

## CHAPTER THREE

### *LIBER GRADUUM*: THE HEAVENLY GARDEN OF ASCETIC DELIGHTS

Notwithstanding its peculiar features, the *Liber Graduum* (*LG*),<sup>1</sup> commonly dated to the late fourth—early fifth century, expresses the centrality of the ascetic imperative also characteristic of the broader Syriac tradition, notably attested in both Aphrahat and Ephrem. Thus similarly to Ephrem, religious anthropology becomes a major concern in *LG*'s interpretation of paradise. *LG* reflects the transition from proto-monastic Syrian asceticism—also primarily familiar to us from Aphrahat and Ephrem—to the subsequent phase influenced by Egyptian and Basilian monasticism.<sup>2</sup> Thus the asceticism of *LG* still reflects proto-monastic ascetic patterns though there was already a significant development of anchoritic and coenobitic monasticism also in Syria at that time.<sup>3</sup> The socioreligious context of the *Liber Graduum*, already devoid of any Jewish points of reference, is characterized by its sharp internal division of Christian society into the upright (ܩܪܘܒܐ)—representing the mass of ordinary believers—and the perfect (ܩܝܘܡܐ) ascetics. The former are those not detached from the world. They deal with

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<sup>1</sup> For the Syriac edition of the text, see M. Kmosko, *Patrologia Syriaca*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1926). For an English translation, see R. A. Kitchen and M. F. G. Parmentier, *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum* (Kalamazoo, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See A. Voöbus, "The Institution of the *Benai Qeiama* and the *Benat Qeiama* in the Ancient Syrian Church," *Church History* 30 (1961), pp. 19–27; S. P. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20 (1970), pp. 1–19 (= *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, London, 1984, chapter 1); S. H. Griffith, "'Singles' in God's Service: Thoughts on *Ihidaye* from the Works of Aphrahat and Ephraem the Syrian," *The Harp* 4 (1991), pp. 145–159; idem, "Monks, 'Singles', and the 'Sons of the Covenant': Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology," in E. Carr, A. A. Thiermeyer and E. Velkovska (eds.), *Euloghema: Studies in Honor of R. Taft* (Rome, 1993), pp. 141–160; idem, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in: V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis, *Asceticism* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 220–245; Kitchen and Parmentier, *The Book of Steps*, pp. xlix–l. On asceticism in *Liber Graduum*, see also R. A. Ratcliff, *Steps Along the Way of Perfection: The Liber Graduum and Early Syriac Monasticism* (Washington, 1988); D. Juhl, *Die Askese im Liber Graduum und bei Afrahat: eine vergleichende Studie zur frühsyrischen Frömmigkeit* (Wiesbaden, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> See Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Religious History*, ed. P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molin-gen, SC 234, 257 (1977, 1979).

the “minor commandments” pertaining to the charities of active life, while the latter are those that deal with the “grand commandments” of detachment from the world, become “strangers to the world,” “leave the earth,” and thus take up the cross in imitation of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Within this socioreligious division the upright are further perceived as those in whom—unlike the perfect—a demonic presence persists alongside the activity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> This trait—mentioned also by Ephrem—is reminiscent of messalianic tenets, though the author of *LG* never suggests that Satan dwells substantively in the soul of the upright, who is regarded as a full member of the liturgical community, destined for the final triumph of the Spirit and redemption.<sup>6</sup>

The treatise contains thirty chapters, or *memre* (sing. *memra*), our focus being on *memra* 21, which portrays the original setting of Adam and Eve in paradise as essentially an ascetic situation, and Adam and Eve before the fall as models of perfect ascetics.<sup>7</sup> This seems to be a peculiar trait of *LG*, especially highlighted in *memra* 21, compared both to early monastic literature and to Christian early literature at large. The special emphasis on Adam and Eve in this context thus provides an additional theological dimension to the ascetic discourse in *LG*. The insistence on the primordial biblical foundation for asceticism also determines the centrality of the hermeneutics of Genesis 1–3 in *memra* 21.

Relying on earlier scholarship on this topic, notably Aleksander Kowalski’s pioneering work,<sup>8</sup> we intend to analyze some of the core motifs employed in this *memra*. We hope, *inter alia*, to clarify the uncommon hermeneutic strategies of the author, still belonging to an early, unapologetically independent phase of Syriac Christianity. We

<sup>4</sup> *LG* 3.11, 5.16, 5.18; A. Guillaumont, “Les ‘Arrhes de l’Esprit’ dans le Livre des Degrés,” in *Memorial Mgr Gabriel Kouri-Sarkis* (Louvain, 1969), pp. 107–113.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., *LG* 3.11; Guillaumont, “Les ‘Arrhes de l’Esprit,’” pp. 107–113.

<sup>6</sup> See Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith* 6.3–4, CSCO 154–155, Syr. 73–74 (Louvain, 1955); Kitchen and Parmentier, *The Book of Steps*, pp. 48–49; C. Stewart, “Working the Earth of the Heart: The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to AD 431 (Oxford, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> The ascetic portrayal of the protoplasts’ existence in paradise stands in contrast to the biblical motif of the richness of paradise expressed in *LG* as “heavenly wealth” (ܩܘܪܒܐ ܩܝܘܢܐ). See *LG* 21.11 (col. 613.22); cf. *LG* 21.10 (col. 612.21–23). On this motif, see A. Baker, “The Gospel of Thomas and the Syriac Liber Graduum,” *New Testament Studies* 12 (1965/6), p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> A. Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo nel Liber Graduum*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 232 (Rome, 1989).

do not aim here to provide a comprehensive analysis of the *memra*, but rather to focus on its explicit and implicit exegetical devices.

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The author of *LG* entertains a concept of a dual paradise—an earthly physical and a heavenly spiritual—as the setting of Adam and Eve’s life before the fall. Their physical existence takes place in the earthly paradise while their mind dwells in the spiritual one.<sup>9</sup> Various concepts of such a dual paradise were common in early Christian thought.<sup>10</sup> The collation of this perception with the concept of paradise as *locus asceticus*, however, seems to constitute a peculiar trait of *LG* and determines the different aspects of its discussion. One of the core aspects of the theme is the nature of primordial sin and, correspondingly, the ascetic way of restoring the “paradise lost,” propagated by *LG*.

Adam and Eve’s state before the fall is portrayed as perfect innocence and ignorance of evil, since when God created them he taught them only good (ܐܘܪܘܢܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ).<sup>11</sup> This innocence signifies the total spiritual preoccupation with heavenly things in immortal existence. Yet in *LG* this blissful state is not identical to the final consummation of man’s destiny: man is called upon to choose—out of the freedom granted to him by the Creator—to resist temptation and remain in heavenly bliss and, in the words of the author, to “eat our Lord (ܐܘܪܘܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ) and live and become great and be perfected (ܐܘܪܘܢܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ) through him.”<sup>12</sup> “The consummation of the Lord” refers to the spiritual consummation of the tree of life—identified by the author with Christ<sup>13</sup>—which would have been Adam’s lot had he not sinned. We will return later to the peculiarity of such an understanding of the consummation of the Lord

<sup>9</sup> *LG* 21.7 (cols. 600–604).

<sup>10</sup> See J. Daniélou, “Terre et paradis chez les Pères de l’Église,” *Eranos Jahrbuch* 22 (1953), pp. 433–472; A. Louth, “Paradies: IV Theologiegeschichtlich,” in G. Müller (ed.), *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. xxv (Berlin and New York, 1995), cols. 714–719.

<sup>11</sup> *LG* 21.1 (col. 585.1–2). According to Martikainen, *LG* differs here from Ephrem, for whom the twofold knowledge of Adam of good and evil exists unconditionally, already in the state of bliss. See J. Martikainen, “Das Böse in den Schriften des Syrsers Ephraem, im Stufenbuch und im Corpus Macarianum,” in W. Strothmann (ed.), *Makarios-Symposium über das Böse: Vorträge der Finnisch-Deutschen Theologentagung in Goslar 1980*, Göttinger Orientforschungen: Reihe 1, Syriaca 24 (Wiesbaden, 1983), pp. 36–46, esp. p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> *LG* 21.1 (col. 588.8–9).

<sup>13</sup> *LG* 21.2 (col. 589.3–5).

and its Eucharistic connotations. The above unfulfilled reality would have led in turn to the final transformation of human existence, when physical existence would have united with the spiritual one in the heavenly paradise.<sup>14</sup>

Like Ephrem in his commentary on Genesis, the author of *LG* perceives the primordial sin as essentially an act of free will, which could therefore have been avoided: “However, in the end, Adam had a will, and if he had not so desired, the evil one would not have oppressed him [during] the thousand years he lived on the earth.”<sup>15</sup> But whereas in Ephrem the sin is conceived of in general terms of disobedience, according to *LG* it is portrayed as a shift in the inner intellectual focus from heavenly to earthly concerns:

... the thought of transitory things by which Adam and Eve tasted death. For through it they came to know evil (ܐܘܘܪܐܘܬܐ), which they had not known.... After they obeyed the evil one (ܐܘܘܪܐܘܬܐ) and observed the earth and saw this thing on [the earth] and loved it, evil (ܐܘܘܪܐܘܬܐ) had power over them and they knew it.<sup>16</sup>

Earthly concerns are in fact equated here with both evil and death and are introduced by Satan through Adam and Eve’s voluntary decision.<sup>17</sup> Their own decision thus constituted a precondition for their submission to Satan’s power and to earthly concerns. Consequently his role in the paradisiacal narrative is substantially marginalized; he merely performs a supporting role in the pivotal drama of the ascetic psyche—the author’s concept of the heavenly paradise being thus primarily metaphorical, as distinct from many other early Christian and Jewish traditions.<sup>18</sup> This is further manifested in the internalization of evil by Adam and Eve as a psychological entity distinct from Satan;

<sup>14</sup> *LG* 21.7 (col. 604.1–3).

<sup>15</sup> *LG* 21.10 (col. 612.9–14). See Chapter 2 above.

<sup>16</sup> *LG* 21.1 (col. 584.4–12). Cf. *LG* 21.10 (col. 612.12–24), *LG* 21.17 (col. 625.20–26).

<sup>17</sup> *LG* 21.20 (col. 632). In Syriac literature, free will is often identified with celibate and ascetic life, in opposition to Satan. See, e.g., Aphrahat, *Dem.* 7.25; P. Bettolo, “Adamo in Eden e la liturgia celeste: temi della meditazione cristiana nella Siria del IV secolo, tra Afraate e il Liber Graduum,” *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 37 (2001), pp. 3–27, esp. p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the figure of Satan in the context of the biblical account of paradise in early Christian and Jewish sources, see G. A. Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, 2001), pp. 21–42.

it is this psychological entity (ܐܘܘܪܐ) rather than Satan as the “evil one” (ܐܘܪܐ) that is said to overpower the protoplasts.

Satan, however, is still regarded by *LG* as the epistemic source of evil, identified peculiarly with the tree of knowledge—another sign of his metaphorical devaluation.<sup>19</sup> This notion is presented as dichotomous to the more traditional identification of Christ with the tree of life.<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that, somewhat unexpectedly, Augustine’s view here is akin to that of *LG*. In line with his generally negative appraisal of free will, he identifies the tree of knowledge with the exercise of free will as disobedience.<sup>21</sup> *LG*, however, seems also to perceive free will as a source for the underlying principles guiding the upright in their mundane existence and thus to discern certain positive aspects of the tree.<sup>22</sup> But its author claims that knowledge of good was taught to the protoplasts by God himself prior to the fall, and according to his idiosyncratic interpretation the tree of knowledge signifies in fact the additional ungodly knowledge of evil:

Because God had only taught what is good (ܐܘܪܐ ܕܘܢܐ) to Adam and Eve when he created them. . . . Because of this Satan is called the “Tree,” through which Adam and Eve knew evil and good (ܐܘܪܐ ܕܘܢܐ ܐܘܪܐ ܕܘܢܐ). They learned good from God (ܐܘܪܐ ܕܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐ) and evil from Satan. They became “knowers of good and evil,” and from there the enmity of impiety (ܐܘܪܐ ܕܘܢܐ ܐܘܪܐ ܕܘܢܐ) bound Adam and his children.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *LG* 21.1 (col. 585.5). Unlike Ephrem, however, who also devalues the original status of Satan before his fall, our author retains Satan’s original heavenly status. See Martikainen, “Das Böse,” p. 38. According to Hippolytus, Justin the Gnostic identified the tree of knowledge with the serpent. See Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 5.21, ed. M. Marcovich, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 25 (1986). The question as to whether the tree of knowledge is Satan appears in ps. Macarius, although his own concept is different. See H. Dörries, *Die Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*. AAG. Philologisch-historische Klasse. Dritte Folge 105 (Göttingen, 1978), p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> *LG* 21.2 (col. 589.3–6); Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 3.2.15; Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 13.21; Louth, “Paradies,” p. 716.

<sup>21</sup> For Augustine’s general concept of free will, see, e.g., *De spiritu et littera* 5; *Ep.* 217 (to Vitalis); *De correptione et gratia* 34–38. His negative view of free will is also similar in principle to that of Evagrius Ponticus. See, e.g., Evagrius, *Chapters on Prayer* 31, PG 79, cols. 1165–1200; Eng. trans., R. E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus* (Oxford, 2003). On Augustine’s identification of the tree of knowledge with free will, cf. *De Civ. Dei* 13.21; Louth, “Paradies,” p. 716. For additional patristic views on free will, see Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, p. 124.

<sup>22</sup> *LG* 21.8 (col. 604.17–25).

<sup>23</sup> *LG* 21.1 (col. 585.4–9).

According to our author, earthly concerns are a general category of thought of what he terms “transitory” things (ܠܘܕܝܐܢܐ)—such things as labor and anxiety regarding food, property, beauty, honor, clothes and sex—namely, concerns alien to the ascetic ideal, all branded as lust (ܠܘܕܝܐܢܐ). It deserves notice that though undeniably belonging to the story of Adam and Eve, sex is here no more than one aspect of the human yearning for mundane existence.<sup>24</sup> The very concept of primordial sin as an act of free will and its inescapable consequences encompasses the above list of transitory interests, reflecting *LG*’s ascetic perception of paradise. This approach allows *LG* to entertain a twofold understanding of the commandment not to eat from the tree: as symbolically representing a general prohibition of lust for material possessions, as well as literally sanctioning against the “lustful anxiety” for food.<sup>25</sup> The latter emphasis appears as also applying to the rest of earthly concerns, in a sense encapsulating the concept of primordial sin. This approach is strikingly reminiscent of similar attitudes attested already in Tertullian and prevalent in early Egyptian monasticism—as highlighted by Peter Brown—where it was widely believed that the first sin of Adam and Eve had been lust for food rather than for the sexual act.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, such an attitude is also found in early Syriac ascetic tradition, notably in Aphrahat.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, in a number of contexts in *LG*, the act of eating functions as an allegorical representation of sin—namely, of the fateful change in spiritual/intellectual orientation. The sin is thus perceived essentially as being of a spiritual character.<sup>28</sup> This is explicit, inter alia, in the following passage: “But after they ate from the tree, that is, after they had abandoned heaven and loved the earth, their mind came from heaven

<sup>24</sup> *LG* 21.1 (col. 584.5), 21.4 (col. 596.1); 21.7 (col. 600.25–26). See also R. A. Kitchen, “Syriac Additions to Anderson: The Garden of Eden in the Book of Steps and Philoxenus of Mabbug,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 6.1 (2003), par. 22 (e-journal).

<sup>25</sup> *LG* 21.7. In this context *LG* also uses the idiom “fasting to the world” (ܠܘܕܝܐܢܐ ܠܠܘܕܝܐܢܐ), otherwise attested in Oxyrhynchus papyrus (*Oxy.* I,2) and the *Gospel of Thomas* 27. See A. Guillaumont, “Nêsteuein ton kosmon,” *Bulletin de l’institut français d’archéologie orientale* 61 (1962), pp. 15–23; A. Baker, “Fasting to the World,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84.3 (1965), pp. 291–294.

<sup>26</sup> See Tertullian, *On Fasting* 3, ed. A. Reifferscheid, G. Wissowa, CSEL 20, pp. 274–297; P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), pp. 220–221.

<sup>27</sup> *Dem.* 14.40.

<sup>28</sup> See Kovalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, pp. 206–207.

to their bodies (ܐܡܘܢܐ ܕܐܠ ܠܡܢܐ ܡܢ ܐܡܘܢܐ ܝ ܠܕܐܠܐ), [and] then they saw that they were naked.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the result of the initial attention they paid to earthly desires or—according to the *LG* imagery—their initial consumption of the illicit fruit is humanity’s enslavement to those desires. This is in contradistinction to the spiritual food—namely, the “life-giving words of our Lord,” represented by the tree of life. Had Adam and Eve chosen this latter path, it would have allowed them to realize their potential immortality and “be bound up” with the Lord (ܠܕܐܠܐ ܡܢ ܕܠܐ ܠܡܢܐ ܡܢ ܐܡܘܢܐ ܝ ܠܕܐܠܐ).<sup>30</sup> One may discern here an interesting parallel, *mutatis mutandis*, to Ludwig Feuerbach’s famous interpretation of an old dictum: “Der Mensch ist, was er isst (One is what one eats).” In Feuerbach’s context the consumption relates not to food but rather to the particularities of man’s socio-cultural environment that define his world outlook.<sup>31</sup>

In light of his perception of the dual paradisiacal reality, the author of *LG* distinguishes between the spiritual/allegorical nourishment and the material nourishment of the physical body of Adam and Eve in their pre-fall existence. This paradisiacal food is referred to as heavenly bread (ܠܡܢܐ ܠܡܢܐ), identical with that of the angels (ܠܡܢܐ ܠܡܢܐ).<sup>32</sup> This heavenly bread—apparently referring to Ps 78:24–25—is associated with the manna that is the food both of the primordial state in paradise and of the perfect ascetic.<sup>33</sup> In contrast to the notion that the physical food in paradise came from the various trees—as implied by the biblical verse (Gen 2:16, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, you may freely eat of every tree of the garden”) and endorsed by common Christian exegesis, including Ephrem<sup>34</sup>—*LG*’s author, focusing exclusively on the manna, gives no indication of the fruit trees in paradise being a source of physical nutrition. In this blissful state Adam is fully absorbed in the contemplation

<sup>29</sup> *LG* 21.8, col. 605.8–12.

<sup>30</sup> *LG* 21.1, col. 588.5–9. Compare this peculiar idiom with the biblical verse which later became a Jewish liturgical formula expressing the soul’s immortality: “To be bound up in the bundle of life” (1 Sam 25:29) and the Hebrew prayer for the dead “*El male rachamim*” (merciful God).

<sup>31</sup> L. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Leipzig, 1904) pp. 67–93; Eng. trans. G. Eliot (New York, 1957).

<sup>32</sup> *LG* 21.7, col. 601.1–2; Kovalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, pp. 103–105.

<sup>33</sup> *LG* 25.8, cols. 752.24–753.4. This idea differs from the understanding of the manna as purely spiritual food as suggested in 1 Cor 10:3.

<sup>34</sup> See Ephrem, *Gen. Com.* 2.8 and our discussion in Chapter 2, above.

of heaven while his physical needs are supplied by God: “He looked into heaven and not on earth and rejoiced with the heavenly angels without anxiety and pains, and was concerned neither about clothing nor about food. But God fed him, as was appropriate to the wealth of his kindness (ܡܘܠܘܬܘܗܘܢ ܩܝܕܘܠܘܬܗ) with heavenly bread.”<sup>35</sup>

The author emphasizes, in this context as elsewhere in the treatise,<sup>36</sup> that the heavenly bread is gained by Adam and the perfect ascetics without labor (ܐܕܡ ܡܘܠܡ ܠܐ ܠܒܘܐ),<sup>37</sup> denoting his radical anti-labor ascetical concept, where labor is regarded essentially as an impediment to a truly spiritual existence and hence on a par with the rest of earthly concerns: “However, Adam chose labor, which is the opposite of perfection, and through his own choice he bore anxiety—something that stifles those who seek to ascend to the higher realm.”<sup>38</sup>

This concept is manifestly distinct from the more common monastic approach, where minimal labor is considered essential to the monk’s ideal of autarky. Moreover, since the need for material nourishment is common to both the pre-fall and the post-fall modes of existence, it is precisely the exigency of labor that determines here the essential difference between the two types of material food—namely, the heavenly and the earthly. The author of *LG* thus associates the cessation of heavenly bread with the fall and the beginning of the need for human labor to produce food: “They saw that the heavenly bread was withheld (ܠܡܘܠܘܬܗܘܢ) and went on to labor (ܠܠܒܘܐ) on the earth for food.”<sup>39</sup>

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The exegetical strategy here is founded upon two biblical passages employed to define both the nature of the ideal physical existence—be it of the protoplasts in paradise or the perfect ascetics—and the consequences of the fall. The first is obviously the verdict: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Gen 3:19), while the second is the Exodus description of the divine gift of manna in the desert and its

<sup>35</sup> *LG* 21.7, cols. 600.23–601.2; see also *LG* 23.1 (col. 692.11–13). The motif of contemplation of heaven before the fall has antecedents and parallels in Greek Christian literature. See Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, p. 54, n. 55. The angelic state of Adam and Eve is an old motif found already in Jewish Pseudepigrapha and early Christian literature. See *ibid.*, p. 84, n. 144.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, *LG* 25.8, cols. 752.1–753.8.

<sup>37</sup> *LG* 21.7, col. 601.3–4.

<sup>38</sup> *LG* 21.20 (col. 632. 7–11).

<sup>39</sup> *LG* 21.10, col. 613.10–11.

abuse by the Children of Israel, expressed in the exaggerated care for the food and the consequent punishment (Exod 16:14–27). From the *LG*'s perspective, this misconduct might have been interpreted as excessive attention to earthly concerns and a lack of spiritual focus.

This anti-labor stance may be perceived as contradicting the dictum in Genesis 2:15, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to *work* it and keep it." It may not be accidental that our author, in the whole of his lengthy work, does not relate to this verse. It is plausible that he is relying on an old and common exegetical tradition, which interpreted "to work it" not literally as physical labor, but rather as either intellectual contemplation of divine truths and the performing of the celestial liturgy or as generally observing God's commandments. These patterns of exegesis—ignoring the literal sense of the verse, which implies physical labor—are found already, for example, in Philo,<sup>40</sup> in later targumic and rabbinic sources<sup>41</sup> and in Ephrem, who combines the interpretation of "work" as observing the commandment not to eat from the tree with its identification as Adam's priestly ministry.<sup>42</sup>

As noted, this idea of real material paradisiacal nourishment is complemented in *LG* by the notion of spiritual sustenance—an idea that in itself was widely known both in the Jewish Hellenistic and early Christian traditions. An illustrative example is found in Philo's elaboration on the spiritual food consumed by the elect among the Children of Israel on Mount Sinai. Relating to Exodus 24:11 ("And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank"), Philo interprets beholding God (ויחזו את האלהים) as seeing God with the keen-sighted eyes of the mind; this vision is, according to him, the food of souls, of which a true partaking results in immortality. Thus the ascent to Mount Sinai is perceived as a heavenly ascent to the tree of life, to a holy and divine place identified as

<sup>40</sup> Philo, *Legum Allegoria* 1.14.

<sup>41</sup> *Tg. Neofiti*, *Tg. Yer.*, *Tg. Frag.* ad locum. See T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11, in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian* (Upsala, 1978), p. 76, n.96; *Gen. R.* 16,15, ed. J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck (Jerusalem, 1965).

<sup>42</sup> *Hymns on Paradise* III.2,3; III.5,13–14; III.16; II.10–13. See Ortiz de Urbina, "Le Paradis eschatologique d'après Saint Ephrem," pp. 467–472; Séd, "Les Hymnes sur le Paradis de Saint Ephrem et les Traditions Juives," pp. 455–501; Kronholm, "The Trees of Paradise in the Hymns of Ephraem Syrus," pp. 48–56; Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, pp. 52–53; Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis*, pp. 76–77. See also discussion in Chapter 2, above.

God's logos. In Philo's context, the sacrificial meal of the biblical narrative is entirely spiritualized and replaced by an ecstatic vision of God that provides "food for the soul" without any physical food consumed! Sacrificial cult is thus replaced by ecstatic vision. All this is connected in Philo to Israel's privileged status, recognized in their divine gifts of "seeing" God (a Philonic pseudo-etymology of the name Israel) and later enjoying the heavenly manna.<sup>43</sup>

The general concept of spiritual food as the true nourishment of the human soul appears in *LG* in the peculiar form of a spiritual consummation of the tree of life. Unlike Philo, for whom it is the Sinai revelation that is intrinsically connected to the tree of life, for the Syriac author the archetypal metaphor of spiritual sustenance is grounded in the pre-cosmic reality of the heavenly paradise. Moreover, the primordial tree of life is perceived as a purely spiritual entity identified in the context of Christian theological discourse with the eternal Messiah-Christ. According to *LG*, then, the spiritual food is in fact the "words of our Lord (Jesus)," tantamount here to the Lord himself and to the tree of life:

In that world in which there is no death, ... they will eat the life-giving words of our Lord (ܘܝܬܝܘܢ ܘܝܬܝܘܢ ܘܝܬܝܘܢ ܘܝܬܝܘܢ ܘܝܬܝܘܢ). They shall eat our Lord (ܘܝܬܝܘܢ ܘܝܬܝܘܢ) and live. ... The good tree, in that world of light invisible to the eyes of flesh, is our Lord Jesus. He is the tree of life (ܘܝܬܝܘܢ ܘܝܬܝܘܢ) who gives everything life by its fruit wherever the perfect will of God is.<sup>44</sup>

This logos-centered interpretation is reminiscent of Philo, though here, as noted, it is clearly part of the Christian discourse. Moreover, both traditions seem to refer to the biblical dictum "man does not live by bread alone, but ... by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (Deut 8:3). This may have served as a scriptural foundation for *LG*'s concept of the double nourishment in paradise, the spiri-

<sup>43</sup> See Philo, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Exodum* to Exod 24:11–12 (ed. LCL, trans. R. Marcus, 1953), pp. 80–83. Various noetic nourishment traditions according to which angels do not consume material sustenance are attested in pseudepigraphic, rabbinic and patristic writings. Manna and ecstatic vision as both sources of divine knowledge and angelic sustenance are attested also in Jewish Hellenistic writings. For discussion, see A. Lieber, "Jewish and Christian Heavenly Meal Traditions," in A. D. DeConick (ed.), *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, SBL Symposium Series 11 (Atlanta, 2006), pp. 313–339, esp. pp. 315–320.

<sup>44</sup> *LG* 21.1-2, cols. 588.6–589.7. The appellation "our Lord" (ܘܝܬܝܘܢ) is a regular title for Jesus among Syriac writers. See Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, p. 47.

tual one being identified with the words of the Lord or even with the divine logos symbolically represented by the tree of life. The identification of the tree of life with Christ, albeit without the consummation motif peculiar to *LG*, was apparently a common feature of early Syriac thought as evident in Ephrem.<sup>45</sup>

The purely spiritual interpretation suggested here for the “eating of the Lord” is complemented by the negative spiritual alternative of eating from the tree of knowledge, identified with Satan:

Because of this Satan is called the “Tree” (ܟܘܠܗ ܟܘܠܗ ܟܘܠܗ) through which Adam and Eve knew evil and good. They learned good from God, and evil from Satan. . . . Because of this, God said to them: “Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” that is, do not listen to it because it will teach you all sorts of evil things and take you away from heavenly things (ܟܘܠܗ ܟܘܠܗ) and from the kindness of your Creator.<sup>46</sup>

It seems that this elaboration of the paradisiacal spiritual consummation of the tree of life, understood as the consummation of the Lord, has implicit Eucharistic connotations.<sup>47</sup> In other words, the spiritual nourishment in the heavenly paradise is identified with the Eucharistic communion. Consequently, in this emphasis on the equation of “eating the Lord” with hearing his words, one may see how the general focus of *LG* on the inner intellectual preoccupation with heavenly things, is further enhanced by symbolic understanding of the Eucharist, a tendency rather common in early Christianity, that coexisted peacefully with “literal” interpretations.<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting that such clearly metaphorical usage of the idiom “eating the Messiah” is not restricted to Christian sources but is also found in a contemporaneous rabbinic tradition, albeit in a different context and with a different meaning. According to this tradition, “Israel has no Messiah, because

<sup>45</sup> See Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 3.2.15; *Hymns on Faith* 6.14.9–11, ed. E. Beck, CSCO 154, 29. See also Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 113–129, 320–324; Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11*, p. 74. This identification is also found in Augustine (*De Civ. Dei* 13.21). See also Louth, “Paradies,” p. 716.

<sup>46</sup> *LG* 21.1, col. 585.4–15.

<sup>47</sup> It is noteworthy that for Ephrem it is rather the tree of knowledge which bears Eucharistic connotations. According to him, the Eucharist is a form of eating from the tree of knowledge. See Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* VI.7–8; XII.7; XII.15 and our discussion in Chapter 2, above.

<sup>48</sup> J. Betz, *Eucharistie in der Schrift und Patristik* (Freiburg, 1979).

they have *consumed* him already in the days of Hezekiah (אין להם משיח לישראל שכבר אכלוהו בימי חזקיה).<sup>49</sup>

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The perception of the consequent earthly existence of humanity as virtual death, in contrast to the paradisiacal one, corresponds to the ascetic imperative where death to the world constitutes true life. This informs *LG*'s idiosyncratic interpretation of Genesis 2:17: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." God, then, according to *LG*—in contradistinction to a common Jewish and Christian exegetical pattern<sup>50</sup>—does not inform Adam here about an impending punishment of death at the end of human life span, but simply warns him of the inevitable transformation ensuing immediately after the change of inner disposition. We can further notice here the hermeneutical aspect of *LG*'s elaboration of the subject, expressed in its idiosyncratic interpretation of the story of paradise in Genesis, according to the general ascetic paradigm.

*Memra* 21 also links the protoplasts' enchantment with earthly concerns with their desire—either triggered or enhanced by Satan's instigation—to "become like God" (Gen 3:5), a desire branded by *LG* as silly and infantile (עבוי) and in fact perceived as a manifestation of the sin of pride.<sup>51</sup> In this the author further unfolds the uncommon parallelism between Adam's sin and Satan's earlier sin and fall, reflected in his notion that in Adam Satan was looking for a soul mate of a sort.<sup>52</sup>

The Genesis narrative itself (Gen 1:26–27) contains an inherent tension between the divine proclamation that man is created in God's image followed by the clear mandate to rule over the natural world and multiply—this dominion is understood by Ephrem as the ultimate

<sup>49</sup> *b. Sanh.* 98b

<sup>50</sup> See Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection*, pp. 155–176.

<sup>51</sup> *LG* 21.11 (col. 616.2–5, 25). For a discussion of the nuances of the terms עבוי and עבוי in the context of early Syriac traditions about the state of Adam and Eve before the fall, see Salvesen, "Infants or Fools in the Garden of Eden?" pp. 433–440. Salvesen notes that though childhood is elsewhere used as a simile of humanity's perfect innocence before the fall, in *LG* Adam's state of perfection is contrasted with עבוי in its meaning of immaturity and foolishness, regardless of his actual age.

<sup>52</sup> *LG* 21.18 (col. 628.20–23). See also, Kitchen, "Syriac Additions to Anderson," par. 7.

expression of being in God's image<sup>53</sup>—and Satan's/the serpent's enticement to become like God (Gen 2:4–5). The author of *LG* is manifestly aware of this inherent tension, due inter alia to his strong emphasis on the ascetic rejection of the earthly world. He highlights this tension by further adapting Satan's speech to God's proclamation: "The evil one (ܐܘܘܠܐ) counseled: Possess and enjoy yourself; rule, increase, and multiply. Cast off from yourself asceticism (ܐܘܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ) and renunciation (ܐܘܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ) and holiness, also lowliness (ܐܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ), and know evil as well as good things and grow and become like God who created you."<sup>54</sup> The call to "rule, increase, and multiply" echoes then the divine mandate in Genesis 1:26–28 ("Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion...").

According to the author, Adam perceived earthly paradise as the realm of his dominion, where he could hide from God, who was restricted, as it were, to his heavenly domain.<sup>55</sup> The author suggests that the way to dominion lies not in the pursuit of earthly wealth and power—advocated by Satan—but in renunciation of the world in imitation of Christ's *kenosis*. Namely, the possibility of *imitatio Dei* is here restricted to an imitation of Christ in his condescending state and not in his function as creator and *Pantokrator*. The idea of deification, common in Ephrem and in Greek patristic literature, is totally unknown to the author; according to him, it is impossible—a vain, childish arrogance—to aspire to be like God and act like God the King and Creator.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, God's commandment in Genesis 1:28 is idiosyncratically reinterpreted as a law given "for the aid of his soul *lest he let go of heaven and inherit the earth*."<sup>57</sup> Thus the protoplasts' desire to be like God—following the earlier revolt of Satan—signifies a total rebellion against God and a rejection of his will regarding certain precepts of ascetic perfection.<sup>58</sup> Yet in *LG* the achievement of a limited degree of

<sup>53</sup> See Ephrem, *Gen. Com.* 1.29 and Chapter 2, above.

<sup>54</sup> *LG* 21.9 (col. 609.7–12).

<sup>55</sup> *LG* 21.17 (col. 625.3–15). Kitchen sees here a comic element introduced by the author into the biblical narrative. See Kitchen, "Syriac Additions to Anderson," par. 25.

<sup>56</sup> On the idea of deification in Ephrem, see *Hymns on the Church* 45.32.1, ed. E. Beck, CSCO 198, 117; *Carmina Nisibena* 69.12.1, ed. E. Beck, CSCO 240, 112.

<sup>57</sup> *LG* 21.8 (cols. 604.26–605.1). See also P. Bettiolo, "Confessare Dio in perfetta spogliazione. La via del discernimento dei comandamenti nel Liber Graduum," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 19 (1998), pp. 631–651.

<sup>58</sup> See Kovalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, pp. 206–207.

*imitatio Christi* is in fact tantamount to a deification of sorts, where humanity is able to be a true image of God or to “become like God,” and partake in his dominion. Such a “low” notion of deification—alongside “higher” deification concepts—is also common in Greek patristic literature.<sup>59</sup>

This is how *LG* resolves the inherent tension, retaining both the ascetic imperative and the state of dominion from Genesis 1 or, as *LG* restates it elsewhere:

Thus people would have been on earth physically and in heaven spiritually until it pleased their Creator to elevate them to on high. Nothing on earth would have harmed them: neither reptile, nor wild beast, nor Satan.... For he said to them on the day he created them, “I will throw the fear and dread of you upon all that exists on the earth” (Gen 9:2). The hand of the Lord was on Adam and the hand of Adam tamed (ܕܗܘܢ ܕܚܘܒܐ) all there was on the earth beneath him by the power of our omnipotent (ܕܠܗ ܗܘܐ ܗܘܐ) Lord.<sup>60</sup>

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Another conspicuous motif in the Genesis 1:26–28 divine call to humanity involves the mandate to procreate and multiply. This maxim seemingly contradicts the manifest ascetic program of the author, forcing him to adapt his exegesis correspondingly.<sup>61</sup> His hermeneutical solution is the claim that had the protoplasts kept God’s commandments they would have multiplied in the earthly paradise in a non-sexual mode of procreation, one resembling the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib:

But if they had kept the commandments of our Lord and made supplication to him... our Lord would have made (ܚܒܐ) for them children as he had made Eve from Adam, without lust (ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ) and without intercourse (ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ), or if he had wanted he could have made children by the hairs of their heads or by the fingernails, and the people would have become the image (ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ) of angels.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> See, e.g., N. Russel, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>60</sup> *LG* 21.7 (col. 604.1–12).

<sup>61</sup> The difficulty regarding the existence of male and female genitalia—similarly contradicting the ascetic agenda of the author—is also addressed by him. See Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, pp. 63, 68.

<sup>62</sup> *LG* 21.7 (col. 601.11–19). For Adam’s similarity to angels in his pristine state, see also *LG* 23.1 (col. 692.11–13). Gregory of Nysa also expresses the idea of an angelic

This mode of procreation, then, somewhat resembles the natural vegetative mode of reproduction, or even a primitive form of the idea of cloning. The absence of lust is emphasized as characterizing this neutral mode of procreation. Elsewhere the author refers to Eve as Adam's daughter who was created out of him in a non-sexual way.<sup>63</sup> The idea that Adam generated Eve and hence has a kind of parental relation to her has some equivalent in Aphrahat who says that Adam "gave birth" (ܐܠܰܟ) to Eve, whereas Ephrem explicitly denies that Eve was Adam's daughter.<sup>64</sup> In *LG* this ideal form of reproduction appears to be restricted to Eve and hence to the female sex, and is initiated by a divine word: "he (God) would have made Eve fruitful by the word of our Lord without lust" (ܠܰܗܰܘܰܐ ܰܠܰܘܰܠܰܘܰܬܰܐ ܰܠܰܘܰܬܰܐ ܰܠܰܘܰܬܰܐ ܰܠܰܘܰܬܰܐ ܰܠܰܘܰܬܰܐ).<sup>65</sup> This seems to connote Mary's conception of Jesus without lust or intercourse.<sup>66</sup> The concept of heavenly bliss without lust was known also to Aphrahat and Ephrem.<sup>67</sup>

In propagating this non-sexual, quasi-angelic form of reproduction, the author deliberately avoids the common verb ܐܠܰܟ, which is for him connected with sexual and animal procreation which Adam and Eve engaged in only after the fall.<sup>68</sup> Adam and Eve in fact sin sexually after *watching* the animals.<sup>69</sup> Before that, concupisence did not enter their hearts, as they were like children. The motif of the

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mode of procreation, which Adam and Eve lost (*De hominis opificio* 17, PG 44, col. 189).

<sup>63</sup> *LG* 25.3 (cols. 737.26–740.2).

<sup>64</sup> Aphrahat, *Dem.* 18.9, PS 1, col. 837.15; Ephrem, *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, Arm. 19.5, ed. L. Leloir, CSCO 137, 277. See Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, p. 69.

<sup>65</sup> *LG* 15.6 (col. 348.18–21).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. John 1:13, where it is applied to the believers at large. See also *LG* 25.3.

<sup>67</sup> Aphrahat, *Dem.* 22.12–13; Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 7.5.4, 14.11.3.

<sup>68</sup> Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, p. 71. Cf. Philo, who regards Adam before the creation of Eve as an ascetic, imitating the solitary asceticism of God (*De opificio mundi* 151, 153; Bettolo, "Adamo in Eden e la liturgia celeste," p. 6. For an overview of Jewish and Christian traditions regarding the possibility of sexual relations between the protoplasts in paradise, see G. Anderson, "Celibacy or Consummation in the Garden? Reflections on Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Garden of Eden," *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989), pp. 121–148.

<sup>69</sup> *LG* 21.10 (col. 613.15–19). The idea that Adam and Eve and their first descendants learned basic human functions by observing the animal world is found also in Ephrem, as well as in rabbinic and early Muslim sources. See Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith* 34.2–4; Martikainen, "Das Böse," pp. 41–42; G. Friedlander, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer (The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great)* (New York, 1965), chap. 21, p. 156; Quran 5:31; A. Geiger, *Judaism and Islam* (Madras, 1898), pp. 80–81.

ideal innocence of childhood is combined here with that of nudity.<sup>70</sup> It should be noted that Eve's role in the sin and fall is not developed in *LG* beyond repetition of the biblical details. She is not the actual cause of Adam's sin—in sharp contrast to Aphrahat and Ephrem, where Eve plays a major role in the fall.<sup>71</sup>

All this is in line with the author's concept of the parallel dual existence, when the mind is totally absorbed in its heavenly contemplation and the body exercises its biological functions without sensation. This undoubtedly reflects the ascetic agenda of the author, espousing the idea of a passionless physical existence in paradise without abolishing the literal aspect of procreation.<sup>72</sup> We suggest that this balancing act is derived from the hermeneutical framework of harmonizing Genesis 1:26–28 with the author's ascetic ideal.

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The description of Adam's paradisiacal existence and of the nature of his fall provides the author of *LG* with the necessary backdrop for his portrayal of the Messiah-Christ (ܡܫܝܚܐ) as one who fulfills the original perfection of the Adamic ascetic ideal. This is clearly an idiosyncratic elaboration of the Pauline motif of Jesus as the second Adam (Rom 5:14–19), where Paul seems to relate to the two phases in the creation of Adam depicted in Genesis 2:7—namely, his formation from the dust of the earth, followed by the breathing of the spirit of life into him.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *LG* 15.3 (col. 341.1–6). For a discussion of this motif, see Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, pp. 64, 74–77.

<sup>71</sup> See Chapter 2, above; Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection*, pp. 99–116; Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, pp. 208–209.

<sup>72</sup> See Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, pp. 63–67.

<sup>73</sup> In *LG* there is no first creation of Adam in the Origenian sense of a double creation. On the distinction between the “first” and “second” Adam in Paul, and its possible midrashic setting, see M. Kister, “‘In Adam’: 1 Cor 15:21–22; 12:27 in Their Jewish Setting,” in A. Hilhorst, É. Puech and E. Tigchelaar (eds.), *Flores Florentino: Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of Florentino García Martínez* (Leiden, 2007), pp. 687–690; idem, “‘First Adam’ and ‘Second Adam’ According to Paul (1 Cor 15) in the light of Midrashic Exegesis and Hebrew Usage” (forthcoming). The motif of a “second Eve,” common among Syriac authors, does not appear explicitly in *LG*. See Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, p. 209. According to *LG* 28.1, in addition to the created spirit God also breathed into Adam something of the non-created Holy Spirit, the same spirit that Christ gave the apostles after his resurrection. This was already a traditional Syriac motif found in various stages of development in Tatian, the *Acts of Judah Thomas*, Aphrahat and Ephrem. See A. Tanghe, “Memra de Philoxène de Mabboug sur l’inhabitation du Saint Esprit,” *Le*

In *LG*, Adam's sin is posited as the opposite of Christ's achievement. What failed in Adam succeeded in the Messiah: God wanted that Adam should not transgress his commandment, and that wish was fulfilled in the Messiah. Christ and Adam both started from the same point—that is, both were made according to the image (ܩܕܝܫܐ) of God. Moreover, Christ is clearly presented as created in the image of the “true primitive Adam before the fall.”<sup>74</sup> But from the moment of sin, their paths diverged dramatically. Adam betrayed his original state of perfection in his foolish hope to become like God, whereas Christ adhered to it. The difference between the two consists in their relation to God: Christ assumed Adam's existential situation and was able—by adopting a different stance than Adam—to realize via his *kenosis* God's plan for the state of ascetic perfection.<sup>75</sup> Christ, in fact, came to show people their original nature and teach them how to return to their original form; this seems to be the major purpose of the incarnation.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, there seems to be no special emphasis in *LG* on the death of Christ as a redeeming sacrifice; rather, it is on his crucifixion as an ultimate ascetic example of the detachment of the perfect from earthly existence.<sup>77</sup> We shall return to this ideal of self-crucifixion below.

The author of *LG* is distinguished by his uncommon elaboration of the comparison between Jesus and Adam, based mainly on the description of the temptation of Christ by Satan in Matthew 4:1–11 (cf. Mark 1:12–13, Luke 4:1–13).<sup>78</sup> Jesus' temptation by Satan is in fact presented as a replay of Adam's temptation. This hermeneutical choice presents itself as ideally befitting *LG*'s agenda. In addition to the ascetic setting of the scene in the desert, two of the temptations relate to food and

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*Muséon* (1960), pp. 39–71, esp. p. 41; S. Brock, *The Holy Spirit in Syrian Baptismal Tradition* (Kottayam, 1979), pp. 46–48; Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, pp. 105–110. Here, too, the author of *LG* has in mind the identity between the primordial state of Adam and the state of the perfect. The Holy Spirit dwells in a person only as long as he follows the right ascetic way (*LG* 28.1).

<sup>74</sup> *LG* 21.11 (col. 616.2–24), based on Phil 2:6–7. See A. Louf, “Une ancienne exégèse de Phil 2,6 dans le Ketâbâ de Masqâtâ (Livre des degrés),” in *Studiorum Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus*, AB 17–18 (Rome, 1963), vol. 2, pp. 523–533.

<sup>75</sup> See Louf, “Une ancienne exégèse de Phil. 2,6 dans le K<sup>c</sup>tâbâ d<sup>e</sup>Masqâtâ,” pp. 523–533; Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, pp. 139–141. Cf. Aphrahat, *Dem.* 23.51.

<sup>76</sup> *LG* 21.3–4, 23.1, 26.1 (cf. Eph 1:10).

<sup>77</sup> See *LG* 21.3 (col. 593.7–9).

<sup>78</sup> *LG* 21.4 (cols. 593–596). On the pre-Nicene motif of comparison between Adam and Christ, see Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, p. 127, n. 20.

dominion over the world, the latter being explicitly exploited in our treatise. Thus according to *LG*:

“He approached and was tempted [by Satan]” (Matt 4:3) in order to show us how Adam was tempted (ܩܘܨܬܐ) in the first place. It is written, “He defeated Satan” (Matt 4:10–11) in order to show us how if Adam had wished by a [single] word (ܩܘܠܐ), he would have been able to demolish (ܠܐ ܩܘܨܘܫܐ) [Satan]...by that word (ܩܘܠܐ, ܩܘܠܐ) to which he (Christ) did not listen when [Satan] cajoled him to look out over the earth like Adam so that he might lust (ܩܘܠܐ) for the wealth of the earth and its transitory beauty (ܩܘܠܐ ܩܘܨܘܫܐ) as Adam and Eve had yearned for.<sup>79</sup>

This hermeneutical device recurs further on in the *memra*, where the seduction of Adam—and here also Eve—by Satan is paralleled by his attempt to seduce Jesus:

But when the deceitful one (ܩܘܨܬܐ) approached Eve and Adam..., he seduced (ܩܘܠܐ) them as he would have seduced Jesus, and said to the Creator of the universe, “Look, see how the earth is attractive with its possession and its kingdoms. Listen to me and take possession (ܩܘܠܐ ܩܘܨܘܫܐ) and rule (ܩܘܠܐ) and you will not become *poor* (ܩܘܠܐ ܩܘܨܘܫܐ) and *empty yourself* (ܩܘܠܐ ܩܘܨܘܫܐ) and become a *stranger* (ܩܘܠܐ ܩܘܨܘܫܐ) on the earth.<sup>80</sup>

This parallel contains more than a shred of irony, since Christ who is being tempted by earthly possessions is emphatically called here “the Creator of the universe” (ܩܘܠܐ ܩܘܨܘܫܐ), demonstrating the absurdity of Satan’s scheme. Christ is similarly described further as “that one who is the Creator and who is our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>81</sup> It is worth noting that the trinitarian identification of Christ as the creator of the universe was not self-evident in earlier Syriac theology, as is clearly attested by both Aphrahat and Ephrem.<sup>82</sup> Thus *LG* may be regarded as an early instance of adapting to Greek Nicene Trinitarian theology, albeit in an undeveloped form.<sup>83</sup>

We may also note here the ascetic terminology of Satan’s temptation, such as “become *poor*,” “*empty yourself*” and “become a *stranger*”

<sup>79</sup> *LG* 21.4 (col. 593.19–col. 596.2).

<sup>80</sup> *LG* 21.9 (col. 608.19–24).

<sup>81</sup> *LG* 21.11. (col. 616.4–5).

<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 1, above.

<sup>83</sup> See also Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, pp. 115, 201–203.

on the earth.”<sup>84</sup> In Christ’s victory over Satan through his unwavering humility, crowned by the crucifixion, he had broken down “the fence of enmity (כִּלְכִּיל הַחֶסֶד) and ‘Everything is made new again in Christ’ (Eph 1:10), as [God] had wanted Adam to become, and as he had been created before he transgressed.”<sup>85</sup> In other words, Christ carries out God’s eschatological (last) will, which is identified by the author with God’s original will envisioned for human paradisaical existence but rejected by Adam, who “had done away with [it] at creation.”<sup>86</sup>

The Christ-Adam opposition—integral to their parallelism—is further accentuated by the radical contrast in their perception of the vocation of humanity, created in God’s image. Adam’s misinterpretation of the nature of his divine image as one of majesty is contrasted with Christ’s adherence to the original ascetic virtue of humility as the only avenue open for humans to “become like God.” In other words, the only way to *imitatio dei* is that of humility and *kenosis*. This is exegetically linked in *LG* to the famous passage in Philippians 2:6, depicting Christ’s semi-divine status as derived from his humility. Contrary to Adam, who desired to become equal to God, Christ “took the example of a servant while he was in the image of that creation of the first human being.... He took the image of servant so that he might obey his father like a servant (cf. Ph 2:6)—not in the way Adam took the image of majesty in order to be the opposite and adversary to his Lord and Creator.”<sup>87</sup>

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In line with his general view of Christ’s death, as an ultimate ascetic example of detachment from earthly existence rather than as an atoning sacrifice, the author states that the Messiah showed the way up to the perfect; as he dwells in the upper heavens, they also should strive to achieve this goal through humility, ascetic detachment, and

<sup>84</sup> On the ascetic virtue of *xeniteia*, see A. Guillaumont, “Le dépaysement comme form d’ascèse dans le monachisme ancien,” in idem, *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien. Pour une phénoménologie du monachisme*, Spiritualité Orientale 30 (Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1979), pp. 89–116; B. Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2005), pp. 146–160.

<sup>85</sup> *LG* 21.3 (col. 592.14–20).

<sup>86</sup> *LG* 21.8 (col. 605.15–16).

<sup>87</sup> *LG* 21.11 (col. 616.14–23). See also Louf, “Une ancienne exégèse de Phil 2,6 dans le K<sup>o</sup>tābā d<sup>o</sup>Masqāṭā,” pp. 523–533.

obedience.<sup>88</sup> In other words, the perfect ascetic faces the same challenge: to die in his thoughts to earthly things (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ) and the way is open for him here and now to follow Christ and not Adam.<sup>89</sup> This apparently explains the lack of eschatological emphasis on Christ's second coming, since the ascetic imperative is now envisioned as the ultimate avenue for salvation.<sup>90</sup>

The ideal of ascetic humility as the vehicle for *imitatio dei* is further enhanced by the notion that a chain of Old and New Testament figures had exemplified this virtue, including Noah, Moses, Job, Daniel, Mary, Paul and the apostles. Moses (Exod 32:33) and Paul (Rom 9:3), in fact, were willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their brethren.<sup>91</sup> It is significant that the author here changes the biblical attribute of Noah in Genesis 6:9 and 7:2 from "righteous" (ܐܘܪܝܬܐ) to "humble" (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ) and calls him "the most humble of all the earth" (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ).<sup>92</sup> *LG* seems to discern an exegetical link between Noah and Moses in the verb "to blot out" ܩܘܪܒܢܐ, used in both Genesis 6:7 and Exodus 32:33, denoting God's readiness to annihilate the rest of humanity or the people of Israel.<sup>93</sup> He thus attributes a similar status to Noah as that of Paul and Moses, as an advocate for the sinners.<sup>94</sup>

According to *LG*, Moses was chosen precisely because he was the humblest. God weighed Moses against all the other 600,000 Israelites and their families, who sinned in pride, and in his lowliness and humility he outweighed them all.<sup>95</sup> A similar motif—the scales of pride versus humility—appears in connection with Noah, whose lowliness

<sup>88</sup> *LG* 21.4 (col. 596.13–17), 21.11 (col. 616.16–17).

<sup>89</sup> *LG* 21.5 (col. 597).

<sup>90</sup> According to Naeh, one may discern in certain Talmudic traditions a salvific dimension of celibacy influenced by Syriac early asceticism. See S. Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy: A Talmudic Variation on Tales of Temptation and Fall in Genesis and Its Syriac Background," in J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay (eds.), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation*, Trad. Exeg. Graeca 5 (Louvain, 1997), p. 80, n. 28. On sexuality in general in rabbinic literature, see D. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford, 1993).

<sup>91</sup> *LG* 21.12–16 (cols. 617–625). On Moses' plea for his brethren in Jewish and Christian literature, see Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection*, pp. 168–170.

<sup>92</sup> *LG* 21.13 (col. 620.21–22).

<sup>93</sup> *LG* 21.12 (col. 620.8–10), 21.13 (col. 620.23–24).

<sup>94</sup> *LG* 21.13 (cols. 620.19–621.6). The motif of Noah's negotiation with God for the sake of humanity is manifestly adopted from the story of Abraham and Sodom (Gen 18:23–36).

<sup>95</sup> *LG* 21.12 (cols. 617.23–620.6). For this motif, see *Syriac Acts of Thomas* 9.

outweighed all the rest of humanity.<sup>96</sup> This type of humility is represented in various generations, so that a clear shift of emphasis from the biblical virtue of righteousness to the ascetic virtue of humility can be discerned.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, the author also singles out Mary's humility as the prime motive for her election as the mother of the Messiah, going so far as to state that "if there had been another woman who was more humble (כַּחֲמֻדָּה) than Mary, Christ would have been given birth to by her!"<sup>98</sup> The ascetic ideal of perfection through humility, then, is expanded to include outstanding figures from the whole range of pre-monastic sacred history and thus relativized in preparing the ground for contemporary ascetics.<sup>99</sup>

The contemporary notion of ascetics as a spiritual elite is molded into the author's paradigm of the dual division of Christian society between the perfect and the upright—compatible with his idea of a dual paradise.<sup>100</sup> The upright represent the situation of Adam after the fall and in the physical paradise, whereas the perfect achieve in their lives Adam's original state of existing in the earthly paradise while dwelling spiritually in the heavenly one. The double existence of Adam and Eve—mind in heaven, body on earth—is thus likened to "spiritual people" of today—namely, ascetics (אֲנָשֵׁי אֲרָצָה וְרוּחַ שָׁמַיִם)—whose mind is "with our Lord in heaven."<sup>101</sup> According to this conceptual framework Satan harms the upright because they are tied to transitory things. The perfect, by contrast, are bound spiritually to the world of light. Thus a perfect ascetic liberates himself from Satan in this life through asceticism, perceived as following the way of Jesus:

Therefore... [if] you do not wish to die, renounce and distance yourself from Satan and his teaching; that is, from Satan, from everything evil, from the world, from its anxiety, and from everything that Jesus had said to abandon through lowliness, prayer, and fasting, while keeping the commandments. Moreover... the teaching of the evil one... who harms

<sup>96</sup> LG 21.13. Noah's humility vis-à-vis the contempt and abuse of his contemporaries as he was building the ark is also found in rabbinic midrash. See, *Tanhuma* Noah 5 (Warsaw, 1878).

<sup>97</sup> For the application of this motif to Job and Daniel, see LG 21.14.

<sup>98</sup> LG 21.16 (cols. 624.22–625.4).

<sup>99</sup> See also LG 21.3 (cols. 592.22–593.3).

<sup>100</sup> LG 21.1 (cols. 584–585).

<sup>101</sup> LG 21.8 (cols. 605.22–608.8–9).

the upright ones because they are held fast in this world by transitory things and are far removed from the perfect.<sup>102</sup>

The ideal of *imitatio Christi* is exemplified by a number of basic images—living like angels in the upper heaven as Adam did before the fall, as the Messiah<sup>103</sup> and, more prominently, the self-crucifixion of the ascetic as representing his/her dying to all things earthly: “Whoever does not get far away from the evil one and abandon everything on earth and look into heaven while being crucified (ܐܡܪܘ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ) will not attain that thing which Adam lost.”<sup>104</sup> This ideal of self-crucifixion is in fact presented by the author as a cardinal commandment given by Christ to the apostles and further enjoined by them to all future believers.<sup>105</sup> Self-crucifixion is perceived as the ultimate expression of humility. It would appear, then, that it was achieved by the biblical paragons of humility, though the author attributes it explicitly only to Paul.<sup>106</sup> Here too we may discern the relativization of the ideal of ascetic perfection, preparing the ground for its realization by contemporary ascetics. The author even goes a step further and claims that there are a handful of ascetics in his own generation who are closer to the full achievement of the ideal than their biblical predecessors.<sup>107</sup>

These contemporary ascetics, however, might also, like Adam and Eve, fall into the sin of pride and “return to the earth in order to possess and use it...and the door will be closed in their faces. They will depart from the heavenly Jerusalem just like Adam from the spiritual Eden, which is the spiritual Jerusalem, the city of God.”<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, the way of return through repentance (ܐܘܬܘܒܐܘܬܐ, lit. “return”; cf., the Hebrew תשובה) is still open to the ascetic—a manifestation

<sup>102</sup> LG 21.2 (col. 588.10–21).

<sup>103</sup> LG 21.4 (cols. 596.26–597.4); 21.7 (col. 601.18–19). Cf. LG 21.17 (col. 625.10–11).

<sup>104</sup> LG 21.3 (col. 593.6–9).

<sup>105</sup> LG 21.3 (cols. 592.16–593.1); 21.5 (col. 597.5–17). According to LG 9.13, 28.1, the restoration of the original perfection of Adam begins, following Christ, with the apostles. See also Stewart, *Working the Earth of the Heart*, p. 91; Bettiolo, “Adamo in Eden e la liturgia celeste,” p. 25.

<sup>106</sup> LG 21.6.

<sup>107</sup> LG 21.14 (cols. 621.15–624.4).

<sup>108</sup> LG 21.8 (col. 608.9–15). Paradise as the spiritual and heavenly Jerusalem of the perfect signifies the identity of the primordial and eschatological reality in contradistinction to the tradition deriving from the Johannine Apocalypse—apparently unknown to or rejected by the early Syriac Church—which does not associate it with paradise. See Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 261–262.

of God's mercy—as it was originally open to Adam and Eve.<sup>109</sup> This possibility was further facilitated by a law (ܠܘܘܐ) that God “established...for them *on earth* (ܠܝܪܥܗ), for if a person does it he will be saved thereby.”<sup>110</sup> This auxiliary law thus differs from the sublime law given to the protoplasts in paradise consisting of the epitomizing commandment to abandon all earthly concerns. This duality of the law apparently corresponds to the socioreligious division of Christian society espoused by the author, the second law destined to govern the conduct of the upright.<sup>111</sup>

It is according to this perception of the perfect ascetics, whose will and desires are entirely focused on heaven, in imitation of Christ, that the author interprets the Lord's Prayer. In the prayer the ascetic should ask that:

He might dwell spiritually in heaven with the angels while his mind is clothed with the glory of his Creator and the earth is not seen by him... wherever the perfect will of God is, as our Lord said: Pray so that the will of God might be on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10).<sup>112</sup>

It seems that the hermeneutical choice in this context was influenced no less by the earth-heaven duality found in the Lord's Prayer than by the motif of God's will. The prayer is thus turned into a petition for achieving the ideal mode of human existence, existing in heaven according to God's initial will with regard to Adam while dwelling on earth. Doing so is facilitated by the divine glory that constitutes an existential buffer between the perfect ascetic and earthly reality; or rather, in the author's imagery, it blinds the perfect from seeing that reality (ܡܠ ܠܘܘܐ ܠܥܘܠܡ).<sup>113</sup>

A further means of reaching and maintaining ascetic perfection is an imitation of Adam's consumption of the Lord identified as the tree of life and interpreted as consumption of the “life-giving words of Christ” with its clear Eucharistic connotations. The existential

<sup>109</sup> According already to certain ancient midrashic traditions, Adam and Eve have repented. See, e.g., *The Life of Adam and Eve* 9, 30; *Gen. R.* 22.13. Cf. *Num. R.* 13.3.

<sup>110</sup> *LG* 21.18 (cols. 628.23–629.1).

<sup>111</sup> See also Kitchen, “Syriac Additions to Anderson,” pars. 30–32; Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, pp. 210–211.

<sup>112</sup> *LG* 21.2 (col. 589.1–9).

<sup>113</sup> The emphasis here differs from the common ascetic interpretation of giving up one's will in order to follow God's will. See A. Kofsky, “The Renunciation of Will in the Monastic School of Gaza,” *Liber Annuus* 56 (2006), pp. 321–346. Cf. *m. Avot* 2.4: “Do his will as if it was your will, that He may do your will as if it was his will.”

alternative would be eating from the tree of knowledge of evil identified with Satan and the transitory world:

Today the children of Adam still eat with the hardness of their heart from this tree, which makes known [to them] evil and teaches them to be bound on the earth by transitory things. . . . Neither do they learn from God nor from a person of God how they may be bound up with our Lord in that world in which there is no death where they will eat the life-giving words (ܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܠܡܐ ܕܥܝܠܡܐ) of our Lord. They shall eat our Lord and live and become great and be perfected through him.<sup>114</sup>

This imagery of the “life-giving words” of Christ as the spiritual fruits of the tree of life is complemented by perceiving the ascetics themselves as those who in turn yield these fruits as part of their perfection: “Everyone who imitates [our Lord] yields these fruits and becomes perfect.”<sup>115</sup> Thus the *imitatio Christi* of the perfect ascetics not only restores in their lifetime the lost status of Adam in paradise but in fact transcends his original state, becoming as it were a branch for diffusing the spiritual gifts of the tree of life.

#### CONCLUSION

The author of *LG* harbors the concept of a dual paradise as the setting of Adam and Eve before the fall. The perception of paradise as *locus asceticus* constitutes a peculiar trait of *LG* and determines the various aspects of its discussion. Core aspects here are the nature of primordial sin and the ascetic way of restoring the “paradise lost.” In *LG*, primordial sin is peculiarly portrayed as a shift in the inner intellectual focus from heavenly to earthly concerns, epitomized by the lust for food. The author is also distinguished by his radical anti-labor ascetic concept. Earthly concerns are equated with evil and death, and are introduced through the protoplasts’ voluntary decision; consequently Satan’s role in the paradisiacal narrative is substantially marginalized. Moreover, the primordial tree of life and tree of knowledge are perceived as purely spiritual principles, identified respectively with Christ and Satan. The spiritual existence in paradise is tantamount to

<sup>114</sup> *LG* 21.1 (cols. 585.20–587.9). Cf. John 6:53–58.

<sup>115</sup> *LG* 21.3 (col. 589.18–20).

the consummation of the tree of life—namely, the Lord; it thus has implicit Eucharistic connotations.

The description of Adam's paradisiacal existence and of the nature of his fall provides the author with the backdrop for his portrayal of the Messiah-Christ as Adam's corrective, as the one who fulfills the original ideal of Adamic ascetic perfection. Though Christ is identified with the tree of life and the logos, his primary function in the redemption of the ascetic is to show the way to the restoration of that perfection—this seems to be the major purpose of the incarnation. There is no special emphasis in *LG* on the death of Christ as a redeeming sacrifice; rather, it is on his crucifixion as an ultimate example of the detachment from earthly existence. In other words, the only way to *imitatio dei* is that of humility and *kenosis*. The way is open for the perfect ascetic here and now to follow Christ and not Adam. Hence the lack of eschatological emphasis on Christ's second coming.

The ideal of ascetic humility as the vehicle for *imitatio dei* is further enhanced by the notion that a chain of pre-monastic Old and New Testament figures exemplified this virtue; it is thus relativized as preparing the ground for contemporary ascetics. The contemporary notion of ascetics as spiritual elite is molded into the author's paradigm of a dual Christian society—a society divided between perfect and upright—compatible with his idea of a dual paradise.

This chapter has focused on the way the ascetic agenda of *LG* informs its author's hermeneutical approach to the biblical narrative on the Garden of Eden. Whereas some particularities of the narrative fit readily into this mold, others clearly contradict it and demand creative, idiosyncratic, exegetical solutions. These include the author's interpretation of both the dominion over the earth and human procreation in Genesis 1:26–28 as relating to kenotic humility and non-sexual procreation respectively. A major hermeneutical key for interpreting the story of the fall is provided by Satan's temptation of Jesus; the latter's ascetic elements are projected backwards to Adam's temptation. The author also invokes the Lord's Prayer, a central liturgical text of the community, as epitomizing his ascetic existential vision of overcoming the cosmic spiritual dichotomy. It is precisely because *LG* is not an exegetical treatise but an ascetic manifesto that its hermeneutical strategies stand out as an illuminating example of exegetical "acts of power." A different exegetical tour de force with regard to the story of paradise is discussed in the following chapter.

