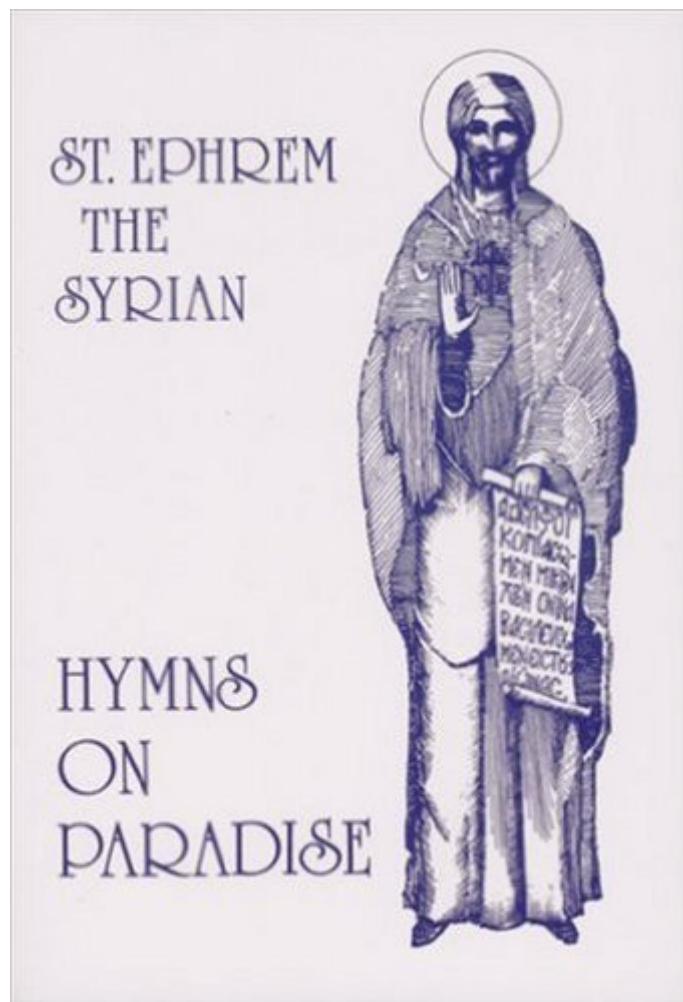


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St. Ephrem The Syrian: Hymns On Paradise



Synopsis

St Ephrem the Syrian's cycle of 15 Hymns on Paradise offers a fine example of Christian poetry, in which the author weaves a profound theological synthesis around a particular Biblical narrative. Centered on Genesis 2 and 3, he expresses his awareness of the sacramental character of the created world, and of the potential of everything in the created world to act as a witness and pointer to the creator. God's two witnesses, says Ephrem, are: 'Nature, through man's use of it, [and] Scripture, through his reading it.' In his writing, Ephrem posits an inherent link between the material and spiritual worlds. St Ephrem's mode of theological discussion is essentially Biblical and Semitic in character. He uses types and symbols to express connections or relationships to 'reveal' something that is otherwise 'hidden,' particularly expressing meanings between the Old Testament and the New, between this world and the heavenly, between the New Testament and the sacraments, and between the sacraments and the eschaton. Because his theology is not tied to a particular cultural or philosophical background, but operates by means of imagery and symbolism basic to all human experience, his theological vision expressed in his hymns has a freshness and immediacy today that few other theological works from the early Christian period can hope to achieve. *the Holy Mountain. Hymns on Paradise* is part of the POPULAR PATRISTIC SERIES.

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Customer Reviews

"The garden of life" has been opened for us with the "keys" that He gave us. So opens Hymn VII of these collected hymns by St. Ephrem the Syrian (+373, age unknown but speculation identifies his

birth between AD 300 and 310). Hymn VII resembles all 15 Hymns of Paradise collected. Translated by Sebastian Brock of Oxford University (year of publication: 1998), Hymn VII resembles the other hymns in emphasis of Nature metaphors drawn from part of the creation and sequel texts of Genesis in chapters 2 and 3. There is seldom a moral goad to sinners in these Hymns as one discovers in Dante, another Christian allegorist centuries later. Rather, if a goad exists at all in Hymns of Paradise, it is desire and delight to shed the cloak of slavery and return to freedom. Disobedience has led to slavery; obedience returns one to freedom. Thereby, obedient "people behold themselves in glory and wonder at themselves...; " Blessed is He who, with His keys, has opened up the Garden of Life" (Hymn VII, v. 12 and Response). Shedding a moral cloak may be impossible for some Greek/Slavonic or Latin-Christian descendants to digest. However, for this Syriac saint of the fourth Christian century, every aspect of his life interpreted the "Nature" that inspired his hymns from the Genesis texts. To say, therefore, that Ephrem breathed and ate Genesis would reflect his experience of air and sustenance. Hebraic meter is obtuse in translation. Certainly any translation of the Psalms faces a similar struggle. Brock rose to the challenge far better than most anyone might expect. Brock's translation is excellent in my opinion. But translation alone was not the only gift of this publication.

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