inherits the notion of "thick darkness" from Pseudo-Dionysius, but he connects this Pseudo-Dionysian theme of "thick darkness" with both wonder and astonishment, even though this connection is not explicit in the Syriac translation of Pseudo-Dionysius's texts. Isaac associates wonder with the light that one experiences after suffering through "thick darkness" and he associates astonishment with the human response to the darkness of God's incomprehensible essence.

Isaac uses language from the Syriac translation of the first chapter of Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* in order to draw connections between darkness and either wonder or astonishment. Although two ancient Syriac translations of the Dionysian corpus exist, one by Sergius of Rehsaina, which dates to the first half of the sixth-century, and a thorough revision of Sergius' translation by Phocas bar Sargis completed around 684 CE, only the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology* has been published.[35] We will consult Sergius's translation, since it is the one that would have been available to Isaac.

In the opening lines of Sergius's translation of the *Mystical Theology*, Pseudo-Dionysius describes the human inability to comprehend the ineffable mysteries of the Trinity as some form of darkness, either a "thick darkness" (ܚܫܘܟܐ) or a "thick dark night" (ܚܫܘܟܐ ܠܝܠܝܐ).[36] In order to overcome this situation of darkness, Pseudo-

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[35] For background on the Syriac translation of Pseudo-Dionysius' texts, see P. Sherwood, "Sergius of Reshaina and the Syriac Versions of the Pseudo-Denis," *Sacris Erudiri* 4 (1952): 175-84. For background on the possible Syriac milieu of Pseudo-Dionysius, see Alexander Goltizin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Thessalonica: Patriarchikon Idruma Paterikon Meleton, 1994), 349-92; Alexander Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagita: A Chrisitan Mysticism?" *Pro Ecclesia* 12.2 (2003): 161-212; and István Perczel, "The Earliest Syriac Reception of Dionysius," in *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, ed. Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 27-41.

[36] For further background on how Pseudo-Dionysius's language about darkness and clouds influenced other Syriac authors, see Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans forme: introduction à l'étude de la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale* (Chevetogne: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1987), 138-45.

Dionysius explains that the Trinity must direct human minds to the sublime beauty of the hidden mysteries of theology by filling them with the light of divine knowledge, which penetrates the darkness.[37]

> You [Trinity] fill in the thick darkness (ܒܥܪܦܠܐ) [with] the light of silence that is the hidden mysteries, that is, when that which is greater has arisen, [you] are sublimely shining forth in the thick dark night (ܒܥܡܛܠܝܐ). In the complete incomprehensible and unseen, you fill our sightless minds [with] sublime and splendid beauties.[38]

Later on, Pseudo-Dionysius refers to the gift of divine light as a ray of light (ܙܠܝܩܐ) that comes from the being of the divine darkness (ܚܫܘܟܐ). Addressing his readers in the second person, he says, "It is through an unhindered egress and unbinding that you are freed from yourself and from everything in purity, and [then] you are elevated unto the sublime ray [that comes] from the being of the divine darkness."[39] The gift of divine light is necessary to overcome the situation of darkness, that is, the human inability to comprehend the Trinity.

In a paradoxical manner, Pseudo-Dionysius also refers to the process of leaving the ray of divine light behind in order to fully penetrate the thick darkness (ܒܥܪܦܠܐ) of God, who is the ultimate cause of all creation. Behind the external rays of light, God's being is wholly imperceptible to all modes of human knowledge.

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[37] Pseudo-Dionysius opens the *Mystical Theology* by imploring the Trinity to direct him to the hidden mysteries of theology. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1.1 (Hornus:86:997A): "Trinity! More sublime than being, more sublime than deity, and more sublime than goodness. Protector of the divine wisdom of Christians, direct us to the summit of the most sublime knowledge and the most sublime light, and to the height of the mystical scriptures, where the simple, resolute, and unchangeable mysteries of theology are hidden." ܬܠܝܬܝܘܬܐ ܥܠܝܬ ܡܢ ܐܘܣܝܐ ܘܥܠܝܬ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܘܬܐ: ܘܥܠܝܬ ܡܢ ܛܒܘܬܐ: ܦܩܘܕܬܐ ܕܡܫܡܫܢܘܬܗܘܢ ܐܠܗܝܬܐ ܕܟܪ̈ܣܛܝܢܐ: ܬܪܘܨ ܠܢ ܠܘܬ ܪܘܫܐ ܕܝܕܥܬܐ ܥܠܝܬ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܘܥܠܝܬ ܢܘܗܪܐ: ܘܪܘܡܪܘܡܘܬܐ ܕܟܬ̈ܒܐ ܐܪ̈ܙܢܝܬܐ: ܐܝܟܐ ܕܐܪ̈ܙܐ ܦܫܝ̈ܛܐ ܘܫܪ̈ܝܪܐ ܘܠܐ ܡܫܬܚܠܦܢܐ ܕܬܐܘܠܘܓܝܐ ܟܣܝܢ: ܒܚܫܘܟ. Page and section numbers refer to Jean-Michel Hornus, "Le Corpus Dionysien en Syriaque," *Parole de l'Orient* 1 (1970): 69-93.

[38] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1.1 (Hornus:86-88:997B). ܒܥܪܦܠܐ ܡܠܝܢ ܢܘܗܪܐ ܕܫܬܩܐ ܟܣܝܢ ܐܪ̈ܙܐ: ܗܿ ܕܒܥܡܛܠܝܐ ܠܒܝܪܐ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܕܢܗܪ ܕܢܣܒ ܡܢ ܡܢܗܪܐ ܥܠܝܬܐܝܬ: ܘܒܠܐ ܡܥ ܡܫܟܚܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܢܘܬܐ: ܟܠܗ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܥܝܢܐ: ܫܘܦܪ̈ܐ ܥܠܝܐ ܘܢܨܝܚܐ.

[39] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1.1 (Hornus:88:997B-100B). ܒܡܦܩܢܐ ܓܝܪ ܠܐ ܡܬܟܠܝܢܐ ܘܫܪܝܐ ܕܢܦܫܟ ܐܝܬ ܕܠܥܠܝܬܐ ܡܢܟ ܘܡܢ ܟܠܗܘܢ: ܒܕܟܝܘܬܐ ܐܝܟ ܠܘܬ ܙܠܝܩܐ ܥܠܝܐ ܡܢ ܐܘܣܝܐ ܕܚܫܘܟܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ.

> The good cause of all is both of many words and of small discourse (as in wordless). Neither word nor understanding belongs to it, since its constitution is more sublime than all things in the excellence of its being. It is manifest openly and truly only to those who overcome every defilement and every purity and who climb higher than every summit of every holy ascent and who leave every divine light (ܢܘܗܪܐ), voice, and word from heaven far behind and who enter into the thick darkness (ܥܪܦܠܐ), where truly there is, as the scripture says, the one who is beyond all things.[40]

This relationship between divine light and thick darkness appears, at first, to be a paradox: the divine light can only be experienced by entering into a thick darkness. However, an observation by John of Scythopolis, the sixth-century Greek commentator on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology*, helps explain this paradox. In his *scholion*, John notes that the Pseudo-Dionysius's Greek term for the "thick darkness" (γνόφος) is a translation from the Hebrew term, *araphel* (this fact is clear in the Syriac translation of the *Mystical Theology*: the Syriac ܥܪܦܠܐ is based on the same Semitic root as the Hebrew *araphel*).[41] Alexander Goltizin has noted that this reference to the seventh heaven recalls Moses's ascent to the throne of the divine Glory, that is, to the light of the *Shekinah*.[42] If John's reading of the *Mystical Theology* is correct, then the divine darkness is paradoxically the light of the *Shekinah*.[43] The first chapter of the *Mystical Theology*

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[40] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1.3 (Hornus:90:1000C). ܘܡܣܬܒܪܢܐ ܠܗ܆ ܕܟܕ ܐܣܬܟܠܬܗ ܠܟܠ ܡܢ ܚܢܢܐ ܠܗܕܐ܆ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܠܚܘܬܐ ܕܟܠ܆ ܡܫܟܚܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܘܕܚܘܪܬܐ ܡܥܡܪܐ ܘܕܠܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܐܚܝܕܐ. ܐܝܟܢܐ܆ ܒܗ܆ ܕܠܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܡܣܟܠܐ ܐܝܬ ܕܠܗ. ܡܛܠ ܕܡܬܠܝܐ ܡܫܟܚܐ ܠܟܠ ܡܢ ܟܠ. ܒܡܬܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܐܘܣܝܐ. ܘܠܚܘܕ ܡܢ ܟܠܗܝܢ ܠܐ ܡܬܦܫܩܢܐܝܬ ܘܫܪܝܪܐܝܬ ܠܗܘܢ ܕܢܥܒܪܘܢ ܠܟܠܗܘܢ ܛܡܐܬܐ ܘܕܟܝܘܬܐ܆ ܘܡܣܬܠܩܝܢ ܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܟܠܗ ܫܘܡܠܝܐ ܕܟܠܗܘܢ ܡܣܩܢܘܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ܆ ܘܫܒܩܝܢ ܠܢܘܗܪܐ ܠܟܠܗܘܢ ܢܘܗܪܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ ܘܩܠܐ ܘܡܠܐ ܫܡܝܢܝܬܐ܆ ܘܥܐܠܝܢ ܠܥܪܦܠܐ. ܐܝܟܐ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܫܪܝܪܐܝܬ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܐܡܪܝܢ ܟܬܒܐ܆ ܗܘ ܕܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܟܠ. Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1.3 (Hornus:92:1001A): "He enters the thick darkness of unknowing." ܥܐܠ ܠܥܪܦܠܐ ܕܠܐ ܝܕܥܬܐ

[41] PG 4, 421C: "The Hebrew says that *araphel* is the name for the firmament into which Moses went, for [the Jews] speak of seven firmaments, which they also call heavens." Translation is from Alexander Golitzin, "Revisiting the 'Sudden': Epistle III in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*," *SP* 37 (2001), 482.

[42] Alexander Golitzin, "Revisiting the Sudden," 482.

[43] Pseudo-Dionysius makes this point clear in his *Epistle* 5 ("The divine darkness is the unapproachable light in which God is said to dwell") and again in *Divine Names* 7.2. See Pseudo-Dionysius, Ep. 5.1073A (Heil and Ritter:162:3-4). Page and line numbers refer to *Corpus Dionysiacum II*, ed. G. Heil and A. M. Ritter (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991). Translation and references are from Alexander Golitzin, "Revisiting the Sudden," 483. Beulay has also made this observation; see Robert Beulay, "Quelques axes de l'enseignement de Denys l'Aréopagite chez les mystiques syro-orientaux, et leur continuité possible en mystique musulmane," in *Patrimonie syriaque, Actes du colloque IX. Les syriaques*

therefore implies that the rays of divine darkness are also a thick darkness, which is the *Shekinah* of God.

Isaac uses this Pseudo-Dionysian language of light and darkness to construct his definitions of wonder and astonishment. He does not quote the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology* directly, but *Homilies* 1.13, 2.5, 2.10, 3.7, and 3.8 contain a high enough frequency of linguistic matches to legitimate the conclusion that these homilies are based on the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology*.[44] Isaac's use of words such as "darkness" (ܚܫܘܟܐ), "thick darkness" (ܥܪܦܠܐ), and "dark night" (ܥܡܛܢܐ) along with references to rays of light (ܙܠܝܩܐ) and the *Shekinah* all indicate that, in these specific homilies, Isaac is reworking Pseudo-Dionysian concepts into his own understanding of wonder and astonishment.

We find the greatest deal of dependence on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* in *Homily* 1.13. In this homily, Isaac assimilates but also reinterprets Pseudo-Dionysius's definition of darkness by identifying darkness not with the ineffable essence of God, but with a moment of weakness that occurs before the ray of divine grace settles upon the soul of a human being and induces wonder. He says that before wonder occurs in the mind, a monk first experiences both darkness (ܚܫܘܟܐ) and a dark night (ܥܡܛܢܐ) in his soul. This temporary moment of darkness in the soul does not come from God, but rather, is a darkness that arises as a result of the passions, which cloud the light that causes wonder.[45]

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transmetteurs de civilization (Antélias-Liban: 2005), 101: "la ténèbre est lumineuse, la lumière est ténébreuse."

[44] Isaac does explicitly quote Pseudo-Dionysius for other purposes. He refers to the *Celestial Hierarchy* 6 in *Homily* 1.25 and 2.10 and he mentions Pseudo-Dionysius by name in *Homily* 1.22.

[45] See also Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.13 (Bedjan:31:2), where Isaac refers to the "order of the thick darkness of the passions." ܬܟܣܐ ܕܥܪܦܠ ܚܫܘܟܐ Page and line numbers refer to *Mar Isaacus*

> When a person who has determined in his mind to order his being in solitary habitation by himself and to pass the remainder of his days in service and in the ordering of the way of stillness is in [the sort of] customary stillness that is duly prescribed by divine grace, then it so happens that his soul is buried inside a thick night (ܚܫܘܟܬܐ). Just as the radiance of the sun is covered from the habitable earth by a density of clouds, [so also], for a short time, [a person] is deprived from spiritual comfort and the burst of grace by the cloud of the passions. Some of that gladdening power is withdrawn from him and [then] that unusual darkness (ܚܫܘܟܐ) will befall his intellect, [yet] his intellect is not troubled nor does it submit to faintheartedness.[46]

According to Isaac, darkness sometimes refers to the moment before the mind enters the threshold of wonder, when it is illumined by divine light.

Isaac goes on to say that once this darkness from the passions has dissipated, rays of divine light fill the intellect until the soul arrives at a state of wonder at God. The darkness that precedes wonder is a necessary step in the ascetical life because it is the invitation for divine grace to "suddenly" fill the soul with wonder during prayer.[47] He continues,

> [If a monk] becomes engrossed in the writings of divine men and compulsory prayer and [if] he looks for healing, then [the gladdening power] will suddenly (ܡܢ ܫܠܝܐ) be given to him unexpectedly. Since, for example, the face of the earth is made bright by the rays (ܙܠܝܩܘܗܝ) of the sun when the sun is released from the density of the air, so too is the word of prayer able to unbind and drive away the thick darkness (ܚܘܦܠܐ) of the passions from the soul and to gladden and illuminate the intellect by the brightness of joy and comfort that give birth to our thoughts, especially when there is an occasion for [the soul to gain] healing from the holy books and vigils that adorn the intellect. Continual study on the Holy Scripture will fill the soul with incomprehensible wonder and joy in God.[48]

Ninivita De Perfectione Religiosa, ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris: Nihil Obstat, 1908; repr. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007).

[46] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.13 (Bedjan:124:6-15). ܐܝܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܦܣܩ ܒܪܥܝܢܗ ܕܢܕܒܘܪܐ ܠܚܘܕܝܐ ܕܒܗ ܢܦܫܗ ܢܬܟܣܐ ܠܗܿ: ܕܐܦ ܕܫܠܝܐ ܢܦܩ ܥܪܦܠܐ ܕܫܘ̈ܚܐ. ܐܟܙܢܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܒܝܬܐ ܕܒܫܠܝܐ: ܗܘ ܕܡܬܚܫܒ ܦܣܝܩܐܝܬ ܠܡܥܒܕܘܬܐ ܐܠܗܝܬܐ: ܢܒܙܥ ܕܠܝܚ ܒܡܥܠܝܐ ܡܬܛܪܦܐ ܢܦܫܗ: ܘܒܙܒܢܬ ܘܙܘܙܝܐ ܕܥܣܩܐ ܕܡܬܚܫܒܝܢ ܡܢ ܡܬܚܬܐ ܡܢ ܠܒܝܘܬܐ ܕܒܝܬܐ: ܒܡܥܠܐ ܩܠܝܠ ܡܚܬ ܚܠܐ ܡܢ ܒܘܝܐܐ ܪܘܚܢܐ ܘܡܢ ܢܡܘܣܐ ܕܛܝܒܘܬܐ ܒܝܕ ܚܫܘܟܐ ܕܚ̈ܫܐ: ܘܩܦܣ ܡܢܗ ܩܠܝܠ ܚܝܠܐ ܗܘ ܡܚܕܝܢܐ: ܘܢܦܠܙ ܥܠ ܪܥܝܢܗ ܚܫܘܟܐ ܗܘ ܕܠܐ ܒܥܝܕܐ: ܠܐ ܡܬܕܘܕ ܡܫܬ ܥܠܝܐ ܕܬܪܥܝܬܗ: ܘܡܢܗ ܐܝܕܐ ܠܒܨܝܪܘܬ ܢܦܫܐ.

[47] According to Sabino Chialà, Isaac's writings contain a contradiction. On the one hand, Isaac thinks that succumbing to the passions can be helpful and that darkness is a part of the spiritual life that is sent by God. On the other hand, Isaac speaks of combating darkness with ascetical actions. See Sabino Chialà, "L'importance du corps dans la prière, selon l'enseignement d'Isaac de Ninive," *CPE* 119 (2010): 33-37. Also, see Irénée Hausherr, "Les Orientaux connaissent-ils les 'nuits' de saint Jean de la Croix?," *OCP* 12 (1946): 5-46, who says that Isaac was a precursor for John of the Cross' "dark night of the soul."

[48] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.13 (Bedjan:124:15-125:5). ܐܠܐ ܢܫܟܚ ܒܗ ܡܬܒܥܐ ܒܡܠܬ̈ܐ ܕܐܢܫ̈ܐ ܐܠܗܝ̈ܐ ܘܒܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܒܥܝܐ: ܘܡܫܟܚܐ ܠܐܣܝܘܬܐ. ܘܡܢ ܫܠܝ ܡܬܝܗܒ ܠܗ: ܒܗ ܠܐ ܣܟܐ. ܡܛܠ ܕܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܡܬܦܨ̈ܝܢ ܐܦܝ̈ܗ ܕܡܫܬܦܐ ܒܠܡ̈ܘܗܝ ܕܫܡܫܐ: ܟܕ ܫܪܐ ܠܫܡܫܐ ܡܢ ܥܒܝܘܬܐ ܕܐܐܪ: ܗܟܢܐ ܡܨܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܬܫܪܐ ܘܬܦܠܘܚ ܡܢ ܢܦܫܐ ܚܘܦܠܐ

In addition to language of light and darkness, Isaac also says that the gift of the gladdening power is given suddenly (ܡܢ ܫܠܝܐ). This use of the adverb "suddenly" recalls language from earlier Syriac texts, including the *Acts of Thomas* and Ephrem's *Paradise Hymns*, but also occurs in Pseudo-Dionysius's *Epistle* 3.[49] Pseudo-Dionysius uses the word sudden, with its biblical overtones, to convey the presence of the light from Christ that monks experience during mystical theophany. This occurrence of Pseudo-Dionysian language, including "rays," "darkness," and the "sudden" gift of grace, indicates that Isaac has Pseudo-Dionysius's description of divine illumination in mind when he describes his own concept of wonder. According to Isaac, wonder is the moment when a monk suddenly receives the rays of divine light, which penetrate the intellect after the soul has endured a period of darkness.

Another point of connection between Pseudo-Dionysius and Isaac occurs in *Homiles* 3.7 and 3.8. In *Homily* 3.8, we see that Isaac explicitly alludes to the overshadowing cloud of 1 Kgs 8.10-12, where it is said that a cloud overshadows the house of the Lord and creates a thick darkness as God's dwelling place.[50] Isaac allegorically interprets this passage as describing the spiritual journey of the soul and mind and concludes that during the moment of prayer, the soul "perceives the cloud that overshadows the mind in prayer."[51] In other words, God overshadows the mind during prayer and transforms the mind into the thick darkness, which is the dwelling place for

ܕܢܩܫܐ܆ ܘܬܬܦܨܚ ܘܬܬܢܗܪ ܠܢܘܗܪܐ ܒܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܘܗܪܬܐ ܘܕܒܘܝܐܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܒܫܠܝܐ. ܘܬܬܐܡܪ ܐܡܪܬ، ܕܗܘܢܐ ܠܗ ܡܠܐܐ
ܠܚܘܪܪܐ ܡܢ ܟܠܗܝܢ ܦܘܪܫܐ܆ ܘܥܘܗܕܢܐ ܡܘܗܒܬܐ ܕܢܘܗܪܐ. ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܒܟܠܗܝܢ ܦܘܪܫܐ܆ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܢܬܡܬܚ ܠܗ ܠܡܬܒܪܝܢܘܬܐ ܘܫܘܒܚܐ
ܕܐܠܗܐ ܟܠܗ ܠܗ ܠܢܦܫܐ.

[49] For specific examples, see Alexander Golitzin, "Revisiting the Sudden," 486-91.

[50] "And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. Then Solomon said, 'The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness" (NRSV).

[51] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.8.8 (CSCO 637:58). ܡܐ ܕܚܙܝܐ ܕܛܠܠܬܐ ܠܥܢܢܐ ܚܙܝܐ ܗܝ ܢܦܫܐ ܕܡܛܠܠܐ ܥܠ ܗܘܢܐ ܒܨܠܘܬܐ.

God.[52] Although Isaac derives his terminology in *Homily* 3.8 from the biblical text, his full commentary also resonates with the Pseudo-Dionysius's connection between God's dwelling place and the thick darkness. While Pseudo-Dionysius implicitly alluded to the connection between the *Shekinah* and the divine darkness, Isaac explicitly connects the *Shekinah* with the thick darkness that results from the overshadowing cloud. Later on in *Homily* 3.8, he says outright that the *Shekinah* of God overshadows the soul during prayer, but in addition, his remarks in *Homily* 3.7 establish the same connection between the *Shekinah* and the thick darkness that was implicit in Pseudo-Dionysius's text.[53]

> Even though we have not asked, you have given us the great gift of faith through which one approaches the mysteries of knowledge that enable spiritual beings to proceed to the *Shekinah* of your essence. It is through the mystery of faith, oh Lord, that the [faithful] progress into the interior of the thick darkness of your glory.[54]

Like Pseudo-Dionysius, Isaac assumes that faith brings a person into contact with the *Shekinah* of God, which is perceived as a thick darkness.[55]

Isaac's original contribution to this connection between the *Shekinah* and the thick darkness is the inclusion of wonder. According to Isaac, the experience of thick darkness from the overshadowing cloud is also the experience of wonder. He states that the perception of the overshadowing cloud "is revealed though an insight of the mind when [a person] achieves silence in wonder" and that such a person has arrived at a state

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[52] Isaac makes the same point about the soul; see also Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.8.1 (CSCO 637:56): "The temple of God is a house of prayer and therefore the soul is a house of prayer when the continual remembrance of God is consecrated in it." ܗܝܟܠܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܒܝܬܐ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ. ܒܝܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܢܦܫܐ ܗܝ܇ ܕܡܬܩܕܫ ܒܗ ܥܘܗܕܢܐ ܐܡܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ.

[53] See Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.8.10 (CSCO 637:58).

[54] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.7.4-5 (CSCO 637:46). ܝܗܒܬ ܠܢ ܕܠܐ ܫܐܠܢ ܡܘܗܒܬܐ ܪܒܬܐ ܕܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ܇ ܗܝ ܕܒܗ ܢܬܩܪܒ ܠܐܪ̈ܙܐ ܕܝܕܥܬܐ. ܗܢܘܢ ܕܪ̈ܘܚܢܐ ܡܕܪܓܝܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܘܬ ܫܟܝܢܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܘܬܟ܀ ܒܪܐܙܐ ܕܝܢ ܡܪܝ ܕܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܡܬܦܫܛܝܢ ܗܢ، ܐܝܟ ܗܘܢ ܠܓܘ ܥܪܦܠܐ ܕܫܘܒܚܟ. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.74 (Bedjan:517:20).

[55] For further background on Isaac's use of the term *Shekinah*, see Brenda Fitch Fairaday, "Isaac of Nineveh's Biblical Typology of the Cross," in *Papers presented at the thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1995*, ed. M.F. Wiles and E.J. Yarnold (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 385-90.

where "the Lord has consented to overshadow him."[56] Prayer is the occasion when the *Shekinah* overshadows the soul, thereby inducing a thick darkness in soul, which is the state of wonder.

One would expect Isaac's connection between the rays of divine light, darkness, and wonder to come straight from the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology*, where the extant Greek edition of the *Mystical Theology* uses the Greek term *ecstasy* to indicate the absolute abandonment that occurs before a person is uplifted before the divine rays of God's shadow.[57] Since the Greek term *ecstasy* (ἔκστασις) is often rendered into Syriac with the term *wonder* (ܬܗܪܐ) and since ecstasy is Isaac's equivalent to wonder, it would appear that Isaac is simply following Pseudo-Dionysius's text when he connects wonder with the divine darkness.[58] This is not the case. Both Syriac translations of the *Mystical Theology* (i.e., Sergius' earlier translation and as well as Phocas's revision) avoid using the word wonder to render the Greek word ecstasy and they instead express the concept of self-abandonment with less technical language.[59] This absence of the term wonder in the Syriac translation of the *Mystical Theology* means that Isaac's own correlation

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[56] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.8.9 (CSCO 637:58). ܗܘܐ ܕܝܢ ܒܠܐ ܡܬܚܫܚܢܘܬܐ܆ ܘܠܐ ܡܨܒܝܢ ܕܢܛܠܠܐ ܬܡܝܗܘܬܐ ܕܝ̈ܢ ܠܘܬܗ. ܟܕ ܐܬܚܒܠ ܡܘܕ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܐ܆ ܕܐܬܐ ܠܗ ܒܝܕ ܫܘܒܠܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ܆ ܘܐܫܬܪܝܬ ܒܬܡܗܐ. ܐܝܬܝܗ ܗܝ ܕܐܝܟ ܛܠܠ ܒܗ ܡܪܝܐ܆ ܘܐܦ ܠܟ ܒܠܗܘܢ.

[57] See MT 1000A: "By an undivided and absolute abandonment (ἔξίστημι) of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow, which is above everything that is." Translation is from *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

[58] Hilarion Alfeyev states that *wonder* is Isaac's equivalent to *ecstasy*. See Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000), 242.

[59] A literal rendering of the same passage from Sergius's Syriac translation is: "It is through an unhindered egress and unbinding that you are freed from yourself and from everything in purity, and [then] you are elevated unto the sublime ray [that comes] from the being of the divine darkness." Sergius renders *ecstasy* as "freed from yourself." See Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1.1 (Hornus:88:997B-100B). ܒܡܦܩܢܐ ܓܝܪ ܠܐ ܡܬܟܠܝܢܐ ܘܫܪܝܐ ܕܢܦܫܟ ܐܢܬ ܕܒܠܥܬ ܡܢܟ ܘܡܢ ܟܠܗܝܢ܆ ܡܬܥܠܝܐ ܐܢܬ ܠܘܬ ܙܠܝܓܐ ܡܥܠܝܐ ܕܡܢ ܐܘܣܝܐ ܕܚܫܘܟܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ.

between the wonder and the rays of divine darkness is original, or at the very least, an interpolation that he imposes on these passages from the *Mystical Theology*.[60]

In *Homilies* 2.5 and 2.10, Isaac also uses Pseudo-Dionysian language of darkness to develop a definition for the term astonishment. When he refers to the darkness that is associated with astonishment, Isaac uses a different definition of darkness than what he used in order to develop his definition of wonder. The darkness associated with astonishment is not a period of weakness that occurs prior to illumination from the rays of divine grace nor is it the *Shekinah* of God, but rather, it describes one's inability to perceive the ineffable essence of God. Like Pseudo-Dionysius, Isaac bases this definition on Ex 19.9, which records God's self revelation to the Israelites as being accompanied by a "dark cloud" (ܥܪܦܐ ܕܥܢܢܐ).[61] Like other Christian authors before him, Isaac interprets this mode of self revelation as normative, which means that even God's self revelation in the future world will also occur in the midst of either a dark cloud (ܥܪܦܐ ܕܥܢܢܐ) or thick darkness (ܚܫܘܟܐ).[62] God's self revelation is always accompanied by darkness.

When Isaac defines the term astonishment in *Homily* 2.5 and 2.10, he does so in terms of the inability to perceive God's ineffable being on account of the darkness that shrouds God's self revelation. In *Homily* 2.5, for example, he states that angels experience a "thick darkness" when they are directly confronted with the incomprehensible nature of God's glory. Unable to perceive God in His essence, they

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[60] Pseudo-Dionysius does draw a connection between the thick darkness of God and God's own ecstatic self-revelation in the *Divine Names*, so it is possible that Isaac based his connection between divine darkness and wonder from passages from the *Divine Names*. Unfortunately, the Syriac translation is unavailable. For further discussion on the connection between darkness and ecstasy in Pseudo-Dionysius, see Alexander Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei*, 114-18.

[61] "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after.'" (NRSV).

[62] Isaac refers to God's self revelation through a dark cloud in *Terza Collezione* 3.9.25 (CSCO 637:68). He refers to God's self revelation through thick darkness in *Terza Collezione* 3.7.5 (CSCO 637:46).

stand in astonishment at what transcends their understanding: “Angelic natures are plunged into silence in astonishment before the thick darkness (ܥܪܦܠܐ) of this eternal mystery and [from] the flood of his glory that [comes] from within astonishment.”[63] Astonishment is how angelic beings respond to the darkness of God’s self revelation.

In *Homily* 2.10, Isaac also refers to the inability of the human mind to grasp the fullness of the divine mysteries, yet he explains that this inability to conceptualize the divine nature — the “thick darkness, as it were — is itself the experience of astonishment. Isaac states that when a monk transcends the categories of material thought and experiences the ineffable God, he has reached the “thick darkness” of God.

> As a result of the practical discovery of things that belong to Him, a person is raised up in his thoughts to the contemplation of Him. [This raising up] is the true vision, not of his nature, but of a thick darkness (ܥܪܦܠܐ) of his glory. Once these things are explained, [a person] is first moved to study Him, and then gradually the study envelopes his mind little by little and brings [the mind] in and sets it in the thick darkness (ܥܪܦܠܐ) of his glory and in that fountain of life, whence life springs forth at all times without interruption, both to minds above and below.[64]

Isaac goes on to equate this experience of this thick darkness with astonishment. He continues by describing the monk who “is astonished at all the things that [God] has done and is doing and has filled his mind with the majesty of God.”[65] Astonishment, therefore, is what happens to a mind that is filled with God’s majesty to such an extent that it cannot fathom the depth of God’s ineffable essence.

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[63] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.5.1 (CSCO 554:5). ܗܘ ܕܟܝܢ̈ܐ ܕܥܝܪ̈ܐ ܒܫܬܩܐ ܫܬܝܩܝܢ ܒܬܗܪܐ. ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܥܪܦܠܐ ܕܐܪܙܐ ܗܢܐ ܡܬܘܡܝܐ. ܘܡܒܘܠܐ ܕܫܘܒܚܗ ܕܠܓܘ ܡܢ ܬܗܪܐ. Page numbers refer to *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) ‘The Second Part,’ chapters IV-XLI*, ed. Sebastian Brock, CSCO 554, Scriptores Syri 224 (Louven: Peeters, 1995).

[64] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.10.17 (CSCO 554:34). ܡܢ ܫܟܚܢܘܬܐ ܣܘܥܪܢܝܬܐ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܕܝܠܗ ܡܬܥܠܐ ܐܢܫ ܒܡܚܫܒ̈ܬܗ ܠܘܬ ܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܕܝܠܗ ܗܝ ܗܝ ܚܙܬܗ ܫܪܝܪܬܐ. ܠܐ ܕܟܝܢܗ ܐܠܐ ܕܥܪܦܠܐ ܕܫܘܒܚܗ܆ ܘܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܦܫܝܩܬܐ ܕܐܟܠ ܒܗ ܗܘ ܠܘܬ ܕܝܠܗ ܠܗܪܓܐ ܘܗܝܕܝܢ ܒܐܝܕܐ ܒܐܝܕܐ ܚܒܫ ܗܘ ܗܪܓܐ ܠܒܝܬ ܩܠܝܠ ܩܠܝܠ ܠܗܘܢܗ܆ ܘܡܥܠ ܘܡܩܝܡ ܠܗ ܒܥܪܦܠܐ ܕܫܘܒܚܗ܆ ܘ ܒܡܒܘܥܐ ܗܘ ܕܚܝ̈ܐ. ܕܢܒܥܝܢ ܡܢܗ ܚܝ̈ܐ ܒܟܠ ܙܒܢ ܕܠܐ ܦܣܩ܆ ܠܗܘܢ̈ܐ ܥܠܝ̈ܐ ܘܬܚܬܝ̈ܐ.

[65] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.10.19 (CSCO 554:35). ܟܠ ܕܥܒܕܗ ܐܝܟ ܘܥܒܕ ܘܡܠܐ ܗܘܢܗ ܡܢ ܪܒܘܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ. ܘܒܟܠܗ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܕܡܫܬܥܝܢ ܠܗ ܘܦܪܘ܆ ܡܬܕܡܪ ܬܗܪܐ ܘܡܬܕܡܪ ܒܡܪܚܡܢܘܬܗ.

In summary, Isaac uses three different definitions of Pseudo-Dionysian darkness to construct definitions for wonder and astonishment. First, in *Homily* 1.13, he defines darkness as a state of weakness that precedes divine illumination. Based on this definition of darkness, Isaac defines wonder as the reception of divine illumination that overcomes this darkness. Second, in *Homily* 3.8, he associates wonder with the experience of the *Shekinah* of God, which creates darkness by overshadowing a person during prayer. Finally, in *Homilies* 2.5 and 2.10, Isaac defines darkness as the ineffable and unknowable essence of God. With this definition of darkness in mind, he defines astonishment as the mind's inability to fully comprehend the glory and majesty of the divine essence. What is remarkable about the way Isaac forms both his definition for wonder and his definition for astonishment is that the Syriac translation of the *Mystical Theology* never connects darkness with either wonder or astonishment. The connection is Isaac's alone and it demonstrates his original synthesis of Pseudo-Dionysian language and the terms wonder and astonishment.

6.2.2 Wonder in the Greek Tradition: Evagrius

Isaac also connects Evagrian concepts with wonder and astonishment. While these connections are also original, they are based on one solid textual reference. Evagrius himself did not refer to wonder or astonishment, but the Syriac translator added the word "wonder" into his translation of *Reflections* 30. On the basis of this one influential passage, Isaac explicitly equates either wonder or astonishment with four other Evagrian concepts, including "solitary knowledge," "purity of mind," the joy that occurs during prayer, and angelic visitation. This section of the chapter will examine how Isaac

equates these concepts with wonder or astonishment on the basis of the Syriac translation of *Reflections* 30.

Scholars have already noticed the important changes that the Syriac translator made to *Reflections* 30. In addition to using the Syriac word ܡܬܦܨܡܐ ("to be interrupted") to translate the Greek word γινομένη ("to become"), he inexplicably added the phrase "through wonder" to the end of Evagrius's sentence.[66] While Evagrius's Greek text originally read, "Prayer is a state of mind that comes to be from the single light of the

[66] The substantial differences between Evagrius's original Greek of *Reflections* 30 and the Syriac translation have sparked an important debate in the secondary literature. Irénée Hausherr was the first person to notice the changes that the Syriac translator made to *Reflections* 30, as well as the influence that these changes had on the formation of Isaac's theory of prayer. In an influential article, Hausherr attributed the changes to a mistake in the translation process, saying that although the original Greek manuscript had the Greek word γινομένη, the Syriac translator mistakenly read τεμνομένη ("to be cut") and translated the term with the Syriac equivalent, ܦܨܡܐܝܬ ("to be cut," or "to be interrupted"). Hausherr then claimed that Isaac developed his entire theory of how wonder interrupts prayer on the basis of this one mistranslation. See Irénée Hausherr, "Par delà l'oraison pure grâce à une coquille. À propos d'un texte d'Évagre," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 13 (1932): 8-12.

E. Khalifé-Hachem responded to Hausherr's article and successfully showed that Isaac's theory of wonder and interrupted prayer had deep roots in the Syriac tradition and therefore was not based on this one mistranslated word alone. In particular, Khalifé-Hachem briefly pointed to the close connection between Isaac's theory of interrupted prayer and John the Solitary's interest in the world to come. See E. Khalifé-Hachem, "La prière pure et la prière spirituelle selon Isaac de Ninive," in Mémorial Mgr Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis (1898-19-68) (Leuven: Impr. Orientaliste, 1969), 167-72. Khalifé-Hachem's article paved the way for a new examination of the sources behind Isaac's theory of how wonder interrupts prayer, but scholars have yet to examine this topic in depth.

I contend that the findings of this chapter build on Khalifé-Hachem's claim that Isaac's theory of interrupted prayer has roots in the Syriac tradition. Earlier in this chapter, I showed that Isaac places his discussion of interrupted prayer within the framework of John the Solitary's discussion of the world to come (see 6.1.2). This early section of the chapter lent support to Khalifé-Hachem's thesis that Isaac's theory of how wonder interrupts prayer has roots in John the Solitary. The previous section of this chapter (6.2.1) just demonstrated that Isaac was also influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius's concept of darkness — a point not mentioned by Khalifé-Hachem. Antoine Guillaumont, however, has alluded to the importance of Pseudo-Dionysius. See Antoine Guillaumont, "Le mystique syriaque Isaac de Ninive," in *Études sur la spiritualité de l'Orient Chrétien*, Spiritualité Patristica 66 (Bellefontaine: Abby of Bellefontaine, 1996), 211-25.

In addition, Khalifé-Hachem did not perform an in-depth analysis of how the addition of the phrase "through wonder" in *Reflection* 30 influenced the way that Isaac connected the phenomenon of wonder to other Evagrian concepts. The rest of this section will now explore how Isaac derived definitions for wonder and astonishment based on other Evagrian passages.

Holy Trinity," the Syriac version instead reads, "Prayer is stability of mind that is only interrupted by the holy light of the Trinity through wonder."[67]

This revised version of *Reflections* 30 had considerable influence on subsequent Syriac authors. Babai, for example, interprets this passage in terms of an elaborate two-stage theory of prayer. In the first stage, the monk engages in prayer in order to purify the intellect from all of the distractions and sensual impulses that have corrupted his intellect ever since the time of the fall. This purification process helps restore the intellect to its natural stability as a pure image and reflection of God. In his commentary on *Reflections* 30, Babai states,

> This is the blessed prayer in which a person inclines his intellect along with his senses entirely towards that sublime vision and there is nothing that can interrupt or hinder it while he stands in his natural stability, which is the image adorned with the beauties of adorable Lordship. This [prayer] separates him from every motion of the impulses and from unnatural disturbance.[68]

In the second stage of prayer, Babai defines wonder as the phenomenon that interrupts the natural stability of prayer with an even greater state of mind, that is, the infiltration of light from the Trinity. He continues, "It is only through that innumerable and wondrous wonder that the Holy Trinity sheds its light upon the soul, interrupting it from every union in which it was entangled and [from all] troubles and material impressions."[69]

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[67] This passage is *Reflections* 27 in the Greek edition. For the Greek, see Evagrius, *Skemmeta* 27 (Muyldermans:41). Προσευχή ἐστι κατάστασις νοῦ, ὑπὸ φωτὸς μόνου γινομένη τῆς ἁγίας Τριάδος. Page number refers to Joseph Muyldermans, "Evagriana," *Le Muséon* 44 (1931): 37–68. For the Syriac translation, see Anonymous, *Skemmata* 30 (Frankenberg:454:7-8). ܡܨܠܬܐ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܗܝ ܕܒܗ ܡܫܬܡܫ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܥܡ ܚܘܫܗ ܠܬܪܥܝܗ ܠܬܚܙܝܬܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܠܝܬ ܠܗ ܡܢܥܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܒܬܪܝܨܘܬܗ ܕܛܒܥܐ ܕܨܠܡܗ ܕܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܐ ܕܡܦܪܫ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܪܓܫܐ ܕܡܬܚܪܟ ܘܡܢ ܟܠ ܛܪܘܕܐ ܕܛܒܥܐ. Page and line numbers refer to *Euagrius Ponticus*, ed. W. Frankenberg, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen Philologisch-Historische Klasse 13.2 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912).

[68] Babai, *Comm.Skemmeta* 30 (Frankenberg:454:8-11): ܡܠܬ ܡܠܬ ܡܠܬ ܕܡ ܕܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܫܠܝܬ ܡܨܠܬܐ ܕܢܢ ܕܡܬܚܙܐ ܠܬܪܥܝܗ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܠܝܬ ܠܗ ܡܢܥܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܒܬܪܝܨܘܬܗ ܕܛܒܥܐ ܕܨܠܡܗ ܕܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܐ ܕܡܦܪܫ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܪܓܫܐ ܕܡܬܚܪܟ ܘܡܢ ܟܠ ܛܪܘܕܐ ܕܛܒܥܐ.

[69] Babai, *Comm.Skemmeta* 30 (Frankenberg:454:11-13). ܗܢ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܡ ܗܢ ܕܡܬܚܙܐ ܠܬܪܥܝܗ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܠܝܬ ܠܗ ܡܢܥܐ ܕܡܬܩܝܡ ܒܬܪܝܨܘܬܗ ܕܛܒܥܐ ܕܨܠܡܗ ܕܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܐ ܕܡܦܪܫ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܪܓܫܐ ܕܡܬܚܪܟ ܘܡܢ ܟܠ ܛܪܘܕܐ ܕܛܒܥܐ.

Wonder, which allows the light from the Trinity to infiltrate the purified mind of the monk, is the apex of Babai's two-stage theory of prayer.

In the same vein as Babai, Isaac also describes wonder as the occasion when the light of the Trinity interrupts the intellect during prayer. In *Homily* 1.22, he refers to *Reflections* 30 and concludes, like Babai, that wonder interrupts the stability of mind that is achieved through prayer. At the same time, Isaac is not satisfied with this basic observation that light from the Trinity interrupts the intellect during prayer; for Isaac, it is important that the Trinitarian light interrupt prayer *with something*. He concludes, therefore, that the light from the Trinity interrupts the mind with spiritual insights. In his own commentary on *Reflections* 30, Isaac adds that wonder specifically arises from insights that pass into the intellect during prayer.

> Prayer is the "stability of mind" that is only interrupted by the light of the Holy Trinity through wonder." You see how prayer is interrupted through wonder when those insights that are born from prayer [pass into] the intellect.[70]

According to Isaac, prayer is interrupted when the light from the Trinity passes insights into the intellect.

This notion that insights arise during prayer and pass into the intellect is the basis for Isaac's theory of non-prayer.[71] According to Isaac, prayer, by definition, is a human activity, but wonder originates from a divine source, namely, insights that come from the

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[70] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.22 (174:10-14). ܨܠܘܬܐ ܠܗ̇ ܐܝܬܝܗ̇: ܫܠܝܘܬܗ ܕܗܘܢܐ: ܗܝ ܕܒܠܚܘܕ ܡܢ ܢܘܗܪܐ ܕܬܠܝܬܝܘܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܒܝܕ ܬܗܪܐ ܡܬܦܣܩܐ. ܚܙܝܬ ܕܐܝܟܢܐ ܡܬܦܣܩܐ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܒܝܕ ܬܗܪܐ ܕܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ: ܗܠܝܢ ܕܡܢܗ̇ ܡܢ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܡܬܝܠܕܝܢ ܒܪܥܝܢܐ.

[71] For background on Isaac's theory of non-prayer, see Irénée Hausherr, "Par delà l'oraison pure grâce à une coquille," 184-88; E. Khalifé-Hachem, "La prière pure et la prière spirituelle selon Isaac de Ninive," 157-73; Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita: Ricerche su Isacco di Ninive e la sua fortuna* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2002), 223-30; Nestor Kavvadas, "Theology of Language and Liturgical Prayer in Isaac of Nineveh," in *Symbola Caelestis: Le symbolism liturgique et paraliturgique ans le monde chrétien*, ed. Andre Orlov and Basil Lourié (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009), 280-81; and Bouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (νοῦς): Pure Prayer according to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh," *ZAC* 15:2 (2011), 315-17.

light of the Trinity. Since these insights are not human in origin, they cannot be part of prayer. In *Homily* 1.22, for example, he refers to the insights that arise in the intellect after prayer has ceased and the mind has been interrupted by the Trinitarian light, which Isaac here interprets as the Holy Spirit.

> Some incomprehensible insights arise [when] the Holy Spirit, according to measure in which it is moved in a person, accepts the sum of one's prayer and is moved in him. As a result of these insights, prayer is interrupted from its motion and the mind is absorbed in wonder. [72]

Prayer must end before insights arise in the intellect and cause wonder to take place.

The final experience that occurs before divine grace instills insights into the mind is the phenomenon of astonishment, which is the limit of prayer. In *Homily* 1.22, Isaac continues to describe this transition period from human activity to divine activity by saying that prayer reaches its limit after a monk engages in "pure prayer." Pure prayer, which is an Evagrian term that Isaac borrows to describe undistracted prayer, is the highest form of prayer and the limit of human activity. Once pure prayer is reached, the mind enters into a state of astonishment and divine activity takes over.

> There is no prayer beyond pure prayer, for all of its impulses and its manners conduct the intellect up until here under the sway of their freedom. For this reason there is strife in it [pure prayer]. There is a limit beyond this, however, and it is astonishment and not prayer.[73]

Elsewhere, in *Homily* 2.35, he reiterates this notion that astonishment represents the limit of prayer and that insights arise once the mind goes beyond the restrictions of prayer.

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[72] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.22 (Bedjan:174:3-7). ܡܢܝ ܡܬܚܙܝܢܝܢ ܠܐ ܡܕܡ ܡܬܚܠܩܐ ܒܗ ܡܢ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܬܚܙܐ ܒܐܢܫܐ ܡܩܒܠ ܡܕܝܢܬܗ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܘܡܬܚܠܩ ܒܗ ܡܢ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܬܩܛܥ ܡܢ ܬܪܥܝܬܗ ܘܡܬܒܠܥ ܒܬܡܗܐ ܡܢ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܬܩܛܥ ܡܢ ܬܪܥܝܬܗ ܘܡܬܒܠܥ ܒܬܡܗܐ. ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܡܠܝܢ ܡܬܩܛܥ ܡܢ ܬܪܥܝܬܗ ܘܡܬܒܠܥ ܒܬܡܗܐ. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.13.6 (CSCO 637:106): "This wonder of thoughts begins to appear in the intellect when the intellect begins to shine [with the light from the Trinity] and grows in the hidden realities." ܠܝܬ ܡܕܡ ܕܡܢ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܬܩܛܥ ܡܢ ܬܪܥܝܬܗ ܘܡܬܒܠܥ ܒܬܡܗܐ. ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܡܠܝܢ ܡܬܩܛܥ ܡܢ ܬܪܥܝܬܗ ܘܡܬܒܠܥ ܒܬܡܗܐ.

[73] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.22 (Bedjan:165:19-166:2). ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܡܠܝܢ ܡܬܩܛܥ ܡܢ ܬܪܥܝܬܗ ܘܡܬܒܠܥ ܒܬܡܗܐ. ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܡܠܝܢ ܡܬܩܛܥ ܡܢ ܬܪܥܝܬܗ ܘܡܬܒܠܥ ܒܬܡܗܐ. ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܡܠܝܢ ܡܬܩܛܥ ܡܢ ܬܪܥܝܬܗ ܘܡܬܒܠܥ ܒܬܡܗܐ. ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܡܠܝܢ ܡܬܩܛܥ ܡܢ ܬܪܥܝܬܗ ܘܡܬܒܠܥ ܒܬܡܗܐ. ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܡܠܝܢ ܡܬܩܛܥ ܡܢ ܬܪܥܝܬܗ ܘܡܬܒܠܥ ܒܬܡܗܐ.

> When a person reaches insights into creation on the journey of his way of life, then he is raised up higher than having prayer set for him by a limit. It is superfluous from then onwards for him to limit prayer by means of fixed times or the Hours [because] his situation has gone beyond praying and giving praise whenever he wants. From here on, he continually finds the senses stilled and the thoughts bound with the bonds of astonishment. A vision filled with praise that takes place without the movement of the tongue constantly fills him and again, from time to time, prayer remains for its part, but the mind is taken away from it as if it is in captivity, and tears fall like fountains of water, involuntarily soaking his entire face.[74]

Although prayer may continue by all earthly appearances, the mind no longer takes part in prayer once it has entered into a state of astonishment.

On the basis of the Syriac translation of *Reflections* 30, Isaac develops an elaborate theory about how insights that arise from the light of the Trinity interrupt the natural stability of the mind in pure prayer. Wonder arises after prayer has reached its limit in astonishment. Isaac was so influenced by the occurrence of the word “wonder” in *Reflections* 30 that he interpreted other Evagrian passages in light of the phenomenon of wonder. In particular, he equates wonder with two other Evagrian concepts, “solitary knowledge” and “purity of mind,” and he connects astonishment with both the joy that occurs in the heart during prayer and angelic visitation in the human soul.

The first conception that Isaac borrows from Evagrius and associates with the state of wonder is Evagrius’s conception of “solitary knowledge.” In *Gnostic Chapter* 2.3, Evagrius used this phrase to describe the original form of knowledge that God gave

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[74] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.35.1 (CSCO 554:139). ܐܡܬܝ ܕܠܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ ܕܒܪ̈ܝܬܐ ܡܛܐ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܒܐܘܪܚܐ ܕܕܘܒܪܗ܆ ܗܝܕܝܢ ܐܬܥܠܝ ܡܢ ܗܝ ܬܬܚܡ. ܕܒܙܒ̈ܢܐ ܘܒܫ̈ܥܐ ܢܬܚܡ ܠܨܠܘܬܐ܆ ܡܝܬܪܐ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܗܫܐ܆ ܡܢ ܗܝ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܨܒܐ ܗܘܐ ܟܠܐ ܢܨܠܐ ܘܢܫܒܚ. ܘܡܢ ܗܘ ܡܟܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܐܡܝܢܐܝܬ ܠܪ̈ܓܫܐ ܒܗ ܫܠܝܢ. ܘܡܚܫ̈ܒܬܐ ܒܐܣܘ̈ܪܐ ܕܬܗܪܐ. ܘܡܠܐ ܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ ܣܠܩܐ ܕܠܐ ܬܫܡܫܬܐ ܕܗܘܝܐ ܟܠܐ ܡܢ ܙܘܥܐ ܕܠܫܢܐ܆ ܘܡܟܝܠ ܐܦ ܙܒܢ ܙܒܢ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܒܕܘܟܬܗ ܩܝܡܐ܆ ܘܗܘܢܐ ܥܠ ܫܒܝܗ. ܘܗܘܝܐ ܕܕܡ̈ܥܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܒܘܥܐ܆ ܘܢܚܬܝܢ ܕܒܠܐ ܨܒܝܢܐ ܕܡ̈ܥܐ ܢܚܬܝܢ ܘܡܪ̈ܛܒܢ ܠܟܠܗ ܦܪܨܘܦܗ. Isaac consistently draws a connection between the presence of insights that arise from astonishment and the occurrence of tears. In addition to the quotation just cited, see *The Second Part* 2.8.17 (CSCO 554:24), where Isaac states that tears come as a result of wonder and “once the door of insights has been opened before the heart. . .he gradually approaches astonishment.” ܡܐ ܕܐܬܦܬܚ ܬܪܥܐ ܕܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ ܩܕܡ ܠܒܐ. . .ܡܢ ܗܪܟܐ ܒܡܫܘܚܐ ܒܡܫܘܚܐ ܠܘܬ ܬܕܡܘܪܬܐ ܡܬܩܪܒ. Also see also Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.18.4 (CSCO 554:139): “A flow of constant tears may occur in someone. . .from the astonishment that is from insights.” ܡܢ ܬܠܬ ܗܘܝܐ ܥܠܠ ܗܘܐ ܪܕܝܐ ܕܕܡ̈ܥܐ ܐܡܝܢܝܬܐ ܒܐܢܫ. ܐܘ ܡܢ ܬܕܡܘܪܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ

to rational natures before their initial movement away from Him. Solitary knowledge is therefore the original knowledge of God before the knowledge of created beings became tarnished with perceptions from the created world. The Syriac translation of *Gnostic Chapter* 2.3 reads: "The first of [all forms of] knowledge is solitary knowledge of the unity. . .[which] goes forth from the creator and appears with the nature that has accompanied it."[75] Later on in the *Gnostic Chapters*, Evagrius goes on to say that human beings were separated from their original solitary knowledge of God after the movement. The Syriac translation of *Gnostic Chapter* 3.22 states, "The original movement of rational nature is the separation that [is produced] by the mind from the solitary knowledge that is in it."[76] According to Evagrius, solitary knowledge was originally part of human nature until the movement away from God eliminated this form of knowledge from human nature.

Isaac inherits Evagrius's definition of solitary knowledge, but he explicitly equates solitary knowledge with wonder. In *Homily* 1.40, Isaac states,

> [Evagrius] says that the personal contemplation enters the original creation of nature. From this time onward, one will easily be moved towards what is called solitary knowledge, which is, according to a luminous interpretation, wonder in God. This is the order of that *great future way of life*, which will be given in freedom that lives in immortality. In other words, human nature will not be cut off from there, that is, from *constant wonder* in God in order to mingle with something from without. If there were anything else that were equal to Him, then [human nature] would sometime focus on [God], but sometimes those other things.[77]

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[75] The Syriac translator retains the sense of the original passage. See Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.22 (PO 28:60). ܩܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܟܠܗܘܢ ܝܕ̈ܥܬܐ܆ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܝܚܝܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܝܕܝܘܬܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ̇. ܘܗܝ ܟܠܗ̇ ܬܬܐܪܬܐ ܒܚܕܝܘܬܐ ܡܫܟܚܐ ܗܝ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܕܙܕܩ. ܗܕܐ ܓܝܪ ܠܒܪܝܐ ܡܢ ܒܪܘܝܐ ܢܦܩܬ܆ ܘܥܡ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܐܬܠܘܝ ܠܗ̇ ܡܬܚܙܝܐ. Page numbers refer to *Les Six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique*, ed. Antoine Guillaumont, PO 28 (Paris: 1958).

[76] Anonymous, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.22 (PO 28:106). ܡܬܬܙܝܥܢܘܬܗ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܦܘܪܫܢܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܠܗܘܢܐ܆ ܡܢ ܐܝܕܥܬܐ ܝܚܝܕܝܬܐ ܕܒܗ.

[77] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.40 (Bedjan:304:18-305:4) (emphasis mine). ܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܕܦܘܪܫܢܗܘܢ܆ ܥܠ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ ܐܡܪ. ܕܡܢ ܗܪܟܐ ܡܟܝܠ܆ ܦܫܝܩܐܝܬ ܢܗܘܐ ܡܬܬܙܝܥ ܥܠ ܗܝ ܕܡܫܬܡܗܐ ܝܕܥܬܐ ܝܚܝܕܝܬܐ܆ ܕܐܝܬܝܗ̇ ܐܝܟ ܕܒܦܘܫܩܐ ܢܘܗܪܢܐ܆ ܬܗܪܐ ܕܒܐܠܗܐ. ܗܢܘ ܛܟܣܐ ܕܗܘ ܕܘܒܪܐ ܪܒܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ܆ ܕܡܬܝܗܒ ܒܚܐܪܘܬܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܒܠܐ ܡܘܬܘܬܐ܆ ܒܗܘ ܦܘܫܩܐ ܕܐܚܪܢ ܡܬܐܡܪ. ܒܗ̇ ܕܠܐ ܬܗܘܐ ܡܬܦܣܩܐ ܟܝܢܐ ܐܢܫܝܐ ܡܢ ܗܝ ܬܡܢ܆ ܡܢ ܬܗܪܐ ܐܡܝܢܐ ܕܒܐܠܗܐ܆ ܠܡܬܚܠܛܘ ܥܡ ܡܕܡ ܡܢ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܠܡܬܐܡܪܘ. ܐܠܘ ܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܡܕܡ ܐܚܪܢ ܕܫܘܐ ܠܗ܆ ܦܢܝܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܙܒܢ ܒܗ܆ ܘܒܙܒܢ ܒܗܠܝܢ.

Although Isaac has clearly adopted Evagrius's phrase "solitary knowledge," he adapts the phrase to fit into his own ascetical system. While Isaac acknowledges Evagrius's connection between solitary knowledge and the original knowledge of the primordial creation of human nature, he also identifies solitary knowledge with the "great future way of life." Isaac is more concerned with the way of life in the future world than with the original state of purity so he reinterprets solitary knowledge as the knowledge of the future way of life, which is constant wonder at God. This association between wonder and solitary knowledge is original to Isaac.

A second connection that Isaac makes between an Evagrian concept and the phenomenon of wonder has to do with purity of the mind. Isaac uses Evagrius's description of purity of mind as his own description for wonder. In *Practical Life* 66, Evagrius described purity of mind in the following manner:

> The mind that has completed the work of the practical life with the help of God and has approached knowledge possesses little or no awareness at all of the irrational part of the soul, for knowledge has carried it off to the heights and separated it from sensible things.[78]

Isaac paraphrases this Evagrian description of purity of mind, but he adds that this phenomenon is also the phenomenon of wonder. Although Evagrius himself does not connect wonder with this state of purity of mind, Isaac explicitly associates Evagrius's description of a pure mind with wonder.

> As the blessed Evagrius says, the mind, which accomplishes works of virtue and approaches knowledge by the grace of God, perceives little of this foolish part of the soul, for [the mind's] knowledge forces it on high and alienates it to all things in the world. This [alienation] happens [to monks] because their mind becomes ethereal, light,

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[78] See Evagrius, *cap. pract.* 66 (SC 171:650): "Anger is a boiling over of the irascible part" (Sinkewicz:109). Page numbers refer to *Traité le Pratique ou Le Moine*, ed. Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont, CS 171 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1971). English translation refers to Evagrius, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

> and swift on account of their purity. On account of asceticism and the leisure that [the mind has] from [spending] so much time in solitude, the mind is also cleansed through the stretching out of the body. As a result, [the minds of the monks] quickly settle upon various things to which their contemplation draws them to in wonder.[79]

Isaac builds on Evagrius's description of the pure mind by adding that purity of mind leads to the sort of contemplation that is induced by wonder.

Isaac also associates astonishment with the Evagrian notion that joy arises in the heart during prayer. Although Evagrius never connected astonishment with any aspect of prayer, Isaac equates astonishment with joy based on a specific citation from Evagrius's *Chapters on Prayer*. In this passage, Evagrius simply states that "prayer is joy that bestows thanksgiving," but Isaac, without revealing why he makes this connection, connects the thanksgiving that arises from the joy of prayer with astonishment.[80] In *Homily* 1.8, he paraphrases Evagrius's statement as follows: "This prayer that bestows [thanksgiving], in which a person does not pray nor act. . .but instead is filled with joy and astonishment in his heart, frequently incites stirrings of thanksgiving and gratitude, in the silence of kneeling."[81] According to Isaac, astonishment occurs when prayer produces joy and thanksgiving in the heart.

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[79] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.74 (Bedjan:513:12-21). ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܐܦ ܠܒܢܝܐ ܐܘ ܒܪܢܫ: ܕܗܘܝܢ ܕܟܠܝܠܘܬܗ ܕܐܝܟ ܗܘܐ ܟܕܒܐ ܕܡܬܬܪܝܨܘܬܐ ܒܗܪ. ܘܐܬܬܘܪܒ ܠܘܬ ܡܕܒܪܐ: ܡܛܠ ܗܪ ܠܟ ܡܢ ܡܢܬܐ ܣܓܝܠܬܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ. ܡܕܒܪܗ ܟܕ ܫܦܝܐ ܠܗ ܪܘܚܐ: ܘܡܥܒܪܢܐ ܠܗ ܠܒܠܒܝ ܕܒܠܒܐ. ܘܒܗ، ܕܗܘܢ ܡܛܠ ܕܒܝܬܗܘܢ ܐܬܬܦܠ ܠܗ ܗܘܢܗܘܢ: ܘܗܘܐ ܡܠܠ ܘܣܪܦ. ܡܛܠ ܒܒܘܢܝܬܐ ܬܘܒ ܐܬܬܕܝܪ ܠܗ ܗܘܢܐ: ܒܕܒܪ ܠܗ ܠܒܫܡܝܐ ܘܐܦ ܡܢ ܦܫܝܫܘܬܐ ܕܫܠܝܐ ܘܡܬܚܣܢܘܬܗ ܕܪܒܝܐ ܕܒܗ. ܘܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܡܠܠܐܝܬ ܫܟܚ ܒܠ ܡܕܡ ܡܕܡ: ܕܢܒܕܐ ܠܗ ܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܕܒܗܘܢ ܠܬܗܪܐ ܕܠܘܬܗ.

[80] Evagrius, *or.* 75 (Hausherr 13). ܨܠܘܬܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ̇: ܚܕܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܕܝܢܘܬܐ ܬܘܕܝܬܐ. Page numbers refer to Irénée Hausherr, "Le *De Oratione* d'Évagre le Pontique en syriaque et en arabe," *OCP* 5 (1939): 7-71.

[81] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.8 (Bedjan:106:7-15). ܘܗܕܐ ܗܝ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܐܡܘܕܝܢܐ ܠܫܒܩܝܢ ܒܡܘܕܝܢܐ ܗܪ، ܐܘ ܒܪܢܫ: ܗܘ ܕܢܦܩ ܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܢܦܫܐ ܠܒܠ ܢܒܗ: ܕܢܨܠܐ ܠܐ ܐܫܬܒܩ: ܚܕܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܕܝܢܘܬܐ ܬܘܕܝܬܐ. ܒܠ ܗܘܕܐ ܢܨܠܐ ܕܟܠ ܡܫܒܠܢܘܬܐ ܕܢܬܒܠܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܡܪ: ܗ، ܕܝܢ ܕܡܘܕܝܢܐ: ܒܗ ܕܠܐ ܗܘ ܐܝܟ ܡܢܝܢܐ ܘܡܒܚܠܐ: ܐܝܟ ܥܕܡܐ ܕܢܨܠܐ ܕܢܫܐ: ܕܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܗܪ ܒܚܕܘܬܐ ܕܒܠܒܘܬܐ: ܐܠܐ ܗܘ ܠܒܐ ܒܗ ܡܠܠܐ ܚܕܘܬܐ ܘܬܗܪܐ: ܡܒܗ ܢܚܡ ܗܘܢ ܡܘܕܝܢܘܬܐ ܒܘܪܟܐ ܕܬܘܕܝܬܐ ܘܡܘܕܝܢܘܬܐ ܘܫܘܒܚܠܘܬܐ: ܒܫܬܩܐ ܕܢܦܩ ܒܒܘܪܟܗ. The connection that Isaac makes between silence and prayer may have come from John the Solitary's texts. According to Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, John the Solitary developed an innovative model of prayer that was grounded in the perception of God as silence. See Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "'More Interior than the Lips and the Tongue': John of Apamea and Silent Prayer in Late Antiquity," *JECS* 20.2 (2012): 303-31.

A fourth element that Isaac borrows from Evagrius in order to construct his conception of wonder is the belief that the angels cause astonishment to arise in the human soul. Isaac connects the phenomenon of astonishment with the presence of the angels in two different passages in which he cites Evagrius. The first passage is *Homily* 1.72, where he says,

> When by the operation of grace, great impulses suddenly fall upon your soul and [there is] astonishment at the mind's vision of those things that are more exalted than nature, [this occurrence is] as like what the blessed Evagrius says, "when the holy angles pursue and approach [us] and then fill us with spiritual vision."[82]

Isaac makes a similar observation in *Homily* 2.18, where he states that the "blessed fathers of holy memory say that these moments which causes astonishment at insights. . .[arise] from proximity to the angels."[83] According to Sebastian Brock, Isaac has the Syriac translation of Evagrius's *Practical Life* 32 in mind for both of these passages.[84] This text reads: "When an angel approaches us all those who are troubling us depart, and the intellect is to be found at great ease, praying in a healthy way."[85] Once again, there is no correlation in Evagrius's text between the angels and astonishment, which means that Isaac makes this connection on his own. Isaac learns from Evagrius that the angels approach human beings and inspire spiritual stirrings and spiritual insights, but he interprets these inspired moments as moments of astonishment.

On the basis of *Reflections* 30, where the Syriac translator introduced the concept of wonder into the Evagrian theory of prayer, Isaac associates a wide range of Evagrian

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[82] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.72 (Bedjan:497:14-18). ܐܡܬܝ ܕܡܢ ܡܥܒܕܢܘܬܐ ܕܛܝܒܘܬܐ ܡܫܠܝ ܢܦܠܝܢ ܒܢܦܫܟ ܙܘܥܐ ܪܘܪܒܐ܂ ܘܬܗܪܐ ܕܚܙܬܐ ܕܡܕܥܐ ܕܥܠ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܡܥܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܟܝܢܐ܂ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܛܘܒܢܐ ܐܘ ܓܪܝܣ܂ ܕܐܡܬܝ ܕܡܠܐܟܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܪܕܦܝܢ ܘܩܪܒܝܢ܂ ܡܠܝܢ ܠܢ ܚܙܬܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܬܐ.

[83] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.18.19 (CSCO 554:91). ܠܛܘܒܢܐ ܐܒܗܬܐ ܚܣܝܢ ܕܘܟܪܢܐ. ܐܡܪܝܢ܂ ܕܡܢ ܡܩܪܒܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܐܟܐ ܗܘܝܢ ܙܒܢܐ ܗܠܝܢ ܡܬܗܪܢܝܬܐ܆ ܕܒܣܘܟܠܘܗܝ ܡܬܬܗܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܩܠܐ ܢܘܪܐ.

[84] See *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part,' chapters IV-XLI*, ed. Sebastian Brock, CSCO 554, Scriptores Syri 224 (Louven: Peeters, 1995), p. 101 n. 19.

[85] Translation is from Sebastian Brock, Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part,' chapters IV-XLI, 101.

terms and quotations to construct his own definitions of wonder and astonishment. Isaac's portrait of wonder includes the possession of the original, prelapsarian knowledge that Evagrius calls "solitary knowledge" and the state of mind that Evagrius calls "purity of mind." Likewise, Isaac connects astonishment with the experience of joy that Evagrius says occurs during prayer and inspiration in the soul that Evagrius says comes from the angels. Since Evagrius did not make these connections, Isaac's point of reference is solely the Syriac translation of *Reflections* 30, but his synthesis of wonder and astonishment with Evagrian terms is original.

CONCLUSION

This overview of the way that Syriac authors used the terms wonder and astonishment demonstrates that while Isaac based his understanding of these terms on earlier writings, especially the writings of John the Solitary whose account of wonder shares the same focus on the world to come, Isaac nevertheless advances his theory of wonder and astonishment in a unique way by associating these two terms with ideas already present in the works of Greek authors. Isaac interprets wonder and astonishment as integral components to Pseudo-Dionysius's concept of divine darkness, even though the extant Syriac translation of Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* does not correlate divine darkness with wonder or astonishment. Likewise, although the Syriac translation of Evagrius's texts contains just one reference to wonder, Isaac connects wonder and astonishment with other important concepts from different Evagrian texts.

While this chapter has examined how Isaac appropriates certain notions from earlier Syriac and Greek authors into his own work and how he connects wonder and

astonishment with concepts present in the works of earlier authors, the next chapter will provide a synthesis of Isaac's own account of wonder.

Chapter 7

Wonder as the Union between Anthropology and Eschatology

Since I am presenting wonder as the culmination of Isaac's ascetical system, a brief summary of our findings so far is in order. In part one of this dissertation (chapter 1 and chapter 2), I demonstrated that Isaac retains Evagrius's anthropological division of the soul into three parts, but that he reworks this basic anthropology in order to better account for the origin of evil. Chapter one showed that Evagrius formulates his anthropology as a way to explain how evil arises from the natural goodness of the soul. He concludes that although the passionate part of the soul is supposed to work towards virtue, it sometimes becomes distracted by material sensations and fails to successfully perform its task. Babai builds on Evagrius's theodicy, but specifically identifies the will as the source of either virtue or distraction.

In chapter two, I demonstrated that Isaac uses John the Solitary's three levels of the ascetical life in order to explain how evil arises in the soul. While Babai blamed the existence of evil on the will, Isaac blames the existence of evil on the presence of outside distractions that prevent the soul from acting according to its natural goodness. John the Solitary's three degrees provides Isaac with the tools for explaining how material distractions affect the interiority of the soul. When a monk operates in the bodily level of the ascetical life, the bodily senses overwhelm the impulses of the soul and cause them to fail in their natural task of protecting the soul from outside distractions. When a monk operates in the soulish level of the ascetical life, however, the soul's impulses succeed in

excising distractions from the soul and, in addition, they begin to help prepare the mind for wonder, which represents the spiritual level of the ascetical life.

Next, in part two (chapter 3, chapter 4, and chapter 5), we turned to the subject of Isaac's eschatology. Chapter three showed that Isaac rejects Evagrius's *katastatic* eschatology, which focuses on returning the soul to the original purity of creation and instead emphasizes an eschatology in which the future state of the soul surpasses the purity of original creation. According to Isaac, the soul recovers its original purity during prayer, which takes place during the soulish level of the ascetical life, but even when it is immaculate and pure, the soul is subject to the limitations of material creation. With the assistance of divine grace, human beings enter into an *ecstatic* state of wonder and live according to a way of life that transcends the limits of material creation. This way of life is the conduct of the world to come and is the ultimate eschatological aspiration for human beings.

Chapter four identified John the Solitary as the primary source for Isaac's emphasis on the way of life of the world to come. Based on a selective reading of Pauline texts, John concludes that human beings will undergo a transformation when they enter the world to come. After this transformation is made complete, he states that human beings will shed the way of life associated with this world and assume the glorious way of life of the world to come. We know that Isaac used John as a source for his own account of future transformation because he uses many of John's distinctive linguistic phrases, such as "hope to come," "way of life of the new life," and "interior man," as well as distinctive metaphors, such as the metaphor of the snake.

Chapter five showed that although Isaac retains John the Solitary's emphasis on the world to come, he also emphasizes a proleptic eschatological experience wherein the monk participates in the knowledge of the world to come while remaining in this world. Isaac takes John's interest in the knowledge of the future world and makes it a reality that can be experienced in this world.

At this point we moved into part three of the dissertation (chapter 6 and chapter 7), which deals with the question of how Isaac reconciles his anthropology and eschatology. Isaac uses the phenomenon of wonder to explain how the future, eschatological way of life exists within the anthropological structures of the human person. Wonder is how material beings experience the immaterial, spiritual mysteries of the world to come. Closely related to wonder is the phenomenon of astonishment, which Isaac uses to describe a person's inability to grasp the spiritual mysteries on account of material limitations.

Chapter six examined some of the Syriac and Greek sources for Isaac's conception of wonder and astonishment and found, first of all, that Isaac derives the framework for the terms wonder and astonishment from John the Solitary. John associated wonder with the eternal praise that the angels offer to God in heaven and with the reverence for God that human beings receive once they have achieved the spiritual level of the ascetical life, which takes place in the world to come. Isaac retains this meaning of wonder, but he extends the possibility of experiencing wonder to monks who are still living on this earth and who have achieved ascetical perfection.

Next, I showed that Isaac derives definitions for wonder and astonishment from Pseudo-Dionysius's concept of darkness and from the Evagrian concepts of solitary

knowledge, purity of mind, the joy that occurs during prayer, and angelic visitation. Isaac concludes that astonishment refers to the human inability to understand spiritual realities, while wonder refers to successful apprehension of spiritual realities through a mode of knowing that transcends temporal logic.

The current chapter will continue to explain the relationship between Isaac's anthropology and his eschatology by arguing that wonder is what renders Isaac's ascetical system coherent. The phenomenon of wonder and astonishment unites Isaac's anthropology and eschatology.

7.1 Wonder as the Union between Anthropology and Eschatology

In order to understand how wonder unites Isaac's anthropology and eschatology, we will consider these two parts of Isaac's ascetical system separately, beginning with his anthropology. So far, we have seen that Isaac describes three distinct anthropological levels within the ascetical life. In the first level, the monk succumbs to the material needs of the body, but in the second level, which Isaac calls the level of the soul, the monk begins to make real progress in advancing towards perfection. In particular, he stresses the important role that the impulses of the soul play in preparing the mind for the experience of wonder, which occurs during the spiritual level of the ascetical life. These impulses, which exist naturally in the soul, both protect the soul from distractions and push the soul towards the threshold of wonder, yet they cannot generate an authentic experience of the world to come because they are subject to the limitations of material creation. Although the impulses of the soul are essential to progression in the ascetical life, their inherent materiality cannot bring the monk to perfection, which is spiritual.

Next, we turn to Isaac's eschatology. According to Isaac, the eschatological state is better than the original state of creation because the original state of creation is subject to the natural limitations of the human soul. The perfect eschatological state, by contrast, is spiritual and is primarily reserved for the saints and angels in heaven. Nevertheless, Isaac states that advanced monks proleptically participate in the eschatological state of perfection even while they remain in this world. Since Isaac holds to a strict division between knowledge of the world to come and knowledge derived from the material world, he is faced with the dilemma of trying to explain how monks can experience the eschatological perfection of the world to come despite the limitations of material modes of apprehending knowledge. Or, to state the problem another way: how do human beings comprehend spiritual knowledge of the world to come through the cognitive structures of material creation?

The solution to this dilemma is the phenomenon of wonder. According to Isaac, wonder is a proleptic experience of the future world that does not come through the impulses of the material soul, but instead through divinely inspired spiritual insights imparted directly into the human mind. These spiritual insights set the impulses of the mind into motion and generate knowledge of the world to come, which the mind perceives through wonder rather than through temporal reasoning. Wonder is the moment when eschatological experience operates within the material, anthropological structures of the human being.

7.2 The Transition from the Level of the Soul to the Level of the Spirit

This chapter will now demonstrate how Isaac describes the transition between the level of the soul and the level of the spirit. This transition represents the moment when wonder appears in the mind and when anthropology and eschatology are united. During the level of the soul, the soul is in charge of processing stimuli that originate from the bodily sensations while its impulses prepare the mind for the reception of spiritual knowledge of the world to come, but in the spiritual level of the ascetical life, the mind is in charge of processing spiritual insights that come from divine grace. Once the mind is ready to receive spiritual insights, the impulses of the soul, since they are unable to comprehend spiritual insights, become superfluous distractions to the operation of the mind and must be suppressed. Isaac calls the complete suppression of the impulses of soul the state of "stillness."

The transition from the level of the soul to the level of the spirit is therefore a transition from the activity of the soul to the activity of the mind. The soul must yield to the mind before a person can live according to the spiritual way of life. Isaac describes this transition from the level of the soul to the level of the spirit in terms of how the soul and mind each react to spiritual insights given by the Holy Spirit. The soul, Isaac says, reacts to spiritual insights be entering into a state of astonishment at what is beyond its ability to comprehend while the mind successfully comprehends spiritual insights through a state of wonder and uses this comprehension to live according to the way of life of the world to come.

The rest of this chapter will provide a detailed description of this transition from the level of the soul to the level of the spirit. The first section will describe how the soul

prepares the mind for spiritual insights; the second section will illustrate how the soul responds to spiritual insights by entering into a state of astonishment; the third section will describe how the mind reacts to spiritual insights through a state of wonder; and the fourth section will show how once a monk has transitioned to the spiritual level of the ascetical life, he is then able to live according to the way of life of the world to come.

7.2.1 THE IMPULSES OF THE SOUL PREPARE THE MIND FOR WONDER

Before the Holy Spirit can supply spiritual insights, the impulses of the soul must prepare the mind for wonder because, according to Isaac, knowledge of God grows in accordance with progression through the levels of the ascetical life.[1] A monk who is in the level of the soul, for example, knows more than a person in the bodily level, but he does not yet have the perfect knowledge that comes through wonder, which is reserved for those monks who are in the spiritual level of the ascetical life. In *Homily* 3.13, Isaac explains that knowledge derived from the soul is temporary and imperfect because it is merely a preparation for the perfect knowledge that is experienced by the mind through wonder. "It is not immediate, nor all of a sudden," he says, "that a person is brought

[1] Isaac progressive theory of knowledge is part of his broader theory of progressive revelation. According to Isaac, God created the world with the intention of revealing himself gradually over time. See, for example, Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.9.27 (CSCO 637:68): "Just as [God] is incomprehensible and invisible, so too are his revelations. There were no [revelations] before the coming of our Lord as a human being, nor was the way of life of the world to come known at that time, nor was the perfect grace of the spirit given until after the Paraclete appeared to the apostles. At that time, the secret revelations and the mysteries of things to come, which do not resemble this world, began to be entrusted to, and were known by, each one of the saints. In [the world] beyond, the angel is shown all of these wondrous things by a commandment of God." ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܗܘ ܠܐ ܡܬܕܪܟܢܐ ܗܘ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܢܐ: ܗܟܢܐ ܐܦ ܓܠܝܢܘ̈ܗܝ. ܘܗܕܐ ܩܕܡ ܡܐܬܝܬܗ ܕܡܪܢ ܒܐܢܫ ܠܐ ܗܘܬ. ܕܐܦ ܠܐ ܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ ܒܗܘ ܙܒܢܐ ܝܕܝܥ ܗܘܐ ܗܘܐ: ܘܠܐ ܛܝܒܘܬܐ ܓܡܝܪܬܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܐܬܝܗܒܬ ܗܘܬ ܥܕܡܐ ܕܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܕܢܓܗ ܦܪܩܠܝܛܐ ܥܠ ܫܠܝܚܐ. ܘܗܝܕܝܢ ܓܠܝܢܐ ܕܟܣܝܬܐ ܘܐܪ̈ܙܐ ܕܥܬܝܕܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܠܗܢܐ ܥܠܡܐ: ܫܪܝܘ ܡܬܗܝܡܢܝܢ ܘܡܬܝܕܥܝܢ ܠܚܕ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܩܕܝܫܐ. ܠܗܠ ܕܝܢ ܡܠܐܟܐ ܡܚܘܐ ܗܘܐ ܗܠܝܢ ܟܠܗܝܢ ܬܕܡܪ̈ܬܐ ܒܦܘܩܕܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ. Page numbers refer to *Isacco Di Ninive Terza Collezione*, ed. Sabino Chialà, CSCO 637, Scriptores Syri 246 (Louven: Peeters, 2011).

directly near to this perfection and to this consummation, but the soul is at first enlightened in mysteries that are inferior to this [perfection]."[2] Only once the soul has achieved this initial imperfect knowledge can the mind then begin to experience wonder at God.[3] This progressive theory of knowledge means that the knowledge received during the level of the soul is imperfect, but necessary, for the acquisition of knowledge about God. Isaac maintains that once a monk has removed all external distractions from his soul, the soul's natural impulses — zeal and loving desire — prepare the mind for the reception of spiritual insights that lead to wondrous thoughts.

Isaac uses two metaphors to illustrate the inherent tendency for the impulses of the soul to prepare the mind for wonder. The first metaphor, in *Homily* 1.3, is the natural flow of water. Isaac says that once water from outside sources has dissipated, the water that arises naturally within the soul will flow towards God, carrying wondrous thoughts with it: "When the waters from the outside do not enter the fountain of the soul, those waters that are from its nature will arise, i.e., wondrous understandings that are moving towards God all the time."[4] The impulses of the soul, when they are unencumbered by

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[2] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.13.6 (CSCO 637:106). ܠܐ ܓܝܪ ܡܫܡܠܝܐ ܘܡܫܬܠܡ ܡܬܩܪܒ ܐܝܟ ܠܘܬ ܗܢܐ ܠܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ ܗܕܐ܆ ܘܠܘܬܗ ܕܫܘܡܠܝܐ ܗܢܐ܆ ܐܠܐ ܒܩܕܡܝܬܐ ܠܘܬ ܐܪ̈ܙܐ ܕܠܬܚܬ ܡܢ ܗܢܐ ܢܗܪ ܢܦܫܐ.

[3] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.13.6 (CSCO 637:106): "He [then] begins to regard this wonder of thoughts in his intellect when the intellect begins to be illumined and grow in the hidden realities." ܡܫܪܐ ܕܝܢ ܡܕܝܩ ܒܪܥܝܢܗ ܗܢܐ ܬܗܪܐ ܕܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ ܡܢ ܐܡܬܝ ܕܫܪܝ ܢܗܪ ܪܥܝܢܐ ܘܡܬܪܒܐ ܒܟܣܝ̈ܬܐ.

[4] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:20:19-21). ܐܡܬܝ ܕܝܢ ܕܡ̈ܝܐ ܕܡܢ ܠܒܪ ܥܠ ܡܒܘܥܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܠܐ ܢܥܠܘܢ܆ ܗܢܘܢ ܡ̈ܝܐ ܕܡܢ ܟܝܢܗ ܢܒܥܝܢ܆ ܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ ܐܝܟܢ ܬܗܝܪ̈ܐ܆ ܕܡܬܬܙܝܥܝܢ ܥܠ ܐܠܗܐ ܒܟܠܙܒܢ. Page and line numbers refer to *Mar Isaacus Ninivita De Perfectione Religiosa*, ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris: Nihil Obstat, 1908; repr. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007). Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.3 (Bedjan:20:14-19): "Every soul whose nature does not move towards a concern for the gathering of possessions does not require great diligence in order to find from within itself the stirrings of wisdom unto God. The [soul's] solitude from the world will naturally move the flashes of understandings in the soul and, by them, [the soul] will be exalted before God and will remain in astonishment." ܟܠ ܢܦܫܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܬܘܣܦܬܐ ܕܩܢ̈ܝܢܐ ܕܟܝܢܗ̇ ܠܐ ܡܬܬܙܝܥܐ ܥܠ ܗܝ ܕܟܢܫܐ܆ ܠܐ ܣܢܝܩܐ ܥܠ ܒܝܠܢܘܬܐ ܣܓܝܐܬܐ܆ ܠܡܫܟܚܘ ܡܢܗ̇ ܘܒܗ̇ ܙܘ̈ܥܐ ܕܚܟܡܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܐܠܗܐ. ܗܝ ܕܝܢ ܫܠܝܘܬܗ̇ ܕܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ ܒܟܝܢܗ̇܆ ܙܩܦܐ ܡܚ̈ܪܐ ܕܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ ܒܢܦܫܐ܆ ܘܒܗܘܢ ܡܬܪܘܡܐ ܠܘܬ ܐܠܗܐ ܘܬܬܟܠܐ܆ ܘܒܬܗܪܐ ܬܗܘܐ.

outside distractions, stimulate the mind so that it will obtain wondrous thoughts from spiritual insights.

The second metaphor occurs in *Homily* 3.10, where Isaac equates the quietness of the night with the quietness that the soul experiences when outside distractions have been removed. Once distractions that impede the natural operation of the soul have dissipated, the impulses of the soul will seek knowledge of God. Isaac expresses this notion in the words of the following prayer: "During the night, when all the voices, human impulses, and everything else are all silent, our soul will find light in you with its impulses, oh Jesus, the light of the righteous."[5] The impulses of the soul seek the light of God and, in doing so, help prepare the mind for the reception of spiritual insights through wonder.

In order to further demonstrate the inherent ability of the impulses to prepare the mind or intellect for experiencing wonder, I will return once again to a quotation that was used in the discussion of Isaac's anthropology in chapter two. In that chapter, I pointed out that Isaac identifies the impulse of loving desire as the impulse that directs the intellect towards thoughts of wonder and to support this claim, I quoted a passage from Isaac's first ascetical homily. I will now return to this passage because it speaks to the important role that the soul's impulses play in preparing the intellect for wonder and it specifically identifies the impulse of loving desire as the impulse that binds the thoughts of the intellect to the thoughts that arise out of wonder. The passage reads as follows: "Study, with its loving desire, is sufficient to bind the thoughts [of the intellect] firmly to the thoughts of wonder."[6] Isaac assumes that there is a distinction between the thoughts

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[5] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.10.1 (CSCO 637:71). ܒܠܠܝܠܐ ܕܟܠܗ ܩܠܐ ܕܐܢܫܝܐ ܘܟܠ ܕܠܝܬ ܡܕܡ ܫܬܝܩܝܢ ܗܘܝܢ ܢܦܫܢ ܒܥܝܢܝܗ ܢܫܟܚ ܢܗܝܪܐ ܡܢܟ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܙܕܝܩܐ.

[6] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.1 (Bedjan:5:8-11). ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܫܠܡܘܬܐ ܕܪܗܝܒܘܬܐ ܕܡܪܝ ܐܝܣܚܩ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܢܢܘܐ ܕܡܬܩܪܐ ܒܫܡܗ ܕܡܪܝ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܢܥܒܕ ܠܟ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܬܩܢܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܟ ܠܡܬܩܢܘܬ ܪܘܚܟ ܠܡܬܩܢ ܠܪܘܚܐ ܕܡܬܩܢ ܠܗ ܠܡܬܩܢ ܠܪܘܚܐ ܕܡܬܩܢ ܠܗ ܠܡܬܩܢ ܠܪܘܚܐ ܕܡܬܩܢ ܠܗ ܠܡܬܩܢ ܠ

that naturally arise in the intellect through academic study and the thoughts that arise in the intellect from spiritual insights that come from divine grace and are apprehended through wonder.[7] He says that loving desire, which is set into motion through study, connects the natural thoughts of the intellect with the spiritual insights that are processed through wonder. Loving desire, in other words, is the motor that prepares the mind for wonder by binding the mind's natural thoughts to the spiritual insights received through wonder. The monk's first step in achieving perfect knowledge of God and entering into the spiritual level of the ascetical life, therefore, is to let the impulses of the soul work according to their nature, without any distraction.

7.2.2 The Soul's Reaction to Spiritual Insights: Astonishment

Once the soul has suppressed all outside distractions, the monk begins to pray. According to Isaac, prayer is the final action of the soul before it yields to the spiritual

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ܠܫܝܢܐ ܫܠܝܬܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܢܘܫܡܐ ܕܬܗܪܐ. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.18.3 (CSCO 554:85-86): "Through purity, [a person] is deemed worthy of the operation of the Holy Spirit. This occurs when he is first purified, then sanctified. From time to time, this happens during the middle of studious reflection by means of some luminous impulse that is greater than the flesh, at which point he acquires an inner solitude in God that is a semblance of what is to come and [consists in] a continual and ineffable repose in God." ܒܝܕ ܕܟܝܘܬܐ܆ ܡܫܬܘܐ ܠܡܥܒܕܢܘܬܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ. ܗܢܐ ܡܐ ܕܐܬܕܟܝ ܠܘܩܕܡ ܒܬܪ ܡܬܩܕܫ. ܘܐܝܬ ܗܘ ܒܙܒܢ ܙܒܢ ܕܒܗܪܓܐ ܡܨܥܬܐ ܙܘܥܐ ܕܢܘܗܪܐ ܚܕ ܕܪܒ ܡܢ ܒܣܪܐ܆ ܘܗܝܕܝܢ ܩܢܐ ܫܠܝܘܬܐ ܓܘܝܬܐ ܒܐܠܗܐ ܕܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܥܬܝܕܬܐ. ܒܢܝܚܐ ܐܡܝܢܐ ܕܒܐܠܗܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠ. Page numbers refer to *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part,' chapters IV-XLI*, ed. Sebastian Brock, CSCO 554, Scriptores Syri 224 (Louven: Peeters, 1995).

[7] For the importance of study, see Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.9.6 (CSCO 637:63): "Study is a reflection on God alone so that one wonders in the things that belong only to [God]. It investigates these things as well as His majesty and the intellect is engaged in this alone. [The intellect] does not reflect on things here, nor on the memory of beautiful things, not the virtues of the body and bodily things, but it is engaged only in the study of the [divine] being." ܗܪܓܐ ܕܝܢ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܕܐܠܗܐ܆ ܕܒܗܝܢ ܕܝܠܗ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܢܬܕܡܪ܆ ܘܒܗܠܝܢ ܘܒܪܒܘܬܗ ܡܥܩܒ ܘܡܬܗܦܟ ܗܘܢܐ ܒܗܕܐ ܒܠܚܘܕܝܗ܆ ܠܐ ܗܪܓ ܠܗ ܬܡܢ ܗܪܟܐ܆ ܘܠܐ ܒܕܘܟܪܢܐ ܕܫܦܝܪܬܐ ܘܡܥܠܝܬܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܘܦܓܪܢܝܬܐ. ܐܠܐ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܒܗܪܓܐ ܕܐܝܬܘܬܐ ܡܬܥܢܐ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܗܘ. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.9.9 (CSCO 637:64), where Isaac describes how a monk stands in wonder before God's hidden being and the mysteries of the hope to come. ܒܟܣܝܘܬܐ ܐܝܬܘܬܐ ܡܬܗܪ ܠܗ܆ ܘܒܐܪ̈ܙܐ ܕܣܒܪܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ ܠܡܬܓܠܝܘܬܗ ܡܬܗܪ.

activity of the mind.[8] "Prayer," he says, "is a mediator between the soulish and spiritual state."[9] During prayer, the monk invites God to provide insights about the world to come and when prayer is answered, the Holy Spirit supplies divine insights that are incomprehensible to the soul.

According to Isaac, the soul processes insights that originate from bodily sensations through a mode of apprehension that follows a temporal sequence of logic, but insights that arise from the Holy Spirit are beyond the soul's capabilities of perception and cannot be understood through temporal reasoning. Unable to grasp the eternal truths of the world to come, the soul enters into a state of astonishment at what is beyond its ability to understand. Astonishment is the technical word that Isaac uses to describe what happens when a person is unable to turn insights into knowledge and, during the level of the soul, astonishment signals the limit of the soul's capabilities. For this reason, Isaac sees prayer as a human activity that eventually must come to an end before the mind is free to yield to God's self revelation. "The level [of prayer]," Isaac says, "is inferior to the [level] of revelation."[10] Since the impulses of the soul are unable to process the fullness of God's revelation, they eventually become distractions to the mind. Prayer must cease once God has accepted the invitation to provide spiritual insights.

The astonishment that occurs during prayer is an important step towards the progression of wonder because it is the moment when the soul begins to yield its dominance to the mind. According to Isaac, the soul and the mind process divine insights

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[8] Prayer is an activity of the soul. See Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.9.5. (CSCO 637:63): "ascetical way of life is the body, prayer is the soul, and reflective vision is the level of the spirit." ܕܘܟܪܐ ܦܓܪܐ܀ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܢܦܫܐ܀ ܚܙܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܪܥܝܢܐ ܠܪܘܚܢܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ.

[9] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.22 (Bedjan:169:20-21). ܨܠܘܬܐ ܐܝܟ ܡܨܥܝܢܐ ܡܕܡ ܒܝܬ ܢܦܫܢܘܬܐ ܠܪܘܚܢܘܬܐ.

[10] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.9.18. (CSCO 637:66). ܡܢ ܓܠܝܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܒܨܝܪ ܗܘ ܠܪܘܚܢܐ

in different ways. The soul cannot comprehend spiritual insights so it instead processes them as astonishment; meanwhile, the mind comprehends these same insights through wonder. In *Homily* 1.71, Isaac explains that the content of divine revelation is received by the mind in the form of intelligible revelations, but in the soul as astonishment:

> This divine power [i.e. the Holy Spirit], which is the director of all these things, shows itself to a person in secret by intelligible revelations to his spiritual nature (which is his mind), but when a person has been deemed worthy to receive this power within his soul, then he will [experience] nothing other than astonishment.[11]

The soul reacts to God's revelation by entering into a state of astonishment while the mind accepts intelligible revelations from the Holy Spirit. Isaac makes a similar observation in *Homily* 1.51. In this passage, he states that when the Holy Spirit imparts knowledge to the soul, the soul receives this knowledge by entering into a state of speechlessness and astonishment: "The soul that has once, in faith, entrusted itself to God and, under many temptations, has received the taste of [faith's] help, no longer has any reflection of itself, but is rendered speechless by astonishment and silence."[12] While the soul cannot fathom revelation from the Holy Spirit and, as a result, enters into a state of astonishment and silence at what is beyond its ability to understand, the mind understands and perceives God's presence in wonder.

Since the impulses of the soul are subject to the laws of created order and incapable of proceeding past astonishment when confronted with divine revelation, Isaac

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[11] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.71 (Bedjan:489:16-490:1). ܘܡܕܒܪܢ ܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܗܘ ܚܝܠܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ܆ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ, ܡܕܒܪܢܐ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܟܠܗܝܢ܆ ܡܬܚܘܐ ܢܦܫܗ ܠܒܪܢܫܐ ܒܟܣܝܐ܆ ܒܓܠܝܢܐ ܡܬܝܕܥܢܐ ܠܟܝܢܗ ܪܘܚܢܐ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܗܘܢܐ. ܡܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܐܫܬܘܝ, ܒܪܢܫܐ ܠܡܩܒܠܘ ܠܚܝܠܐ ܗܢܐ ܒܓܘ ܢܦܫܗ܆ ܗܝܕܝܢ ܠܝܬ ܠܗ܆ ܐܠܐ ܬܗܪܐ ܘܬܕܡܘܪܬܐ܆ ܘܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܒܠܒܗ ܪܕܝܢ ܐܢܫ ܡܢܗ܆ ܘܦܐܪܫ ܡܚܝܠ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܡܢ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܒܬܗܪܐ.

[12] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.51 (Bedjan:360:11-18). ܢܦܫܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ ܚܕ ܒܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܐܫܠܡܬ ܢܦܫܗ ܠܐܠܗܐ܆ ܘܒܢܣܝܘܢܐ ܣܓܝܐܐ ܩܒܠܬ ܛܥܡܐ ܕܡܥܕܪܢܘܬܗ܆ ܬܘܒ ܠܝܬ ܠܗ ܪܢܝܐ ܕܢܦܫܗ܆ ܐܠܐ ܒܬܗܪܐ ܘܒܫܬܩܐ ܡܫܬܬܩܐ.
Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:254:15-17): "As in the way of life that is after the resurrection, [a person] thinks and dares to receive such thoughts in his soul for the sake of his delight and in due time he becomes intoxicated on the astonishment, which [derives from] the impulses." ܕܒܗܘ ܪܢܐ܆ ܘܡܬܚܨܦ ܠܡܩܒܠܘ ܗܠܝܢ ܚܘܫ̈ܒܐ ܒܢܦܫܗ ܡܛܠ ܒܘܣܡܗ܆ ܕܒܬܗܪܐ ܕܙܘ̈ܥܐ, ܢܪܘܐ ܒܙܒܢܗ܆ ܐܝܟ ܕܒܗܘ ܕܘܒܪܐ ܕܒܬܪ ܩܝܡܬܐ.

says that monks who want to enter the spiritual level of the ascetical life must suppress the impulses of the soul (along with the bodily senses), thereby bringing the soul into a state of stillness. Isaac says that a monk "is drawn towards wonder by the suppression of the two senses: the fleshly and soulish [senses]."[13] Elsewhere he says, "When a person is standing on his feet or kneeling and his intellect is seized by the wonder of prayer, then he is not under the control of the will of flesh and blood or the impulses of the soul.[14] Isaac refers to this suppression of the soul's impulses as "stillness," which is a necessary step towards perception of God with the mind.[15]

Stillness in the soul means that all human motions have been put to rest, including the soul's impulses. Once all human motions have ceased, divine grace is free to move into the mind because it is unencumbered by human distractions. Isaac explains that stillness provides the necessary environment for allowing divine grace to foster wonder in the mind:

> Stillness. . .creates an opportunity for the mind to rest upon itself in peace that occurs. When this happens, [a person] is moved from this point by remembrance towards the adaption of the banner of his way of life and he receives the glory of the world to come in his intellect, [that is], the hope that is preserved for the righteous for whom there is life moved in the spirit and [life] completely originating in God. This is the new way of life, without remembrance and without any impulse from the things here.[16]

Stillness is the moment when the impulses of the soul reach their limit and yield to divine operation, at which time the monk experiences the glory of the new world and begins to live according to the spiritual way of life.

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[13] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.1 (Bedjan:9:3-4). ܠܘܬ ܬܗܪܐ ܡܬܓܪܓ܆ ܒܡܒܨܝܘܬܐ ܕܬܪ̈ܝܢ ܪ̈ܓܫܐ ܒܣܪܢܝܐ ܘܢܦܫܢܝܐ.

[14] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.14.24 (CSCO 554:63). ܟܕ ܩܐܡ ܥܠ ܪ̈ܓܠܘܗܝ܆ ܐܘ ܟܪܝܥ܆ ܘܐܬܚܕ ܗܘܢܗ ܒܬܗܪܐ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܨܒܝܢܐ ܕܒܣܪܐ ܘܕܡܐ ܘܙܘ̈ܥܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ.

[15] See, for example, Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.13.3 (CSCO 637:105-106).

[16] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.35 (Bedjan:254:17-255:2). ܫܠܝܐ ܓܝܪ ܥܒܕ ܫܠܝܐ ܐܬܪܐ ܠܗܘܢܐ܆ ܒܗ ܕܐܝܬ ܐܬܪܐ ܠܗܘܢܐ ܠܡܫܪܐ ܥܠ ܢܦܫܗ ܒܫܝܢܐ ܕܓܕܫ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܥܠܬܐ. ܐܡܬܝ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܬܬܙܝܥ ܡܢ ܗܪܟܐ ܒܥܘܗܕܢܐ ܠܘܬ ܡܠܒܫܘܬܐ ܕܢܝܫܐ ܕܗܘܦܟܗ܆ ܘܡܩܒܠ ܒܪܥܝܢܗ ܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ܆ ܣܒܪܐ ܕܢܛܝܪ ܠܙܕܝ̈ܩܐ܆ ܠܗܘܢ ܚܝܐ ܡܬܬܙܝܥܝܢ ܒܪܘܚ܆ ܘܒܗ ܒܐܠܗܐ ܟܠܗܘܢ. ܗܘ ܗܘܦܟܐ ܚܕܬܐ܆ ܕܕܠܐ ܥܘܗܕܢܐ ܘܕܠܐ ܙܘܥܐ ܕܡܕܡ ܕܗܪܟܐ.

In *Homily* 2.7, Isaac again refers to the stillness that occurs prior to entrance into the spiritual level of the ascetical life. This stillness, which Isaac calls the "harbor full of rest" in this passage, stands at the threshold of the entrance into the spiritual level of the ascetical life.[17] The monk exists in stillness just prior to experiencing the wonder associated with the spiritual level of the ascetical life.[18]

> It can also happen that a certain stillness, without any insights, can fall upon a person, and the intellect is gathered in and dives within itself in ineffable stupefactions. This is the harbor full of rest of which our Fathers speak in their writings. From time to time [human] nature enters there, when it draws near to the boundary of the spiritual way of life. This is the beginning of the entrance into the third high point, which is the spiritual way of life.[19]

Isaac goes on to say that once a monk passes through the threshold into the spiritual level he experiences "wondrous things" and receives the pledge of the new world: "When the solitary has drawn near to this entrance point, he will then arrive at the harbor as he draws near to the spiritual way of life. From this point onwards, wondrous things will take place before him as he receives the pledge of the new world."[20] Stillness is the threshold of the spiritual way of life, when the mind will assume leadership over the soul and begin to comprehend spiritual insights about the new world through wonder.

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[17] The phrase, "harbor full of rest" has a long history in the Syriac tradition. See E. R. Hambye, "The Symbol of the 'Coming to the Harbour' in the Syriac Tradition," Symposium Syriacum I (1972) 401-11. For the frequent use of this phrase in the Greek Macarian collections, see Susan Ramsey, "Exploring the Harbor of Rest: The Significance of ἀνάπαυσις in the Theology of the Pseudo-Macarian Corpus," Ph.D. Dissertation, Marquette University, 2012.

[18] Isaac consistently connects the phenomenon of wonder with stillness. See, for example, Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.5 (Bedjan:43:21): "Persevere in study [done] in stillness, then you will be drawn to wonder at all times." ܐܬܐܡܢ ܒܗܪܓܐ ܒܫܠܝܐ܆ ܘܬܬܢܓܕ ܠܘܬ ܬܗܪܐ ܒܟܠܙܒܢ.

[19] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.7.2 (CSCO 554:19-20). ܘܐܝܬ ܕܐܦ ܫܠܝܐ ܡܢ ܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ ܒܪܡ ܐܦ ܫܠܝܐ ܡܢ ܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ ܢܦܠ ܥܠ ܒܪܢܫܐ܆ ܘܡܬܟܢܫ ܘܡܥܡܕ ܗܘܢܐ ܒܬܗܪ̈ܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠܢ. ܗܢܘ ܠܡܐܢܐ ܕܡܠܝܐ ܢܝܚܐ ܕܐܡܪܝܢ ܐܒܗ̈ܝܢ ܒܟܬܒܝܗܘܢ܆ ܕܒܙܒܢ ܙܒܢ ܡܥܠ ܠܗ ܟܝܢܐ ܠܬܡܢ. ܡܐ ܕܩܪܒ ܠܬܚܘܡܐ ܕܕܘܒܪܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ. ܘܗܢܘ ܫܘܪܝܐ ܕܡܥܠܬܐ ܠܡܘܫܚܬܐ ܗܝ ܕܬܠܝܬܝܐ ܕܗܝܘ ܕܕܘܒܪܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ.

[20] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.7.2 (CSCO 554:20). ܡܐ ܕܠܗܢܐ ܡܥܠܐ ܩܪܒ ܝܚܝܕܝܐ܆ ܗܝܕܝܢ ܡܛܐ ܠܠܡܐܢܐ. ܘܩܪܒ ܠܘܬ ܕܘܒܪܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܐ. ܘܡܢ ܗܐ ܡܟܝܠ ܬܗܪ̈ܬܐ ܡܬܬܥܝ̈ܢ ܠܘܬܗ ܘܢܣܒ ܪܗܒܘܢܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ.

7.2.3 The Mind's Reaction to Spiritual Insights: Wonder

Once the impulses of the soul have been suppressed and the soul has entered into a state of astonishment and stillness, the mind begins to dominate the reception of knowledge.[21] Since the impulses of the soul distract the mind from processing spiritual insights as wonder, monks must progress past the impulses of the soul and enter the spiritual level of the ascetical life in order to comprehend the mysteries of God. Isaac states in *Homily* 3.9 that the revelation of mysteries is "the spiritual way of life and not the impulses of the soul."[22] Elsewhere, in *Homily* 3.13, he states "through that recollection that is elevated in God, one becomes white in a wonder that is higher than all the impulses and a freedom that is [higher] than everything here and a limpidity of intellect that is more sublime than words."[23] The full revelation that takes place in wonder occurs after the impulses of the soul have been put to rest.

Once prayer has ended and the human impulses have been suppressed through astonishment and stillness, the mind begins to process spiritual insights from the Holy Spirit.[24] This process causes the mind to expand, as Isaac explains in *Homily* 1.54:

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[21] For a general background on Isaac's understanding of mystical knowledge, see Serafim Seppälä, "The Idea of Knowledge in East Syrian Mysticism," *Studia Orientalia* 101 (2007): 265-77.

[22] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.9.19 (CSCO 637:66). ܕܪܘܚܢܐ ܗܘ ܕܘܒܪܐ ܘܠܐ ܙܘܥܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ.

[23] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.13.11 (CSCO 637:107). ܒܗ ܒܥܘܗܕܢܐ ܗܘ ܡܬܥܠܝܐ ܕܒܗ ܒܐܠܗܐ܆ ܕܚܘܪ ܒܬܗܪܐ ܕܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܙܘܥܐ܆ ܘܗܘܐ ܒܚܐܪܘܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܟܠ ܕܬܢܢ܆ ܘܒܫܦܝܘܬܐ ܕܬܪܥܝܬܐ ܕܪܡܐ ܡܢ ܡܠܬܐ. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.13.7 (CSCO 637:106): "His way of life is empowered by the Spirit and he progresses towards a certain tranquility in so far as he exists above habitual thoughts and the impulses of joy." ܕܒܪܘܚܐ ܡܬܚܝܠ ܕܘܒܪܗ܆ ܘܠܘܬ ܒܫܠܝܘܬܐ ܡܕܡ ܡܬܩܪܒ ܟܠ ܐܝܟܢ܆ ܕܗܘܐ ܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܚܘܫܒܐ ܕܥܝܕܐ܆ ܘܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܙܘܥܐ ܕܚܕܘܬܐ. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.3.19 (CSCO 637:14): "A person will be encouraged when he senses that we have strength as well as a protector, who is the power from heaven that has invisibly drawn near [to us] at all times and assists us. He will infinitely approach those things that elevate nature until he abides outside of the human intellectual activity, impulses, and the human will [that originate] from sickly nature." ܘܡܬܒܝܐܢܐ܆ ܚܝܠܐ ܡܢ ܫܡܝܐ܆ ܕܡܪܓܫ ܠܗ ܢܦܫܐ ܠܡܒܥܐ܆ ܕܗ ܢܩܒ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܢ ܚܝܠܐ. ܡܬܩܪܒܢܘܬܐ ܒܟܠ ܙܒܢ܆ ܘܡܥܕܪܢ܆ ܘܠܘܬ ܗܘ ܕܡܥܠܝܢ ܠܟܝܢܐ ܡܦܪܥ ܕܠܐ ܣܘܦ. ܘܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܣܘܥܪܢܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܘܙܘܥܐ ܘܨܒܝܢܐ ܐܢܫܝܐ܆ ܕܡܢ ܟܝܢܐ ܟܪܝܗܐ.

[24] See Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.13.7 (CSCO 637:106): "The power of knowing approaches those partial [realities] through the power of the Spirit when grace settles upon [the monk] from time to

> This mysterious kind of overshadowing, as the [gifts imparted] to each one of the saints, is a kind of energy that rests upon the mind. When a person is deemed worthy of this overshadowing, the mind is snatched up through astonishment and expanded by some divine revelation. As long as this operation rests upon the mind, the person is raised above the movements of soulish thoughts through participation with the Holy Spirit.[25]

The Holy Spirit mystically expands the mind by filling it with spiritual insights that set its impulses into motion. According to Isaac, the mind, like the soul, possesses natural impulses, but unlike the impulses of the soul, which were designed to operate in material creation, the impulses of the mind were created to operate in the spiritual kingdom of heaven, which means that they must be set in motion by the Holy Spirit. Isaac states that by the grace of Christ, a monk is "deemed worthy of the way of life of the new man and [his mind operates] from this time on with the impulses that naturally arise in the kingdom of heaven."[26] Elsewhere, he refers to these mental impulses as the "impulses of the mind that are illumined by the Spirit."[27] Unlike the impulses of the soul, which only stimulate comprehension of visible objects of creation, these spiritual impulses of the mind lead to comprehension of the spiritual mysteries.

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time." ܠܘܬ ܗ̇ܘܢ ܡܬܬܢܝܢ ܦܪ̈ܝ ܣܓܝܐ ܕܡܛܠ: ܟܕ ܣܓܝܐ ܕܪ̈ܘܚܐ: ܒܗ̇ ܕܒܟܢ ܕܝܢ ܥܢ̈ܝܢܐ ܠܟܠܗܘܢ ܠܚܕܡܬܐ. Also see Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.6.2 (CSCO 637:31): "[God's] grace and His love are entirely abundant, for out of which them flows tides of wondrous thoughts onto the intellect." ܠܛܝܒܘܬܗ ܘܚܘܒܗ ܗܘܐ ܟܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ ܒܡܘܬܪܘܬܗܘܢ: ܕܢܒܥܝܢ ܥܠ ܗܘܢܐ ܡܪ̈ܕܝܬܐ ܕܬܕܡܪ̈ܬܐ ܕܬܐܘܪܝܐ.

[25] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.54 (Bedjan:390:21-391:5). ܐܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܙܪܙܢܝܐ ܕܡܛܠܠܢܘܬܐ: ܐܝܟ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܠܘܬ ܐܢܫ ܐܢܫ ܡܢ ܩܕ̈ܝܫܐ: ܕܐܝܬܝܗ̇ ܐܝܟ ܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ: ܕܥܠ ܗܘܢܐ ܣܟܝܐ. ܘܐܡܬܝ ܕܠܗ̇ܕܐ ܡܛܠܠܘܬܐ ܡܫܬܘܐ ܐܢܫ ܒܪܢܫܐ: ܚܕ ܬܕܡܪܐ ܡܬܚܛܦ ܗܘܢܐ ܘܡܬܦܬܚ: ܒܓܠܝܢܐ ܡܕܡ ܐܠܗܝܐ. ܘܟܡܐ ܕܐܝܬܝܗ̇ ܕܡܬܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܡܟܝܢܐ ܥܠ ܗܘܢܐ: ܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܬܬܙܝܥܢܘܬܐ ܕܗ̈ܘܢܐ ܢܦܫܢܝ̈ܐ ܢܦܩ ܐܢܫ ܒܪܢܫܐ: ܟܕ ܫܘܬܦܘܬܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ.

[26] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.20.10 (CSCO 554:98). ܘܡܢ ܪ̈ܓܫܐ ܕܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ ܡܬܒ̈ܥܐ ܡܬܬܟܫܦܠ ܘܡܬܐ: ܘܒܗܘܢ ܙܘ̈ܥܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܒܫܡܝܐ ܐܦܬܚ ܐܢܫܐ ܠܒܗ. ܘܒܗ̇ ܒܡܕܐ ܕܚܕܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܢܐ ܡܢ ܒܪܢܫܐ: ܘܒܣܘܪܓܢܘܬܐ ܕܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܢ ܟܠܗ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܘܚܝܐ ܕܙܘ̈ܥܐ ܡܬܬܙܝܥܝܢ ܕܓܠܝܢܐ ܕܝܠܗ ܥܠܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ: ܟܕ ܕܐܢܫܘ، ܠܡܠܟܘܬܗ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܠܡܬܒܪܐ ܕܒܪ̈ܢܫܐ ܚܕܬܐ: ܒܙܘ̈ܥܐ ܘܙܘ̈ܥܐ ܕܢܦܫܗܘܢ ܒܫܡܝܐ ܡܬܒܥܝܢ ܒܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ.

[27] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.9.20 (CSCO 637:67). ܙܘ̈ܥܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܕܒܪܘܚ ܡܬܢܗܪܝܢ. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.7.15 (CSCO 637:48): "It is the glory of spiritual beings, the power of wondrous revelations about the divinity, and the various manifestations of faith, which spring forth on account of the impulses, for by them you, oh Lord, are the object of faith and not visible things." ܗܕܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ̇ ܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ ܕܪ̈ܘܚܢܝܐ ܘܚܝܠܐ ܕܓܠ̈ܝܢܐ ܬܡܝܗ̈ܐ ܕܥܠ ܐܠܗܘܬܐ ܘܡܫܚܠܦܐ ܕܬܚܘܝ̈ܬܐ ܕܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܕܢܒܥܝܢ ܥܠ ܐܦܝ ܙܘ̈ܥܐ. ܕܐܦ ܠܗܘܢ ܡܬܗܝܡܢܐ ܐܢܬ ܡܪܝܐ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܢܐ. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.3.15 (CSCO 637:15), where Isaac says that a "great force" is needed to help the impulses overcome the flesh.

When divine grace instills knowledge of the divine mysteries into the human mind or intellect, wonder occurs. Whereas astonishment at God reflected the soul's inability to comprehend the spiritual truths of God's mysteries, wonder is the means by which the mind comprehends spiritual truths that are incomprehensible to the soul. In other words, wonder, unlike astonishment, is accompanied by intelligible content.[28] Isaac explains that a person in wonder reflects on the mysteries of the new world and reflects on the things to come:

> Virtuous is the one who is in God alone and who continually remains in wonder at His nature. From that time on, [his] intellect reflects on what is known in the Spirit and [he possesses] a virtuous knowledge and faith in the mysteries. He is expanded in his meditation on the new world and he reflects on things to come.[29]

Wonder makes a person virtuous because it is accompanied by comprehension and knowledge of the mysteries of God and it is the means by which a monk reflects on the world to come. Unlike the soul, which is unable to comprehend spiritual insights provided by divine grace, the mind is able to understand and process spiritual insights.

7.2.4 Proleptic Participation in the Way of life of the World to Come

Once the mind has received and processed spiritual insights from the Holy Spirit, the monk enters into the spiritual level of the ascetical life. During this level, the monk

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[28] Wonder, as Isaac says, is a "wonder of thoughts" because it includes thoughtful insights concerning the mysteries of God. See Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.13.12 (CSCO 637:108). ܡܕܡܐ ܕܡܝܡܪ ܠܗ. ܒܪܝܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܬܓܪܐ ܡܝܡܪ ܒܠܒ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܡܬܬܐ.

[29] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.1.8 (CSCO 637:4). ܒܠ ܚܝܢ ܐܢܘܢ ܒܪܝܬܗ ܡܠܐ ܡܢ ܐܘ ܡܝܡܪ ܕܡܬܬܐ. ܡܬܬܝܕܥ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܬܬܐ ܕܒܪܝܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ,ܡܠܐ ܕܟܝ ܕܡܬܝ ܕܡܬܝܕܥܐ. ܡܬܬܝܕܥ ܕܟܝܢ ܡܝܡܪ ܕܡܬܬܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܬܬ ܕܡܬܝܕܥ ܠܡܬܝܕܥ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܬܬ. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.1.7 (CSCO 637:4), where Isaac states that the monk directs his wonder "before the providence of God." ܩܕܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܕܥ.

proleptically participates in the world to come even while remaining in this world.[30] In *Homily* 3.1, for example, he describes the paradox of living on this earth while the mind mystically participates in the realities of the future world: “The solitaries have mystically died, have mystically lived, and have mystically risen [to heaven] while their body [remains] on earth.”[31] Elsewhere, in *Homily* 2.35, he says that a monk who has received knowledge of the spiritual mysteries exists in a condition that resembles those who live in the world of the righteous (which is another way of saying the world to come). He states that a person who “is deemed worthy of [receiving the spiritual mysteries] exists in this manner night and day, like someone who has departed from the body and is existing in that world of the righteous even now.”[32] A gloss in one of the manuscripts labels this condition a “taste from heaven.”[33] Isaac therefore understands that human beings who have entered the spiritual level of the ascetical life remain in this world while simultaneously experiencing wonder as a “taste from heaven.”

This proleptic taste from heaven enables monks to abide by the way of life of the new world. In *Homily* 2.20, Isaac explains that a monk who has obtained wonder and who has achieved the spiritual level of the ascetical begins to live according to the way of life of the world to come:

> A person is raised from the service of the soul in his reflection and in his knowledge, or in other words, virtue in deeds and in conscience accompanies elevation to the spiritual

[30] For further background on the role that proleptic participation in the world to come plays in liturgical prayer, see Nestor Kavvadas, “Theology of Language and Liturgical Prayer in Isaac of Nineveh,” in *Symbola Caelestis: Le symbolism liturgique et paraliturgique dans le monde chrétien*, ed. Andrei Orlov and Basil Lourié (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009), 278: “Already in this life humans may be temporarily endowed with a form of divine knowledge qualitatively superior to that formulated in the Holy Scripture, the Patristic tradition, Canon law and liturgical prayer.”

[31] Isaac of Nineveh, *Terza Collezione* 3.1.18 (CSCO 637:7). ܡܝܬܝܢ ܓܝܪ ܒܐܪܙܐ܆ ܘܚܝܝܢ ܒܐܪܙܐ܆ ܘܡܬܥܠܝܢ ܒܐܪܙܐ܆ ܟܕ ܦܓܪܐ ܒܐܪܥܐ.

[32] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.35.9 (CSCO 554:142). ܠܗܕܐ ܡܫܬܘܬܐ܆ ܗܟܢܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܠܠܝܐ ܘܒܐܝܡܡܐ܆ ܐܝܟ ܗܘ ܕܐܫܬܢܝ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܦܓܪܐ ܘܗܘܐ ܒܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܕܝܩܐ ܡܟܝܠ ܡܢ ܟܕܘ.

[33] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.35.9 (CSCO 554:142). ܛܥܡܬܐ ܡܕܡ ܕܡܢ [] ܡܢ ܫܡܝܐ

> way of life and, as much as human nature is capable of here, wonder at God immediately befalls him.[34]

This new way of life, Isaac says, is foreign to this world because it is the way of life of the world to come:

> When he departs from these things [i.e. activities associated with the way of life of the soulish level], he is [in a state] of joy of soul, and in his reflection and thoughts he does not resemble those who belong to this world, for he exists from now on in a freedom from thoughts that is filled with impulses of knowledge and wonder at God.[35]

The monk who has entered the spiritual level of the ascetical life has the freedom to live according to way of life of the world to come because he is free from the distractions associated with the material world.

CONCLUSION

Isaac centers his account of the transition from the level of the soul to the level of the spirit on astonishment and wonder. According to Isaac, astonishment and wonder each describe how the soul and mind each react to spiritual insights that are revealed by the Holy Spirit. While the soul is capable of processing material sensations with temporal reasoning and logic, it cannot process immaterial forms of knowledge. Since spiritual insights are not material and cannot be understood through temporal reasoning, the soul enters into a state of astonishment when it receives spiritual insights of divine revelation. The mind, by contrast, is capable of processing spiritual insights through wonder. The transition from astonishment to wonder represents the moment when the

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[34] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.20.10 (CSCO 554:98). ܐܬܬܠܝ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܡܢ ܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܢܦܫܢܝܐ ܒܪܘܚܗ ܘܒܫܘܚܠܦܗ܇ ܕܗܝ ܗܝ ܡܫܬܢܝܘܬܐ ܕܗܘܦܟܐ ܘܕܪܐܬܐ ܒܡܘܠܝܐ ܕܠܘܬ ܕܗܘܒܪܐ ܪܘܚܢܐ. ܐܝܟ ܡܟܐ ܕܠܚܝܢܐ ܐܢܫܐ ܡܡܫܚܐ ܬܡܢ܇ ܒܪܫܬܗ ܬܗܪܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܢܦܩ ܠܗ.

[35] Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.20.11 (CSCO 554:98). ܐܡܬܝ ܕܢܦܩ ܬܘܒ ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܒܚܕܘܬܐ ܕܢܦܫܗ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ. ܘܒܪܢܝܗ ܘܒܚܘܫܒܘܗܝ ܠܐܕܡܐ ܠܗܠܝܢ ܕܒܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ. ܡܛܠ ܕܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܡܟܝܠ ܒܚܐܪܘܬܐ ܕܚܘܫܒܐ܇ ܕܡܠܝܐ ܙܘܥܐ ܕܝܕܥܬܐ ܘܬܗܪܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ.

monk enters into the spiritual level of the ascetical life and begins to comprehend the mysteries of the world to come. Once a monk understands the mysteries of the world to come, he begins to live the heavenly way of life while remaining in the material world.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has studied how anthropology and eschatology function together in Isaac's ascetical system. The relationship between these two disciplines is important for Isaac because successful practice of the ascetical life requires an understanding of both the nature and destination of human beings. Anthropology studies the inherent characteristics of a human being and how these inherent characteristics function so as to enable a person to progress towards his or her ultimate end: heavenly worship in the world to come. Eschatology studies the ultimate end itself, for people needs to know where they are going before they can get there. Or, to say it another way, anthropology studies all the parts of a human person — body, soul, mind, and spirit — and how these parts are supposed to function when they are operating without any distraction while eschatology ensures that the parts of a human person are directed toward their proper end.

This study of Isaac's anthropology and eschatology is important because it clarifies scholarly positions on how Isaac used Greek and Syriac sources to construct his ascetical system. Contrary to the belief of older scholarship, I conclude that Isaac's ascetical theology is much more than a Syriac repetition of Greek Evagrian thought; rather, his ascetical system is influenced by a Syriac author who has received less scholarly attention: John the Solitary. Although Isaac refers to a host of Greek sources, including Evagrius, Pseudo-Macarius, and Pseudo-Dionysius, he relies most heavily on the anthropology and eschatology of John the Solitary in order to construct the framework of his ascetical theory. Isaac situates his anthropology within John's three levels of the ascetical life and his focus on a future-oriented eschatology follows John's emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge in the life of the world to come.

Although Isaac derives the main framework of his anthropology and eschatology from John the Solitary, he does use Greek sources to provide the technical terminology for his essentially Syriac system. One characteristic that distinguishes Isaac from author Syriac authors is that he was very well-read and collected ideas from an extraordinary range of Greek authors. Isaac then used these ideas to articulate an original synthetic account of the ascetical life. In the realm of anthropology, he appropriates Evagrius's understanding of the tripartite soul. Furthermore, he learned of the important role that Pseudo-Dionysius and Pseudo-Macarius assigned to loving desire so he elevates loving desire to the status of the impulse associated with the concupiscible part of the soul. While Isaac rejects Evagrius's eschatology, which stressed the return of the soul to the original purity of creation, he nevertheless turns to Evagrius and Pseudo-Dionysius in order to construct definitions for the terms wonder and astonishment, which play a central role in uniting his eschatology with his anthropology. These Greek ideas help order and articulate the broader foundation that Isaac assumed from John the Solitary.

In order to make all of the disparate pieces of his synthetic ascetical system fit together, Isaac employs the concepts of wonder and astonishment. Since he posits a strong distinction between the structures of material creation and spiritual knowledge of the mysteries in the world to come, the task of reconciling the material and the spiritual is, for Isaac, a difficult matter. Wonder and astonishment render Isaac's synthetic ascetical system coherent because they account for the different ways that the anthropological structures of the material human being embrace the spiritual order of the world to come. Astonishment explains what happens when a monk encounters the limitations of human structures. A soul that has recovered its original purity has reached

the limit of its inherent capabilities and yet it remains incapable of comprehending the mysteries of the world to come. This soul can only exist in astonishment at what is beyond its ability to understand.

When a soul has reached astonishment, it has progressed to the threshold of the perfection of the world to come, which will surpass the original purity of creation. At this point, the soul yields to the natural activity of the mind and, although the impulses that are inherent in the mind require the aid of divine grace in order to process spiritual insights that lead to knowledge of the world to come, these mental impulses are nevertheless able to participate in the perfect, spiritual knowledge of the world to come through wonder. Wonder is what enables the perfection that surpasses the original purity of material creation to exist within the structures and limitations of the material creation. According to Isaac, through wonder, human beings achieve the spiritual perfection of the world to come while they remain in this world.

EPILOGUE: WONDER AND ASTONISHMENT AS ISAAC'S LEGACY

This dissertation has shown that wonder and astonishment render Isaac's synthetic ascetical system coherent. As such, the conception and development of wonder and astonishment is one of Isaac's most influential contributions to Syriac ascetical theology. This epilogue will briefly point to areas where further study will reveal the depth of influence that Isaac's use of the terms wonder and astonishment had on later Syriac authors.[1] In particular, I will point to areas where Isaac's conception of wonder and

[1] For a broader overview of Isaac's legacy, see Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla miseriocrdia infinita: Ricerche su Isacco di Ninive e la sua fortuna* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2002), 281-305.

astonishment influenced two eighth-century East-Syriac authors who had recourse to his texts. The first author is John Dalyatha.[2] The second author is Joseph Hazzaya.[3]

ISAAC'S INFLUENCE ON JOHN DALYATHA

While scholars have presumed that John Dalyatha is influenced by Isaac's conception of non-prayer, my study of Isaac provides a textual basis to what has so far been a very general perception of Isaac's influence on John.[4] I believe that John's dependence on Isaac is centered upon Isaac's conception of astonishment and wonder and I will here point to three textual connections between John and Isaac that merit further study. In all these textual connections, John's theory of non-prayer is dependent on Isaac's theory of wonder.

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[2] For background on the identify of John Dalyatha, see Brian Colless,"The Biographies of John Saba," *Parole de l'Orient*3 (1972): 45-63 and Robert Beulay, "Précisions touchant l'identité et la biographie de Jean Saba de Dalyatha," *Parole de l'Orient* 8 (1977-1978): 87-116. The most thorough overviews of John Dalyatha's ascetical theory are Robert Beulay, *L'Enseignement spiritual de Jean de Dalyatha mystique Syro-Oriental du VIII siècle*, Théologie Historique 83 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1990) and Georg Günter Blum, *Die Geschichte der Begegnung christlich-orientalischer Mystik mit der Mystik des Islams*, Orientalia Biblica et Christiana 17 (Wiesbaden: 2009), 345-442. On John Dalyatha's use of sources see, Brian Colless, "The Mysticism of John Saba," *OCP* 34 (1973): 83-102; Robert Beulay, *La Lumière sans forme: Introduction à l'étude de la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale* (Chevetogne: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1987); and Ilaria L. Ramelli, "Note per un'indagine della mistica siro-orientale dell'VIII secolo: Giovanni di Dalyatha e la tradizione origeniana," *'Ilu: revista de ciencias de la sreligiones* 12 (2007): 147-79.

[3] For general background on the life and works of Joseph Hazzaya, see Addai Sher. "Joseph Hazzaya: Ecrivain Syriaque du VIIe siècle," *Revista degli Studi Orientali* 3 (1910): 45-63; Antoine Guillaumont, "Sources de la doctrine de Joseph Hazzaya," *L'Orient Syrien* 3 (1958): 3-24; S. J. Sherry, "The Life and Works of Joseph Hazzaya," in *The Seed of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of T.J. Meek*, ed. W.S. McCullough (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964),78-91; Micheline Albert, "La doctrine spirituelle de Joseph Hazzâyâ'," in *De la conversion*, ed. Jean-Christophe Attias (Paris: Cerf, 1997), 205-15; Thomas Olickal, *The Three Levels of Spiritual Realization according to Joseph Hazzaya*, Catholic Theological Studies of India 4, (Changanassery: HIRS Publications, 2000); and Georg Günter Blum, *Die Geschichte der Begegnung christlich-orientalischer Mystikmit der Mystik des Islams*, Orientalia Biblica et Christiana 17 (Wiesbaden: 2009), 285-344.

[4] See Robert Beulay, "*L'Enseignement spiritual de Jean de Dalyatha*," 216-34, but especially 234: "Les rapprochements que l'on peut faire ici entre lui et Jean de Dalyatha me paraissent indiquer une dépendance directe de ce dernier par rapport à Isaac."

First, both Isaac and John base their theory of non-prayer on the Syriac translation of *Reflections* 30, where the first Syriac translator states that prayer is interrupted by the light of the Trinity, and they both interpret the text as showing that wonder interrupts human impulses.[5] Based on this passage, John concludes that prayer reaches its consummation when a monk enters the place of the mysteries and receives wonder from God. This conclusion is a straightforward reading of the text, but what is important here is that John follows Isaac in adding that prayer has reached its consummation when the human impulses stop working and that John, like Isaac, connects the cessation of the impulses with wonder at perception of the mysteries.[6] John's commentary on *Reflections* 30 reads as follows: "The consummation [of prayer] is wonder that is [caused] by God, as we have said, and not from the continued impulses of prayer. The one who has entered the place of the mysteries abides in the wonder that is in [the mysteries]."[7] For both Isaac and John wonder presupposes the cessation of human impulses.

Second, like Isaac, John logically extends the idea, derived from *Reflections* 30, of wonder interrupting human impulses, by saying that wonder is the moment when divine impulses replace human impulses. Once prayer has reached its consummation, the

[5]John quotes the same passage from the Syriac translation of *Reflections* 30 that Isaac had quoted. See John Dalyatha *Letter* 12.3 (Hansbury:57). Page numbers refer to John Dalyatha, *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*, ed. and trans. Mary Hansbury, Texts from Christian Late Antiquity 2 (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006). Also see Anonymous, *Skemmata* 30 (Frankenberg:454:7-8): "Prayer is stability of mind that is only interrupted by the holy light of the Trinity through wonder." Page and line numbers refer to *Euagrius Ponticus*, ed. W. Frankenberg, *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen Philologisch-Historische Klasse* 13.2 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912).

[6] See section 7.2.2 of this dissertation.

[7] John Dalyatha *Letter* 12.3 (Hansbury:57): ܡܕܝܢ ܫܘܡܠܝܐ ܬܗܪܐ ܗܘ ܕܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪܢ܆ ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܐܡܝܢܘܬ ܙܘ̈ܥܐ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ. ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܠ ܠܐܬܪܐ ܕܐܪ̈ܙܐ܆ ܒܬܗܪܐ ܕܒܗܘܢ ܡܩܘܐ. Cf. John Dalyatha *Letter* 12.8 (Hansbury:63): "Every prayer that is not transformed from time to time into wonder at the mysteries has not yet arrive at the consummation as we have said above. Not even does the prayer of the impulses remain continually if has never tasted the astonishment that [is caused by] the joy of God. Continual prayer is astonishment before God." ܡܕܝܢ ܟܠ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܒܬܗܪܐ ܕܐܪ̈ܙܐ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܚܠܦܐ ܒܙܒܢ ܙܒܢ܆ ܠܐ ܡܛܬ ܠܫܘܡܠܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪܢ ܡܢ ܠܥܠ. ܘܐܦܠܐ ܡܩܘܝܐ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܙܘ̈ܥܐ ܒܡܐܡܝܢܘܬܐ܆ ܐܢ ܠܐ ܛܥܡܬ ܬܗܪܐ ܕܚܕܘܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܟܠ ܟܠܗ ܠܐ ܠܡܛܬ.

mind receives divine impulses that replace human impulses. “Their mind does not reflect on the world,” he says, speaking about monks who engage in prayer, “but their impulses originate in God, in silence, and in great astonishment.”[8] Elsewhere, he notes that these impulses, which are connected with the occurrence of astonishment, contain innumerable insights concerning the mysteries of the new world.

> From this time forward, limpidity establishes astonishment within him and, without interruption, grace stirs up in him impulses that do not lend themselves to elaboration and, in short, are innumerable. [These impulses are] emotions of the new world, mysteries, revelations, and insights concerning the [divine] being that are [otherwise] not permitted to be revealed.[9]

Once again, John’s understanding of non-prayer bears remarkable similarities to Isaac’s understanding of non-prayer.[10] Like Isaac, John connects the phenomenon of astonishment with the presence of divine impulses that contain innumerable insights.

Third, John uses four terms in conjunction with his theory on non-prayer: astonishment, wonder, silence (ܬܗܪܐ) and the limit of prayer (ܬܡܗܐ).[11] This combination of terms is unique to Isaac, which means that John is articulating his theology of non-prayer with language derived from Isaac. In a number of passages from his *Ascetical Homilies*, Isaac draws a connection between silence and astonishment and

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[8] John Dalyatha *Letter* 4.4 (Hansbury:225): ܠܐ ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢܐ ܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܠܗ ܒܡܠܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܒܫܬܝܩܘܬܐ ܘܒܬܡܗܐ ܘܒܬܗܪܐ ܕܣܓܝܐܐ.

[9] John Dalyatha *Letter* 4.5 (Hansbury:25): ܡܢ ܗܢܐ ܙܒܢܐ ܠܐ ܢܬܚܘܢ ܠܗ ܡܝܬܐ ܕܚܕܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܬܗܪܐ ܘܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܠܗ ܡܠܝܢ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܬܠܝܢ ܘܡܬܬܠܝܢ ܡܢ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܓܠܝܐ ܠܒܪܢܫܐ ܕܡܫܬܡܥ ܠܗ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܓܠܝܐ.

[10] See section 7.2.3 of this dissertation.

[11] For background on John’s understanding of wonder and astonishment, see Robert Beulay, “De l’émerveillement à l’extase: Jean de Dalyatha et About Sa’id al-Kharraz,” in *Youakim Moubarac. Dossier dirigé par Jean Stassinet*, Cahiers d’Orientalisme 20 (Lausanne: L’âge d’homme, 2005), 333-43. According to Mary Hansbury, John distinguishes wonder and astonishment with a chronological distinction. See Mary Hansbury, *The Letters of John Dalyatha*, Texts from Christian Late Antiquity 2 (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2006): 12, n. 2: “The process of ecstasy begins with astonishment or wonder (*tehrâ*) and leads to helpless amazement or stupor (*témhâ*).”

implies that when a person is astonished before God and when all human forms of reasoning cease to operate, a person experiences only silence.[12]

John follows and intensifies Isaac's connection between silence and astonishment. In *Letter* 1, he refers to the ineffable "place" of silence and the "place of marvel," thereby indicating that he is describing the interior ascent of the mind into the heavenly realm, or the divine place of God.[13] Using language that is reminiscent of Isaac, he describes this interior ascent as an experience of silence and astonishment:

> The place whose language is silence, how will its mysteries be explained? When the mysteries are revealed to those who are not accustomed, the mysteries astonish the inhabitants of the place with silence and for [the inhabitants] they establish one who is in stupefaction without any impulse or desire. The name of the place is marvel and the explanation of its mysteries is astonishment. And if it is fitting for speech to name it, it is a silence without impulse and without a title.[14]

The monk who has entered into the place of marvel experiences astonishment and begins to comprehend the mysteries through the silence that occurs when his impulses cease to

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[12] See Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.8 (106:7-15): "This prayer that bestows [thanksgiving], in which a person does not pray nor act, as in the other passionate prayers that come before the perception of grace, but instead his heart is filled with joy and astonishment, frequently incites stirrings of thanksgiving and gratitude, in the silence of kneeling." ܘܗܕܐ ܗܝ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܐܡܗܪܐ ܠܬܚܝܢ ܒܡܘܕܝܢܐ ܡܢ ܐܘ ܓܒܘܗ: ܗܝ ܕܠܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܢܦܫܐ ܠܟܠ ܝܨܗ: ܕܝܠܗܬܐ ܠܡ ܐܬܠܝܬܗ: ܫܘܬܐ ܕܚܫܘܫܐ ܡܬܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ. ܟܠ ܗܕܐ ܝܠܗܬܐ ܕܒܬܪ ܡܫܡܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܒܝܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܡܪ: ܗܝ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܫܘܚܐ: ܒܗܪ ܕܠܐ ܗܘ ܐܝܟ ܚܝܠܐ ܘܡܒܠܒܠܐ: ܐܝܟ ܫܪܟܐ ܕܝܠܗܬܐ ܕܢܫܡܐ: ܘܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܡܢ ܚܝܠܘܬܐ ܕܒܠܝܡܘܬܐ: ܐܠܐ ܗܘ ܠܒܐ ܒܗ ܡܠܝܐ ܚܕܘܬܐ ܘܬܗܪܐ: ܡܟܒܪ ܢܟܢ ܡܫܟܚܐ ܒܢܝܢܐ ܕܬܘܕܝܬܐ ܘܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܒܫܬܩܐ ܕܒܘܪܟܐ. Page and line numbers refer to *Mar Isaacus Ninivita De Perfectione Religiosa*, ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris: Nihil Obstat, 1908; repr. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007); Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.51 (Bedjan:360:11-18): "The soul that has once, in faith, entrusted itself to God and, under many temptations, has received the taste of [faith's] help, no longer has any reflection of itself, but is rendered speechless by astonishment and silence." ܢܦܫܐ ܕܚܕܐ ܙܒܢ ܒܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܐܓܥܠܬ ܢܦܫܗ̇ ܠܐܠܗܐ: ܘܒܢܣܝܘܢܐ ܣܓܝܐܐ ܛܥܡܬ ܥܘܕܪܢܗ̇: ܬܘܒ ܠܝܬ ܠܗ̇ ܪܢܝܐ ܕܡܕܡ ܕܢܦܫܗ̇: ܐܠܐ ܒܬܗܪܐ ܘܒܫܬܩܐ ܒܠܝܡܐ; Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.5.1 (CSCO 554:5): "Angelic natures are plunged into silence in astonishment before the thick darkness of this eternal mystery and [from] the flood of his glory that [comes] from within astonishment." ܗܘ ܕܟܝ̈ܢܐ ܕܪ̈ܘܚܢܐ ܒܫܬܩܐ ܛܒܥܝܢ ܒܬܗܪܐ. ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܥܪܦܠܐ ܕܐܪܙܐ ܗܢܐ ܡܬܘܡܝܐ. ܘܡܫܘܚܐ ܕܫܘܒܚܗ ܕܠܓܘ ܡܢ ܬܗܪܐ. Page numbers refer to *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part,' chapters IV-XLI*, ed. Sebastian Brock, CSCO 554, Scriptores Syri 224 (Louven: Peeters, 1995).

[13] Recall "place" language of John the Solitary and Aphrahat discussed in section 6.1.2 of this dissertation.

[14] John Dalyatha *Letter* 1.5 (Hansbury:7): ܐܬܪܐ ܕܫܬܩܐ ܗܘ ܠܫܢܗ: ܐ̈ܪܙܘܗܝ ܒܡܢܐ ܡܬܦܫܩܝܢ. ܘܐܢ ܠܡܥܡܪܘܗܝ ܕܐܬܪܐ: ܐ̈ܪܙܘܗܝ ܒܫܬܩܐ ܡܬܗܪܝܢ. ܠܠܐ ܡܥܕܝܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܐܢ ܡܬܓܠܝܢ ܗܘܘ. ܒܬܗܪܐ ܒܠܐ ܙܘܥܐ ܠܗܘܢ ܡܩܝܡܝܢ ܗܘܘ: ܡܢ ܟܠ ܙܘܥܐ ܘܪܓܬܐ. ܘܐܬܪܐ ܕܫܡܗ ܬܗܪܐ ܗܘ: ܐܦ ܦܘܫܩ ܐ̈ܪܙܘܗܝ ܬܗܪܐ ܗܘ. ܘܐܢ ܙܕܩ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܬܫܡܝܘܗܝ ܠܗ: ܫܬܩܐ ܗܘ ܕܠܐ ܙܘܥܐ ܘܕܠܐ ܫܡܐ.

operate. Elsewhere, in *Letter* 17, John makes a similar observation about the relationship between silence and astonishment:

> Whoever understands, let him understand. Whoever does not understand, in silence let him honor the one who is glorified and who desires to glorify whomever seeks to be glorified. How can we name the place of vision? It is the likeness of the one who sees everything in Himself just as he is to be seen in everyone, small and great. Then in silence**,** let us honor our Word, and with astonishment let us embrace our mystery.[15]

In both of these passages, John follows Isaac in using silence as a descriptive term for astonishment. Silence and astonishment, together, are the means by which a monk embraces the mysteries of understanding in the ineffable place of the divine mysteries.

Another example of John's dependence on language that comes from Isaac's notion of wonder and astonishment occurs in *Letter* 1. In this letter, John incorporates his understanding of silence as the expression of astonishment with Isaac's understanding of the limit of prayer. Isaac had implied that prayer reaches its limit with silence and John follows suit.[16] He states that an intellect that has entered into wonder in the place of the mysteries has first reached the limit that is experienced in silence.

> Speaking of the manner of God's revelation in holy minds is not permitted to the tongue, but [God] places the explanation of the great mystery in purified and luminous minds. [The great mystery] is immersed in silence because God is revealed in the place of wonder to those who love him. He causes them to wonder with his beauty and he

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[15] John Dalyatha *Letter* 17.3 (Hansbury:87). ܡܢ ܕܣܟܠ ܢܣܟܘܠ. ܘܡܢ ܕܠܐ ܣܟܠ: ܢܝܩܪ ܒܫܬܩܐ ܠܡܫܬܒܚܢܐ: ܘܪܚܡ ܕܢܫܒܚ ܕܢܐ ܠܗ ܕܢܫܬܒܚ. ܐܝܟܢ ܢܫܡܗ ܠܐܬܪܐ ܕܚܙܬܐ. ܕܡܘܬܐ ܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܕܚܙܐ ܒܗ ܟܠ ܚܙܐ. ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܗܘ ܠܗ ܒܟܠ ܙܥܘܪܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܐ ܘܪܒܐ. ܗܝܕܝܢ ܒܫܬܩܐ ܠܡܠܬܢ ܢܝܩܪ: ܘܒܬܗܪܐ ܠܐܪܙܢ ܢܥܦܩ. ܗܘ ܥܡܘܩܐ ܦܫܝܛܐ ܒܐܪܐ ܕܝܠܢ. ܒܪܝܟ ܗܘ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܕܒܪܟܐ ܡܢ ܐܬܪܗ.

[16] Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.22 (165:19-166:2); "There is no prayer beyond pure prayer, for all of its impulses and its manners conduct the intellect up until here under the sway of their freedom. For this reason there is strife in it [pure prayer]." There is a limit beyond this, however, and it is astonishment and not prayer. ܨܠܘܬܐ ܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܟܝܬܐ. ܠܝܬ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܓܝܪ: ܙܘܥܝܗ̈ ܘܐܘܪܚܬܗ̈ ܥܕܡܐ ܠܗܪܟܐ ܡܕܒܪܝܢ ܠܗܘܢܐ ܒܫܘܠܛܢܐ ܕܚܐܪܘܬܗܘܢ. ܡܛܠܗܢܐ: ܐܦ ܬܟܬܘܫܐ ܐܝܬ ܒܗ̇. ܒܬܪ ܗܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܬܚܘܡܐ: ܡܟܝܠ ܬܗܪܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ: ܘܠܐ ܨܠܘܬܐ.; Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.35.1 (CSCO 554:139): "When a person reaches insights into creation on the journey of his conduct, then he is raised up higher than having prayer set for him by a limit. It is superfluous from then onwards for him to limit prayer by means of fixed times or the Hours [because] his situation has gone beyond praying and giving praise whenever he wants. From here on, he continually finds the senses stilled and the thoughts bound with the bonds of astonishment." ܐܡܬܝ ܕܠܣܘܟܠܐ ܕܒܪܝܬܐ ܡܛܐ ܒܪܢܫܐ ܒܐܘܪܚܐ ܕܕܘܒܪܗ: ܗܝܕܝܢ ܐܬܥܠܝ ܡܢ ܗܝ ܕܬܗܘܐ. ܕܒܬܚܘܡܐ ܘܒܙܒܢܐ ܬܬܚܡ ܠܗ ܨܠܘܬܐ: ܘܡܬܚܡܐ ܠܗ ܨܠܘܬܐ: ܡܢ ܗܪܟܐ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܕܗܘ ܒܟܠܐ ܙܒܢܐ ܘܥܕܢܐ. ܘܡܢ ܗܘ ܡܟܐ ܡܥܒܪ ܐܡܫܬܡܫܢܘܬܐ ܗܝ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܒܨܒܐ ܕܒ. ܘܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܒ ܦܓܪܝܢ. ܒܐܣܘܪܐ ܕܬܗܪܐ.

> silences their impulses with the marvel that is in the vision of his mysteries. Since this place of wondrous visions is the place of astonishment, it is also enclosed with a wall of unstillness. When the intellect wants to attempt to bring the mystery out from there to the place of voices and examine it, then [the mind] is confronted with the limit of stillness and becomes silent.[17]

Once the mind confronts silence, John says, it has reached the place of astonishment, which is also the moment when a person moves into a state of wonder at God's revelation of the mysteries. John's language in this passage, in which he draws connections between the terms silence, limit, and wonder, reveals a dependence on Isaac, who also frequently grouped all of these words together.

One final example occurs in *Letter* 12, where John includes an anonymous quotation from another monk who describes what happens to him when his human impulses cease and his mind enters into the place of revelation. This fellow monk describes this occurrence as the moment when God's light shines on a world that is wonder before God. The quotation proceeds as follows:

> When the grace of God is pleased with me and draws my mind to the place with His vision, [then my mind] remains without impulses all day long in the place of marvel. When it goes out from there, it prays and makes supplication that the light of the hidden one who is hidden within him may shine in the world that is full of wonder.[18]

John follows with his own commentary on this anonymous quotation and, once again, makes the same connection that Isaac frequently made between the terms wonder, silence, and limit. According to John, the moment when the impulses cease and God's mysteries are revealed is the moment when a monk has reached the limit of prayer. This

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[17] John Dalyatha *Letter* 1.4 (Hansbury:7): ܕܐܡܪܬ ܕܝܢ ܐܬܚܒܫܬܐ ܒܗ ܠܚܙܘܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܒܬܕܡܪܬܐ ܡܫܬܒܩܐ: ܐܠܝܨܐ ܠܐ ܐܠܦܫܘܬ. ܐܠܐ ܫܦܝܪ ܦܣܩܘ ܐܬܪܐ ܗܢܐ ܒܬܕܡܪܬܐ ܕܟܢܐ ܘܫܘܪܐ: ܘܐܠܝܨ ܒܫܠܝܐ. ܡܛܠ ܕܒܐܬܪܐ ܕܬܗܪܐ ܗܘ ܐܠܘ ܟܠܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܠܫܪܟܢܘܗܝ. ܘܠܗܘܢ ܒܟܣܝܘܬ ܚܙܘܢܝܗ: ܘܒܕܘܒܪܐ ܡܫܬܘܕܥܝܢ ܒܗܘܢ ܕܐܪܙܘܗܝ. ܘܡܛܠ ܕܐܬܪܐ ܗܘ ܗܢܐ ܕܬܗܪܐ ܐܬܪܐ ܗܘ ܕܬܕܡܪܬܐ: ܐܦ ܫܘܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܫܠܝܐ ܒܗ ܕܟܪܝܟ. ܘܡܐ ܕܨܒܐ ܡܕܥܐ ܕܢܦܩ ܐܪܙܐ ܡܢ ܬܡܢ ܠܐܬܪܐ ܕܩܠܐ ܘܢܒܨܝܘܗܝ: ܦܓܥ ܒܗ ܬܚܘܡܐ ܕܫܠܝܐ ܘܫܬܩܘ.

[18] John Dalyatha *Letter* 12.7 (Hansbury:61). ܕܐܡܪܬ ܕܝܢ ܟܕ ܨܒܝܐ ܒܝ ܛܝܒܘܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ: ܘܢܓܕܐ ܠܗܘܢܝ ܠܐܬܪܐ ܕܚܙܘܬܗ: ܡܟܬܪ ܗܘܐ ܕܠܐ ܙܘܥܐ ܟܠܗ ܝܘܡܐ ܒܐܬܪܐ ܕܬܕܡܪܬܐ. ܘܡܐ ܕܢܦܩ ܡܢ ܬܡܢ. ܡܨܠܐ ܘܡܬܟܫܦ: ܕܢܕܢܚ ܢܘܗܪܐ ܕܟܣܝܐ ܕܟܣܐ ܠܗ ܒܓܘܗ: ܒܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܐ ܬܗܪܐ.

limit, which John refers to as silence, is the moment when intelligible speech no longer suffices to explain the mysteries of God. John says that, in silence, the mind engages the mysteries of God in wonder.

> From this time forward, it is no longer a place of words in which the pen is able to flow with ink, for here a limit is set: silence. Only the intellect is permitted to pass over and see this resting place of all mysteries. [The intellect] has the authority to enter and to wonder at the beauty of the marvel, which is above all things and hidden within all.[19]

In summary, John's presentation of wonder and astonishment uses two words — silence and limit — that appeared prominently throughout Isaac's writings. Although these two words also appear in other authors, such as Pseudo-Dionysius, only Isaac uses both of them in connection with wonder and astonishment.[20] Therefore John's use of the words wonder and astonishment in connection with silence and limit is based on Isaac's texts.

ISAAC'S INFLUENCE ON JOSEPH HAZZAYA

Two areas of textual connections between Joseph Hazzaya and Isaac merit further study. First, Joseph notes that astonishment coincides with the moment when the impulses of the body and soul cease operating. This connection between the cessation of the impulses and astonishment, which can be traced back to Isaac, occurs in John's *Letter on the Three Levels of the Monastic Life*.[21]

> Blessed is the solitary who has been deemed worthy of this glorious vision of the beauties and of the natural spirits and who has entered the holy place. He takes delight in the

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[19] John Dalyatha *Letter* 12.7 (Hansbury:61). ܡܢ ܗܪܟܐ ܘܠܗܠ܆ ܠܐ ܐܬܪܐ ܗܘ ܕܡ̈ܠܐ܆ ܕܬܫܟܚ ܬܪܕܐ ܒܗ ܟܠܡܬܐ ܡܠܝܬܐ ܒܡܫܚܬܐ ܕܕܝܘܬܐ. ܗܪܟܐ ܬܚܘܡܐ ܣܝܡ ܫܬܩܐ. ܠܗܘܢܐ ܒܠܚܘܕ܆ ܫܒܝܩ ܠܗ ܠܡܥܒܪ ܘܠܡܚܙܐ ܒܗܢܐ ܢܘܚܐ ܕܟܠ ܐܪ̈ܙܝܢ. ܠܗܢܐ ܫܠܝܛ ܠܗ ܠܡܥܠ ܘܠܡܬܗܪ ܒܫܘܦܪܐ ܕܕܘܡܪܐ. ܕܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܘܟܣܐ ܒܓܘ ܟܠܐ.

[20] Pseudo-Dionysius also uses language of silence; see, for example, Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1.1 (Hornus:86-88:997B). ܒܥܪܦܠܐ ܡܠܝܠܬܐ ܢܗܘܪܐ ܕܫܬܩܐ ܕܐܪ̈ܙܐ܆ ܗ̇ܝ ܕܒܡܥܡܛܠܐ ܠܒܪܐ ܠܗܘ ܡܢ ܢܗܝܪܐ ܕܢܗܝܪ ܡܢ ܚܫܘܟܐ ܡܬܚܠܦܢܘܬܐ܆ ܘܟܠܗ ܡܢ ܒܠܥܕܘܬ ܡܬܚܙܝܢܘܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܡܫܡܫܢܘܬܐ܆ ܟܠܗ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܚܙܝܢ܆ ܫܘܦܪܐ ܡܡܠܐ ܕܠܐ ܘܡܝ̈ܬܪܝܢ. Page and section numbers refer to Jean-Michel Hornus, "Le Corpus Dionysien en Syriaque," *Parole de l'Orient* 1 (1970): 69-93.

[21] See section 7.2.2 of this dissertation.

> divine mysteries and understands the subtleties of their sounds. . .When this chanting of the sounds from the natural spirits falls into the intellect, it descends into the intellect in astonishment and all the impulses of the body and soul are stopped, as in sleep.[22]

This passage occurs in a section of Joseph's letter dedicated to describing the spiritual level of the ascetical life, so according to Joseph, the impulses of body and soul cease to function when the intellect engages in astonishment and prepares for the spiritual level of the ascetical life.[23] This sentiment reflects similar statements by Isaac, who also says that the impulses culminate in astonishment during the spiritual level of the ascetical life.

Second, Joseph follows Isaac in connecting wonder with both study and tears. Like Isaac, Joseph situates wonder with study.[24] In *Letter* 4, Joseph states that when a monk studies the providence of God, "wonder will fill your heart and interrupt the phrases that [are coming] from your mouth.[25] Also, like Isaac, Joseph draws a connection between the presence of insights that arise from wonder and the occurrence of

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[22] Joseph Hazzaya, *Lettre sur Les Trois Étapes* 5.144 (Harb:420:1-6): ܠܩܘܒܠܗܘܢ، ܠܝܚܝܕܝܐ ܕܐܬܬܝܗܒ، ܠܗ، ܚܝܘܬܐ ܥܒܘܕܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܣܝܩܝܐ. ܕܒܢܝܐ ܩܘܠܐ. ܘܟܠ ܠܗܘ ܐܬܪܐ ܡܪܢܝܐ. ܘܐܬܦܫܩܘ ܒܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܐܪ̈ܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ: ܘܡܫܟܚ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܒܪܐ ܡܠܝܠܐ. ܥܕܪܐܝܬ ܐܘ ܢܚܝܬ: ܕܡܢܐ ܕܢܦܠ ܗܢܐ ܩܘܠܠܐ ܕܠܒܪܐ ܕܒܢܝܐ ܩܘܠܐ ܒܡܕܢܚܐ: ܢܚܬܐ ܠܗ ܠܡܕܢܚܐ ܒܬܗܪܐ. ܘܐܬܟܢܝ ܕܟܝܢܝܐ ܡܬܬܟܠܝܢ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܙܘ̈ܥܐ ܕܦܓܪܐ ܘܢܦܫܐ. Page and line numbers refer to Joseph Hazzaya, *Lettre sur les trois étapes sur la vie monastique*, trans. and ed. Paul Harb and François Graffin, Patrologia Orientalis 45 (Turnhout: Brepolis, 1992).

[23] Also see Joseph Hazzaya, *Lettre sur Les Trois Étapes* 5.145 (Harb:420:1-4): "Each time when the mind strives after the vision of contemplation in delight, it has not yet arrived at the spiritual place, for when the mind arrives there, it does not have the authority [for the commemoration of itself, but is unbound in astonishment." ܟܠ ܐܡܬܝ، ܕܗܘ ܗܘܢܐ ܒܪܓܬܐ ܡܬܬܟܫܦ ܒܚܙܘ ܚܙܬܐ ܕܬܐܘܪܝܐ: ܠܐ ܥܕܟܝܠ ܐܬܬܟܬܠ ܠܐܬܪܐ ܕܪܓܝܓܘܬܐ. ܟܕ، ܕܡܐ ܕܐܬܟܬܠ ܗܘܢܐ ܠܬܡܢ: ܠܝܬ ܠܗ ܫܘܠܛܢܐ ܥܠ ܡܬܕܟܪܢܘܬܐ ܕܢܦܫܗ. ܐܠܐ ܫܪܐ ܒܬܗܪܐ.

[24] See section 7.2.1 of this dissertation and Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.1 (Bedjan:5:8-11): "Study, with its loving desire, is [still] sufficient to bind the thoughts [of the intellect] firmly to the thoughts of wonder." ܐܦ ܒܗܢܘܢ، ܥܠܝܢܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܐ ܪܢܝܐ: ܟܕ ܠܐ ܢܥܒܕ ܠܗܬ ܗܘ ܟܠܗ ܒܚܘܒܐ ܕܚܘܒ ܪܘܚܗ، ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܟܠܗܘܢ ܠܐ ܕܬܗܘܡܘܬܗܘܢ، ܗܟܢ ܗܘ ܪܘ ܠܐ ܒܪܚܡܬܗ ܦܓܪ ܠܚܘܫܒܐ ܚܘܫܒܝܗ ܐܬܬܘܬܐ ܒܝܬ ܚܘ̈ܫܒܐ ܕܬܗܪܐ.; Isaac of Nineveh, *De Perfectione Religiosa* 1.5 (Bedjan:43:21): "Persevere in study [done] in stillness, then you will be drawn to wonder at all times." ܐܬܐܡܢ ܒܗܪܓܐ ܒܫܠܝܐ: ܘܬܬܢܓܕ ܠܘܬ ܬܗܪܐ ܒܟܠܙܒܢ.; and Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.18.3 (CSCO 554:85-86): "Through purity, [a person] is deemed worthy of the operation of the Holy Spirit. This occurs when he is first purified, then sanctified. From time to time, this happens during the middle of studious reflection by means of some luminous impulse that is greater than the flesh, at which point he acquires an inner solitude in God that is a semblance of what is to come and [consists in] a continual and ineffable repose in God." ܒܝܕ ܕܟܝܘܬܐ: ܡܫܬܘܐ ܠܡܥܒܕܢܘܬܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ. ܗܢܐ ܗܘ ܡܐ ܕܐܬܕܟܝ ܠܘܩܕܡ ܡܢ ܡܬܩܕܫ. ܘܐܝܬ ܗܘ ܒܙܒܢ ܙܒܢ ܕܗܘܝܐ ܡܢ ܒܗ ܒܓܘ ܗܪܓܐ ܕܡܕܥܐ ܒܝܕ ܙܘܥܐ ܢܗܝܪܐ ܕܛܒ ܡܢ ܒܣܪܐ: ܘܩܢܐ ܝܚܝܕܝܘܬܐ ܓܘܝܬܐ ܒܐܠܗܐ ܕܕܡܘܬܐ ܗܝ ܕܥܬܝܕܬܐ. ܘܢܝܚܐ ܐܡܝܢܐ ܘܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠ.

[25] Joseph Hazzaya, *Lettre sur Les Trois Étapes* 4.141 (Harb:416:2-4): ܚܕ ܡܢܝܢܐ ܕܒܠܬܐ ܕܐܬܪܥܝܬ ܥܠ ܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ. ܕܒܗܐ ܕܦܪܫܬ ܐܢܬ ܒܗܘܢ ܡܬܡܠܐ ܠܒܟ ܬܗܪܐ ܘ ܡܬܦܣܩܝܢ ܦܬܓܡܐ ܡܢ ܦܘܡܟ.

tears.[26] Joseph states, in *Letter* 4 that "from this union of thoughts and from wonder of insights, he will have peace [accompanied] by tears during the night and day."[27] Joseph's language regarding wonder reveals an awareness of Isaac's contribution and Joseph follows Isaac in connecting wonder to both study and tears.

While the textual and terminological connections are different in the cases of John and Joseph, the works of both of these Syriac authors manifest a dependence on Isaac's development of the concept of wonder. Both John and Joseph follow Isaac in connecting wonder with the cessation of impulses. In addition, John manifests a linguistic dependence on Isaac with his use of the constellation of the terms astonishment, wonder, silence, and limit while Joseph depends on Isaac in connecting wonder with both study and tears.

Accurate scholarly study of East-Syrian authors necessitates an appreciation of Isaac's corpus and especially the influence of his theology of wonder. This epilogue has briefly pointed to a few of the linguistic and terminological connections between the writings of Isaac and those of two later Syriac authors, John Dalyatha and Joseph Hazzaya. Although more work must be done to establish Isaac as an important source for understanding these later two authors, I have briefly shown that both John and Joseph manifest a textual dependence on Isaac's articulation of wonder and astonishment.

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[26] See *The Second Part* 2.8.17 (CSCO 554:24), where Isaac states that tears come as a result of wonder and "once the door of insights has been opened before the heart. . .he gradually approaches astonishment." ܡܢ ܕܐܬܦܬܚ ܠܗ ܩܕܡ ܠܒܐ ܬܪܥܐ ܕܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ. . .ܡܢ ܗܪܟܐ ܒܐܝܕܐ ܒܐܝܕܐ ܠܘܬ ܬܗܪܐ ܡܬܩܪܒ. Also see also Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part* 2.18.4 (CSCO 554:139): "A flow of constant tears may occur in someone…from the astonishment that is from insights." ܡܢ ܬܠܬ ܡܚܝܠ ܚ̈ܠܠ ܗܘܐ ܪܕܝܐ ܕܕܡ̈ܥܐ ܐܡܝܢܝܬܐ ܒܐܢܫ. ܐܘ ܡܢ ܬܗܪܐ ܕܡܢ ܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ For further background on the importance of tears in Isaac's ascetical theology, see Paul T Mascia, "The Gift of Tears in Isaac of Nineveh: A Transition to Pure Prayer and the Virtue of Mercy," *Diakonia* 14:3 (1979): 255-65; David A. Lichter, "Tears and Contemplation in Isaac of Nineveh," *Diakonia* 11 (1976): 239- 58; and Geevarghese Panicker, "Prayer With Tears: A Great Feast of Repentance," *The Harp* 4 (1991): 111-33.

[27] Joseph Hazzaya, *Lettre sur Les Trois Étapes* 4.136 (Harb:410:12-13): ܡܢ ܗܕܐ ܚܒܝܫܘܬ ܚܘܫ̈ܒܐ ܘܡܢ ܬܗܪܐ ܕܣܘ̈ܟܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܬܪܥܘܬܐ ܕܕܡ̈ܥܐ ܒܠܠܝܐ ܘܒܐܝܡܡܐ.

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