

for even the simple adornments  
by the Garden's fence  
cannot be related  
in an adequate way.

For the colors of Paradise are full of joy,  
its scents most wonderful,  
its beauties most desirable,  
and its delicacies glorious.

8. Even though the treasure  
that adjoins the fence is lowly,  
yet it surpasses all other treasures  
in the world entire;  
and by as much as the slopes, too,  
are lowly in comparison  
with that treasury  
of the summit on high,  
so the blessed state by the fence  
is more glorious and exalted  
than all that we experience as blessed,  
who live in the valley below.
9. Be not angry that my tongue  
has presumed to describe a theme  
too great for it,  
and so, through its own inadequacy, has  
diminished that greatness.  
As there is no mirror adequate  
to reflect its beauty,  
nor paints  
which may portray it,  
then may my attempt not be rejected,  
for I have labored to compose  
in my description of Paradise  
a means whereby we may gain profit.

10. The mourner can find comfort therein,  
the child be educated thereby,  
the chaste become radiant through it,  
the needy find provision from it.  
And so let each one of them throw me  
his little coin,\*  
and may they all make supplication for me  
in Eden,  
so that I may enter that place  
whereof I have spoken in so far as I am able;  
and so that the downcast may become desirous  
of the riches that it promises.
11. May my purpose not be judged  
by You, O Knower of all things;  
may my search not be held blameworthy  
by You, concealed from all;  
for I have not made bold to speak  
of Your generation, hidden from all;  
in silence  
I have bounded the Word.  
Yet because I have honored Your birth,  
allow me to dwell in Your Paradise.  
From all who love You  
be praise to Your hiddenness!

## HYMN V

Although from one point of view the Biblical text may seem to be something static like a rock (Exodus 17:6), in fact this rock accompanies those who make use of it (1 Corinthians 10:4) and from it flow streams of vivifying water. St Ephrem goes on to describe his own experience of being transported to Paradise as he read the Paradise narrative of Genesis. A practical question then raises itself in his mind: is there going to

be enough space there for everyone at the final Resurrection? The analogy of a legion of demons inhabiting a single body (Mark 5:9), however, reminds him that the resurrected body will be of a different order from the physical, and so there is in fact no problem. As he is transported back into this world (stanza 11), he reflects on how misguided are those who weep to leave this world of sorrows when Paradise is so full of beauty (compare Hymn XIII).

1. I considered the Word of the Creator,  
and likened it  
to the rock that marched  
with the people of Israel in the wilderness;<sup>1</sup>  
it was not from the reservoir  
of water contained within it  
that it poured forth for them  
glorious streams:  
there was no water in the rock,  
yet oceans sprang forth from it;  
just so did the Word  
fashion created things\* out of nothing.

RESPONSE: Blessed is that person accounted worthy  
to inherit Your Paradise.

2. In his book Moses  
described the creation of the natural world,  
so that both Nature and Scripture  
might bear witness to the Creator:<sup>\*2</sup>  
Nature, through man's use of it,  
Scripture, through his reading of it.  
These are the witnesses  
which reach everywhere,

<sup>1</sup>1 Cor. 10:4.

<sup>2</sup>cf John 8:17.

they are to be found at all times,  
present at every hour,  
confuting the unbeliever  
who defames the Creator.

3. I read the opening of this book  
and was filled with joy,  
for its verses and lines  
spread out their arms to welcome me;  
the first rushed out and kissed me,  
and led me on to its companion;  
and when I reached that verse  
wherein is written  
the story of Paradise,  
it lifted me up and transported me  
from the bosom of the book  
to the very bosom of Paradise.
4. The eye and the mind  
traveled over the lines  
as over a bridge, and entered together  
the story of Paradise.  
The eye as it read  
transported the mind;  
in return the mind, too,  
gave the eye rest  
from its reading,  
for when the book had been read  
the eye had rest,  
but the mind was engaged.
5. Both the bridge and the gate  
of Paradise  
did I find in this book.  
I crossed over and entered;

my eye indeed remained outside  
but my mind entered within.

I began to wander  
amid things not described.

This is a luminous height,  
clear, lofty and fair:

Scripture named it Eden,<sup>3</sup>  
the summit of all blessings.

6. There too did I see  
the bowers of the just  
dripping with unguents  
and fragrant with scents,  
garlanded with fruits,  
crowned with blossoms.  
In accord with a person's deeds  
such was his bower;  
thus one had few adornments,  
while another was resplendent in its beauty;  
one was but dim in its coloring,  
while another dazzled in its glory.
7. I enquired into this too,  
whether Paradise  
was sufficient in size  
for all the righteous to live there.  
I asked about what is not written in Scripture,  
but my instruction came from what is written  
there:  
"Consider the man  
in whom there dwelt  
a legion of all kinds of demons;<sup>4</sup>  
they were there although not apparent,

<sup>3</sup>Gen. 2:8.

<sup>4</sup>Mark 5:9; Luke 8:30.

for their army is of a stuff finer and more subtle  
than the soul itself.

8. That whole army  
dwelt in a single body.  
A hundred times finer  
and more subtle  
are the bodies of the righteous  
when they are risen, at the Resurrection:  
they resemble the mind  
which is able,  
if it so wills, to stretch out and expand,  
or, should it wish, to contract and shrink;  
if it shrinks, it is in some place,  
if it expands, it is in every place.
9. Listen further  
and learn  
how lamps with thousands of rays  
can exist in a single house,  
how ten thousand scents  
can exist in a single blossom;  
though they exist within a small space,  
they have ample room  
to disport themselves.  
So it is with Paradise:  
though it is full of spiritual beings,  
it is amply spacious for their disportment.
10. Again, thoughts,  
infinite in number, dwell  
even in the small space of the heart,\*  
yet they have ample room;  
they neither constrict each other,  
nor are they constricted there.

How much more will Paradise  
the glorious  
suffice for the spiritual beings  
that are so refined in substance  
that even thoughts  
cannot touch them!"

11. I gave praise as far as I was able  
and was on the point of departing  
when, from the midst of Paradise,  
there came a sudden thunderous sound,  
and, like the blare of trumpets  
in some camp,  
a voice crying "holy"  
thrice over.<sup>5</sup>  
Thus I knew that the divinity  
received praise in Paradise;  
I had supposed it was empty,\*  
but I learn otherwise from the thunderous sound.
12. Paradise delighted me  
as much by its peacefulness as by its beauty:  
in it there resides a beauty  
that has no spot;  
in it exists a peacefulness  
that knows no fear.  
How blessed is that person  
accounted worthy to receive it,  
if not by right,  
yet at least by grace;  
if not because of good works,  
yet at least through mercy.
13. I was in wonder as I crossed  
the borders of Paradise

<sup>5</sup>Isaiah 6:3.

- at how well-being, as though a companion,  
turned round and remained behind.  
And when I reached the shore of earth,  
the mother of thorns,<sup>6</sup>  
I encountered all kinds  
of pain and suffering.  
I learned how, compared to Paradise,  
our abode is but a dungeon;  
yet the prisoners within it  
weep when they leave it!
14. I was amazed at how even infants  
weep as they leave the womb—  
weeping because they come out  
from darkness into light  
and from suffocation they issue forth  
into this world!  
Likewise death, too,  
is for the world  
a symbol of birth,  
and yet people weep because they are born  
out of this world, the mother of suffering,  
into the Garden of splendors.\*
15. Have pity on me,  
O Lord of Paradise,  
and if it is not possible for me  
to enter Your Paradise,  
grant that I may graze  
outside, by its enclosure;  
within, let there be spread  
the table for the "diligent,"\*  
but may the fruits within its enclosure  
drop outside like the "crumbs"<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Gen. 3:18.

<sup>7</sup>Matt. 15:27 and parallels.

for sinners, so that, through Your grace,  
they may live!

### HYMN VI

It is only when studied within the context of Orthodox belief ("the keys of doctrine," stanza 1) that the Scriptures become truly meaningful, allowing the reader/hearer of the Paradise narrative to experience something of what Paradise is really like. In stanzas 4-5 St Ephrem describes just such an experience of the Garden's delights, and this simply serves to deepen his awe and wonder at the original state of Adam and Eve, for whose sake Paradise had been created. The Church now corresponds to Paradise, and this correspondence can be understood from two different aspects. On the one hand, we are ourselves undergoing the same period of testing that Adam and Eve underwent: whereas they were required to be obedient to the commandment not to eat of the Tree, we are now required to be obedient to Christ, whose fruit we are actually permitted to eat daily (stanza 8); once again all depends on our interior disposition and the proper exercise of the gift of free will. On the other hand, those who have successfully exercised this free will and have listened to Christ already experience the eschatological Paradise, and indeed themselves constitute fruits even more glorious than those of Paradise's own trees. This being so, the saints still on earth can be seen as revealing Paradise to the rest of humanity. This state of affairs indeed applied already under the Old Covenant, and it is from this that St Ephrem enumerates a series of examples with which the poem concludes.

1. The keys of doctrine  
which unlock all of Scripture's books,  
have opened up before my eyes  
the book of creation,

the treasure house of the Ark,  
the crown of the Law.  
This is a book which, above its companions,  
has in its narrative  
made the Creator perceptible  
and transmitted His actions;  
it has envisioned all His craftsmanship,  
made manifest His works of art.

RESPONSE: Blessed is He who through His Cross  
has flung open Paradise.

2. Scripture brought me  
to the gate of Paradise,  
and the mind, which is spiritual,  
stood in amazement and wonder as it entered,  
the intellect grew dizzy and weak  
as the senses were no longer able  
to contain its treasures—  
so magnificent they were—  
or to discern its savors  
and find any comparison for its colors,  
or take in its beauties  
so as to describe them in words.
3. Paradise surrounds the limbs  
with its many delights:  
the eyes, with its handiwork,  
the hearing, with its sounds,  
the mouth and the nostrils,  
with its tastes and scents.  
Blessed is that person who has gathered for himself  
the company of all  
who have kept vigil and fasted;  
they, in return for their fasts,