

CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES: NUMBER TWO HUNDRED THIRTY-FIVE

The *Discourses* of Philoxenos of Mabbug

Translated by Robert A. Kitchen



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The *Discourses* of Philoxenos  
of Mabbug  
A New Translation and Introduction

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# Contents

Preface vii

Introduction to the *Discourses* of Philoxenos of Mabbug xiii

List of Abbreviations lxxx

Mēmrā 1: Introduction 1

Mēmrā 2: On Faith 18

Mēmrā 3: On Faith 39

Mēmrā 4: On Simplicity 56

Mēmrā 5: On Simplicity 95

Mēmrā 6: On the Fear of God 126

Mēmrā 7: On the Fear of God 151

Mēmrā 8: On Renunciation of the World 176

Mēmrā 9: On Renunciation of the World 203

Mēmrā 10: On Gluttony 275

Mēmrā 11: On Asceticism 327

Mēmrā 12: On Fornication 386

Mēmrā 13: On Fornication 428

Bibliography 489

Biblical References 502

Index of Topics 509



## Preface

One of the most illustrious theologians and ecclesiastical leaders of the post-Chalcedonian era, Philoxenos (bishop of Mabbug in western Syria), was known for the elegance of his written Syriac in which he wrote all his works. Rarely has he been acknowledged by historians of Christianity or by the memory of the Church. A subtle theologian explaining the One Nature of Christ, Philoxenos was also an imaginative biblical exegete who insisted upon a better translation of the Syriac Bible, a dedicated supporter and guide to the monks and monasteries under his episcopal care, as well as one who could not only play in the rough and tumble of political matters but also be a compassionate reconciler.

Perhaps it was the language. “The devil spoke Syriac” is Theodoret of Cyrrihus’s memorable quip and the language certainly faded from the spotlight in the memory of the Western Church where Greek and Latin were the preferred tongues. Philoxenos, whose name means “Lover of Strangers” or “the Hospitable One,” spoke and wrote many things worth rescuing from history’s forgetfulness. His most copied and circulated work, the *Discourses*, appeals to the broadest audience and is the logical place to begin hearing again a forgotten voice.

The *Discourses* of Philoxenos serves as the companion volume to the *Book of Steps*,<sup>1</sup> although on the surface the two texts appear quite diverse in geographical locations, theological perspectives, social structures and political surroundings, and time. Their connection

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Steps: the Syriac Liber Graduum*, trans. with an introduction and notes, Robert A. Kitchen and Martien F. G. Parmentier, CS 196 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2004).

is in the common infrastructure of the two levels of committed Christian life, uprightness (*kēnūtā*) and perfection (*gmīrūtā*), which only these two works describe at length in subtle detail.

I stumbled across Philoxenos and his *Discourses* nearly four decades ago in the Semitics department of The Catholic University of America, and it must have been Fr. Alexander Di Lella who directed me to the bishop since I surely had never heard of him. The Eastern and particularly Syriac churches were not part of a mainline-Protestant seminarian's worldview at that time. Things have changed. I eventually wrote a master's thesis on the upright and the perfect in the *Book of Steps* and the *Discourses*. Philoxenos back then took center stage, although along the way to a DPhil at the University of Oxford under the guidance of Sebastian Brock, the *Book of Steps* would play the siren and I was seduced.

Now Philoxenos is receiving his due again. The study of this author is reviving, but not with the vibrancy due a prolific author who played a major role in the establishment of a church movement still very much alive. A physical problem is that the critical edition of the *Discourses*, upon which this and previous translations have been based, is E. Wallis Budge's beautifully produced and printed 1894 two-volume set.<sup>2</sup> There are simply too few copies available in North American and European libraries for the access of younger scholars. A new translation enables Philoxenos' voice to be heard in a modern accent, to direct the reader toward recent scholarship and interpretations, and an opportunity to emend the Syriac text en route.

The length of the *Discourses* is daunting, but the most effective and engaging way to access their dynamic tone is to read them aloud, whether in Syriac or in translation. Debate continues whether these *mēmre* were actually delivered orally by Philoxenos or written in order to be read by someone else—a debate that will not be conclusively resolved. I hope that Philoxenos did preach them himself, for after reading these aloud, what reader would be able to duplicate his voice and passion?

<sup>2</sup>E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Discourses of Philoxenos, Bishop of Mabbôgh, A.D. 485–519*, 2 vols. (London: Asher & Co., 1894).



Several decisions have been made in translating and annotating the text that should be clarified. “Discourses” is an appropriate yet flat translation for *mēmnrē*, the Syriac term (plural) for this kind of literary vehicle that adopts a wide variety of genres. As I did in the *Book of Steps*, I will identify each unit as a *mēmnrā* (singular) so that the reader may come to appreciate the qualities of this unique Syriac genre.

The labels of the two levels of spiritual life remain the same from the *Book of Steps*: the lower, worldly level of uprightness (*kēnūtā*) and its practitioners, the upright (*kēnē*), and those who follow the major commandments of perfection (*gmūrūtā*), or the perfect (*gmūrē*). In earlier translations, *kēnūtā* was rendered as “justice” / “the just,” but that can be confusing at certain points, so the suggestion of “uprightness” / “upright” seemed more fitting, and considering the subsequent work done on the *Book of Steps* the term has become fixed. The translations “perfection” and “the perfect” have been challenged from time to time, for although this is a legitimate translation of the terms, the perfect were frequently described as being decidedly not perfect in the modern sense. Suggestions have been offered along the lines of “mature,” but the imprecision of that term seems even more ambiguous. I have remained with the renderings perfection/perfect because both authors project an eschatological tone, the idea that one is striving for perfection which will be finally fulfilled in the kingdom of heaven.

Scholarship is never a solitary task; one stands on the shoulders of countless other people who have written and spoken and taught, much of which one records only as a footnote. In the first place, I wish to express my gratitude to Sebastian Brock for his innumerable hours looking over much of what I have done in the last couple of decades. His suggestions have always given me needed direction and his generosity and patience have enabled me to understand how much grace is at play in these endeavors. The people engaged in Syriac studies are indeed a graceful lot, but how could they be otherwise once touched by the personality and example of Sebastian Brock?

My wife, Molly, knows Philoxenos well and can cite his verdict on the lust of the belly at a moment’s notice. Her encouragement

and participation as a pastoral colleague in a life of study have constituted the less traveled road, but for us that has made all the difference. Our children, Winifred, Sidney, and Thanh, have heard the bishop's name whispered around the table all their lives and they willingly admit they know who he is.

I wish to express my gratitude to the congregation and leadership of Knox-Metropolitan United Church, Regina, Saskatchewan, for their generous and continuing support of my scholarship throughout the years of my pastorate. While they do not always catch on fully to the significance of the Oriental and Syriac churches, they have recognized the importance of my contribution to the study of the Great Church. I was granted a sabbatical leave by the congregation to be a pastor-theologian in residence at the Center of Theological Inquiry (CTI), Princeton, New Jersey, where my work on the *Discourses* really began to take shape. The environment of theological adventure fostered at CTI by William Storrar can only be experienced to fully appreciate.

I have been fortunate to become acquainted with David Michelson, now assistant professor, Vanderbilt Divinity School, whose Princeton dissertation on Philoxenos under Peter Brown has taken the study of the bishop of Mabbug to a deeper and subtler level in much the same way that the dissertation on Philoxenos by André de Halleux did more than a generation ago. We organized the so-called Philoxenos Phest at CTI, cosponsored by the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton University and Gorgias Press, and were able later to edit a full year's volume of *Hugoye Journal of Syriac Studies* devoted to various aspects of the study of Philoxenos. Our conversations have enabled me to see Philoxenos in significantly new ways, as well as to better understand things about Philoxenos I had known for a good while. It is my desire and intent to transmit many of those things now to the reader.

The introduction begins with an overview of miaphysite theology and ecclesiastical history in which Philoxenos was engaged then reviews what is known about the life and ministry of Philoxenos and his writings. The previous study of the *Discourses* is described, along with the various manuscripts E. W. Budge used to create the critical edition. A summary of the contents of the thirteen *mēmvrē*

is presented, followed by a note on the versions of Philoxenos' literary work in other languages and a brief review of how Thomas Merton read and interpreted the *Discourses*. Several sections then treat various key terms and issues in the work: a detailed analysis of the upright and the perfect and a reflection on the nature of Syriac asceticism from the vantage point of the *Book of Steps* and the *Discourses*; the use of christological terminology in the *Discourses*; how Philoxenos interpreted the Bible in the *Discourses*; and finally the manner in which Philoxenos utilized the concepts and categories of Evagrius Ponticus.

The English translation of the thirteen *Discourses*, or *mēm̄rē*, is given with biblical references and occasional notes. For those who may be reading the English translation with Budge's Syriac text at hand, the numbers inside parentheses are the page numbers in Budge's Syriac edition. Notations regarding typographical errors of the Syriac text, as well as the use of variant readings, are recorded in the footnotes.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>E. A. Wallis Budge admits in his preface to his 1894 critical edition and translation that after some shifting back and forth regarding which readings would be in the text and which in the apparatus and notes, he realized that "as a result of these changes it will be seen that, in some cases, the better readings are given in the notes and the less good in the text." Budge, 2:viii.



# Introduction to the *Discourses* of Philoxenos of Mabbug

## Post-451 and the One Nature of Miaphysitism

To live in a quiet age was not the luxury of Philoxenos of Mabbug. Persecution and controversy assailed him throughout his entire life. The years following the Council of Chalcedon in 451 were generally troubled times for the Syriac Church, and Philoxenos, it seems, consistently found himself in the eye of the storm.

Celebrated and stigmatized for his role as one of the leaders in the anti-Chalcedonian movement in the late fifth / early sixth centuries, Philoxenos' doctrinal position, along with those of Severus of Antioch and others, is identified by several confusing christological labels—monophysite, miaphysite, and henophysite. The *Discourses* are perhaps the least affected of Philoxenos' writings by christological concerns, but these *mēmre* do include casual comments and particular questions and refutations that illustrate Philoxenos' theological allegiance.<sup>1</sup> A brief description of the history and concepts of miaphysitism will help in comprehending Philoxenos' orientation, though certainly not fully describe it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See below, "Christological Comments in *The Discourses*," for how and where these casual comments were used.

<sup>2</sup> The starting point for modern interpretation is W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

The emergence of Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople, in the late 420s is the usual place to begin. Educated in the Antiochene tradition under Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius emphasized the human nature of Christ, infamously rejecting the popular use of the term for Mary, *Theotokos* or God-bearer, Mother of God. Cyril of Alexandria responded with vehement and articulate refutations, and the controversy eventually led to the calling of the Council of Ephesus in 431 at which Nestorius was condemned and removed from office.

Matters were not settled in Ephesus, similar to the way things had happened a century earlier at Nicaea over the nature of the Trinity, and heated debate continued for twenty years until the Council of Chalcedon was gathered in 451. Cyril's phrase, "one incarnate nature [*mia physis*] of God the Logos/Word," became the central affirmation to describe the incarnation on which Chalcedon would focus.

The Definition of Chalcedon rejected both the two-nature interpretation of Nestorius that seemed to imply two Christs (one human and one divine), and the one-nature interpretation of Eutyches that essentially denied a human element in Christ.<sup>3</sup> The Council affirmed that Christ existed in one person in two natures, fully human and fully divine, without confusion, change, division, or separation.<sup>4</sup> Many Eastern bishops disagreed, believing that Christ had One Nature, out of or from two natures, and refused to sign the Definition. Two Greek prepositions—*en* and *ek*—marked the distinction, the difference of one letter creating a wide chasm between theologies and churches. The debate, which would continue unabated for over a century, showed that the Nicene and post-Nicene decisions about the nature of the Trinity were not finally conclusive.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For a vivid narrative regarding Eutyches and the "Gangster" or "Robber" Synod, see Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 187–97.

<sup>4</sup> The Definition of Chalcedon is recorded in numerous sources. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1976), 339–40.

<sup>5</sup> Still the best discussion of the doctrinal intricacies is that of Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol.

A significant portion of the Eastern Church—the so-called Oriental Churches of Syria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Armenia, and Georgia—would effectively separate from the Constantinople- and Rome-centered Western churches. Ironically, Cyril's theology was accepted by both sides, especially by the Eastern miaphysite wing after Chalcedon.<sup>6</sup> When the miaphysites wished to caricature the Chalcedonian position, they castigated the majority decision as thinly veiled Nestorianism. In turn, they were incorrectly labeled “monophysite” or “one nature”—the implication being that Christ had simply one divine nature, no human nature, echoing the intellectual excesses of Eutyches.

The miaphysite movement itself was neither uniform nor unified, so it has been uncomfortable for historians and historical theologians to label the theologies and churches with one stroke. In recent years, the accepted academic label for these groups is *anti-Chalcedonian*, which appropriately reflects the political character of the controversy as emperors and empresses and patriarchs, monks, and courtiers wrestled for power and official status of orthodox faith.<sup>7</sup> The vocabulary was theological, but the language was power politics.<sup>8</sup>

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1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (1971), esp. 266–77; and vol. 2., *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700)* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), esp. 49–61.

<sup>6</sup>Pelikan, 2:52: “The Chalcedonian opponents of the Jacobite Christology quoted Cyril against it, and its defenders had to explain away some of Cyril's language.” See Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and of a Heretic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), especially the epilogue, 296–302.

<sup>7</sup>A. H. M. Jones, “Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?” *JTS* 11 (1959): 280–98.

<sup>8</sup>Two recent monographs demonstrate the critical role of the Eastern churches in the history of Christianity in Late Antiquity: Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking, 2010), especially chapter 7, “Defying Chalcedon: Asia and Africa (451–622),” 233–54; and Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 years* (New York: HarperOne, 2010). Interestingly, the two

Philoxenos was involved in all aspects of the controversy, theological and political. The reigns of emperors Zeno and Anastasius, both empathetic to the anti-Chalcedonian movement, enabled Philoxenos to be bishop from 485 to 518 of Mabbug. However, the moment Justin I, a strong supporter of Chalcedon, assumed the throne in 518, it was the end of the miaphysite movement thriving in imperial favor. Justin removed all miaphysite clergy from their positions on Easter, March 31, 519, including Philoxenos. Attempts to reconcile the Chalcedonian Church with the miaphysites failed and the latter were increasingly persecuted. The Second Council of Constantinople in 553 reasserted Chalcedon and condemned various aspects of One Nature theology along with various of the personalities who supported it. In dire straits, the miaphysite church found a different solution as Jacob Baradaeus embarked on an ambitious and charismatic pilgrimage throughout an immense territory, ordaining priests and bishops into the miaphysite fold. His labors infused a renewed vitality to the Syrian Orthodox Church which would be nicknamed “Jacobite” in deference to the contribution of the one who revitalized it.<sup>9</sup>

## **Philoxenos, Bishop of Mabbug: The Hospitable Stranger**

### *Life*

We know Philoxenos mainly through his writings, although there are a few sources that give a systematic, albeit sometimes legendary,

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authors diverge in terminology. MacCulloch’s magisterial work carefully underlines that the subject is *miaphysite* Christianity, while Jenkins’s more popular book focused on Chalcedon and its aftermath recognizes that this is the correct term, but apologetically opts for *monophysite* since it is still the more recognizable expression among the general readership.

<sup>9</sup>See Jeanne-Nicole Saint-Laurent, *Apostolic Memories: Religious Differentiation and the Construction of Orthodoxy in Syriac Missionary Literature* (PhD dissertation, Brown University, 2009); and Volker L. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).



account of his life. The primary source is the anonymous *Chronicle of 846* compiled at the monastery of Qartmīn in the Ṭūr 'Abdīn.<sup>10</sup> From this same monastery a thirteenth-century monk, Elijah, composed a valuable poetical biography.<sup>11</sup> A handful of other manuscripts offer short biographies with some interesting details, about which A. de Halleux<sup>12</sup> and A. Vööbus<sup>13</sup> have published notices.

All indications point to Taḥel in Bet Garmai as the birthplace of Philoxenos, probably in the 440s. His family, as part of the Christian Aramaic-speaking community of Persia, found themselves precariously caught between the hostility of Zoroastrian clergy and the suspicions of the Sassanian monarchy against these reputed allies of Roman Christianity.<sup>14</sup> According to Elijah, a severe persecution took place in Bet Garmai ca. 445–46, forcing Philoxenos' family to migrate to Ṭūr 'Abdīn.<sup>15</sup> De Halleux believes Elijah may have imagined this final location in order to situate Philoxenos geographically closer to the monastery of Qartmīn, although the date of the persecution provides a logical explanation for the family's migration.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Chronicon anonymum ad A.D. 846 oertinens*, ed. E. W. Brooks, trans. J. B. Chabot in *Chronica minora* (CSCO 3–4; Louvain, 1903).

<sup>11</sup> Eli de Qartamin, *Memra sur S. Mar Philoxène de Mabboug*, ed. A. de Halleux (CSCO 233–34/Syr 100–101; Louvain, 1963).

<sup>12</sup> André de Halleux, "À la source d'une biographie expurgée de Philoxène de Mabboug," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 6/7 (1975–76): 253–66. Focuses on variations in Sin. syr. 10 and the relevant section in *Chronicle of 846*.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Vööbus, "La Biographie de Philoxène: Tradition des Manuscrits," *Analecta Bollandiana* 93 (1975): 111–14. Mss. noted: Vat. syr. 155; Damas Patr. 2/8; Mardin Orth. 270; Mardin Orth. 267; Mardin Orth. 216; Mossoul Orth. F; Midyat Melki 8; Manchester Rylands syr. 45; Deir Za'faran 1/6; Diyarbakir Mar Ja'qob 1/13; Mardin Orth. 264; Sarfeh 5/3; Harvard Har. 47 (now Harvard Syr. 59—contains Elijah of Qartmin, note 11 above).

<sup>14</sup> Andre de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabboug: Sa vie, ses Écrits, sa Théologie* (Universitas Catholica Lovaniensis Dissertationes ad gradum magistri, Series 3 8; Louvain, 1963), 13–15.

<sup>15</sup> Eli de Qartamin, vv. 39–44.

<sup>16</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 15.

If there were one quiet period in Philoxenos' life, it was during his youth and education. He attended the School of Edessa while it was still dominated by Antiochene Christology, but Philoxenos was eventually attracted to the Cyrillian/miaphysite perspective. After becoming a head teacher<sup>17</sup> of the School of the Persians he was expelled by Calendio, the patriarch of Antioch, for promoting miaphysite Christology among the monasteries. The controversies concerning the acceptance of the decisions of Chalcedon were to some degree masks hiding the political struggle to keep the Christian empire unified, and in this struggle Philoxenos would prove to be a highly skilled participant.

Calendio was deposed by the Emperor Zeno and Peter the Fuller was reinstated as patriarch of Antioch in 481. The latter ordained Philoxenos as bishop of Mabbug (Hierapolis; currently, Membidj) on 18 Ab of the year 796 of the Seleucids (August 485).<sup>18</sup> Being fundamentally Aramean, little touched by Hellenization, Philoxenos was an excellent choice as pastor for a people of Syriac language and education.<sup>19</sup>

It was apparently at this point that our author adopted his familiar name. His ordination name was *'Aksenāyā*, "the stranger." *Philoxenos* is a Hellenization of this name (φιλόξενος), "lover of strangers," "the hospitable one." Later Syriac works are mixed in using either the original name or its Greek version. Harvard Syr. 59 (formerly Harris 47), however, adds the information that Philoxenos' name prior to ordination was Joseph.<sup>20</sup>

Aside from the furor in the post-Chalcedonian East, Philoxenos had just as serious a problem in his new see with its indigenous paganism. Situated one hundred miles northeast of Antioch, Mabbug was a complex city, being a center of the cult of Atargatis, the

<sup>17</sup> Harvard Syr. 38, folio 113b: lines 6–7. Syriac text edited by S. P. Brock in *Qolo Suryoyo* 110 (1996): 253–54. The related text Rylands Syr. 45 was translated by A. Mingana, "New Documents on Philoxenos of Hierapolis, and on the Philoxenian Version of the Bible," *Expositor* 8.13 (1920): 149–60.

<sup>18</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 40.

<sup>19</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Vööbus, "Biographie," 113–14.

Syrian goddess of fertility. Christians gained the majority in the city only in the fifth century. Numerous temples, especially the principal one in the center of the city, attracted many pilgrims and gave the city its Hellenistic name of Hierapolis or holy city.<sup>21</sup>

The insidious feature of the Atargatis cult for Philoxenos, however, was not the thriving business of the temples, but the artistic connections between the dove as the Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit and the dove as the cult's sacred bird. Philoxenos' remedy was a strong iconoclastic program, forbidding the use of eucharistic doves.<sup>22</sup>

Philoxenos' historical reputation, however, is built on his opposition to the theology and politics of Chalcedon and its heirs. His first target was "Nestorianism," with which he aligned Chalcedon as a dyophysite variation. Although he is often portrayed as a fanatical advocate of miaphysitism, Philoxenos was actually very tolerant with the diphsytes or Chalcedonians. Pleading indulgence for his opponents, he and Severus of Antioch agreed not to require reiteration of sacramental and liturgical acts by Chalcedonians. He even continued to tolerate the mention of a signer of Chalcedon in the liturgy.<sup>23</sup>

As for the other traditional heresies of the early Christian centuries, Philoxenos' opposition was largely intellectual since he had little actual experience of them. He knew about Gnosticism and Origenism through reading the Church Fathers and through Ephrem he became familiar with the basic systems of Valentinus, Bardaisan, Mani, and Marcion. He opposed the Messalian doctrines, although he was uncertain about whether the movement still existed.<sup>24</sup>

By the late-fifth century, monasticism had established itself as a powerful religious and political force.<sup>25</sup> For Philoxenos, the monks under his episcopal jurisdiction were his favorites, and correspondence with individual monks and communities comprised the

<sup>21</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 41–42.

<sup>22</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 89–90.

<sup>23</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène* 86–87. Stephen I of Mabbug.

<sup>24</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> See David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: OUP, 1995).

majority of his literary output. The largest and most famous monastery at Senun was the recipient of his last letter that urged the monks there to stand by their miaphysite faith.<sup>26</sup> It was to these monks at Senun, De Halleux speculates, that Philoxenos directed his *Discourses*.<sup>27</sup>

Although pastoral toward his monks, Philoxenos was uncompromising in his stand for the integrity of his Church. As a consequence, his power steadily rose over the years, but its decline was rapid and catastrophic. He actively opposed Zeno's *Henoticon*, a compromise document that both sides agreed did not accomplish its purpose.<sup>28</sup> However, it was his ten-year-long battle with Flavian, the successor to Peter the Fuller as patriarch of Antioch, that created enough enemies to eventually crush him. Philoxenos equated Flavian's support of the *Henoticon* with an acceptance of Nestorianism. Fortunately, during this period Philoxenos had a protector in the emperor Anastasius (491–518).

Eventually, Philoxenos would triumph over Flavian when the great miaphysite theologian Severus assumed the patriarchate of Antioch, although the triumph was only to last from 512 to 518. When Anastasius died in 518 and the Chalcedonian Justin replaced him, the buffer for miaphysitism was lost, quickly spelling the ruin of the miaphysite regime in the East.

The reconciliation with Rome took place on Easter Sunday, March 31, 519, with Severian bishops being forced to sign a *libellus* or go into exile. Anticipating the situation, Severus fled in September 518 to Alexandria. Philoxenos, however, resisted for a while, but was forced to give up his seat to a Chalcedonian in 519. He was abandoned even by his own clergy of Mabbug who anathematized him as a heretic and a Manichaean.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Philoxène de Mabboug. Lettres aux moines de Senoun*, ed. André de Halleux (CSCO 231–32/Syr 98–99; Louvain, 1963).

<sup>27</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 45.

<sup>28</sup> See Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, trans. John Bowden, vol. 2, part 1 (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 269–73.

<sup>29</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 93–94.

While the last four years of Philoxenos' life were certainly spent in exile, tradition appears confused about the exact location. Jacobite historians named Gangra of Paphlagonia, while the *Chronicle of Seert*, along with three of Philoxenos' letters (including Senun), pinpointed Philippopolis in Thrace.<sup>30</sup> De Halleux concludes that he spent time in both places, remaining at Philippopolis after spending the winter of 519–20 in Gangra.<sup>31</sup>

His last letter to the monks at Senun mentioned two things that have been associated with his death. First, Philoxenos described the uncomfortable conditions in his room above a kitchen from which smoke rose up to him, giving rise in turn to the legend of Philoxenos' martyrdom by asphyxiation.<sup>32</sup> Second, he complained of generally poor health that more likely indicates the eventual cause of death, especially when one considers his eighty-some years. His death took place on the tenth of Kanun, 835 of Alexander, or December 523.<sup>33</sup>

Not doomed to obscurity, Philoxenos was commemorated by an active cult centered at the monastery of Qartmin in Tūr 'Abdīn.<sup>34</sup> There is evidence of the cult's existence as early as the writing of the *Chronicle of 846*.<sup>35</sup> The cult reached its peak in the thirteenth century as Elijah listed three celebrations: 18 August (ordination); 10 December (death); 18 February (translation).<sup>36</sup>

### Writings

Divided primarily between doctrinal polemics and monastic spirituality, Philoxenos' literary output was extraordinary both in volume and variety. Homilies, letters, liturgies, biblical commentaries, and

<sup>30</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 95.

<sup>31</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 97.

<sup>32</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 95–96.

<sup>33</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 100–101.

<sup>34</sup> See Philoxenos' links with Qartmin: Andrew N. Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 113–16.

<sup>35</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 104–5.

<sup>36</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 102.

theological treatises were all part of his repertoire. The only exception appears to be poetry.

Philoxenos has been traditionally associated with a version of the New Testament known to have been compiled by a chorepiscopus, Polycarp, working under Philoxenos' direction at Mabbug in 507–8. Polycarp revised the *Peshitta* in accordance with Greek manuscripts, seeking to give a more theologically correct rendering of the Greek than the *Peshitta* had accomplished.<sup>37</sup> Inconsistent in the quotation of various biblical texts in his own writings, Philoxenos gives us few clues concerning the particular biblical version he used.<sup>38</sup>

As is the case with many spiritual directors of that age, Philoxenos compiled a series of biblical commentaries, exegeting only the significant passages.<sup>39</sup> In addition, he wrote several professions of faith, developing the miaphysite perspective on trinitarian and christological issues and concluding with a list of anathemas.<sup>40</sup> In a pastoral role, he composed funeral sermons, prayers, baptismal and eucharistic liturgies.<sup>41</sup>

The most effective and prolific genre utilized by Philoxenos was the letter. De Halleux lists nineteen letters on dogmatic issues and eight on spiritual and moral issues.<sup>42</sup> One of the longest and most significant letters on the spiritual life is the *Letter to Patricius of Edessa*.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 65–68.

<sup>38</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 118–28. See S. P. Brock, “The Resolution of the Philoxenian/Harclean Problem,” in *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis. Essays in Honour of Bruce M. Metzger*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 325–43.

<sup>39</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 128–62.

<sup>40</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 168–87.

<sup>41</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 290–308.

<sup>42</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 187–223, 253–74.

<sup>43</sup> *Lettre à Patricius d'Édesse de Philoxène de Mabboug*, ed. René Lavenant, *Patrologia Orientalis* 30.5 (1963).

Nevertheless, “probably the most read and recopied work”<sup>44</sup> of Philoxenos was his collection of thirteen *mēmṛē* or *Discourses* on the ascetical life.

### *Scholarship on Philoxenos and the Discourses*

Following the magisterial dissertation of André de Halleux in 1963, virtually all scholarship concerning Philoxenos has had to commence from De Halleux’s work.<sup>45</sup> Not only did this volume catalogue nearly everything Philoxenian, but the Belgian scholar was producing as well critical editions and translations of a number of unedited treatises and letters by Philoxenos.<sup>46</sup> As his title indicates, De Halleux constructs a life of Philoxenos from a number of disparate sources, followed by a descriptive catalogue of any text in any language associated with the author, and concluding with a synthetic survey of his Christology and soteriology, in which it is not surprising that the *Discourses* provide a substantial portion of the sources. De Halleux epitomizes Philoxenos’ understanding of the Christian pilgrimage in a “double becoming”—God becomes human in order that the human being becomes God—the first becoming is the incarnation or Christology and the second is divinization or soteriology.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 283.

<sup>45</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*.

<sup>46</sup> De Halleux, André, “Nouveaux textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabbog. I: Lettre aux moines de Palestine; Lettre liminaire au synodicon d’Éphèse,” *Le Muséon* 75.1–2 (1962): 31–62; “Nouveaux textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabbog. II: Lettre aux moines orthodoxes d’Orient,” *Le Muséon* 76.1–2 (1963): 5–26; Éli de Qartamin. *Memra sur S. Mar Philoxène de Mabbog*. CSCO 233–34, Syri. 100–101 Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1963); Philoxène de Mabbog. *Lettre aux moines de Senoun*. CSCO 231–32, Syr. 98–99 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1963); Philoxène de Mabbog. *Commentaire du prologue johannique (Ms. Br. Mus. Add. 14, 534)*. CSCO 380–81, Syr. 165–66. (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1977); “La deuxième Lettre de Philoxène aux Monastères du Beit Gaugal,” *Le Muséon* 96.1–2 (1983): 5–79.

<sup>47</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 317, 397–98.

The Oxford dissertation of Roberta C. Chesnut (Bondi), *Three Monophysite Christologies*,<sup>48</sup> presented a rich investigation of the doctrines that made Philoxenos distinctive. Her comparative study, along with the Christologies of Severus of Antioch and Jacob of Serug, centers primarily, though not totally, on the *Discourses* or the *Thirteen Homilies* as the source of Philoxenos' miaphysite Christology. This emphasis goes against the grain of several other scholars who see no evidence of miaphysite theology in the *Discourses*. Chesnut begins with the "double being" of Christ—God by nature, human by a miracle—then moves to the "two births," the birth of the Word from the Father and the birth of the humanity from Mary.<sup>49</sup> Chesnut examines closely Philoxenos' provocative emphasis on the *mixture* of natures and concludes that while he knew that the subtleties would not always be understood, he admitted he was drawing on the vocabulary and tradition of the Syriac biblical exegete Ephrem (d. 373).<sup>50</sup> Chesnut's final section analyzes the character of divine knowledge that according to Philoxenos is perceived by means of faith, a faculty outside of or beyond the natural knowledge of the world. At a deeper level, the content of this knowledge is acquired through *theoria*, "spiritual contemplation," though for all practical purposes not as such in the *Discourses*.<sup>51</sup>

Roberta Chesnut Bondi did not write another major work on Philoxenos, but the bishop did not let her go easily. Mentioning Philoxenos in several other books and essays intended for a more general theological readership, Bondi relates how he was that particular author she encountered in the Bodleian Library who gently ignited in her a renewed spiritual pilgrimage.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Roberta C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenos of Mabbug, and Jacob of Sarug* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: OUP, 1976), 57–112.

<sup>49</sup> Chesnut, 57–65.

<sup>50</sup> Chesnut, 65–70.

<sup>51</sup> Chesnut, 102–11.

<sup>52</sup> Roberta Chesnut Bondi, *To Love as God Loves* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), 7; *Memories of God: A Reflection on a Theological Life* (Nashville,



A unique study of Philoxenos was undertaken by Guy Lardreau in a small monograph, *Discours philosophique et discours spirituel: Autour de la philosophie spirituelle de Philoxène de Mabboug*.<sup>53</sup> While neither a theologian nor a student of Syriac Christianity, Lardreau recognized that philosophy and theology are frequently discussing the same thing in a particular text. His experimental study approaches the same text first with a philosophical methodology and then from the perspective of spiritual theology, attempting to discover “le point de fracture” between the two approaches. Primarily focusing on the *Discourses* of Philoxenos, Lardreau draws in a number of other Philoxenian texts in translation, as well as academic studies. His experiment aside, Lardreau offers a number of incisive comments on aspects of the *Discourses* which Lavenant lifts out for numerous footnotes to his revised translation of the *Homélies*.<sup>54</sup> Lardreau’s analysis notes that the dominant theme of Philoxenos’ corpus is that of return and restoration to the original condition of humanity, epitomized by baptism, and that of perfection seen from the vantage of Eden.<sup>55</sup>

Volker Menze’s monograph *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*<sup>56</sup> begins at the point Philoxenos leaves the stage, focusing on the three decades following Justin I’s ascendancy to the emperor’s throne and the deposition of Philoxenos and other anti-Chalcedonian bishops and clergy in 519. Menze’s study is historical. It chronicles the rise of the Syrian Orthodox Church and its leadership, rather than examining the theological debates during

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TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 72, 76, 133; “Monastic Mentors (Luke 20:27-35),” *The Christian Century*, November 2, 2004, 16.

<sup>53</sup> Guy Lardreau, *Discours philosophique et discours spirituel: Autour de la philosophie spirituelle de Philoxène de Mabboug* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985).

<sup>54</sup> Philoxène de Mabboug, *Homélies*, trans. Eugène Lemoine SCh 44 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1956); new and revised edition, SCh 44bis (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2007)—footnotes to text on the following pages of SCh 44bis: 81, 174, 179, 261, 274, 311, 328, 331, 333, 342, 367, 389, 403, 453, 495, 500, 510, 513.

<sup>55</sup> Lardreau, *Discours philosophique*, 79–134.

<sup>56</sup> Volker L. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

this period. Nevertheless, Menze presents a thorough introduction to the political and ecclesiastical controversies, including Philoxenos' role in the temporary dominance of the anti-Chalcedonian faction.

Inevitably, the size and scope of Philoxenos' corpus enticed new students to investigate old assumptions. The 2007 Princeton dissertation of David A. Michelson has challenged and corrected some of these assumptions and moved the study of Philoxenos in fresh new directions.<sup>57</sup> Michelson demonstrates how the christological concerns dominating many of Philoxenos' letters are found as well in the *Discourses*, contrary to the traditional perception that the bishop's most popular work is free of the doctrinal issues and debates of that turbulent period. Essentially, Philoxenos rejects the validity of theological speculation, subtly libeling the content and method of Greek Chalcedonian thought, and insists on the epistemological primacy of faith as a kind of sixth sense. Michelson fills out the increasing attention given to the relationship of Philoxenos to the concepts and writings of Evagrius Ponticus.<sup>58</sup>

A historically significant figure like Philoxenos demands more scholarly attention. The first ever symposium on Philoxenos was organized by David Michelson in May 2008 at the Center of Theological Inquiry (CTI), Princeton, New Jersey, under the auspices of CTI and the Center for the Study of Religion, Princeton University. The papers presented provided the impetus for a double issue of *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* in 2010.<sup>59</sup> Philoxenos' wide range of interests is reflected in the articles. Michelson initiated both the conference and the *Hugoye* volume with a thorough overview of what has been discovered about Philoxenos in the years since De

<sup>57</sup> David A. Michelson, *Practice Leads to Theory: Orthodoxy and the Spiritual Struggle in the World of Philoxenos of Mabbug (470–523)* (PhD dissertation; Princeton University, 2007).

<sup>58</sup> Michelson, 50–72. See the section below on the Evagrius influence on Philoxenos.

<sup>59</sup> *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 13.1–2 (2010). Special Issue on Philoxenos of Mabbug, David A. Michelson and Robert A. Kitchen, guest editors. <http://www.bethmardutho.org/index.php/hugoye/volume-index/83.html>.

Halleux.<sup>60</sup> Daniel King examines closely early translations of Cyril of Alexandria from Greek into Syriac and notes how the Philoxenian version (507) of the New Testament appears to follow the former's lead in the development of the mirror-image strategy of translation—the Syriac translator attempts to conform precisely to the Greek in morphology and grammatical structure.<sup>61</sup> There is no extant text of the Philoxenian version, except perhaps in the writings of Philoxenos. James E. Walters aligns a number of Philoxenos' biblical citations with the *Peshitta* and reputed Harklean citations to compare theological and philological values.<sup>62</sup>

Fr. Roger-Youssef Akhrass treats Philoxenos' affirmative understanding of Mary as *Theotokos* as a window into the bishop's Christology, moving from the virginal conception and birth to the eternal generation of the Son in the incarnation.<sup>63</sup> The most prolific of Philoxenos' literary genres is the letter, written over a period of forty years. Dana Iuliana Viezure analyzes and groups these letters into four periods, the emphasis shifting from scriptural reasoning and paradox to a strident targeting of the personal background of the heretics rather than the heresies, then finally to a more gracious attitude toward opponents developed through contact with the issues and strategies of Greek miaphysite thought.<sup>64</sup> Adam C. McCollum deals with a recurrent problem in late antique texts, here the false attribution of Philoxenos to a text clearly not written by him.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup> David A. Michelson, "Introduction to Hugoye 13: A Double Issue on Philoxenos of Mabbug," *Hugoye* 13.1 (2010): 3–8.

<sup>61</sup> Daniel King, "New Evidence on the Philoxenian Version of the New Testament and Nicene Creed," *Hugoye* 13 (2010): 9–30.

<sup>62</sup> J. Edward Walters, "The Philoxenian Gospels as Reconstructed from the Writings of Philoxenos of Mabbug," *Hugoye* 13 (2010): 177–249.

<sup>63</sup> Roger-Youssef Akhrass, "La Vierge Mère de Dieu dans la pensée de Philoxène de Mabboug," *Hugoye* 13 (2010): 31–48.

<sup>64</sup> Dana Iuliana Viezure, "Argumentative Strategies on Philoxenos of Mabbug's Correspondence: From the Syriac Model to the Greek Model," *Hugoye* 13 (2010): 149–75.

<sup>65</sup> Adam C. McCollum, "An Arabic Scholion to Genesis 9:18-21 (Noah's Drunkenness) Attributed to Philoxenos of Mabbug," *Hugoye* 13 (2010): 125–48.

An Arabic scholion on the drunkenness of Noah (Genesis 9:18-21) identified as that of Philoxenos is shown by McCollum probably to be from Ephrem as it matches up with several Ephremic hymns and commentaries on this text.

The *Discourses* receive their due in a double dose. For my part, I demonstrate how the tenth *mēmṛā* on gluttony or “the lust of the belly” functions as the critical dividing line for the ascetical development of the upright and perfect in the monastic community. Once one has tamed the lust of the belly, all the other thoughts and temptations are readily vanquished.<sup>66</sup> I also submitted a review article of the revised translation and introduction of the *Discourses* in the French patristic series *Sources Chrétiennes*.<sup>67</sup>

A different perspective to be treated more fully below is the transcription by David Odorisio of a lecture by Thomas Merton to monk novices in 1965 on Philoxenos’ spirituality.<sup>68</sup> A fitting conclusion to the volume is a bibliographic clavis to the works of Philoxenos by David Michelson, the most extensive bibliography on this author.<sup>69</sup>

### **The *Discourses*: The Ascetical Homilies**

The starting point for all modern studies of the *Discourses* has been Budge’s two-volume edition of the Syriac text with an English

<sup>66</sup> Robert A. Kitchen, “The Lust of the Belly Is the Beginning of All Sin. Practical Theology of Asceticism in the Discourses of Philoxenos of Mabbug,” *Hugoye* 13 (2010): 49–63.

<sup>67</sup> Robert A. Kitchen, “Philoxène de Mabboug. Homélie. Introduction, traduction et notes par Eugène Lemoine. Nouvelle édition revue par René Lavenant, S.J. *Sources Chrétiennes* 44bis (Paris: les Éditions du Cerf, 2007),” *Hugoye* 13 (2010): 65–73.

<sup>68</sup> David Odorisio, “Thomas Merton’s Novitiate Conferences on Philoxenos of Mabbug (April–June 1965): Philoxenos on the Foundations of the Spiritual Life and the Recovery of Simplicity,” *Hugoye* 13 (2010): 251–71.

<sup>69</sup> David A. Michelson, “A Bibliographic Clavis to the Works of Philoxenos of Mabbug,” *Hugoye* 13 (2010): 273–338.

translation and introduction.<sup>70</sup> Using Budge's Syriac text as its base, the French patristic sources series *Sources Chrétiennes* has produced French translations, initially by Eugène Lemoine and a revision by René Lavenant.<sup>71</sup> This new English translation is also based on Budge's Syriac text.

Budge consulted nineteen manuscripts in the Nitrian collection of Syriac manuscripts in the British Library to construct his critical edition. Nine of the manuscripts have little value since they contain only short passages, but the other ten provide much useful material, dating from the sixth to eleventh centuries. Eight were then chosen to form the critical edition. The seventh- or ninth-century Ms. A (BL Add. 14598), containing all thirteen discourses or *mēm̄rē*, was selected as the base text by Budge, while the sixth-century Ms. B (BL Add. 14595) operated as a close guide for the last six *mēm̄rē*. Budge also appealed to the older authority of the sixth-century Ms. C (BL Add. 12163) as well as the ninth-century Ms. D (BL Add. 17153). The other four manuscripts from which variant readings were taken are: sixth- or seventh-century Ms. E (BL Add. 14596); tenth- or eleventh-century Ms. F (BL Add. 14525); ninth-century Ms. G (BL Add. 14601); dated 802 Ms. H (BL Add. 14621).<sup>72</sup> The most significant manuscript that Budge did not utilize is the twelfth-century Bibliothèque Nationale de France Syrus 201: ff. 1–161. This manuscript also includes the primary manuscript of the *Book of Steps/Liber Graduum* (ff. 174–280).

The French translation of the *Discourses* by Lemoine in *Sources Chrétiennes* was the first Syriac text to appear in the new series, and it was this translation that Thomas Merton would pick up and devour. Lemoine believes that the *Discourses* were written to be read in the monastery and were edited specifically for this purpose.<sup>73</sup> Seeing no traces of miaphysitism in the *Discourses*,<sup>74</sup> Lemoine confirmed the

<sup>70</sup> *The Discourses of Philoxenos, Bishop of Mabbôgh*, ed. E. A. W. Budge, 2 vols. (London, 1894).

<sup>71</sup> See n. 54; see n. 67, Kitchen, "Philoxène de Mabboug. Homélie."

<sup>72</sup> Budge, *Discourses*, 2:lxvi–lxxiii.

<sup>73</sup> SCh 44bis:12–13.

<sup>74</sup> SCh 44bis:15.

earlier observations of Irénée Hausherr that the christological ideas of the miaphysites had no influence on their ascetical and mystical teachings.<sup>75</sup> In a later article Lemoine characterized Philoxenos' literary style as "often cadenced, rhythmic, clear and limpid,"<sup>76</sup> excelling in symmetrical and well-balanced comparatives and parallelisms.

### *Organization and Strategies of the Discourses*

The thirteen *Discourses* begin with an introductory *mēmṛā*, and then proceed with six pairs of *mēmṛē*, each pair treating a single topic. The pairs are: Faith (2 and 3); Simplicity (4 and 5); Fear of God (6 and 7); Renunciation of the World (8 and 9); Gluttony (10 and 11); and Fornication (12 and 13).

While maintaining that the *Discourses* are a unified work, Budge noted that "they were frequently divided into two volumes; the first volume contained the first nine, and the second volume the last four of the *Discourses*."<sup>77</sup> Mss. C and D are of the "first volume," while B and E belong to this "second volume."<sup>78</sup>

Budge speculates that Philoxenos intended the *Discourses* to be a supplement or sequel to the twenty-two *Demonstrations* of Aphrahat.<sup>79</sup> To underline the literary connection Budge included a translation of Aphrahat's first Demonstration, also titled "On Faith," in the edition of the *Discourses*.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Irénée Hausherr, "Contemplation et Sainteté: Une remarquable mise au point par Philoxène de Mabboug," *Révue d'ascétique et de mystique* 14 (1933): 15.

<sup>76</sup> Eugène Lemoine, "Physionomie d'un moine Syrien: Philoxène de Mabboug," *L'Orient Syrien* 3 (1958): 101.

<sup>77</sup> Budge, *Discourses*, 2:lxixiii.

<sup>78</sup> Budge, *Discourses*, 2:xciv–xcv. A table of the manuscripts and the distribution of the *mēmṛē* in each manuscript.

<sup>79</sup> Budge, *Discourses*, 2:lxixiii–lxxiv. See for the Syriac text with Latin translation, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes*, ed. J(ean) Parisot, PS 1 & 2 (Paris, 1894, 1907); *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage*, trans. Adam Lehto (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010).

<sup>80</sup> Budge, *Discourses*, 2:clxxv–clxxxvii.

Lemoine attempted to discern a pattern in Philoxenos' organization of the *Discourses* and developed a theory that stimulated a great deal of debate.<sup>81</sup> He observed that in each pair of *mēm̄rē* written on the same topic the ideas of the first were relatively simple, while the ideas of the second were more sophisticated. Lemoine concluded that Philoxenos combined in his *Discourses* two series of *mēm̄rē* written at different times for different purposes. Initially, Philoxenos dealt with each topic in a *mēm̄rā*, but after a certain interval of time he reworked his ideas into a more theologically mature second homily. During this interval Lemoine perceived Philoxenos' thought becoming more mystical.

Filling out the skeleton of his theory, Lemoine showed that usually the first member of each pair was written in a moralistic tone "with the memory of what is said in the Holy Books"; the second member was written in a mystical tone "with the experience of what is said in the Holy Books."<sup>82</sup>

The further Lemoine tried to demonstrate his theory the more it began to unravel. On closer analysis, Lemoine placed two *mēm̄rē*, the fourth on simplicity and the sixth on the fear of God, out of their expected sequence. Although these two *mēm̄rē* are the first ones to deal with their respective topics, Lemoine assigned them to the second mystical series because they emphasize mystical ideas and experience. Moreover, Lemoine wrote, Philoxenos himself indicated the original order of the *mēm̄rē* in the fifth Discourse: "We spoke in our preceding discourse [On Faith] of simplicity and innocence; it is of that useful subject that I wish to speak again now" (m.5.1; 120:13–16). The fifth Discourse, therefore, should have been in the fourth position.<sup>83</sup>

After this analysis, Lemoine's division of the *Discourses* is as follows: moralistic discourses: 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12; mystical discourses: 3, 4, 6, 9, 11, 13.

<sup>81</sup> SCh 44bis:20–24.

<sup>82</sup> SCh 44bis:163.

<sup>83</sup> SCh 44bis:90–91.

The major problem with Lemoine's theory is that his classification of moralistic and mystical is too subjective, for depending on the definition of these concepts, one could contest the classification either way of any of the *Discourses*.

This theory was not allowed to rest long. Hausherr quickly responded, highly praising Lemoine's translation but questioning his two-series theory.<sup>84</sup> In particular, Hausherr was puzzled by Lemoine's juggling of the order of the second and third pairs. Observing that Lemoine's analysis relied on the appearance of the mystical conception of experience, Hausherr rejected this concept as a reliable criterion and concluded that neither an internal nor external analysis justifies such a transposition of *mēm̄rē*. The *Discourses* of Philoxenos, as we have them now, are in the exact order that Philoxenos intended from the first edition.

Nevertheless, Hausherr believed that Philoxenos had developed a spiritual dichotomy in the *Discourses*. In each pair there appears to be a division into two stages or states of life that are different, but in continuity with each other.<sup>85</sup> By implication, these two stages of life are those of the upright (*kēnē*) and the perfect (*gmīrē*).

Jean Gribomont entered the discussion gingerly, responding both to Lemoine's work as well as to Hausherr's reaction. After reviewing the arguments of both scholars, Gribomont tacitly accepted Hausherr's opinion.<sup>86</sup> T. Jansma also published a thorough review article in which he detailed inaccurate translations of terms,<sup>87</sup> which Lavenant would later credit as one of his sources of amendment to Lemoine's translation.<sup>88</sup>

De Halleux also offered a schema of the *Discourses*, observing that the traditional collection of thirteen *mēm̄rē* is probably an incom-

<sup>84</sup> Irénée Hausherr, "Spiritualité Syrienne: Philoxène de Mabboug," OC 23 (1957): 171–85.

<sup>85</sup> Hausher, "Spiritualité Syrienne," 176.

<sup>86</sup> J. Gribomont, "Les Homélie Ascétiques de Philoxène de Mabboug et l'écho du Messalianisme," *OrSyr* 2 (1957): 419–32.

<sup>87</sup> T. Jansma, "[Review of] E. Lemoine, *Philoxène de Mabboug. Homélie*," VC 12 (1958): 233–37.

<sup>88</sup> R. Lavenant, *Homélie* (2007), 7.



plete or unfinished work. In the introductory *mēmnrā* De Halleux sees Philoxenos proposing a three-part outline: the second through seventh *mēmnrē* deal with the beginning of the spiritual life or the “degree of the body”; the eighth through thirteenth *mēmnrē* show the progress of the individual in the struggle against the passions or the “degree of the soul”; while the third part was to examine the “degree of the spirit.” A series of ninth- to eleventh-century manuscripts reproduce ascetical florilegia that include extracts of the ninth and thirteenth *mēmnrē* along with fragments on humility, penitence, and prayer.<sup>89</sup> These fragments, de Halleux suggests, are from the last *mēmnrē* of the third part, the “degree of the spirit.”<sup>90</sup>

De Halleux’s analysis appears a more comfortable fit to the themes of the existing *mēmnrē*. The first three pairs on faith, simplicity, and the fear of God project the sense of a primer in the essentials of the spiritual life. There is a change in tone entering *mēmnrā* 8, in which is treated the more concrete issue of worldly renunciation for the monk who has only recently gone out from the world. The passions of the lust of the belly and of the lust of fornication are, as Philoxenos identifies, the two fundamental passions against which one must initially struggle once inside the monastery walls.

Yet despite his rambling and length of argument stretching to 625 pages in the critical text, Philoxenos seems far from finished. Noticeably absent are discussions of some of the other traditional disciplines of the way of life of perfection: humility, prayer, solitude. De Halleux’s hunch from the later florilegia fits well into this perception.

However, there is another possible key to Philoxenos’ schema, especially in his second section, “the degree of the soul.” It has been recognized that Philoxenos knew of and read Evagrius Ponticus.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> F. Graffin, “Le florilège patristique de Philoxène de Mabbog,” I. Ortiz de Urbina, ed., *Symposium Syriacum*, 1972 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1974), OCA 197 (1974): 267–90.

<sup>90</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 285–86.

<sup>91</sup> See Paul Harb, “L’attitude de Philoxène de Mabboug à l’égard de la spiritualité ‘savante’ d’Évagre le Pontique,” *Mémorial Mgr. Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis (1898–1968)*, ed. F. Graffin (Louvain: Imprimerie orientaliste, 1969),

One of Evagrius' more enduring contributions has been his identifications of the eight vices or "principal thoughts."<sup>92</sup> The first two are gluttony or the lust of the belly and the lust of fornication—the second and third pairs following the renunciation of the world in Philoxenos' so-called second section. It could be construed that Philoxenos intended to complete the series of principal thoughts: love of money, sadness, anger, listlessness, vainglory, and pride. Then he would move on to treat the topics of "the degree of the spirit" of which we have already been afforded a glimpse. However, there are no known selections of Philoxenos' writing lurking in florilegia and other ascetical collections that deal with the other "thoughts."<sup>93</sup>

In the absence of further evidence it is more prudent to agree with the conclusions of Hausherr and Gribomont that the *Discourses* we have received are the intended complete *Discourses*. Attractive and convincing as de Halleux's schema may be, we do not have any manuscripts that exhibit in a recognizable form that they belong to the third part.

The absence of historical references makes the date of the *Discourses* difficult to ascertain. Budge believed they were written between 485 and 508, and complete copies of the *Discourses* were found in Egyptian monasteries in the early sixth century, identifying Philoxenos as the bishop of Mabbug. Budge reasoned, therefore, that 485 must be the earliest date for that is the year of Philoxenos'

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135–36. Also, John W. Watt, "Philoxenos and the Old Syriac Version of Evagrius' Centuries," *OrChr* 64 (1980): 65–81.

<sup>92</sup>Jeremy Driscoll, *The 'Ad Monachos' of Evagrius Ponticus: Its Structure and a Select Commentary Studia Anselmiana* 104 (Rome: Benedictina Edizioni Abbazia S. Paolo, 1991), 12–17.

<sup>93</sup>Grigory Kessel has undertaken a research project funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), "Syriac monastic anthologies as a source for the history of Syriac Christianity: Reception and transmission of Syriac and Greek monastic literature." Kessel reports in a preliminary fashion that there are numerous excerpts from the *Discourses* in these monastic anthologies which have not yet been analyzed.

consecration.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, Budge assumes that 508, the year of the appearance of the Philoxenian Bible, had to be the latest date because Budge had previously determined that all biblical quotations in the *Discourses* were taken from the *Peshitta*.<sup>95</sup> This assumes too much about Philoxenos' use of Scripture and presumes that Polycarp's version was given immediate canonical status.

The other scholars do not attempt such elaborate reasoning. Lemoine believes the *Discourses* were written before his episcopate, that is, before 485;<sup>96</sup> Gribomont thinks they were written about 485;<sup>97</sup> De Halleux concludes that the *Discourses* were probably written sometime during his episcopate for the monks under his jurisdiction.<sup>98</sup> The latter, general as it may be, makes the most sense for it takes into account most fully Philoxenos' intended audience.

#### *Summary of the Discourses*<sup>99</sup>

*First mēmṛā: Introduction (3–25).* Philoxenos urges first laying the foundation of wisdom with the appropriate building blocks in the correct order. One needs to be able to recognize the various lusts and passions with which one does battle and against which spiritual masters guide us, prescribing the right medicines or antidotes against these passions. A long list of spiritual antidotes to counter various passions of sin is presented. Philoxenos promises to show the reader/listener how to begin and then advance up through all the grades of the Christian life until one reaches Perfection.

*Second mēmṛā: On Faith (26–51).* The first building block is that of faith (ܚܝܡܢܘܬܐ- *haymānūtā*) to which Philoxenos will devote two *mēmṛē*. Everyone should have the kind of faith that accepts God,

<sup>94</sup> Budge, *Discourses*, 2:lxiii.

<sup>95</sup> Budge, *Discourses*, 2:ix.

<sup>96</sup> SCh 44bis:14.

<sup>97</sup> Gribomont, 420–21.

<sup>98</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 288.

<sup>99</sup> The numbers in parentheses following the title of the *Discourse/Mēmṛā* are the page numbers in Budge's Syriac text. Other references will indicate a citation as (*mēmṛā*. section; page: line numbers).

but neither questions nor challenges him. However, the eye of faith, which one possesses by God's grace, is able to see deeply into the secret things of God. All should approach God with the mind of a child, and so through our second birth, which is baptism, we are taught by God as infants. Faith is the tongue and command of God the Creator. Sometimes faith does not even pray first but gives an authoritative command like God, as was the case with Elijah, Jesus, and others. Jesus made faith the foundation of the Church and we should make faith the beginning of our life in God, for without faith all other spiritual activities are ineffectual.

*Third mēmṛā: On Faith (52–73).* Faith is the activity of God in the new creation just as wisdom was utilized in the beginning. Faith is required for the efficacy of baptism and communion. Knowledge is external to created things, while faith, unobservable by the physical senses, is within the thing itself. Without faith the eyes see the things of the Church as common and poor, while the things of the world are perceived as powerful and rich. If one seeks in faith he believes in God; but if he desires in faith he believes in idols. Faith alone should be the cause of one's going forth from the world into the monastery.

*Fourth mēmṛā: On Simplicity (74–119).* The second pair of *mēmṛē* is on the theme of simplicity (ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ - *pšīṭūtā*) which Philoxenos defines as the "singleness of one thought." Abraham responded to the call of God with faith and simplicity, as did the apostles, while Adam lived in simplicity until the Enemy made him use cunning and question God's command to him. God is "Simple," for in God there are no structures or parts. The desert is perceived as the source of simplicity: the primary reason for Israel's wandering in the wilderness was to teach them simplicity. If you were cunning (ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ - *hēr'ūtā*) you would not have followed God who called you to the monastery and eventually you would have despised instruction.

*Fifth mēmṛā: On Simplicity (120–58).* Simplicity is fitting for the life of the solitary and ascetic, those who have forsaken the world and become strangers to it, for in the monastery there is no competition, property, or power in which cunning can become involved. In this angelic way of life, cunning is considered a disease since it

encourages wickedness to act out its deeds. A simple person should be called in a positive sense “a child.” Jesus chose fishermen who were innocent, but since some sought positions of honor he had to teach them more about childlikeness. Just as a king or person of worldly honor denies knowing about lowly crafts, we should not know about the cunning of the world in our simplicity. Those who are simple are more admired and loved by others than the cunning ones. Simplicity is the beginning of the path of Christ, but purity of spirit is its end. The apostles, therefore, began as simple ones, but after receiving the Holy Spirit became pure human beings.

*Sixth mēmṛā: On the Fear of God (159–90).* The third pair of *mēmṛē* is on the fear of God (ܕܗܠܐܬ ܐܠܗܐ - *dehlat 'alāhā*). Meditation on God increases the fear of God in us, by which Philoxenos means an ecstatic feeling in the soul that makes the whole body “tremble.” Essential for this fear is the remembrance of God, for if one sins and does not remember or think of God’s punishment and disappointment, one’s soul is dead. If one is conscious of his sins the fear of God will increase continually within himself. The fear of God is born from faith but is also the preserver of faith. Adam and later Cain cast away their fear and as a consequence lost their faith. The commandments are kept by three things: by fear (servants), by reward (hirelings), by love (spiritual beings and friends).

*Seventh mēmṛā: On the Fear of God (191–221).* Philoxenos returns to the methodological admonition to climb Jacob’s ladder in proper order, as did the upright of old. We should fear God because we have sinned or so that we may not sin. The creation naturally fears God, but loves God by the grace which comes down in search of creation. The country of fear is mortal life, while the country of love is the other world of immortal life. As God’s graciousness is revealed to us, we are urged to become like the Father. The ancient revelations of God belonged to fear showing us that he is our God, while the latter revelation is of friendship and love showing us that he is our Father. God lifted up humanity from the fear of death that belongs to time and laid on us the fear of death for eternity.

*Eighth mēmṛā: On Renunciation (222–56).* The world is an obstacle to perfection and so commandments were set apart for those in the

world (uprightness) and for those above the world (perfection). Wealth, in particular, is an obstacle to meditation on God. Jesus commanded the wealthy to be masters, not slaves, of their wealth, but the perfect are not to be masters even of inanimate objects. The way to perfection is distinguished through renunciation of the world and its possessions in imitation of Jesus the stranger. The upright are also above the law, not doing evil in order not to provoke God to anger. Before baptism Jesus was obedient to his parents and kept the law; after baptism he taught and lived a rule of life more perfect than this and refused to acknowledge his parents. The righteousness of the law is defined as roughly equal to uprightness in this world.

*Ninth mēmṛā: On Renunciation (257–352).* The second *mēmṛā* on renunciation is the longest of the *Discourses* and is found in some manuscripts as an epitome and summation of the *Discourses*. A case in point is the recent publication of a lost text ascribed to Gregory of Nyssa, which turned out to be a collection of excerpts from this Ninth Discourse of Philoxenos.<sup>100</sup>

Jesus' going out into the wilderness is considered the primary example of renunciation for those who wish to be perfect. The metaphor presented is of one leaving the natural womb of this world, renouncing all possessions, and going naked into the Christian life. The natural child proceeds out of nonexistence into existence; the child of the Spirit is born into becoming a son of God. An infant cannot be an adult in the womb and so a person cannot be perfect in the world. As the infant casts off the umbilical cord, so the person born from the world must cast off his own passions and physical appetites.

One becomes truly rich by not needing anything, so Philoxenos urges monks to depart from the world possessing nothing. The monk will have two baptisms: one of water and one of one's own free will. On leaving the world the monk has temptations and memories of past transgressions, as well as concerns regarding

<sup>100</sup> Martien F. G. Parmentier, "Pseudo-Gregory of Nyssa's Homily on Poverty," *Aram* 5 (1993): 401–26.

the future hardships of asceticism. The monk must divide his austerities as Moses divided the sea, leaving Satan and the demons drowned in the depth of one's tribulations. One now enters a new country with one's enemies vanquished behind him, a new spiritual world of great joy and benefit.

Philoxenos examines the life of John the Baptist as the model of the solitary and ascetic who received the natural innocence (ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ - *šapyūtā*) which Adam possessed before he sinned. Monks are to follow his example and not look back on the separation from family life, looking straight ahead to the new world. A person of God is born three times: from womb into creation; from bondage into freedom (that is, from an ordinary human being into becoming a son of God), accomplished through grace by baptism; and from physical into spiritual life, accomplished through the absolute renunciation of everything. Those who renounce the world are higher than the upright and are dead to the world, while the upright are still alive in the world.

*Tenth mēmrā: On the Lust of the Belly (353–419).* The lust of the belly is the filthiest passion that inhibits rational thought and is the door for all evil, enslaving the soul as well as the body. It inhibits compassion and as the opposite of fasting is the destroyer of prayer and the source of sloth.

The glutton considers doctrine and Scripture idle and superfluous, blaspheming those who practice faith, and calls virtues vices. Yet he unduly criticizes anyone who breaks a fast for necessity. Philoxenos cautions about the connivance of the glutton who tries to counsel an ascetic to be moderate and hears only those Scriptures that support his eating. Philoxenos exhorts the disciples not to be lax in their strenuous asceticism and to beware of falling into the trap of the lust of the belly that will lead to all sorts of vices. Gluttony is the sin of Adam's fall in Eden.

*Eleventh mēmrā: On Abstinence (420–93).*<sup>101</sup> One is not completely worthy of the life of Christ until he extinguishes all appetite for

<sup>101</sup> A palimpsest fragment of the eleventh *mēmrā* has recently been discovered in a Melkite manuscript (British Library Oriental 8607), containing

worldly foods. Abstinence gives us birth into the blessing of Christ, which is the beginning of our becoming like the angels.

The lust of the belly contends that food and hunger were given to you by the Creator. Natural hunger needs the power food supplies but should not foster a lust for food. You are god over your own lusts, willing whether they exist or not. If you defeat the first lust (gluttony) you will increase your strength against other lusts. But if you only conquer the rare and expensive foods, you are not completely victorious; defeat common plain foods as well. If possible eat like a dead man; if you eat like one alive, do not taste your food with pleasure which would mean that lust is still alive. Also overcome lust for common garden vegetables, for lust knows it cannot tempt monks with fancy foods. Food itself is not reprehensible, only the lust that eats it. Philoxenos encourages monks to abstain from all kinds of food and to eat without the sensation of taste, seeing the table as a place of struggle rather than pleasure. The apostles did not receive the Holy Spirit until they had led a life of abstinence after leading a life of freedom in Christ.

*Twelfth mēmrā: On Fornication (494–550).* Philoxenos sees the corrupt conversations and stories associated with lustful meals fueling the fire of lust. This lust is placed by God into our bodies for the continuation of the race and in marriage is good, but not for disciples. Defeating this lust is the source of victory and spiritual crowns for the disciples.

An analogy is depicted of a person lured into loving an ugly blind woman, but later he sees the king's beautiful daughter, which is the beauty of Christ. Jesus prohibited disciples from intercourse since God did not place us in the world to perpetuate it, but as a place for spiritual contest in order to gain the crown of victory. The lust of intercourse is left in our members as an adversary. If we lose, it is because of our weakness, not the strength of lust.

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parts of the text found in pages 480–92 in Budge's edition. See Sebastian P. Brock, "Notulae Syriacae: Some Miscellaneous Identifications," *Le Muséon* 108 (1995): 69–78, esp. 72–73.



The soul must not be mingled with the body and become subject to its lusts. Philoxenos contrasts fornication of body, soul, and spirit with intercourse of the same three. It is not good for the mind to have intercourse with the body, but it is good that the body be an associate with the soul in fortitude. When physical lust arises, the soul must counter with the desire of the soul as an antidote. No crown of glory is achieved if there is no adversary.

*Thirteenth mēmrā: On Fornication (551–625).* If the passion of fornication becomes embedded in the soul for too long it obscures its power of discernment so that the mind does not recognize that it is a passion. The war against hidden lust is more critical than the war waged externally, for external lust is restrained by a number of people and circumstances. We must be inwardly chaste before God. Jesus desired to uproot lust from the soul by not lusting after a woman in one's heart. One should look upon a woman as a beautiful work of God. The reason for monasteries is to avoid distraction, for whoever commits fornication sins against the body of Christ.

Young adulthood (ܩܘܠܘܬܐ - *'elaymūtā*) is the primary period of fornication, lust entering one by the sight of women, stories about lust, and meat and drink beyond need. God allowed marriage, lust, riches, and power to remain as originally constituted but commanded the monk to become an alien. Whoever defeats his lusts in the period of early adulthood will become mighty in his soul, for when old and feeble one can redeem the deposits handed over to the soul in young adulthood. But one who has lived entirely in the body will come to a complete end in old age.

In the war against the lust of fornication the best weapon is very little water, for this lust is fed by moisture. The story of Gideon choosing his soldiers to fight against the Midianites through lapping up water is an example of using water sparingly to fight against the sin of fornication symbolized by the Midianites.

## Responses to Philoxenos

### *Philoxenos in Other Tongues*

The consensus is that Philoxenos was fluent only in Syriac, although acquainted with a great deal of the Greek christological literature, including Evagrius Ponticus, but almost certainly through translation into Syriac. Nevertheless, at the turn of the sixth century, texts worth reading did not remain monolingual for long. Philoxenos' writings and his reputation were translated into several neighboring languages and cultures which were usually miaphysite.

Syriac literature was being translated at a great pace into Armenian during Philoxenos' period and later, but questions persist about which are authentic translations of Philoxenos' writings and which merely attribute the work of other authors to Philoxenos, a renowned ecclesiastical writer.<sup>102</sup>

The Second Council of Dvivi, 555–56, at which Armenian and Syrian clergy met to condemn the Chalcedonianism of the imperial church, Abdisho, a Syrian follower of Julian Halicarnassus, is reputed to have brought with him some unnamed works of Philoxenos, although there is no explicit mention of translation into Armenian in the *Book of Letters*, the record of these meetings and conversations conducted over a number of decades.<sup>103</sup>

A seventh-century Armenian florilegium, the *Seal of Faith*,<sup>104</sup> included four citations of Philoxenos: from the seventeenth Discourse, on "I shall go to my Father" (John 20:17);<sup>105</sup> from the Com-

<sup>102</sup> I am grateful for the assistance of Robert W. Thomson in questions of the Armenian Philoxenos.

<sup>103</sup> *Book of Letters* [*Girk' T'it'oc'*], ed. Y. Ismireanc' (Tiflis, 1901); ed. N. Połarean (Jerusalem, 1994). See N. G. Garsoïan, *L'Eglise arménienne et le grand schisme d'Orient*, CSCO 574, Subsidia 100 (Louvain, 1999), esp. 453, for French translation of some of the letters.

<sup>104</sup> *Seal of Faith* [*Knik' Hawatoy*], ed. K. Tēr-Mkrtč'ean (Ejmiacin, 1914); reprinted as *Sceau de la Foi* (Louvain, 1974).

<sup>105</sup> *Seal of Faith*, 253.

mentary on the Gospel of John (quoting John 10:18);<sup>106</sup> unidentified (concerning Christ's freedom from human passions);<sup>107</sup> reference (not verbal quotation) to his twenty-fifth Discourse (also on Christ's freedom from passions).<sup>108</sup>

The other major Armenian text attributed to Philoxenos was the *Letter on the Three Degrees of the Monastic Life*.<sup>109</sup> An Arabic version circulated as well.<sup>110</sup> This text, widely transmitted under Philoxenos' authorship, has only recently been recognized to be written by the eighth-century Church of the East mystical writer Joseph Ḥazzāyā.<sup>111</sup>

De Halleux indicates that there are no known works attributed to Philoxenos in either Coptic or Georgian.<sup>112</sup> Arabic does not appear to have authentic translations of Philoxenos, though there are several short texts attributed to him.<sup>113</sup> Greek also did not receive Philoxenos openly, as the *Letter to Patricius* was transmitted under the name of Isaac of Nineveh.<sup>114</sup>

A unique Syriac text circulated in Arabic and eventually in Ge'ez was erroneously attributed to Philoxenos: *The Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers* by Dadīshō' Qatrāyā (late seventh century,

<sup>106</sup> *Seal of Faith*, 260–61.

<sup>107</sup> *Seal of Faith*, 286.

<sup>108</sup> *Seal of Faith*, 327.

<sup>109</sup> *Vie des saints Pères [Vark' srboc' Haranc' ew k'alak'avarowt'iwink' noc'in est krkin t'argmanouwt'ean naxneac']*, tome 2 (Venice, 1855), 538–62.

<sup>110</sup> See Georg Graf, *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*, vol. 1, *Studi e Testi* 118 (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944), 453, no. 3.

<sup>111</sup> Joseph Ḥazzāyā. *Lettre sur les trois étapes de la vie monastique*, ed. Paul Harb and François Graffin, PO 202 (45.2) (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992); Paul Harb, "Faut-il restituer à Joseph Hazzâyâ la Lettre sur les trois degrés de la vie monastique attribuée à Philoxène de Mabbug?," *Melto* 4 (1968): 13–36.

<sup>112</sup> A. de Halleux, *Philoxène*, 112.

<sup>113</sup> Graf, 384–85. Thanks to Sidney H. Griffith for this reference.

<sup>114</sup> N. Theotoki, ed., first edition (Leipzig, 1770), second edition (Athens, 1895).

Church of the East).<sup>115</sup> Structured as a series of questions and answers from “the brothers” or novice monks to “the old man” (*sābā*), in some manuscripts consistently identified as Dadīshō’ himself, the work treated creatively the stories of the desert fathers collected in Syriac version by an early seventh-century Church of the East author, Ananisho.<sup>116</sup> In one of the question/answer sections, the old man is identified as Philoxenos,<sup>117</sup> possibly to provide a miaphysite writer in place of a Church of the East author for the readership of a particular manuscript. There is no record of explanation, but when translated into Arabic and from Arabic into Ge’ez the reputed author of the collection is Philoxenos. In the Ethiopian Church, the *Filekseyus* had gained the position of one of “The Book of Three Monks” utilized as the ascetical and spiritual manual for novice monks for centuries. The other two books are also translations of Syriac Church of the East authors transmitted through Arabic: Isaac of Nineveh and John Saba of Dalyatha.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>115</sup> A critical edition, French translation, and introduction are being prepared by David Phillips and Jean-Claude Haelewyck for the series *Sources Chrétiennes*. See David Phillips, “The Syriac Commentary of Dadisho’ Qatraya on the Paradise of the Fathers: Towards a Critical Edition,” *BABELAO* 1 (2012): 1–23. [http://www.uclouvain.be/cps/ucl/doc/ir-inca/images/BABELAO\\_I\\_2012\\_1\\_D.\\_Phillips.pdf](http://www.uclouvain.be/cps/ucl/doc/ir-inca/images/BABELAO_I_2012_1_D._Phillips.pdf).

<sup>116</sup> *The Paradise or Garden of the Holy Fathers, Being Histories of the Ancho-rites, Recluses, Monks, Coenobites, and Ascetic Fathers of the Deserts of Egypt between A.D. CCL and A.D. CCCC circiter*, trans. Ernest A. Wallis Budge (London: Chatto & Windus, 1907); Syriac text: *The Book of Paradise*, 2 vols., ed. E. W. Budge, Lady Meux Manuscripts 6 (London: Lady Meux, 1904).

<sup>117</sup> Nicholas Sims-Williams, “Dādišo’ Qatrāyā’s Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers,” *A Boll* 112 (1994): 33–64; esp. 45–47.

<sup>118</sup> Witold Witakowski, “*Filekseyus*, the Ethiopic Version of the Syriac Dadisho Qatraya’s Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers,” *Walatta Yohanna, Ethiopian Studies in Honour of Joanna Mantel-Niecko, Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 51.1 (Warsaw: Oriental Institute Warsaw University, 2006); R. A. Kitchen, “Dadisho Qatraya’s Commentary on Abba Isaiah: The Apophthegmata Patrum Connection,” *SP* 41 (2006): 35–50.

Two other works circulate in Ge'ez under the name of Philoxenos: a prayer of Philoxenos<sup>119</sup> and a homily on Simeon who carried the baby Jesus.<sup>120</sup>

### *Thomas Merton on Philoxenos*

A surprising student and expositor of Philoxenos was Thomas Merton, OCSO (1915–68), a monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky and widely read author on the spiritual and monastic life. Merton introduced many in the general reading public to the Sayings of the Desert Fathers (*Apophthegmata Patrum*), comparing them with the stories of Zen Buddhist masters.<sup>121</sup> Merton went further into Eastern Church literature, reading Eugène Lemoine's French translation of the *Discourses* of Philoxenos of Mabbug in the 1956 edition in the *Sources Chrétiennes* series, the same text being translated in this volume. Philoxenos would also figure in one of Merton's essays in *Raids on the Unspeakable*.<sup>122</sup> When Merton became novice master at Gethsemani, he began a thorough introduction into the history and character of monastic spirituality. The extensive notes he compiled for these lectures are now being published, the second volume focusing on Eastern spirituality, and in particular

<sup>119</sup> A great number of Ethiopic or Ge'ez manuscripts are on microfilm or digitized in the collection of Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML), Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota. The following are in the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (EMML): EMML Pr. 1867–3: "Prayer of Philoxenus of Mabbug," ff. 133a–137b; also, EMML 2213 (2) Ff. 169b–175b; EMML 2793 (1) Ff. 1a–4b.

<sup>120</sup> EMML Pr. No. 1763: "Homily by Philoxenus of Mabbug on how Simeon carried Jesus in his arms," ff. 129a–132b.

<sup>121</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert: Sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1960) (Merton translated selected apophthegmata from the Latin version, *Verba Seniorum*); *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1968), especially the chapter "Wisdom in Emptiness. A Dialogue: D.T. Suzuki and Thomas Merton," 99–138.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas Merton, "Rain and the Rhinoceros," *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1966), 9–23.

a forty-six-page section devoted primarily to his commentary on Philoxenos' *Discourses*.<sup>123</sup> The Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Louisville, Kentucky, possesses an archive of taped recordings of Merton's novice conferences. David Odoriso has published transcripts of four of these conferences that focus on Philoxenos, delivered from April to June 1965.<sup>124</sup>

Merton also dealt with Aphrahat and Ephrem, the two primary fourth-century Syriac authors, so in his preface to *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism* Sidney H. Griffith worked to locate the Syriac tradition for those primarily interested in reading Merton. Griffith observed, "It is startling to find in his novitiate conferences what one now realizes must have been the first general survey in America of several of the works of the major 'monastic' thinkers among the Syriac-speaking Fathers of the Church."<sup>125</sup>

Merton had no pretensions to a scholarly assessment of Philoxenos, but he was captivated by Philoxenos' engagement with and description of the struggles of the monastic and prayer life. In his conferences Merton read Philoxenos as a student and practitioner of the monastic and spiritual life and art who had something to say directly to the spiritual dilemmas of Merton's novices. Merton sought out other texts and scholarly articles by and about Philoxenos, including several French translations of letters of Philoxenos in *L'Orient Syrien*, a Lebanese journal of Syriac studies not easily accessible.

Proceeding through the thirteen *mēm̄rē* in order, Merton is especially attracted to the classic traits of simplicity and purity of heart, as well as the importance of silence (ܫܠܘܬܐ - *šēlyā*) as the way

<sup>123</sup> Thomas Merton, *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 2*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell, Preface by Sidney H. Griffith, MW 9 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2006), 279–325.

<sup>124</sup> "Thomas Merton's Novitiate Conferences on Philoxenos of Mabbug (April–June 1965): Philoxenos on the Foundations of the Spiritual Life and the Recovery of Simplicity," ed. David M. Odoriso. *Hugoye Journal of Syriac Studies* 13 (2010): 251–71. Odoriso transcribes Tapes #142–4 [recorded 4-11-65], #114–2 [4-25-65], #147–4 [5-27-65], and #148–3 [6-7-65].

<sup>125</sup> MW 9:viii.

to knowledge.<sup>126</sup> The analogy by Philoxenos in the ninth *mēmṛā* on renunciation of a fetus exiting the womb into the world and a person exiting the world into the monastery is perceived by Merton as an apt image for his novices still wondering whether they have made the right decision to enter the monastery. “The true maturity of the Christian is in that knowledge of God that is granted only in the desert,”<sup>127</sup> Merton infers and then cites Philoxenos, “The true rich man is not he who has many things but he who has need of nothing.”<sup>128</sup> The two *mēmṛē* on gluttony (10 and 11) also engage a universal principle of monastic practice and Merton regales his listeners with Philoxenos’ long and masterly diatribe against eating and the glutton, adding contributions from John Climacus and Pachomius<sup>129</sup> along the way.

These notes reflect Merton’s research and interests, but the transcripts and the audio recording themselves witness to his passion and enthusiasm for Philoxenos’ own novice conferences, which Merton projects back to his students. Working through the fourth *mēmṛā* on simplicity, Merton is attempting to describe the necessity of becoming simple without trying to be simple:

So the first thing Adam and Eve *never* did was that they never *tried* to be simple. They never made the slightest effort to be simple. As soon as you try to be simple you’re through, you’ve had it. You’re already complicated. So this is a most important point. The thing to do is to absorb this and immediately forget it. When you walk out of this room, don’t give simplicity another thought for the rest of your life! Have nothing more to do with simplicity. Simply walk with God in the reality that He has given us, in which we’re not thinking about Him—we are immediately united with Him—and we just simply walk with God. We are not aware we are walking with God, because 9/10’s of the trouble comes from wanting to *see* that we are walking with God and not with somebody else. How

<sup>126</sup> MW 9:289–95.

<sup>127</sup> MW 9:300.

<sup>128</sup> MW 9:301.

<sup>129</sup> MW 9:309–20.

do I know it's you? That's not the question one asks. Adam and Eve didn't think about Him. They didn't say, "Where did you come from? Where were you at 9:00 this morning? You weren't here then, you're coming only in the afternoon!" [Laughter]. And "Who made you?" Well, mind your own business! [Laughter]. I think this is a very excellent expression of what this whole idea of simplicity is and where [Philoxenos] really gets it across is where he speaks about the child being completely mingled with the word of Him who speaks.<sup>130</sup>

I began this introduction to the *Discourses* by saying that the best way to understand Philoxenos is to read his *mēm̄rē* out loud, and listening to Merton tells one what the benefit of doing that is.

### **Excurses on the Influences and Sources of Philoxenos in the *Discourses***

#### *The Upright, the Perfect, and the Character of Syriac Asceticism*

At least one scribe noticed a long time ago that the *Discourses* of Philoxenos of Mabbug shared something particular and unique with the *Book of Steps / Liber Graduum* written one hundred to one hundred fifty years earlier. The scribe of the manuscript Bibliothèque Nationale de France Syrus 201 included full versions of both lengthy texts in this manuscript.<sup>131</sup> Irénée Hausherr, reviewing Eugène Lemoine's French translation of the *Discourses* in *Sources Chrétiennes*, was alarmed that such a reasonable author as Philoxenos was living so closely on a manuscript folio with the reputed Messalian asceticism of the *Book of Steps*.<sup>132</sup>

Linked by their common usage of the levels of the upright (*kēnē*) and perfect (*gm̄rē*), the *Book of Steps* and the *Discourses* distinguish the non-ascetical from the ascetical wings of the church, although

<sup>130</sup> "Thomas Merton's Novitiate Conferences," Tape #147-4 [5-27-65], 253-64.

<sup>131</sup> BNF Syrus 201 (12th c.): *The Discourses* of Philoxenos, ff. 1-172; *The Book of Steps*, ff. 172b-281a.

<sup>132</sup> Hausherr, "Spiritualité Syrienne," 181-82.



their sociological and political situations are significantly different. While Philoxenos never appears to directly cite the *Book of Steps*, he is clearly familiar with the institutional tradition of these two levels. Both texts describe the relationship between the upright and the perfect in strikingly similar terms, yet there are subtle and important distinctions.

Traditionally titled *Liber Graduum* in academic circles, the *Book of Steps*, a late fourth-century collection of thirty *mēmnrē* appears to be written by an anonymous spiritual leader in a town or village residing in the Persian Empire when memories of Shapur II's persecution of Christians in the 340s as sympathizers to the archrival Roman Empire still haunted the community.<sup>133</sup> Whether the author was the pastor or teacher of this community, or even if he had attained the level of perfection, is not discernible. The author has obvious authority but keeps his personal history out of the text.

This is not an irenic work, for conflict of one sort or another hovers continually in the background and occasionally moves to center stage. The stratification of the upright and perfect produces significant problems that the author persistently addresses—the jealousy of the lower level against the higher, as well as the arrogance of the superior over the inferior.<sup>134</sup>

Monasticism is not yet a reality, although the sharp distinctions between the upright who are married and have families, have jobs and own homes and property, and their counterparts, the perfect,

<sup>133</sup> *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum*, trans. and intro. Robert A. Kitchen and Martien F. G. Parmentier, CS 196 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2004); see Gregory Greatrex, "The Romano-Persian Frontier and the Context of *The Book of Steps*" *Breaking the Mind: New Essays in the Syriac Book of Steps*, ed. Kristian S. Heal and Robert A. Kitchen, Studies in Early Christianity 6 (Washington, DC: CUA Press, forthcoming).

<sup>134</sup> "Conflict and Transition," CS 196:li-lvi; also, Shafiq Abou-Zayd, "Violence and Killing the *Liber Graduum*," *Aram* 11–12 (1999–2000): 451–65; and Peter Nagel, "Die 'Martyrer des Glaubens' und die 'Martyrer der Liebe' im syrische *Liber Graduum*," *Religion und Wahrheit. Religionsgeschichtliche Studien. Festschrift für Gernot Wiessner zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. B. Kohler (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 127–42.

## 1 *The Discourses of Philoxenos of Mabbug*

who are celibate, have renounced all worldly possessions, including a permanent home, and pointedly do not work, prefigure the development of the monastic ideal.

The *Discourses*, a century or more later, is not anonymous but clearly the work of the bishop of Mabbug in West Syria, spoken or read to a monastic audience or audiences during a period when the miaphysites enjoyed imperial favor and security. While elements of the christological controversies did creep into the *Discourses*, these addresses to the monks were not primarily focused on doctrinal issues, but on the methods and problems of the spiritual and monastic life. The audience too was haunted by “remembrance of things past,” but for the monks it was the memory of how they had lived in the world.

Both collections are saturated with scriptural citations and extended exegeses, interpreted to suit each author’s conception of the ascetic *dūbbārā* (דבבארא) or way of life. No holy man or woman or saint crosses the pages, only biblical characters are mentioned and examined. In keeping with this subdued tone no hint of excessive and spectacular feats of ascetical prowess is admitted. The author of the *Book of Steps*, with his signature citation that “you must consider everyone else better than you” (Phil 2:3), would conceivably condemn such practices as self-centered and vain glorious.

The *mēmre* of the *Book of Steps* appear to be occasional pieces addressed in response to circumstances that have risen, although the early *mēmre* do build a systematic picture of the upright and perfect. Philoxenos, proceeding on a more tightly structured road through the steps of the ascetic and monastic life, does not countenance those who seek their own path (look at what he does to gluttons!). Within the monastic community the primary characteristics of the monk are simplicity and humility, or lowliness.

Both levels, the upright and the perfect, have particular tasks of ministry for their calling. For the author of the *Book of Steps*, the upright feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisoners, and heal the sick, and provide for the physical needs of the perfect—the latter assignment producing significant tension from time to time. The perfect lead a contemplative life devoted to unceasing prayer, but also wander in the surrounding areas of teaching and

mediating conflicts. There is little progression indicated from the lower to higher level, although the author is constantly urging the upright to renounce the world, its possessions, and necessarily to renounce their wives and become celibate. Not surprisingly, this is not a popular option for most of the upright so that while the author agrees to the worthiness of the marriage state, becoming celibate is the major boundary line for the upright to negotiate and enter into the level of the perfect.

The author identifies the division of Jesus' commandments into major and minor commandments. The minor commandments center around physical acts of ministry, tasks reserved for the upright. The perfect have advanced to the major commandments that seek to surpass normal human limits and patterns. Moreover, the perfect are severely admonished in several passages for having slid backward into performing the minor commandments and thereby negating their higher calling.<sup>135</sup>

Philoxenos, by contrast, appears not to have heard of the major or minor commandments. He commences with the fundamentals of Christian spirituality: faith, simplicity, fear of God, renunciation, anti-gluttony, asceticism, and celibacy. These characteristics reflect both the directions of traditional Syriac asceticism as well as the basics of the ascetical agenda of Evagrius of Ponticus with which Philoxenos had become enamored.<sup>136</sup> While Philoxenos' *Discourses* appear to be intended for novice monks newly arrived from the world—celibate by requirement, but often not deeply versed in biblical and Christian spirituality—these basic characteristics will not be abandoned upon attaining the level of perfection but are in a continuing process of development for both upright and perfect. Philoxenos has transformed the institution of the upright and perfect of the *Book of Steps* from almost mutually exclusive ways of life into an open-ended continuum in the *Discourses*.

<sup>135</sup>See especially *mēm̄rā* 2: "About Those Who Want to Become Perfect," CS 196:13–21; and *mēm̄rā* 3: "The Physical and Spiritual Ministry," CS 196:23–37; *mēm̄rā* 4: "On the Vegetables for the Sick," CS 196:39–44; and *mēm̄rā* 5: "On the Milk of the Children," CS 196:45–60.

<sup>136</sup>See section below on Evagrius and Philoxenos, "A Student of Evagrius."

Perhaps the most striking contrast between the two configurations of the upright/perfect dichotomy is that Philoxenos never instructs the perfect not to work. The ideal of not working is the re-entry into the state of perfection in the Garden of Eden before Adam had sinned, a trait that left the *Book of Steps* open to accusations of messalianism prevalent during the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>137</sup> Philoxenos, however, never specifically mentions work for the upright or perfect. Moreover, he never mentions that the upright are responsible to care for the perfect, a contentious issue in the *Book of Steps*. Work is an assumption in the life of the monastery.

A different pressure point for each author marks the critical entry onto the road toward spiritual maturity and perfection. The author of the *Book of Steps* returns again and again to celibacy or holiness, renouncing one's wife in practical terms. The fifteenth *mēmṛā*<sup>138</sup> reveals the tensions in the community primarily from the side of the upright, while the author never hints whether there are problems regarding sexuality with the perfect. Renunciation of the world and its possessions is punctuated by the renunciation of sexuality, an indication of one being dead to the world.

Renunciation and poverty for the perfect are givens in the *Book of Steps*, but for the upright, money is to be used for others, not for self-aggrandizement and comfort, in essence an alternative form of poverty and detachment from a soul bent on possessing things.

A century and a half later, while celibacy is no longer a formal issue with Philoxenos' charges, it is the remembrance of things past—family, wealth, food, comforts, positions of power and authority—as well as anxieties, unresolved passions, and regrets that continue to haunt the monk's soul and potentially could infect his fellow monks. Philoxenos points decisively to the lust of the belly as the beginning of all sin and until one has conquered and controlled this basic impulse progress in the spiritual life will continue

<sup>137</sup> "The Decline of Perfection and Messalian Behavior," CS 196:lvi-lxi; and R. A. Kitchen, "Becoming Perfect: The Maturing of Asceticism in the Syriac Book of Steps," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 2 (2002): 30–45.

<sup>138</sup> *The Book of Steps*, *Mēmṛā* 15, "On Adam's Marital Desire," CS 196:139–57.

to be inhibited.<sup>139</sup> Just as with celibacy, the taming and elimination of gluttony is a psychosomatic ascetical act that rebels against the social conventions of the normal life. Once one has controlled the drives for sexuality and eating, the road is clear for authentic spiritual development.

A difficulty in interpreting Philoxenos' prescriptions for the upright is that he does not explicitly declare who the upright are. Often his references clearly indicate someone living in the world, married, and with a job, income, and possessions. At other times, the upright are the novices in the monastery who appear to have a minimal background in Christian life and who cannot seem to get the world out of their heads. This situational ambiguity has a benefit, for the monk must come to grips with the real reasons he has entered the monastery rather than remaining in the world and simply doing good with his money, family, and influence.

The upright and perfect in the *Book of Steps* literally live in the world, perhaps on the outskirts of a town or village. The perfect do not renounce their location in the world, but their social connections to society—family, home, and physical stability, participation in the work of a community. In many ways it is a very difficult model to follow and the author points out the instances where the perfect were imperfect in their endeavors. Philoxenos, on the other hand, is emphatic that perfection is attainable only in the monastery or the wilderness/desert.

For those familiar with the patterns of Syriac asceticism, familiarity breeds a certain contempt. The radical excesses reported in many hagiographical texts can easily direct one to draw the conclusion that some athletic ascetics attempted to outdo one another in reducing their bodies to the bare minimum for life.

While the desert fathers were primarily Egyptian, early translations provided ample models for their Syriac readership. The *Historia Religiosa* or the *History of the Monks in Syria* by Theodoret of Cyrrihus was penned in Greek, but established a standard portrait of Syriac

<sup>139</sup>R. A. Kitchen, "The Lust of the Belly Is the Beginning of All Sin," 49–63.

ascetics, the most famous of whom was Simeon Stylites.<sup>140</sup> There were other Syriac versions of Simeon's story circulating,<sup>141</sup> as well as Jacob of Serug's *mēmnrā* or poetic sermon on the Stylite,<sup>142</sup> none of which shy away from depicting his spectacular and graphic feats of holiness. Hagiographical accounts often narrated the extraordinary efforts of holy men, for instance in the tales of the dendrites or tree-dwellers, who were understood to be forerunners of stylites.<sup>143</sup>

These were the heroes of the Syriac church, but not necessarily the norm or model for budding ascetics. The stories of these spiritual athletes functioned more as literary asceticism driven by the enthusiasm of hagiographical hyperbole. The intensity of these stories may lead one initially to believe that is how one lives as a Christian in Syriac culture. Yet, there are other witnesses to a different way of ascetical life.

Asceticism, which has generally defied a single and universally accepted definition, finds common ground among these authors and their communities. Prayer and fasting are mentioned frequently, and Philoxenos persistently refers to the heavy physical

<sup>140</sup>Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks in Syria*, trans. R. M. Price, CS 88 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1983); Simeon Stylites, 160–76; Paul Naaman, *The Maronites: The Origins of an Antiochene Church, A Historical and Geographical Study of the Fifth to Seventh Centuries*, trans. DIT, Kaslik, Lebanon, CS 243 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2009), especially chapter 3, "Theodoret of Cyr and the Patriarchate of Antioch after the Council of Ephesus (431–452)," 65–115.

<sup>141</sup>*The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, trans. Robert Doran, CS 112 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992). Doran includes Theodoret's version, another Greek vita by Antonius, and a much longer anonymous Syriac version.

<sup>142</sup>"Jacob of Serug, Homily on Simeon the Stylite," trans. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Ascetic Behavior in Graeco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 15–28.

<sup>143</sup>*The History of the Great Deeds of Bishop Paul of Qentos and Priest John of Edessa*, trans. Hans Arneson, Emanuel Fiano, Christine Marquis, and Kyle Smith (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010). Kyle Smith, "Dendrites and Other Standers in *The History of the Great Deeds of Bishop Paul of Qentos and Priest John of Edessa*," *Hugoye Journal of Syriac Studies* 12 (2009): 117–34.

toll that rigorous fasting and narrow confinement in one's cell exact on one's health. Notable, however, is that neither author mentions *šēlyā* (ܫܠܝܐ) or "stillness" in the sense of the advanced technique of wordless, silent prayer practiced in many parts of later Syriac worship. Worship may not be explicitly an ascetical act, but it is an essential aspect of the Christian discipline, especially at the insistence of the *Book of Steps* in *mēmṛā* 12 on the necessity of traveling through the earthly church before one can contemplate the heavenly church or church of the heart.<sup>144</sup> Philoxenos often refers to communal worship in the monastery. Knowledge of the Scriptures is the alphabet of the Christian's language and imaginative universe, and both the author and Philoxenos assume that everyone is speaking the same language.

Celibacy and anti-gluttony are both very difficult steps for the aspiring upright to take, requiring both physical and social renunciation. Both boundaries demand absolute commitment to a distinctive way of life which initially engenders misgivings and regrets, as well as physical discomfort. It should be noted that both authors do not condemn food or eating *per se*, nor do they condemn marriage and sexual activity though these are no longer intended or allowed for the perfect or the monk.

The trajectory on which the *Book of Steps* and the *Discourses* travel is a disciplined, methodical way of life, the narrow steep road. It is the strenuous calling of being simple—abject humility, renouncing the world, its possessions and its sexuality, controlling the intake of food, praying and worshiping unceasingly, populating one's mind and spirit with the personalities and words of the Scriptures that still live among us. The two books emerge from very different sociological, political, and theological environments, as well as living in distinctive historical eras, yet they share the inner core of this ascetic discipline. Both authors lament that the perfect life is neither easy nor fully attainable by a significant segment of Christians.

<sup>144</sup> *Mēmṛā* 12: "On the Hidden and Public Ministry of the Church," CS 196:119–26.

Neither author mentions an instance of the more spectacular ascetic feats, but the regimen of perfection seems significantly rigorous, all-encompassing, and explicitly discouraging of vainglorious behavior to sanction such extraordinary personalities and actions. Despite the size of these two works, a few more comprehensive examples of ascetic communities are needed to draw definitive conclusions about the institutional character of early Syriac asceticism. Nevertheless, what we see in Philoxenos and the *Book of Steps* may well be the genuine norm.

### *Biblical Exegesis in the Discourses*

Philoxenos shows himself to be one more instance of an early Christian writer who lives in the thought-world of the Bible, seldom allowing a page to be turned without some reference to the Scriptures. While Philoxenos does employ the short proof-text, his more striking use of Scripture is through longer narrative units, reading into the narratives rationales for the ascetical and theological themes he is developing. There are over thirteen hundred biblical references in the *Discourses*, so the following will point out only some of the more significant themes.

*The Ordered Steps of Asceticism.* Philoxenos' introduction emphasizes the necessity of an ordered methodology of asceticism. Jesus' words from the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:24-27) regarding the house built on the rock is posited as the requirement for any physical or spiritual development (m 1.1; 4:3-10).

A critical aspect of this development is urged in the explanation of the parable of the person who started building a tower but could not finish it because of lack of funds and materials and was then ridiculed by all (Luke 14:29) (1.3; 7:4-13). The parable of the unfinished tower is revisited in the ninth *mēmṛā* as a caution to the monk to fulfill the obligation of his monastic profession, to stay for the long run or to simply stay in the world (9.41-43; 310:13-314:13).

The importance of a rule is therefore uppermost to Philoxenos who also offers the image of Jacob's ladder (Gen 28:12) to symbolize the orderly progression of humans up the ladder one step or rung at a time (7.2; 192:22-193:20). Angels and humans mingle on



the ladder in order to teach us that a virtuous way is common to both creatures.

*Adam and Eve in the Garden.* The themes of Adam's and Eve's natures and their transgression are threaded throughout early Syriac literature. Philoxenos interprets the story primarily to undergird his rule of spiritual development for monks.

In the fourth *mēm̄rā* on simplicity, Philoxenos demonstrates that the basic characteristic of simplicity is that one never questions the commands of God. Adam and Eve possessed simplicity until they encountered the Enemy who manipulated Adam into exercising judgment on God's command to him—i.e., that he should not eat from the fruit of the tree (4.7; 80:5–81:20). "The advice that was brought to him made that youth and simple one a judge of the commandment of God to him. Because he had lost his simplicity, he also did not prosper by his judgment. He had judged foolishly that he ought to obey an enemy more than a friend" (4.7; 81:1–4).

The simplicity of Adam and Eve allows them to talk directly with God just as with a close acquaintance. During this time their simplicity never thought to ask questions about God's nature or being (4.10–11; 83:17–84:15). In the sixth *mēm̄rā* on the fear of God, Philoxenos observes that Adam believed in God, but once he cast out the fear of God from his mind he abandoned the faith (6.34; 185:21–186:4).

An intriguing detail about Adam comes from a backhanded reference in the discussion of John the Baptist as the greatest of the prophets. Philoxenos observes that John received the Holy Spirit while still in the womb in order that he might attain the innocence (*šapyūtā*) of Adam before Adam had sinned against the commandment (9.35; 300:10–302:19).

The root of Adam's sin occupies a predictable category. Since our author is keen to demonstrate that the lust of the belly is the root of all sin, as well as the most powerful, he identifies this lust as the real source of the transgression—when he ate the fruit<sup>145</sup> of

<sup>145</sup> Scripture does not give us much detail, Philoxenos says, but oral tradition indicates that the fruit Eve ate was from the fig tree (ܩܘܨܩܐ - *tētā*) (11.32; 446:17–23).

the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—thus inducing shame at his nakedness and lust (10.59–61; 412:4–414:5).

*Simplicity and the Fear of God.* Proceeding through the biblical history of salvation, Philoxenos demonstrates that simplicity and the fear of God were the fundamental characteristics of the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. Simplicity is evidenced in receiving God’s command without questioning or analysis. Abraham responded to God’s call without hesitation (4.2; 74:13–76:8), as did the apostles to Jesus’ summons (4.3; 76:17–77:4). Matthew and Philip are extolled specifically for their immediate response (4.4; 77:23–78:8). Philoxenos focuses on Zacchaeus’ triumph of simplicity, a man who had acquired all his possessions through cunning (ܠܚܘܬܐ - *hē’rūtā*) (4.6; 79:5–80:5).

Those Israelites who were born in the wilderness possessed natural simplicity, while those who whored after the daughters of Midian and worshiped the golden calf came from the generation that came up out of Egypt (m 4.15–18; 86:10–90:9).

Simplicity was evident in the people who followed Joshua around the city of Jericho (m 4.19; 90:9–91:2). David is described as a “beast [of burden]” before God—compliant and simple (Ps 73:22). His shepherding and relationship with Jonathan, as well as lack of cunning regarding Saul proved his simplicity (m 4.22–23; 93:2–95:5).

Jacob is proclaimed as the model person of simplicity, both in his struggles with his brother Esau (m 4.25–28; 96:2–99:10) and with the deception of Laban regarding his daughters (m 4.29–30; 99:10–101:7). God turned these controversies into profit for Jacob (m 4.34; 103:3–104:13).

The simplicity of Abel, apparent in his offering in contrast to the evilness and cunning of Cain, is declared (m 4.40; 109:19–110:13), as well as the simplicity of Joseph in the honor toward his father and love of his brothers that bore the test of adversity (m 4.42; 111:1–112:10).

The other basic characteristic of the Christian, the fear of God, is shown to be the active element in several personalities. Adam, as mentioned above, lost his faith in God when he cast out his fear of God. God surrounded succeeding generations with fear so that they might keep the commandments: Cain was overwhelmed by

the fear of everything (m 6.34; 186:6–13); and the commandments given through Moses were embedded with fear (m 6.34; 186:13–22).

Philoxenos constructs a long catena of citations from the Psalms to illustrate David the Prophet's expressions of the fear of God (m 7.9–19; 199:14–212:17). The concluding example is demonstrated in the adventures of Jonah who fled toward Tarshish out of the fear of God and it was the fear of the true God which converted the sailors on his ship (m 7.21; 213:18–214:8).

Joseph's resistance to the advances of Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:8–10) is recounted as an exercise of the remembrance of God. The Ten Commandments had not yet been given, but Joseph knew that to sin against his master would be violating the natural law of the Golden Rule, "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor," which in turn would be sinning against God (m 13.62; 607:1–608:5). The example of Joseph would become an inspiration to all the patriarchs, prophets, and forerunners of monks who would follow him (m 13.65; 610:9–21).

*Monastic Imperatives.* After Philoxenos has established the fundamental characteristics of the ascetic life, he moves to the critical transition from the secular world to the monastery, the renunciation of possessions and passions in order to go out from the world into the desert. Adopting several biblical typologies for this defining experience of the monk, Philoxenos works to reinforce the resolve of his audience to accept and rejoice in their vocation.

The initial scriptural passage is an exegesis of a familiar verse, "Come unto me, all who are weary and are laden with heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). In a lengthy extended discourse, Philoxenos uses the verse to encourage those people burdened with riches and the cares of the world to cast them off and renounce or empty themselves of these things (m 9.12; 270:16–273:15).

The Jordan River becomes a typological landmark for Jesus, that of his passing from the legalism of his prebaptized life into the freedom of the way of life in the wilderness.<sup>146</sup> The Jordan functioned in

<sup>146</sup>See Aloys Grillmeier, "Die Taufe und die Taufe der Christen: Zur Tauftheologie des Philoxenos von Mabbug unter ihrer Bedeutung für

the same way as the sea did for the Israelites fleeing Egypt: through it they ended their subjection to Egypt and had their fear of the Egyptians removed through the return of the waters on Pharaoh's chariots, and entered into the desert—a land of freedom in which no one else would rule over them, except God (m 9.13; 274:3–275:2).

The typology of Israel in Egypt is built on further to identify Egypt with the troubles of this world. "Egypt was making the Hebrews work with mud and bricks and with toils and harsh labors; and with cares, anxiety, adversities, and groans the world also works against you. The Jews were washed of the mud of Egypt once they had crossed over the sea" (m 9.15; 276:10–14).

Creatively, Philoxenos carries the analogy further, observing that Israel did not automatically enjoy the benefits of freedom once it had crossed into the wilderness for there were many moments of doubt. The monk departing from the world to enter the monastery also is not exempt from these doubts.

So also, when the disciple has departed from the world and wishes to become free of its servitude, he does not immediately receive joy, nor is he worthy of the taste of spiritual pleasures, just as neither had those once they had departed from Egypt received joy or were worthy of spiritual pleasure. But there will occur to you at first, O disciple, after your transition from the world the fear of austerities and the vexation of thoughts and repentance concerning your departure from the world, and the fact that you have dispersed whatever you had possessed, or that you have abandoned your inheritance and have moved out of the dwelling of your parents (m 9.16; 277:15–278:4).

Just as the Israelites in the wilderness wished at times to be back amidst the security of the fleshpots of Egypt, the disciple/monk begins to question his choices. "Such [thoughts] as these begin to agitate in your thoughts: why have you left the world in which it

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die Christliche Spiritualität," *Fides Sacramenti Sacramentum Fidei: Studies in honor of Pieter Smulders*, ed. J. J. Auf der Maur (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 137–75.

would have been easier for you to be justified? Why did you decide to disperse your wealth, for while it was with you, through it you were seen to be an especially compassionate person? Now because you have divided it hastily it happens also that it has been given to those who are not worthy” (m 9.17; 278:9–14).

Wealth may be the first thing to come to mind when renouncing the world, but the next most important possession is that of one’s family. Philoxenos recognizes that the monk may often be of weaker resolve in this area, so he presents the biblical precedents and imperatives to fortify his decision.

Philoxenos relates that Mary, the mother of Jesus, attempted to use her parental authority on Jesus at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11).

When the wine was failing for the guests, his mother said to Jesus, “They have no wine.” She began here to speak to him authoritatively as a mother would usually do. But Jesus rejected that liberty, teaching that she had been repaid by him the debt of parental honor, and now he is no longer subservient to them as at first. . . . [H]e was giving an example to the perfect through this word, lest they be led by the law of natural parents once they were living outside of the world in which the parents are dwelling. Mary was living in one mode of life and Jesus was in another rule—she according to the law and he according to the spirit (m 8.30; 251:1–6, 9–14).

This teaching is directed to the monk tempted by visiting relatives to return home. Philoxenos includes the later account (John 7:1-10) in which Jesus refused to go up to the feast of the Tabernacles with his brothers and then went up later by himself during the middle of the feast to show them that he was no longer subject to parents/relatives or to the law, which here was the obligation of attending the feast (m 8.31; 252:15–254:7).

In the ninth *mēm̄rā* on renunciation, Philoxenos points to the example of John the Baptist as the model of the perfect disciple of Christ. “Receive it then as proof for the way of life of this righteous [person], and learn also from it that a person may not become a perfect disciple of Christ unless he has become a stranger from

the entire world by the example of this upright person" (m 9.37; 305:3–7). Jesus' advice to the hesitant disciple, "Leave the dead to bury their dead and you, go announce the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60), is interpreted to mean that one must cast off one's duty to his natural parents (m 9.38; 305:11–306:9).

*Against the Lust of the Belly and Fornication.* Finally, Philoxenos tackles the two fundamental passions, gluttony and fornication, spending on them just short of half of the length of the *Discourses*. He proceeds on a selected biblical tour of the figures who exemplify the saintly model in the struggle against the lust of the belly and fornication.<sup>147</sup>

Philoxenos rehearses the problem of gluttony by recalling three tragic figures who were controlled by the lust for food and meat. Adam, as noted earlier, fell from innocence through the lust of the belly (m 10.59–61; 412:4–414:5). Esau lost his birthright and blessings on account of his lust for food (m 10.62; 414:18–20). And then the people of Israel forgot God on account of their food and worshiped instead the golden calf (m 10.62; 414:20–22).

In the eleventh *mēmṛā* Philoxenos contrasts two cases of eating versus lust. Esau merely ate lentils (Gen 25:29–34) but was condemned because he lusted for food. Elijah, on the other hand, ate meat (1 Kgs 17:6) but was considered spiritual (m 11.38; 452:2–17). Even the drinking of cold water, if done with lust, can bring one down, as nearly happened to David at Bethlehem, before he poured out the water before the Lord to suppress his lust (2 Sam 23:15–17) (m 11.39; 452:17–453:5).

Positively, Philoxenos tells of Daniel and the three young men (Dan 1:3–16) who refused to eat the rich diet of King Nebuchadnezzar for three years and ended being in better physical condition than those who did and were able to receive revelations of divine knowledge (m 11.58; 471:1–473:12). The apostles, however, were exempt from abstinence and fasting while they were with Jesus "the Bridegroom" (m 11.70; 483:22–485:13). Simon broke his fast,

<sup>147</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Kitchen, "The Lust of the Belly Is the Beginning of All Sin," 49–63.

but only because he was divinely ordered to do so (m 11.71–72; 486:1–487:13). A short catena of the fasting heroics of several figures is given: Daniel had to fast three weeks to be worthy of the sight of angels (Dan 10:2, 7); Elijah had a forty-day fast on Mount Horeb (1 Kgs 19:8); Ezekiel ate bread by weight and water by measure (Ezek 4); and David ate ashes like bread and drank tears (Ps 102:9) (m 11.74–75; 488:6–490:17).

Philoxenos utilizes the story of Gideon’s selection of his attack force against the Midianites (Judg 7:1-23) as one of two principal stories to illustrate the overcoming of the passion of fornication. Whereas Aphrahat had interpreted the story as a typology of how the *bnay/bnāt qyāmā* (ܒܢܝ ܩܝܡܐ ܕܗ ܥܘܠܡܐ)<sup>148</sup> were selected and consecrated, simply identifying the three hundred who lapped water in their hands as the elite chosen to join the ranks of the *bnay/bnāt qyāmā*,<sup>149</sup> Philoxenos perceives the test as a struggle against the lust of fornication. Because the Israelites had whored with the daughters of Midian (Num 25:1), the army of Midian now symbolizes fornication. Beginning with an admonition regarding the physiology of fornication, Philoxenos calls on his monks to reduce their liquid intake—for moisture nourishes fornication, especially in tandem with gluttony. Dryness reduces desire by heating it up and burning it off, so to speak. Philoxenos pointed to Gideon’s turning away those who drank their fill, but accepted those who with caution “drank a little,” and this came not from Gideon’s ingenuity, but from God’s divine plan. The sound of the horn is the commandment of God; the breaking of the pitchers is the breaking

<sup>148</sup> Aphrahat wrote twenty-three “Demonstrations” between 337–45, in the midst of severe persecution of Persian Christians by Shapur II. The *bnay/bnāt qyāmā* (“sons/daughters of the covenant”) were premonastic orders of consecrated men and women who led ascetically disciplined and celibate lives in the community.

<sup>149</sup> *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage*, trans. Adam Lehtë (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), Demonstration Seven: “On the Penitent,” 18–22; pp. 210–13; Syriac critical edition: *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae. Demonstrationes*, ed. Ioannes Parisot, PS 1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894), 7.18–22: columns 341:11–349:27.

of the passion of fornication; and the light inside the pitcher is that of divine knowledge (m 13.53–56; 597:15–601:18). While both Aphrahat and Philoxenos see the lapping of water as the selection of the elite, Aphrahat attaches no specific meaning to the method, but Philoxenos creatively interprets this act as a rejection of fornication—an embracement of celibacy.

Philoxenos understands the narrative as an allegorical model for the new resident monks who are ostensibly celibate, but for whom the distracting ideas of the world are still active in their minds and souls. This is a prescriptive text, outlining how and why one should behave in the ascetic and monastic way of life, moving from worldly uprightness up to the spiritual realm of perfection. Philoxenos interpreted the using of hands to drink as an indication of *how much* one drank as the measure of exactly how the monk should perform in the midst of the struggle. The *Discourses* are seldom directed to the perfect, but to the upright, the newly arrived monks, who may lapse into their worldly ways of thinking, even while living in the monastery.

#### *Christological Comments in the Discourses*

One of the appeals of Philoxenos' *Discourses*, his most popular and most copied work, is that it is apparently free from the tensions of contemporary christological debate in which Philoxenos was a well-known and fiery participant. Modern scholarship has generally passed down the assessment that the *Discourses* are not concerned with christological matters. Lemoine believes that the *Discourses* were written to be read in the monastery and were edited specifically for this purpose<sup>150</sup> and sees no traces of miaphysitism in the *Discourses*.<sup>151</sup> Irénée Hausherr had earlier promoted this view that the christological ideas of the miaphysites have no influence on their ascetical and mystical teachings.<sup>152</sup> This view of Lemoine and Hausherr is only partially the case.

<sup>150</sup> SCh 44bis:12–13.

<sup>151</sup> SCh 44bis:15.

<sup>152</sup> Hausherr, "Contemplation et Sainteté," 15.



Philoxenos periodically inserts comments and references that reflect his doctrinal and christological perspectives. These casual comments are not intended to construct a systematic theology for his listeners but are spontaneous interjections reflecting Philoxenos' theological worldview and arise out of concerns for the foundational concepts and practices of monastic asceticism. Indeed, as recent studies have demonstrated, particularly that of David Michelson,<sup>153</sup> there is not the great divide once assumed and imagined between the doctrinal letters and the ascetical homilies of this author. While it is true that the *Ascetical Homilies* and/or the *Discourses* are not consumed by doctrinal matters, Philoxenos persistently implies that proper *ascesis* or progress toward spiritual perfection cannot be accomplished without proper doctrinal understanding. While he doesn't name names or even parties, Philoxenos incessantly warns the monks under his episcopal care about those confused, even demented, dyophysites.

His delineation of the basic doctrinal concepts illustrates this pastoral attention. Philoxenos understands faith (ܩܘܪܝܢܘܬܐ - *haymānūtā*) as the first epistemological faculty that aims to see and hear the knowledge of God. Faith's opponent is error or false doctrine, but broader than simply doctrine. Error derives from trying to analyze and dissect God, Christ, and the truth, rather than simply believing.

Simplicity (ܩܘܪܝܢܘܬܐ - *pšītūtā*) is the characteristic which accompanies and grows out of faith. Philoxenos spends considerable time contrasting simplicity with its opposites—cunning and cleverness. If the monk had been cunning, he would never have departed from the world for the monastery, for he would have imagined too many alternatives. Philoxenos' definition of simplicity is not stupidity or lack of awareness, but “the singleness of one thought.” God, for that matter, is “Simple,” for in God there are no structures or parts.

The fear of God (ܩܘܪܝܢܘܬܐ - *dehlat 'alāhā*), by which Philoxenos means an ecstatic feeling in the soul which then makes the whole body “tremble,” has its basis in the remembrance of God. If one sins and does not remember or think of God's punishment and

<sup>153</sup> Michelson, *Practice Leads to Theory*, 2007.

disappointment, one's soul is dead. If one is conscious of his sins the fear of God increases continually within himself. The fear of God is born from faith but is also the preserver of faith. Adam and later Cain cast out their fear and as a consequence lost their faith. Once again, the fear of God is not an analytical tool, but one of experientially knowing God, derived out of faith and its simplicity. All too many do not remember God, being occupied with new conceptions of the nature of God.

The implication for present monks is that the search for the knowledge and experience of God is not accomplished through speculation and discussion of divine attributes, but through states of being that are beyond discussion—perfection/*apatheia* and natural innocence of the Garden of Eden before Adam had sinned.

While a different tone is at play in the *Discourses*, a decidedly more irenic and pastoral approach, Philoxenos does want to bring the nature of Christ into the conversation, for not surprisingly Jesus Christ is the model for the life of the monk, providing what Philoxenos will refer to frequently as the “*oikonomia*/economy of salvation” (ܡܕܒܪܐܢܘܬܐ - *mdabrānūtā dhayyē*). Description of the true nature of Christ is not the primary subject matter of the *Discourses*, but along the way, Philoxenos finds it instructive to delineate who Jesus really is and what he has accomplished that begs imitation.

There are many instances in which Philoxenos inserts one of the traditional miaphysite formulas, seemingly on reflex and not out of apparent design. In the first *mēmṛā*/discourse, Philoxenos declares, “The foundation is solid and laid down, according to the word of Paul, which is Jesus Christ *our God*” (m 1.3; 7:13–14).<sup>154</sup> Philoxenos understands Christ maintaining a single nature, but as he sees it, the dyophysite error is to divide Jesus into human and divine and thereby reduce Jesus' divinity to his humanity. While Chalcedonians may also say that “Jesus Christ is our God,” for our

<sup>154</sup>“Christ our God” is employed by Philoxenos also at m 2.18 (45:18–19); m 5.40 (158:19); m 8.1 (222:10); m 12.60 (550:1); “Jesus God” at m 9.35 (302:5–6).

author this is a statement of emphasis—Christ is not just human, but in the first place God incarnate.

In the thirteenth and last discourse, a similar epithet slips out almost unnoticed. Speaking about the damage that fornication by a member does to the whole community:

But here [the baptized ones] become spiritual people from corporeal people. And from the fact that every one of them—with regard to his person is a body of many members—is counted in the body of Christ as a member, because it is constructed invisibly and established in the body ineffably and becomes a spiritual member in the *body of God*, according to the word of the Apostle, “Your bodies are the members of Christ.” How then will a member of Christ fight to defeat desire? (m 13.74; 619:24–620:5)

Others arise out of theopaschite vocabulary and theology: that Christ suffered as God on the cross. Two passages in the tenth discourse on gluttony, wickedly humorous in rhetoric against that filthy passion, tuck in familiar formulas.

Not for this has the Creator created you to eat like animals, but to take nourishment as a rational being and to glorify him as a living being. . . . *You have been ordained to [sing] the Holy [Trisagion] with the seraphim.* Why do you compare your life with a mute beast by your feebleness? You are the master of creation by the will of your Maker. Why have you been made the servant of your belly by your free will? The will of your Creator has committed all of creation to you, and have you subjected yourself to your small belly? (m 10.29; 381:20–22, 382:9–14)

Putting aside the gluttony harangue, the mention of the Trisagion<sup>155</sup> is not meant as a full doctrinal affirmation—though it is an

<sup>155</sup> The Trisagion (Greek, “three times holy”; Syriac, ܩܕܝܫܐܢܐ - *mḡadšānā* “that which proclaims ‘holy God, holy mighty, holy immortal’”) is a familiar refrain of the Orthodox liturgy, sung before the reading of the Scriptures. The Chalcedonian churches interpreted “holy” to refer to the

affirmation of their miaphysite identity—but as the divine intention for the monks, the end play of the economy of salvation.

The lust of the belly is still a problem for the would-be singers of the Trisagion in a passage cited above, continued further here:

You have been made a god by the true God, but have you made your belly a god? . . . Your Lord has loved you to such an extent that he should become food for you, but for his love should you not have abstained from vile foods? *The Living One died and was buried in order to save you*, yet have you made yourself a tomb for food? (m 10.29; 382:17–18, 24–383:2)

The “Living One” in Syriac can be a double entendre for the “One Who Saves,” both a play on the character of the Mosaic Lord God and the role of Christ as Savior of the world, but clearly in the theopaschite understanding of a Christ who as God dies in order to save and redeem humanity. A critical part of the economy of Christ’s incarnation is that as the monks become dead to the world, strangers and aliens, no longer tasting pleasurably their food, they are paralleling Christ’s trajectory as the God who dies in order to save humanity, so the monk dies to the world in order to attain this new life or salvation.<sup>156</sup>

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Trinity, while the miaphysite understood it to refer to Christ and added the phrase (“and was crucified for us”) that became controversial, as well as symbolic of miaphysite theology. See Sebastian P. Brock, “The Thrice Holy Hymn in the Liturgy,” *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review* 7.2 (1985): 24–34; Michael Van Esbroeck, “The Memra on the Parrot by Isaac of Antioch,” *JTS* 47 (1996): 464–76; S. P. Brock, “The Origins of the *Qanona* ‘Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal’ according to Gabriel of Qatar (early seventh century),” *The Harp* 21 (2006): 173–85. Philoxenos refers to the Trisagion as well at m 7.2 (193:17–18) and m 9.73 (351.1).

<sup>156</sup>Other christological comments include: “although by nature he is free because he is God,” m 8.20 (241:2–3); “in the foreknowledge of the Father these things were prepared for us in advance because he is God,” m 9.34 (299:17–18); “you will resemble God (= Jesus),” m 8.21 (243:2–5); “the way of freedom of Christ, who as God was above the laws,” m 10.40 (393:11–12); “Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten One, *God the Word*, to him be glory,” m 13.80 (625:6–7).

While these *Discourses* were intended for monks, they replay many of the themes from his other writings dealing more strictly with doctrinal and polemical issues. One cannot practice proper asceticism without correct theology, for theology in this time describes who Christ is and therefore who and what one wishes to become. Incorrect theology can leave one confused, if not actually steered away from the truth by demonic forces. The insertions of christological comments in the *Discourses* are neither programmatic nor accidental. The goal and economy of salvation in Philoxenos is accomplished through imitation of Christ who demonstrates consistently that he is fully involved in the human journey, even while still divine, and through the cross enables his disciples to die to the world and live spiritually, even divinely. It should be kept in mind that Philoxenos, like many controversialists, only sees his side of the story, so in any imagined debate with opponents, he always wins. Ironically, for someone known as an important anti-Chalcedonian theologian, he advises his disciples to avoid theological discussion and accept what the eye of faith abundantly provides.

### *A Student of Evagrius*

Writers in Late Antiquity did not use footnotes and seldom attributed citations and ideas to authors they had read, so we cannot be certain whether a later author was responding to an earlier mentor or appropriating ideas that had acquired common currency in the intellectual culture. In the case of Philoxenos and Evagrius of Pontus, the Greek desert father and theologian of the ascetical life, however, an intellectual relationship is clearly evident.

What is apparent is that Philoxenos had read Evagrius fairly extensively in Syriac translations that started to circulate at an early stage following Evagrius' death. He didn't just read Evagrius; he absorbed Evagrius' thought, and while Philoxenos is quite original, the imprint of the Evagrius method is sewn into all his writings.

Evagrius grew up in Pontus in Asia Minor and as a bright rising theological star served as an archdeacon to Gregory Nazianzen, accompanying him to the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381. He fell in love with a married woman and when he

came to himself he fled to Jerusalem where he was counseled by Melania the Elder to go into the Egyptian desert. He went down into Nitria and Kellia, apprenticed himself to Ammonas and the two Macarii, the Great and of Alexandria, and eventually acquired a reputation for his intellectual acumen. Evagrius is recorded in a number of *logoi* of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the *Lausiatic History* of Palladius, as well as in other works. His learning and strenuous prayer resulted in his many literary works often seen in the tradition of Origen—letters and treatises, as well as collections of pithy and enigmatic *logoi* or chapters on the nature of pure prayer, often in sets of “centuries” or one-hundred sayings. But even in enumerating items Evagrius was subtle: the centuries usually had only ninety entries, indicating the imperfection of the human being’s attempt to grasp God.

Evagrius’ asceticism, unfortunately, so undermined his health that he died prematurely in 399. His literary legacy seemed to accelerate in its influence, and modern scholarship is finding even more evidence of his reception in a variety of spiritual writers in the following centuries—John the Solitary of Apamea, Philoxenos, Isaac of Nineveh, and Joseph Hazzaya in Syriac tradition; John Cassian in the Latin West, Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, John Climacus, and Symeon the New Theologian among the Greek fathers for a short list. The Second Council of Constantinople in 553 anathematized the thought and writings of Origen, but a century and a half removed it turned out that the works and ideas condemned were the interpretations of Evagrius.

In the process of developing theories about Philoxenos’ organization and plan, many scholars see the influence of Evagrius Ponticus factored in.<sup>157</sup>

Evagrius’ most enduring contribution has been his identifications of the eight vices or “principal thoughts.”<sup>158</sup> The first two are gluttony or the lust of the belly and the lust of fornication—the second

<sup>157</sup> See Harb, “L’attitude de Philoxène de Mabboug,” 135–36. Also, Watt, “Philoxenos and the Old Syriac Version of Evagrius’ Centuries,” 65–81.

<sup>158</sup> Driscoll, *The ‘Ad Monachos’ of Evagrius Ponticus*, 12–17; also, Augustine M. Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, Early Church Fathers (New York: Routledge,

and third pairs of *mēm̄rē* following the renunciation of the world in Philoxenos' so-called second section. It seems logical that Philoxenos would have intended to complete the series of "principal thoughts"—love of money, sadness, anger, listlessness, vainglory, and pride—and then move on to treat the topics of "the degree of the spirit" of which we may have been afforded a glimpse in the ascetical florilegia. Notwithstanding, there are no extant copies of the *Discourses* with any more than the thirteen *mēm̄rē* in the canonical list.

Already two important terms of Evagrius, the passions (*ἡσᾶῆ* - ܗܫܐܝܬܐ) and the thoughts (*ܗܘܫܐܒܐܝܬܐ* - ܗܘܫܐܒܐܝܬܐ), come to the fore. These two become persistent terms in Philoxenos' vocabulary: the passions represent the destructive desires and lusts of the human being; the thoughts are not just normal ideas, but imply one of the eight principal thoughts that lead one astray.

In the middle of the longest *mēm̄rā* (ninety-five pages), the ninth on renunciation of the world, Philoxenos discusses the nature and qualities of the kingdom of heaven, but not from a speculative perspective. Renunciation is more than simply abandoning one's possessions, leaving behind one's friends and family and spouse, and departing from the business and conflict of human society and going out into the desert or monastery. All the monks have accomplished this on the surface, but it is the internal struggle that will determine the final salvation of the monk. Philoxenos states plainly, "When a person is freed from the passions of the world, it is as if his dwelling is [already] in the kingdom of heaven" (m 9.31; 297:3–5).

After describing in some detail the benefits of such freedom, Philoxenos cites Evagrius anonymously: "One of the spiritual teachers also correctly said, "The kingdom of heaven is the soul without passions with the knowledge of these things that are in truth,"<sup>159</sup> which are words and incorporeal movements" (m 9.32; 297:16–19).

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2006); Evagrius Pontus, *The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz (New York: OUP, 2003), 66–90, 136–82.

<sup>159</sup> Evagrius Pontus, "The Monk: A Treatise on the Practical Life," *The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, chapter 5, no. 2, p. 97.

This citation appropriately comes from the first volume of Evagrius' monastic trilogy, *Praktikos*, in which he initiates the monk into the first level of the ascetical/monastic life, a work quite similar in purpose and situation to the *Discourses*. The phrase "without passions" is one of Evagrius' most famous technical terms—*apatheia*—or in Syriac, *lā ḥašūšūtā* (ܠܐ ܚܫܘܫܘܬܐ). This state is nothing to trifle with, however, as Philoxenos cautions regarding an absence of *apatheia*. "If freedom from passions is the kingdom of heaven, according to the word of that wise spiritual [teacher], then also the servitude of passions is a Gehenna that tortures, the outer darkness and the worm that gnaws at the heart and thoughts" (m 9.32; 298:10–13).

In the exegesis of Gideon's selection of the three hundred men to fight against the Midianites, the limitation on drinking water derives from Evagrius' *Praktikos* in which he observes, "Limiting one's intake of water helps a great deal to obtain temperance. This was well understood by the three hundred Israelites accompanying Gideon just when they were preparing to attack Midian" (*Praktikos* 17).<sup>160</sup>

Philoxenos begins his instruction on the ascetical life with the Evagrian fundamentals of the ascetic life—faith, simplicity, and the fear of God. In the context of monastic life, these can be understood as solid catechetical instruction for a novice in the Christian faith, as no doubt some of his monks were.

Two critical principles in the monk's spiritual progression emerge: first is the function and importance of simplicity (*pešīṭūtā* - ܫܝܫܘܬܐ) in how Philoxenos approaches the knowledge of God; second is the crucial role of the defeat of gluttony or lust of the belly (*rēḥmat karsā* - ܪܗܡܬ ܕܟܪܫܐ) in the monastic life.

Simplicity here goes well beyond a pleasant naive disposition as it refers to the divine attribute—God is not made of composite parts, but is One, complete, unified, integral whole. In his advanced work, *Antirrhētikos*, or "talking back," Evagrius notes in his prologue an important definition: "For a monastic man is one who has departed from the sin that consists of deeds and action, while a

<sup>160</sup> Evagrius Pontus, "The Monk: A Treatise on the Practical Life," *The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, chapter 5, no. 17, p. 101.



monastic intellect is one who has departed from the sin that arises from the thoughts that are in our intellect and who at the time of prayer sees the light of the Holy Trinity."<sup>161</sup> This describes precisely the situation that Philoxenos addresses: monks who have physically but not mentally/spiritually withdrawn from the world, and have come to live in the monastery, and discover that they are no further advanced in the spiritual life, if not further behind. The development of a monastic intellect indicates an inner spiritual faculty that enables one to discern and reject the passions and make a correct judgment. Evagrius' favorite technique is to prescribe an antidote for a spiritual disease. The critical principles Evagrius has emphasized in the monk's spiritual progression take the literary form of a demon's seductive, typically negative idea followed by a fitting scriptural verse that one uses as a sort of antidote to "talk back"<sup>162</sup> to a demon and defeat it. In his introduction, Philoxenos lists fifty-four pairs of diseases/passions and a fitting antidote for each (m 1.13; 22:2–23:18).

Despite the complexity of his thought, Evagrius nevertheless discourages monks from too much speculation. In his *Exhortations to Monks* he advises, "Restrain your curiosity about the Trinity; only believe and offer worship, for one who displays curiosity does not believe."<sup>163</sup> In his overture to the *Discourses*, Philoxenos repeats this idea several times. "Whoever is constant in reading, but far from works, indicts himself through his reading. He is worthy of greater judgment, for he treats contemptuously and despises daily what he hears every day" (m 1.2; 5:10–13). "Whoever approaches God ought to believe that [God] exists, and [God] rewards those who

<sup>161</sup> Evagrius Pontus, *Talking Back: Antirrhêtikos: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons*, trans. David Brakke, CS 229 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2009), Prol.5, p. 51.

<sup>162</sup> Brakke credits Clark with this colloquial turn of translation, CS 229:4. See Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999), 128–32.

<sup>163</sup> Evagrius Pontus, "Exhortation to Monks," *The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, chapter 2, no. 33, p. 222.

seek him.<sup>164</sup> Paul commended this law to one who desires to draw near to God and placed this debt on him to pay: to believe only that God exists. Whoever believes that [God] exists, and does not investigate ‘when’ and ‘how,’ so also if he obeys his will and word and teaching, he will affirm that it is the will of God and will hear and believe the voice and commandment of God. But as for judging ‘why’ and ‘in which form,’ and ‘why thus,’ this is an audacious investigation for a soul that has not perceived God” (m 2.1; 28:1–11).

Philoxenos becomes more serious when he arrives at “the renunciation of the world.” The shift from the physical to the spiritual realm is apparent, for Philoxenos does not need to urge anyone to “depart from the world.” However, many have not spiritually renounced the world, still dwelling mentally in the memories of worldly settings of family and marriage, instead of their minds dwelling spiritually in the kingdom of heaven or the Garden of Eden.

All of this theological musing on renunciation is still prolegomena for the monks since it concerns an action and event on which they have already embarked, however imperfectly and incompletely. In the tenth *mēmṛā*, Philoxenos drops the shoe and talks bluntly of the beginning of all sin. Gluttony or the lust of the belly is a psychosomatic stumbling block, not only to physical health, but also to spiritual vitality and divine knowledge. In the physiology of asceticism the lust of the belly leads directly to the spirit of fornication, and then to worse spiritual malaise. This is not manichaeistic dualism at play, for nothing is wrong with food, Philoxenos emphasizes, it is a matter of how you eat, of not allowing desire to have control over you.

In *Antirrhêtikos*, Evagrius cites the story in Daniel 1 regarding Daniel and the three other young men who reject the rich food of the Persian court for a diet of seeds and before long they are far more fit than their indulgent compatriots.<sup>165</sup> This is also one of Philoxenos’ favorite stories, reviewed at length in the eleventh *mēmṛā* (m 11.58; 471:1–473:12), partly to show explicitly how to

<sup>164</sup> Heb 11:6

<sup>165</sup> Evagrius Pontus, *Talking Back*, Gluttony 45, p. 62.

practice a proper nongluttonous way of life, but also to demonstrate that it is not food in itself that is the demon, but the tendency and weakness for the wrong kind of food.

In the two long *mēm̄rā* on gluttony, fasting (ܩܘܡܐ - *ṣawmā*) is not the primary focus, since the most difficult sins develop in situations where the individual does not recognize the dire consequences and sinfulness of what he is doing. Philoxenos warns against the delusion that if the monk believes he has conquered the rich and fancier foods that he has defeated gluttony. Rather, one must be alert even more to the temptations of eating too much plain, regular food. Once one is in control regarding plain food, then the challenge of richer foods is a moot point (m 10.63; 415:11–416:8).

Philoxenos' intention is to tame, transcend, and be victorious over the lust of the belly, which has become the new boundary line for his understanding of the ascetical and monastic life,<sup>166</sup> superseding the requirement of celibacy for entry into perfection for the *Book of Steps*. A decision that leads to an authentic commitment typically is of sufficient stringency that one cannot make it with half measures. "The lust of the belly is the beginning of all sin" and the rejection of its control over one's body and soul necessitates at first a clearly uncomfortable transformation of one's entire being, spirit, soul, and body. The "battle" (ܩܘܡܐܐ - *taktūšā* / ܩܘܡܐ - *qrābā*) has moved inwardly, where gluttony plays out its beguiling challenge.

This emphasis on gluttony and then fornication does seem to take us back to the perception that Philoxenos was attempting an Evagrian model of sins and vices in the construction of his *mēm̄rē*.<sup>167</sup>

The most thorough effort at showing the indebtedness of Philoxenos to Evagrius is in the essay of Robin Darling Young, a Syriac and Evagrian scholar, in the Sidney Griffith festschrift.<sup>168</sup> Darling Young succinctly summarizes the literary and ecclesiastic careers of

<sup>166</sup> Kitchen, "The Lust of the Belly Is the Beginning of All Sin."

<sup>167</sup> See David A. Michelson, *Practice Leads to Theory*, chapter 2: "Monastic Practice and Divine Knowledge: The Evagrian Background to Philoxenos' Vision of Christian Faith and Life," 50–72.

<sup>168</sup> Robin Darling Young, "The Influence of Evagrius of Pontus," *To Train His Soul In Books: Syriac Asceticism in Early Christianity*, ed. Robin Darling

both authors, noting that while Evagrius' work would eventually come under fire for its speculative visions, Philoxenos focused solely on the former's theology of monasticism and the spiritual life. Darling Young concentrates on Philoxenos' *Letter to Patricius*<sup>169</sup> to illustrate how Philoxenos understood Evagrius' ideas and intentions, admonishing and amending the interpretation of a monk who had been reading Evagrius erroneously.

Darling Young makes the observation that Philoxenos never seems to have lived in a monastery or to have taken monastic vows.<sup>170</sup> Nevertheless, his monastic deference was formed through the ascetical life of a scholar begun at a young age.<sup>171</sup> Philoxenos' fundamental ethic was to live in imitation of Christ, an essential tenet of Evagrius.<sup>172</sup> He appears to have inherited in some fashion the stratification of the Christian way of life from the *Book of Steps*:<sup>173</sup> uprightness or justice/righteousness and perfection. The first level, Darling Young notes, is more of an exterior imitation of Christ's obedience, while perfection is the true imitation of Christ.<sup>174</sup>

In the *Letter to Patricius*, Philoxenos responds to the inquiries of a monk, Patricius of Edessa, whom he recognizes has read Evagrius in an incorrect way. Patricius wishes to bypass the need to follow the commandments on his way to full contemplation, an immature interpretation of Paul's rejection of the law. Philoxenos insists on the

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Young and Monica J. Blanchard, *CUA Studies in Early Christianity* 5 (Washington, DC: CUAP, 2011), 157–75.

<sup>169</sup> *La Lettre à Patricius de Philoxène de Mabboug*, ed. and trans. René Lavenant, PO 3 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1963).

<sup>170</sup> See Andrew Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier*, 115, regarding the legacy of Philoxenos in the monastery of Qartmin in Ṭur 'Abdin. Eli of Qartmin identifies Philoxenos as a monk of Qartmin (ll. 235–48), but Ignatius Aphram I Barsoum (*The Scattered Pearls: History of Syriac Literature and Sciences*, trans. Matti Moosa [Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005, 297f.]) says Philoxenos only became a monk when he went to Tell'Eda.

<sup>171</sup> Darling Young, "The Influence of Evagrius," 166–67.

<sup>172</sup> Darling Young, "The Influence of Evagrius," 160–66.

<sup>173</sup> CS 196: lxxxii–lxxxiii.

<sup>174</sup> Darling Young, 170.

necessity of suffering and keeping the commandments in the imitation of Christ. Faith precedes and is a prerequisite for knowledge, and Philoxenos goes further in making faith a form of knowledge, a kind of sixth sense, a perspective Darling Young believes he may have acquired from Ephrem and John Chrysostom.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, in a theme found a number of times in the *Discourses*, Philoxenos advises Patricius not to read too much for such practice does not produce the knowledge of Christ and instead will produce many thoughts in the soul that will lead to trouble.<sup>176</sup> Trouble for Philoxenos means the contortions of christological debate, especially as conducted by Chalcedonian supporters. Faith and simplicity are the appropriate and adequate perceptual skills for the monk aspiring to perfection.

David Michelson's studies of Philoxenos' appropriation of Evagrius' *ascesis* and divine knowledge,<sup>177</sup> while paying significant attention to the *Letter to Patricius*, also draw the *Discourses* into the bishop's Evagrius' hermeneutical approach. He demonstrates that Philoxenos' purpose in utilizing Evagrius' system of monastic asceticism was to counter "out of order" theological speculation. Michelson sees the central concept to be that of simplicity, the essential beginning point for those embarking on the monastic life. It is not stupidity or dullness of mind, but the singleness of one thought which hears and does not judge, accepts and does not investigate the ineffable reality of God. Simplicity is, in fact, one of the basic characteristics of God, who is simple, not complex, segmented, or divided. The opposite of simplicity for Philoxenos is worldly wisdom and craftiness which inevitably lead one toward the convoluted arguments and controversies of the christological debates in which Philoxenos both engages and works to disengage himself. Michelson suggests that the order of Philoxenos' themes

<sup>175</sup> Darling Young, 171–72; *Patricius*, 118, 54.

<sup>176</sup> Darling Young, 174; *Patricius*, 62, 65.

<sup>177</sup> Michelson, *Practice Leads to Theory*.

(faith, simplicity, fear of God, renunciation, gluttony, abstinence, fornication) is essentially an Evagrian scheme.<sup>178</sup>

It is apparent that Philoxenos approaches his progression of monastic and spiritual education informed by an Evagrian imagination, but it is not obvious, as might have been with a systematic delineation of the eight thoughts or vices. Philoxenos also participates in the classic Syriac spiritual tradition, so several of his ascetical qualities are not distinguishable from earlier authors. E. W. Budge, in his introduction to the *Discourses*, recognized a kindred spirit between Philoxenos and Aphrahat. The first discourse and demonstration for both authors is "On Faith," which Budge emphasizes by including an English translation of Aphrahat's *Demonstration*.<sup>179</sup> Budge conjectures that Philoxenos might have desired to imitate or continue Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*, but there is no evidence of that scenario. Philoxenos' corpus is more disciplined and directed in its organization, whereas Aphrahat's topics are more occasional. It is Evagrius' theology which Philoxenos is utilizing as a template.

Faith is the first step for Evagrius, not a specific content of doctrine, but a theological "sense." Evagrius states that "faith is the beginning of love; the end of love, knowledge of God,"<sup>180</sup> and then connects faith to one of Philoxenos' other steps, "The fear of the Lord begets prudence; faith in Christ bestows the fear of God."<sup>181</sup> In between faith and the fear of God is simplicity, which as recognized before is a basic concept for Evagrius. "God is universally confessed as simple and uncompounded."<sup>182</sup> The renunciation of the

<sup>178</sup>David A. Michelson, "Philoxenos of Mabbug and the Simplicity of Evagrian Gnosis: Competing Uses of Evagrius in Early Sixth-Century Polemical Theology," *Evagrius and His Legacy*, ed. Joel Kalvesmaki and Robin Darling Young (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming).

<sup>179</sup>Budge, *The Discourses*, 2:lxviii–lxvii.

<sup>180</sup>Evagrius of Pontus, "To the Monks in Monasteries," *The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, no. 3, p. 122.

<sup>181</sup>Evagrius of Pontus, "To the Monks in Monasteries," *The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, no. 69, p. 126.

<sup>182</sup>Evagrius Pontus, "On the Faith," no. 5, Casiday, 47.

world is a universal principal for monastic spirituality—Evagrius, Syrian, and other—while gluttony and fornication are the initial two “thoughts” in Evagrius’ system.

### **A Pastoral Philoxenian Postscript**

Quiet Philoxenos was not. The energy and enthusiasm with which he approached and delivered the themes of the *Discourses* can be overwhelming. Whether or not he ever was a monk himself, the bishop cares deeply for the vocation of the novices around him. Nothing is more important than the monastic and ascetical life, a life that is neither extraordinary nor ordinary. It is the way of perfection by which Christ leads one back into the Garden, characterized by the single-minded simplicity of the original couple before they stopped being simple. There is, however, nothing easy about this way, and it is a continual state of struggle for the monk, and Philoxenos cuts no corners for his charges.

Philoxenos is on the side of the monks, encouraging them, bolstering their spirits, cheering them on as the consummate pastor who knows when to insist uncompromisingly and when to reassure his flock so that they may accomplish the humanly improbable. ‘Tis a gift to be simple, for the human being is drawn to distractions, irrelevancies, and excesses. Philoxenos points on every page or every minute of his narration to the authentic desire to become fulfilled (ܩܘܠܘܬܐ - *mšamlyūtā*)—which is a Syriac synonym for perfection. If the monk can keep that goal in mind, he remembers God.

# Abbreviations

A Boll	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
CS	Cistercian Studies Series
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
MW	Monastic Wisdom Series
OC	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
OCA	<i>Orientalia Christiana Analecta</i>
OrChr	<i>Oriens Christianus</i>
OrSyr	<i>L'Orient Syrien</i>
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
PS	<i>Patrologia Syriaca</i>
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>



## Introduction

**(3) [These are] the discourses concerning instruction in the ways of life described by the blessed Mar Philoxenos, bishop of Mabbug, who explains through them the entire system of discipline: how one should begin in Christ's discipleship, and by which laws and rules one should journey until one attains the spiritual love from which perfection is born. For through [perfection] we become like Christ, as Paul the Apostle said. This is the first *mēm̄rā*, the introduction to this entire volume, by the grace of our Lord.**

*Summary: Philoxenos stresses laying the foundation of wisdom in the correct order with the appropriate building blocks. One needs to be able to recognize the various lusts and passions with which one does battle, and against which spiritual masters guide us, prescribing the right medicines or antidotes against these passions. A long list of spiritual antidotes to counter different passions of sin is presented. Philoxenos promises to show the reader how to begin and then advance through all the grades of the Christian life until one reaches Perfection.*

### **Beginning to Build**

1. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ invited us through his living gospel to approach wisely the work of keeping his commandments and to establish in us the foundation of his discipline in an orderly fashion, so that the building of our ways of life may ascend straight up and true. Whoever does not know how to begin knowledgeably

in the building of this tower that rises up to heaven is not able to finish and bring it to the perfection of wisdom. For (4) knowledge and wisdom direct, order, and accomplish the beginning, completion, and nurturing of all these things.

Whoever begins this way is called wise by our Savior's word: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like the wise man who digs deeply and establishes his building upon a rock. The rain came down and the torrents came and the winds blew, and [though] they beat against that house it did not fall, for its foundations were established upon a rock. But whoever hears and does not do [these words] is like the foolish man who establishes his building upon the sand. Even if the elements beating against his building are weak, they will tear it down."<sup>1</sup>

### **Reading and Hearing the Word**

2. Therefore, according to the word of our teacher, we must not only become constant hearers of the word of God, but also constant doers. Whoever does [these words]—even though he does not listen—is better than one who constantly listens but is bereft of deeds. As the word of the Apostle Paul teaches us, "It is not the hearers of the law [who] are [considered] upright before God, but the doers of the law [who] are held to be righteous. If the Gentiles, who do not have the law, act lawfully by their nature, they are a law unto themselves, even though they had no law. They show that the doing of the law is written on their heart, their conscience witnessing for them."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, hearing the law is excellent because it brings [one] to works. Reading and study (5) of the Scriptures are excellent, purifying our inner mind from the thoughts of evil things. But if a person is constant in reading, hearing, and studying the Word of God, while not carrying through on his reading by performing works[, this is not good]. The Spirit of God foretold this through the blessed David when he was refuting and reproaching his evilness.

<sup>1</sup> Matt 7:24-27.

<sup>2</sup> Rom 2:13-15.

[The Spirit] prohibited him from being able even to pick up the holy book in his filthy hands. God speaks to the sinful person, "What do the books of my commandments matter to you that you take up my covenant with your mouth? Yet you despise my instruction and cast my words behind you,"<sup>3</sup> [along] with the rest of what was written after these [words].

Whoever is persistent in reading, but far from works, indicts himself through his reading. He is worthy of greater judgment, for he treats contemptuously and regularly despises what he hears every day. Therefore, he is like a dead person and a corpse without a soul. If a myriad of trumpets and horns should blow into the ear of a dead person he does not hear. In the same way also, the soul of a person dead in sins and the mind from which the recollection of God has been lost do not hear the sound of shouts of divine voices through the deadly error of thoughts. The loud sound of divine summons and the trumpet of the spiritual word do not stir him, for he is sinking into the sleep of death which he finds pleasurable. Though he is dying, he does not perceive his [own] death, so that he could turn himself around and seek life for himself. Just as the person who has died naturally does not perceive his own death, so also one who is [spiritually] dead, who dies by his own will to the knowledge (6) of God, does not suffer at his own death, nor also does he perceive his destruction in order to find a way to recover life for himself.

So when God saw the deadness of the Jews, who willingly stopped up their ears and shut their eyes and hardened their heart from the recollection and knowledge of God, [God] roused Isaiah to awaken them and [God] called to him to shout into their ears, "Shout at the top of your lungs and do not hold back. Raise up your voice like a trumpet and show my people their iniquity and to those of the house of Jacob their sins."<sup>4</sup>

Again in another passage, the prophet said, "He said to me, 'Cry.' I said, 'What shall I cry?' 'All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like

<sup>3</sup>Ps 50:16-17.

<sup>4</sup>Isa 58:1.

the flower of the field.'"<sup>5</sup> Just as grass and flowers dry up from the sun which the rain and all the irrigation of the springs are not able to make flourish once its natural moisture has been eliminated, such is the case of a people completely dead to the spiritual life. Like grass and flowers they wither and dry up before the noon [sun] of error and from the heat of evil things.

For the soul dies from the recollection of God, and when it has died, all its faculties of discernment die with it, and thoughts on the reflection of heavenly things cease from it. While the soul lives according to its nature, it dies through its will. And while it is found in its form, it perishes in its free will. Then it is necessary for the disciple of God that the recollection of his teacher Jesus Christ become fixed in his soul, and he should meditate on him night and day.

(7) It is appropriate to learn where one should begin, and how and where one should erect the stages of his building, and how one should begin and complete his building, lest one be ridiculed by all the passersby as our Lord said concerning whoever began to build a tower but was not able to finish it, for he became a joke and a mockery to all those seeing him.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Foundation**

3. Who else would begin building the tower about which our Savior spoke, except the disciple who begins on the road of the Gospel of Christ? Here is the beginning of this disciple's own building: his promise and his covenant with God by which he promises to depart from the world and keep the commandments, and to begin to run and accomplish, while gathering and bringing from every place the precious stones of excellent rules for the building of this tower that ascends to heaven.

The foundation is solid and laid down, according to the word of Paul, which is Jesus Christ our God.<sup>7</sup> Every person builds upon that foundation as he desires, because once the foundation [Christ]

<sup>5</sup> Isa 40:6.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 14:29-30.

<sup>7</sup> Eph 2:20.

has bent down through his love so that he might accept everything placed upon him until the day of revelation comes, on which the work of every person is examined and tried; [then] he who is the foundation at the base of the building ascends and becomes the judge and the head at the top of the building. As Paul himself said, "If a person builds upon this foundation, [using] gold or silver or (8) valuable stones or wood or grass or stubble, the work of every person is revealed. For that Day will reveal it, because it is revealed through fire, and the fire will discern the accomplishment of every person as he is."<sup>8</sup>

### Precious Gems

4. Paul compared the rules and virtues of righteousness with gold and silver and precious gems, for faith is in them like gold, and abstinence, fasting, and asceticism with the remainder of the labors of righteousness are like silver. Love, peace and hope, pure minds and holy thoughts are like precious gems; the intellect, pulsating completely in the Spirit, is carried in all its movements by the wonder of God and the marvel at the majesty of his being, and the mind that kept silent with trembling before the unexplained and unspoken mysteries of God.

Therefore, Paul labeled "precious gems" these thoughts and movements and heavenly pulsations and spiritual rules. But he called wood and grass and stubble "error" and "evilness," along with the practice of all these lusts. Insofar as a building is anchored into the ground, every person builds and erects upon it whatever he desires until the day of judgment is revealed, and the one about whom it was said comes: "He holds the winnowing fan in his hand and purifies his threshing floors and gathers grains of wheat into barns and burns the straw in unquenchable fire."<sup>9</sup>

The laborer who has planted the tree of our humanity in the world shows himself to be like a judge, the axe of decision being held (9) in his hand. Every tree that does not bear virtuous fruits

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor 3:12-13.

<sup>9</sup> Matt 3:12, Luke 3:17.

he cuts down and throws into the fire.<sup>10</sup> When the fisher appears, having cast his net into the sea of the world and [the net] is full of large and small fish that are the races and families of humanity, peoples and generations of the sons of flesh, different tongues and nations without measure, [then] at that time he will draw and pull in his net onto the seashore, just as he said, and he will select the good fish and put [them] into his buckets which are the living storehouses of his kingdom. But the bad ones he will cast away into the outer darkness where there shall come to be weeping and gnashing of teeth.<sup>11</sup>

These things are reserved for that time so they may take place when the chief shepherd is revealed in the glory of his kingdom. For one thing is the time of trial, and another that of training, and another that of study, and another that of discernment. Just as there is no trial in this time of training, so also in that time of trial there will be no training.

### **The Beginning of Discipleship**

5. Then, my friends, let us listen to the living voice of God who has called us in order to give us eternal life. His utterances are full of life and give life to whoever listens to them. Living utterances are spoken by life, and life is given by living utterances to those who pay attention to their words with a living ear.

However, because it is right for us to distinguish and speak concerning every one of the matters in its place, we should explain through our word which one is first and which one is after it, and how one after another the virtues are kept **(10)** and are perfected.

### **An Established Regimen**

6. We have written this introduction so that it might encourage the reader [to discover] the wealth in the following discourses. Because it is appropriate for whoever is beginning on the road of

<sup>10</sup> Matt 7:19.

<sup>11</sup> Matt 13:47-50.

the commandments of Christ to know where he should begin and which stone is fitting to become the first [stone] for the building of his discipline, and which stone should be second and which third, lest while not knowing the order, nor learning where one should start, one also does not know where and how one should finish. Without the knowledge of his discipline, one might make the last things first and the first things last, and place some of these things in the middle.

For if the times are known to ploughmen and laborers of the world for seeding and plantings, and other [times] for harvesting and for the picking of fruits, keeping to the order of the seasons lest [the harvests] be damaged and their affairs be troubled—how much more ought the sower and spiritual worker and true disciple know which things are appropriate at first for his discipline, and where he should begin. Once he has set the first stone in its order into the foundation of his discipline, he will correctly erect all the rest of the building. Builders and masons also work in this way, for when they begin on the foundation of their building, [they start with] heavy stones and great solid rocks. Even if they place in the building something inferior, a solid foundation is able to receive and bear inferior materials. But if they place underneath in the foundation **(11)** weak and inferior [materials], and strong and great things above, their entire building will come tumbling down.

Moreover, let us take this example from those teachers who educate youths, who transmit their teaching to them in an order. They do not pass over and mix up the rules and the procedures of human knowledge, but they know which [subjects] they should present first, and which afterward, until the student reaches the completion of his level of education.

This apprenticeship is also familiar to all the worldly crafts according to a norm by which items are given to students to practice when they first begin learning the trade. Their teachers show them how to perform the smaller things in the craft, according to their lowest level. If a defect should occur, there will be [only] a little damage.

It is also standard with these who learn the art of athletics that they first begin with those [elementary] techniques of wrestling and

pay attention to which degrees they will progress through the art of athletics. Initially, they move into a ready position against one another. After this they throw their hands upon each other and so are provoked to wrestle in full competition. Those who are chosen for military service in the world also learn this art of war **(12)** in this same order.

### **Learning in Order**

7. For them, the process of learning is neither in a confused nor disorderly manner. But they learn every one of these things in its place and in its order with everything else that is in the world, the beginning and middle and ending of each being evident.

Then, by the examples of these cases we have brought forward, this order is especially useful for us. The knowledge of the first mode of life and of the one after it is necessary for us. For here, spiritual athletics is learned, and we are chosen for the cultivation of those things that are in heaven, just as those who are chosen to serve kings in the world learn the royal laws and customs from those who preceded them regarding, for example, [how to] walk and [how to] appear and [how to] speak and where one should be in position to speak before [the king]. Those coming later learn from [their] predecessors, those who are chosen recently from those who preceded them. So also here it is necessary for a human being who is chosen, whether by the discernment of his will or by the promise of his parents, to serve Christ, to learn this ministry from those who preceded him, or from the Holy Scriptures, or from a spiritual person, for they have walked following the law on this road, people who have commenced in the labors and completed [them] spiritually and were perfected in love.

### **Fighting the Passions**

8. The lusts that fight with us at the beginning of youth **(13)** are obvious. It is evident which ones occur in the middle of youth, and which ones at the end of the stage of youth; and which ones in the beginning of young adulthood, and which ones in its middle and which ones at its end; and moreover, which ones in middle age



in the same order as the first until the end of this level; and even more, which passions fight with us in the time of old age until our departure from the world. Then, which are the ones that happen to us in childhood and infancy by movements and natural impulses before the discernment of free will is stirred up in us, and we attain the knowledge that distinguishes good things from the bad.

Again, while we are fulfilling the rules and labors, we should know which passion contends against which one, and which desire strives against which one, and at the completion of the work of that good thing, which evil thing is awakened against us. How, in the defeat of one of the lusts, does another seize victory? How, when we have controlled the lusts of the body, does a battle of the soul's passions become aroused against us? And how, when we cast off an evil thing from the outside, does it turn around against us to clothe us interiorly in our thoughts? When we have killed it from the members of the body, it still lives in the living movements of the soul. When we have cut it off and thrown it away from us, it enters insidiously into us (14) in order to live inside us.

Which passion is engendered in the soul from the fasting of the body? Which ones from abstinence, from singing out loud, from prayer in stillness, or from the renunciation of possessions, or by ragged clothing? Which passion is engendered in us from inner compassion toward every person? Which passion is aroused against us when our way of life is greater than that of our brother?

Which passions occur inside us from the knowledge of thoughts? Which ones from the words of instruction, and which ones from the words transmitted in the Scriptures? Into which passion do we fall once we have defeated the lust of the belly in all things? Which one is awakened against us at the final triumph of the war against fornication? Which passion is engendered in us by obedience to superiors, and which one by obedience to every person? What kind of thoughts do we have when we resist obedience? By which teaching is an unruly thought brought to nothing for its teachers? By which way of thinking do we uproot from ourselves the prejudices that we ourselves have? Which passions are defeated by which ones? Which lusts are dissipated by which [passions]?

[It is necessary to know] which [passion] is a battle with physical things, and which one with those of the soul, and which one with spiritual things. What should corporeal [people] do when they wish to defeat the lusts of the body? What should those of the soul do (15) in order to defeat and overcome the soul's passions? What should spiritual [people] [do] to be rescued from the faults that beset the spiritual in the spiritual sphere, and how far should the battle be extended into each one of these orders?

### **Discerning the Passions**

9. How do we know when a movement of desire is from us? How and when does it occur in us by the enemy's instigation from outside? Through which [passions] is the desire engendered by us vanquished, and which ones does the enemy awaken against us? Is the same desire vanquished by a single method at all times? Are [certain] ways also necessary for us to triumph according to the circumstances? How and by what do we sense when our lust is defeated by us, [whether it is] by the strength of our patience or by the grace of God?

Which battle is awakened against us [when we are] among [too] many [people]? And which one when we are in solitude, and how especially is the soul cleansed and purified? Which place is helpful for the labor of the body? In which [things] should we begin first when we approach the discipleship of Christ? Which passion is awakened in us by the glory given to us by superiors, either on account of our knowledge, or on account of our way of life? Which passion [is awakened] when we are praised by the great majority of people? By which thoughts do we see the cause of the passions, and how should we be aware in our soul so as not to be disturbed by them when they set upon us? Which (16) attitudes should we adopt when we defeat their contention? How are we able to acquire humility? By which thoughts should we eliminate from ourselves pride which is the opposite of humility? By which ideas should we take hold of patience in our soul? What is the renunciation of the body, and what is the renunciation of the world, and what is the renunciation of the soul? When we have renounced the wealth

of these visible things, how do we acquire the wealth of the gifts of Christ?

### **First Steps in the Ascetical Life**

10. Which commandments should we keep at the beginning of our discipleship? How should we listen to our teachers, those who advise and teach us virtuous things, while not noticing their faults? Which power wrests our soul away from every one of the good things that are being performed by us? How should we live with excellent manners in the monasteries of our brothers? To what degree is it necessary for one to fast? How in every time like it should we add and subtract from the food for our bodies? How and how much should we eat when the war of desire confronts us? What should we do when we desire to extinguish from ourselves the passions of the soul? With which reflection of thoughts do we uproot enmity from ourselves?

How and from where is pure prayer born inside us? Which examples draw us toward a state of wonder about God? How does the passion for God stir in our soul at every moment? How many passions and examples should there be for this passion for God? How when we come (17) to stillness should we guard our thoughts from wandering beyond us? What harm happens to a person from association with heretics? How is our heart hardened and darkened from the recollection and reflection of God through human encounters and meetings?

We should know which is a physical fast, and which is one of the soul, and which is a spiritual [fast]; which one is physical purity, and which is that of the soul and that of the spirit; which one is physical renunciation, and which is [renunciation] of the soul, and which one is spiritual; and which are the distinctions of stillness—physical, soulful, and spiritual.

### **The Spiritual Art**

11. How is the soul taught to fast from evil things, except through the example of the body [fasting] from food?

These [examples] and many others like them the disciple of Christ ought to learn and comprehend in order to journey with confidence on the road of his service and to carry out the desires of the heavenly King before whom he serves. If those who diligently learn the trades of the world learn all the secrets of the trades and are eager to understand all the forms of activities involved in every one of them, how much more for that one chosen for this spiritual art—if it is right to call it an art—is it necessary for him to know all the roads and paths and aims and examples of the mysteries of this divine way of life, and to understand that while a person is a physical being, he has been selected to serve in spiritual matters, and by the grace of God has been deemed worthy of the way of life of heavenly beings. (18) But while he exists in the flesh in the world, he should journey on the road that is above his nature.

Therefore, we ought—if we are disciples—to inquire and learn as disciples all those things in which we find ourselves living. Just as disciples learn the arts from their teachers, so also let us learn and receive from spiritual teachers. For no one is able to become a teacher, unless at first he becomes a disciple.<sup>12</sup> He is not able to assist and help others unless he has accumulated profits for himself from others, subjugating himself to receive and learn from everyone, and considering everyone greater and higher than himself.

Because our nature is created, and even though we did not exist, we live according to the will of the Creator and are able to acquire newly the learning of virtues. Just as we have come into being from nonbeing, so also from being sinful we become righteous.

But when a person has completely taken off the world, then he clothes himself perfectly in the way of Christ. Until he takes off the dirty outer coat and purifies himself through tears of repentance from the stains of evil things, he is not able to put on the purple garments of the knowledge of Christ. For a person who is defiled by thoughts or by deeds of iniquity ought to heal his [own] bruises first, and cleanse the blemishes of his soul and of his body, and then

<sup>12</sup> See Matt 10:24-25a.

come to the banquet hall of the divine mysteries, while putting on the spiritual outer garments [required for] this feast.<sup>13</sup>

### **Starting from Childhood**

12. Because of this it is especially fitting that everyone who becomes a disciple of Christ should establish the foundation of his discipline from the time of his childhood in order that his entire (19) upbringing should acquire virtuous habits. He should not approach this new ministry after the world depletes the strength of his soul and of his body, like an old and worn out vessel. But as it was said by our Lord, "Let us put new wine into new skins [so that] both of them will be preserved";<sup>14</sup> so at the beginning of our childhood, while our planting is still new, let us place into our soul the new wine of the teaching of Christ, while our strength is in us and our newness has not become old through sins, in order that we might be able to endure the fervor of the love of holy teaching. Thus, while we preserve it, we will be protected in it from all evil things, especially so that the strength of our soul is not seized and taken for the labor of foreign slaveries.

But whoever begins in his childhood in this way of life needs to live with the admonition of teachers, being obedient to their words and not judging their faults. Moreover, those teachers should place themselves in the rank of tutors to whom the sons of the heavenly King have been entrusted so that they might bring them up: whose father is the king, and whose brother is king, and their mother the queen. Just like those who educate princes in the world, they should demonstrate unending diligence for their [students'] education, along with vigilance and care, so that they might be pleasing through them to their parents, and also to [the princes] when they come to the honor of the kingdom; in the same way also the teacher who has disciples should consider himself to be bringing up princes and should be vigilant and alert, inwardly and outwardly, concerning their precepts and their development.

<sup>13</sup> See Matt 22:12.

<sup>14</sup> Matt 9:17; Luke 5:36-38.

It is appropriate, (20) moreover, imitating physicians, that we should behave in this way toward ourselves and toward one another, because there is no physician for whom a disease occurs in his [own] body who does not show diligence concerning it before [he attempts] to cure the diseases of others. Moreover, if others become ill, the code of the healing profession requires him to rush to their healing. In the manner of physicians we should first know the causes of diseases, and then offer the medicines that do not make the disease increase. Bearing the soul and the body by the grace of God in the structure of our created being, we are required to have diligence for both of them.

Concerning diseases and physical sufferings, the nature of the body makes its demands on us and for its nourishment and drink and clothing, its natural needs press us to take care of its need.<sup>15</sup> We are not able to turn away, not even if we want to, because the coercion of its sufferings directs us to its cure and to satisfy fully its needs and necessities.

As for the cure of our soul, the commandment of the word of God urges us to cure its diseases and to heal its passions and to satisfy its hunger with the nourishment of doctrine, to give it the drink of the knowledge of God, to clothe it in the clothing of faith, to put on it the shoe of the preparation of hope, and to rear it in good habits and in the fullness of all virtues, and in the obedience that prepares (21) [it] for the work of the commandments of God.

For while our inner actions are holy and our outer actions are pure, let us become vessels prepared for the spirit of God, so that it may dwell in us purely and in a holy way, while through knowledge and wisdom we heal the diseases that occur within us, and heal the wounds of sin from our soul.

### **Spiritual Antidotes**

13. There is not one of the lustful diseases for which we are not given a medicine for its healing from the word of God. Similar to how medicines are mixed and prepared by physicians for physical

<sup>15</sup> See Matt 6:25ff.

illnesses, medicines against the passions of sins are prepared and made ready by the Spirit of God, in order that whoever is aware of an illness may find the medicine for it at his side and from close by bring aid to himself. Everything for the most part is healed by its opposite, because the opposition of the medicine will fight with the harm of the disease. The diseases that occur from severe cold will receive healing from hot brews. Those that occur from heat, things that quench thirst will be brought to their aid. So also dryness heals those that occur from moisture. Those that happen by moisture, things that dry up [others] are given for their healing. Therefore, take an example from here, O discerning one who wishes to heal the ailments of the soul, and provide for your soul something that performs the art of healing to the body. On account of this, the work of external things is placed before our eyes so that it might be an example of instruction for those things that are internal, and we might heal the soul from **(22)** the diseases of evil things similar to [the way] the body is healed.

Let us prepare against each of the passions of sin the antidote that is the opposite of the disease: against doubt, faith; against error, truth; against supposition, accuracy; against falsehood, integrity; against guile, simplicity; against cunning, innocence; against blurriness, transparency; against harshness, gentleness; against cruelty, kindness; against physical desire, spiritual desire; against pleasure, suffering; against the joy of the world, the joy of Christ.

Against [popular] songs, spiritual melodies; against play, groans and weeping; against intemperance, fasting; against intoxicating drink, the thirst of discernment; against comfort, toil; against pleasure, trouble; against fleshly pleasure, the pleasure of thoughts that exult spiritually; against speaking, stillness; against public conversations, silence; against laxity, tenacity.

Against slowness, quickness; against carelessness of thoughts, acuteness of mind; against listlessness, constancy; against ferocity, mercifulness; against the evilness of the mind, the goodness of the soul.

Against haughtiness, humility; against pride, contemptibleness; against the love of honor, servitude; against praise, reproach.

Against (23) wealth, poverty; against possession, renunciation; against enmity, peace; against hatred, love; against anger, reconciliation; against rage, tranquility; against envy, love; against evil jealousy, the love of people; against curses, blessings; against a blow on the cheek, turning the other cheek to the one who strikes us.

Against grief, joy; against presumptions about ourselves, the confident hope that is with God; against physical passions, spiritual passions; against physical sight, spiritual sight.

Against lavish clothing, ragged clothes; against magnificence, asceticism; against obesity, emaciation; against thought that is concerned with food, thinking that dwells on heavenly matters; against the vision of everything visible, the recollection of everything invisible.

Against this world here and now, the search for the world to come; against the love of physical parents, the love of spiritual parents; against attachment to the human family, the attachment of our mind to our heavenly ancestry; against the city and house that is on earth, the dwelling of Jerusalem on high.

## Conclusion

14. Therefore, all these [illnesses] and those like them are healed and cured by that which is opposite [to it]. Whoever desires spiritual things needs to renounce physical things. For until one [kind of] desire dies in us, the other [desire] will not live in us. That is, until a physical desire dies, a spiritual desire will not live in our thoughts. The death of each one of them gives life to its companion. When the body (24) is alive in us with all of its lusts, the soul dies with all of its desires. When the soul shares in the life in the spirit, and all its parts live with it—that is, its thoughts—then a person rises up from the dead and is alive in the new life of the new world. Until we take off the old [physical] person, we are not able to put on the new spiritual person. But, when we put him on by grace, we do not perceive him.

All these illnesses we have recounted are healed by these medicines. From there it is [the responsibility] of whoever falls sick to know its cure and to become his own physician. Let him ascertain



a medicine, its remedy, for every one of these diseases we have recounted. See, a medicinal herb is placed beside a disease that heals [the disease], and with an ulcer is a medicine that cures it. If you seek to heal your diseases, look, the medicines that heal them are right there beside them; just diagnose your diseases and acquire the knowledge of their remedying plants.

By the brief summary I have outlined for you, take notice of the rest by the diligence of your soul. Learning does not teach you everything lest you become sleepy and idle. But if you consider that those things written or about to be written are too difficult and beyond your strength, call on God to assist you and from him you will receive the grace that assists you in the battle in which you are involved. Then, let us draw near with the assistance of God, and with a small number of words (25) we will describe every one of these passions, according to our power, that is, just as grace provides for my personal aid and for the benefit of others, as we set down these discourses in order one after another and show where the disciple needs to begin and how one should progress and ascend all the degrees of the ways of life until one attains the highest degree of love, and from it ascend to the level of perfection. Then he shall receive the spiritual place of the joy of Christ. When he has come to stand in it he is freed from the passions and has escaped from the lusts and has subdued all his enemies under his feet. From then on a person may speak freely the word of the apostle, "Therefore, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."<sup>16</sup> To him be glory forever. Amen.

The end of the first *mēmṛā*, the introduction of the volume.

<sup>16</sup>Gal 2:20.