The concept of *jihād* in pre-Islamic Syrian Christian and early Sufi Muslim writings

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Abstract

In the Arabic version of the account of Jesus's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus engages in a struggle or *jihād*. This use by Christians of what today is a highly controversial Islamic term that is usually associated with terrorism appears incongruous. The Christian Arabic translator's choice of *jihād* to mean an inner spiritual struggle raises many questions about the pre-Islamic Christian understandings of the concept especially among Syrian ascetics. It also suggests a greater level of Christian-Muslim interaction than often accepted. Given that *jihād* is used here and in several other verses in the earliest ninth-century Arabic Bibles and continuously till today, this indicates that the historic breadth of meaning inherent in the word *jihād* is wider than just an external expression, as is commonly understood in the media. Muslims assert that this breadth existed from the earliest days of Islam and that *jihād* in itself does not always mean external acts of violence but encompasses inner spiritual struggle. In the case of Jesus, Christian ascetics, and Sufis, the word more commonly denotes a metaphorical inward spiritual struggle against temptation, rather than outward violence.

The main focus of this thesis is a comparative analysis of the inner struggle metaphors in mostly pre-Islamic Syrian Christian ascetic authors, compared with early Sufi writers. I investigate the wider range of terms associated with this imagery such as fight, battle, sword, shield, race, fortress, wounds, conquering, capturing, and guarding, and not just the term *jihād* or its Syriac equivalent. I conduct a metaphor analysis of the idea and images of spiritual struggle in seven Syrian Christian and two Muslim authors. This shows that at the level of language and metaphor, and in relation to anthropology and worldview, there is much correlation between pre-Islamic Syrian Christian and Sufi conceptions of inner struggle. This has major significance for how early Christian-Muslim relations should be understood, and also should impact how Islam is interpreted today.

My research clarifies the meaning of *jihād* as understood in early Sufism through analysis of its metaphorical usage in Arabic. I also compare this to the usage of equivalent Syriac words which were used by Christians living in close proximity to early Islam both chronologically and geographically. This fills an important gap in the research on how spiritual struggle was understood in the social context around the emergence of Islam. It also provides valuable information for the debate on the nature of Islam, especially with respect to

the relative roles of spiritual struggle and violent warfare, by identifying the original shared cultural framework for the use of the spiritual struggle metaphor and the term *jihād*.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

John Nicholas D'Alton

Date: 24 October 2018

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Publications during enrolment

D'Alton, John. "The Asceticism of Severus: The Forty Holy Martyrs of Sebaste," in *Severus of Antioch: His Life and Times*, eds. John D'Alton and Youhanna Youssef (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 47-64.

D'Alton, John. "St. Isaac and *agōn*: Isaac's Development of the Greek Notion of the Heroic Struggle and his Metaphors for the Ascetic Life," *Universitas* (June 2016): 59-96.

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26 September 2018, the Feast of the Translation of the Apostle John, who with love and joy completed his struggle.

Abbreviations

ANF   Ante Nicene Fathers

BDM   Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn, Kitāb al-Riʿāya li-Huqūq Allāh.* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1982)

CSCO   Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium

LG   *Liber Graduum* (The Book of Steps)

NPNF   Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

PL   Patrologia Latina

PG   Patrologia Graeca

PS   Patrologia Syriaca

Syriac Transliteration

I have generally used the standard transliteration scheme as per: https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/romanization/syriac.pdf, except that I use ō rather than ā for the *Zqāp̄ā* vowel, as do some other authors, for consistency across the Eastern and Western texts. To facilitate recognition of root forms for non-Syriac readers a hyphen has often been added in between the main word and the "preposition," e.g. *in the struggle (b-āgōno).* In some cases with common words the form used in Brock is maintained. Some of the texts I have used are pointed, but others are not, in which case I have used the customary Eastern or Western vowels.

ܐ	ʾ or a, or disregarded
ܒ	b
ܓ	g
ܕ	d
ܗ	h
ܘ	w except when used to lengthen a vowel
ܙ	z
ܚ	ḥ
ܛ	ṭ
ܝ	y except when used to lengthen a vowel (usually long i)
ܟ	k
ܠ	l
ܡ	m
ܢ	n
ܣ	s
ܥ	ʿ
ܦ	p
ܨ	ṣ
ܩ	q
ܪ	r
ܫ	š or rarely sh
ܬ	t or rarely th

Arabic Transliteration

I have followed the table below based on the IJMES standard except for quotes from secondary sources. Because some of the Arabic source texts do not have vowel points these have been left out, or in some cases added based on the assumed verbal form. To facilitate recognition of root forms by non-Arabic readers a hyphen has in some cases been added between the main word and any "prefixes" or "suffixes." *Alif* is transcribed as long or short depending on its position and its usual pronunciation in the relevant word.

Letter	Name	Transcription
ا	alif	ʾ a or ā
ب	bāʾ	b
ت	tāʾ	t
ث	thāʾ	th
ج	jīm	j
ح	ḥāʾ	ḥ
خ	khāʾ	kh
د	dāl	d
ذ	dhāl	dh
ر	rāʾ	r
ز	zayn/zāy	z
س	sīn	s
ش	shīn	sh
ص	ṣād	ṣ
ض	ḍād	ḍ
ط	ṭāʾ	ṭ
ظ	ẓāʾ	ẓ
ع	ʿayn	ʿ
غ	ghayn	gh
ف	fāʾ	f
ق	qāf	q
ك	kāf	k
ل	lām	l
م	mīm	m
ن	nūn	n
ه	hāʾ	h
و	wāw	w, ū (as a vowel)
ي	yāʾ	y, ī (as a vowel)
آ	alif maddah	a
ة	tāʾ marbūṭah	a, at
ى	alif maqṣūrah	ā, ah

Introduction

In the Arabic version of the account of Jesus's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus engages in a struggle or *jihād*.[1] This use by Christians of what today is a highly controversial Islamic term that is usually associated with terrorism appears incongruous. The Christian Arabic translator's choice of *jihād* to mean an inner spiritual struggle raises many questions about the pre-Islamic Christian understandings of the concept especially among Syrian ascetics. It also suggests a greater level of Christian-Muslim interaction than often accepted. Given that *jihād* is used here and in several other verses in the earliest ninth-century Arabic Bibles and continuously till today, this indicates that the historic breadth of meaning inherent in the word *jihād* is wider than just an external expression, as is commonly understood in the media. Muslims assert that this breadth existed from the earliest days of Islam and that *jihād* in itself does not always mean external acts of violence but encompasses inner spiritual struggle. In the case of Jesus, Christian ascetics, and Sufis, the word more commonly denotes a metaphorical inward spiritual struggle against temptation, rather than outward violence. This is especially evident in the Syrian Christian writings, which is important in relation to possible influence on Sufi Islam because Syriac and Arabic are sister languages.

The main focus of this thesis is a comparative analysis of the inner struggle metaphors in mostly pre-Islamic Syrian Christian ascetic authors and early Sufism. Because the concept of spiritual battle has been well-studied in Islam, I emphasise more the pre-Islamic Syrian Christian authors whose use of struggle metaphors has been relatively ignored. I investigate the wider range of terms associated with this imagery such as fight, battle, sword, shield, race, fortress, wounds, conquering, capturing, and guarding, and not just the term *jihād* or its Syriac equivalent. The bulk of this thesis consists of this metaphor analysis and leads into a comparison chapter where literary motifs and theological similarities and differences are explored. I show that at the level of metaphor, and even in the usage of specific terms, there is much correlation between Syrian Christian and Sufi conceptions of inner struggle. My research bypasses the often contested field of philology and instead I analyse textual motifs and semantic ranges.[2] This has major significance for how early Christian-Muslim relations

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[1] Luke 22:44; وَإِذْ كَانَ فِي جِهَادٍ cf. Greek *agōn,* Syriac *agōna.*

[2] More philological research is certainly needed, for example regarding the Arabic cognate of the Syriac *qraba* (battle), however, other of the main terms I explore (such as *agōna*) are not cognate with the Arabic, and it is

should be understood, and also should impact how Islam is interpreted today.

None of the authors I study exist in a vacuum, hence before approaching the chosen texts I survey their contexts in preceding chapters. The contemporary contexts of the developing perceptions of Islam and the idea of "*jihād*" is my starting point as it determines some aspects of the assumptions often made about the early Sufi authors. I also cover the source texts of the Sufis, namely the Qur'ān and other possible influences, and the antecedents for the Syrian Christians, namely the Christian Old and New Testaments. Especially significant is the Hellenist cultural framework prevalent in the shared region of the authors, and its background of military and sporting imagery and terms for the ascetic struggle. The metaphors and terms for the spiritual or inner fight cluster around a central image or "macrotrope" which I explain. My dominant approach to selected ascetic texts is that of critical metaphor analysis, summarised in Chapter One. In this Introduction I situate my thesis within present-day issues, explain the significance of the research, and outline the structure of the thesis chapters.

Current context

The concept of *jihād* is often used as a "proof of Islam's innate violence" which allows for a representation of Islam as the essentially violent enemy.[3] Some recent representations of Islam have even described *jihād* as a singular Islamic invention with no historic equivalents. However, cognates of *jihād* (exertion or struggle) and a cluster of related concepts such as *shahid* (martyr), were in widespread use prior to Islam in the Syrian Christian tradition. The term *jihād* in Arabic translates the Syriac word *agōna,* which in turn is the Syriac version of the important Greek philosophical idea of the *agōn*. In both pre-Islamic Syriac language and early Sufi vocabulary, *agōna* or *jihād* meant primarily the internal spiritual battle against the passions rather than the external forms of battle.[4] Far from being an indictment of Islam, the concept of *jihād* thus proves to be a key bridge between Greek philosophy, Syrian Christianity, and Islam.

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beyond the scope of this thesis to explore philological evidence for equivalence of meaning. My analysis is of the use of terms having a similar semantic range as part of broadly equivalent metaphors and is less contestable.
[3] Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1.
[4] The "passions" are mentioned in the New Testament and most clearly explained by Evagrius (d. 399) and then Gregory (d. 604), as being out of control desires, namely, gluttony, greed, sloth, sorrow, lust, anger, vainglory, despair, and pride.

The recent construction by Western cultures and churches of Islam as the "Other" ignores the significant historical interplay between European and Islamic cultures, and between Islam and the Christian faith in particular. While Western polemic often portrays Islam and Christianity as natural antagonists, there have historically been many areas of similarity, dialogue and mutual enlightenment. Over the last century there has been significant work done on the possible Christian background to various Muslim practices, but the evidence is unclear in many cases and the arguments often strained.[5] However, the case for ideas of an internal Islamic *jihād* being influenced by earlier ideas of Christian spiritual struggle seems much clearer, although surprisingly there is almost nothing written on the Christian pre-cursors to *jihād*. This has enabled some authors to claim that *jihād* as spiritual struggle is a ninth-century CE Muslim invention constructed to hide Islam's true violent nature. This thesis explores the pre-Islamic use of the Syriac cognates of the Arabic terms for struggle and warfare as used in the Syrian Christian ascetical tradition, and the subsequent Sufi usage in the light of this history, which in turn informs the modern interpretation of *jihād* in Islam.

There are significant connections between early Islam and Oriental Christianity that have not been well explored, notably the central roles of "prayer, fasting, and alms for the poor," spiritual struggle, and desert mysticism. Understanding these points of connection can reframe how both Islam and Christianity are understood. Massignon argues that Islamic mysticism grew out of the Qur'ān, but Baldick says that Syrian Christian influences were more critical. I argue that the ongoing interactions between Muslims and Syrian Christians left an indelible mark on Sufi Islam at the level of the metaphors used for practical asceticism.[6] This was not so much an explicit copying of "Christian" ideas as a borrowing of the central metaphor that "life is a struggle" from the surrounding somewhat-Hellenised partly-Christian Syrian/Arab cultural milieu.

The Contested Meanings of *jihād*

"In debates over Islam taking place today, no principle is invoked more often than *jihād*."[7] The term "*jihād*" has become the main Western media symbol for the Muslim response to the perceived Western oppression. Hearkening back to the medieval battles against the

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[5] See for example Gerald Hawting, ed. *The Development of Islamic Ritual* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2006).
[6] Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1989), 15-17.
[7] Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History,* 1.

"crusades" of the Latin Christians, *jihād* is often incorrectly translated as "holy war."[8] The events of September 11, 2001 have made the concept of *jihād* and the definition of Islam itself politically significant. The trope of the inevitable "clash of civilizations" has propelled the role of violent *jihād* into the forefront of global politics.[9] Badawi says that,

> [T]he reputation of Islam itself as a peaceful and tolerant religion has been damaged. Because Osama bin Laden and other terrorist leaders use an historically inaccurate and distorted view of the Islamic concept of just war (*jihād*) to justify their actions, Islam itself has been depicted by its enemies and estranged friends as condoning unethical, unlimited and almost unthinkable acts of violence and terrorism, which it does not.[10]

Media representations of Islam frequently emphasise bearded warriors intent on destroying the West, and only less commonly portray the typical Muslim as a spiritually-questing person of peace. Much of the recent media misrepresentation has quoted from apparently objective non-Muslim scholarship, but much of this appears highly polemical.

The debate over the meaning of *jihād* also occurs within the context of the current heavily-charged research into the origins of Islam. In 1927 Mingana claimed that the Qur'ān was significantly derived from Syriac Christian materials and raised questions about the legitimacy of Islamic history.[11] In 2007 Luxenberg argued even further that the Qur'ān had been misread and that Muslims have misrepresented the history of the Qur'ān and Islam.[12] Luxenberg also asserts that Muhammad never existed, and claims that the inscription on the dome of the rock shows that "Muhammad" was really another name for Jesus Christ.[13] However, as others have noted, there is significant non-Islamic evidence for an actual historical person Muḥammad, including references in Christian documents written during his lifetime.[14] Neuwirth has shown that Luxenberg makes many assumptions and ignores

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[8] Meghnad Desai, *Rethinking Islamism: The Ideology of the New Terror* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2007), 19.

[9] Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam: Misgivings and History* (New Delhi 2008), 53.

[10] Zaki Badawi, foreword to Richard Bonney*, Jihad: From Qur'an to bin Laden* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), x.

[11] Alphonse Mingana, "Syriac Influence On The Style Of The Kur'an," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library Bulletin* 11 (1927): 77-98.

[12] Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Qur'an* (Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2007).

[13] Christoph Luxenberg, "A New interpretation of the Arabic Inscription in Jerusalem's Dome of the rock," in *The Hidden Origins of Islam,* eds. Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin (New York: Prometheus, 2010), 125-51 (130-1).

[14] Bonner, *Jihād in Islamic History,* 68, notes the sermon of Sophronius, patriarch of Jerusalem in the 630s CE, who laments the arrival of the Muslim invaders. The writings of John of Damascus against Islam, written roughly 100 years AH are also strong evidence against Luxenberg's view. John identifies Muhammad at length in John of Damascus, *Fount of Knowledge*, *part two: Heresies in Epitome: How They Began and Whence They*

important data that contradicts his assertions, but this issue is still being hotly debated, and the implications are enormous.[15]

One of the most well-read recent books on *jihād* is David Cook's *Understanding Jihād*, which presents as a well-documented historical review of the concept. Cook argues that the real meaning of *jihād* is always violent. He asserts, contrary to the evidence in this thesis, that the idea of the greater *jihād* as peaceful internal spiritual struggle was a distortion invented between the ninth and eleventh centuries CE. Cook quotes the important *ḥadīth*:

> A number of fighters came to the messenger of Allah, and he said: "You have done well in coming from the 'lesser *jihād*' to the 'greater *jihād*'." They said: "What is the 'greater *jihād*'?" He said: "For the servant [of God] to fight his passions."[16]

He concludes, "Clearly this tradition is an attempt to radically reinterpret the originally aggressive nature of the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* literature in order to focus on the waging of spiritual warfare."[17] Cook even boldly suggests that the "substitution of the idea of fighting the lower self for aggressive *jihād*" was invented after the ninth century and probably in the eleventh century, due to the evidence of the lack of explicit reference to the 'greater *jihād*' in ninth and tenth century Muslim writers.[18] However, his argument from apparent silence ignores the whole genre of ascetic Sufi writings which describe this spiritual battle without explicitly using the specific term 'greater *jihād*.' The absence of this particular jargon does not invalidate the existence of a concept, which in this case is commonly described using other terms. Cook also ignores his own references to 'Abdallah ibn Mubārak (d. 797 CE) who explicitly describes spiritual *jihād*. Cook notes that Mubarak's book on *jihād* "presents *jihād* as spiritualised warfare in the same spirit as Qur'ān 9:111," which undermines his argument. Given the extensive evidence for pre-Islamic Christian ideas of spiritual warfare, Cook's eisegetical approach to the Qur'ān is problematic.

Drew Their Origin, English translation in *Writings by St John of Damascus*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 37 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 153-160.

[15] Angelika Neuwirth, "Qur'an and History - A Disputed Relationship. Some Reflections on Qur'anic History and History in the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies,* Volume V, Issue I (2003): 1-18. See also Walid A. Saleh, "The Etymological Fallacy And Qur'anic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, And Late Antiquity," *Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu* (2009), 649–98. DOI:10.1163/EJ.9789004176881.I-864.177, accessed October 15, 2018.

[16] David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 35 citing al-Bayhaqī, *Zuhd* (Beirut, n.d.), 165. On the idea of a "greater *jihād*" see John Renard, "*Al-Jihad al-akbar*: Notes on a Theme in Islamic Spirituality," *Muslim World* 78 (1988): 225-42.

[17] Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 35. Any author who relies on using "clearly" as a way to avoid producing evidence is suspect.

[18] Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 35-37.

Cook also admits the existence of the Qur'ānic verse 22:78, "And strive (*jahidu*) for Allah as you ought to strive (*haqq jihādihi*) … So, perform the prayer, give the alms and hold fast to Allah,*"* but explains away this reference to non-violent *jihād* by suggesting that, "It is likely that the Islamic definition of "*jihād"* was expanded from its original meaning to encompass "struggle" or "striving."[19] This thesis demonstrates that pre-Islamic Syrian Christians also describe the spiritual struggle as a war, and therefore that Cook is mistaken.

Syrian Christianity

With regards to the Syrian Christian texts, there has been a substantial recent development in the nature and extent of the research. Formerly, authors such as Vööbus and Drijvers analysed Syriac Christianity and monasticism from a very Euro-centric worldview which at times decried the supposed "dead ritualism" of the monks.[20] They have however highlighted many very Jewish aspects of the Syrian monastic tradition and especially clarified the character of asceticism in the texts of Aphrahat, Ephrem, and others. Of particular significance for my research is Vööbus' assertion that Syrian monasticism is centred on the concept of warfare, which he says does not come from Judaism, and laments that this has not been adequately studied.[21] My research fills this lacuna of over 50 years.

Syrian Christian writings have historically been mainly researched by French and German scholars who focused on liturgical development, working from a history of religions perspective. This has changed since 1980 with authors such as Sebastian Brock and Hilarion Alfeyev recognizing the lively nature of the Oriental churches, and they have elucidated the unique Syriac spiritual worldview. Research on central Syrian writers such as Isaac of Nineveh (d. *c.* 700 CE) has attempted to understand Syrian theology and praxis in the light of both Jewish and Evagrian writings. Alfeyev for example clarifies the nature of the worldview within which Isaac's writings should be understood, and this informs my research. He notes the dependence of Isaac on Evagrius (d. 300 CE), Ephrem (d. 373 CE), and Aphrahat (d. 345 CE), and the "complete absence' of any Greek philosophical ideas in Aphrahat, although this

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[19] Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 32.
[20] See Arthur Vööbus, *Literary, critical and historical studies in Ephrem the Syrian* (Stockholm: ETSE, 1958) and H. J. W. Drijvers, *East of Antioch: studies in early Syriac Christianity* (London : Variorum Reprints, 1984).
[21] Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* vol. 1 (Louvain 1958), lx, 13.

is somewhat an overstatement as I show in relation to his use of the struggle metaphor.[22] Also, recent researchers on Evagrius, the highly influential fourth-century monk and author, have mainly emphasized the neo-Platonic aspects of his work but have not studied in any depth his usage in later Syriac tradition with regards to spiritual struggle.[23] Robert Murray in his excellent *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* discusses many themes prominent in Syrian Christian writings and delivers a useful contextual understanding of my analysed authors.

A major re-appraisal since 1980 of the nature of the differences between the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches has also contributed to fresh scholarship on the Syrian church. McGuckin, Ware, and Alfeyev argue that the differences demonstrated at the council of Chalcedon were more linguistic than theological.[24] This has led to a fresh approach to the writings of, for example, Theodoret of Cyrrhus (d. 466 CE). Pasztori-Kupan's book is just one of a number of recent works to resurrect the status of Theodoret as an honoured church father whose writings should be studied.[25] Pasztori-Kupan rightly notes that the Christology of Theodoret was not so different from Chalcedon and that his Christology in relation to Nestorius was seriously misunderstood. He also argues correctly for a recognition of the immense impact of Theodoret on the Syrian church, and this is important for my analysis of his history of ascetic monks and descriptions of inner spiritual warfare. Overall however, research on Syrian documents is still very much in its infancy. Especially weak is the research on the notion of the internal spiritual battle and the relation of Syrian spirituality to Sufi Islam. One possible cause of these lacunae is that few Syriac scholars understand Arabic and Islam, and few Islamic scholars have explored Syriac.

The *Agōn*

Because the underlying concept of the Greek *agōn* (struggle) is so central to this research, the literature on *agōn* is of vital interest. Pfitzner's 1967 book on Paul's use of the *agōn* motif is extremely insightful in its coverage of the metaphor of athletic struggle.[26] The author

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[22] Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Kalamzaoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000), 17, 23.

[23] See for example Augustine Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus* (London: Routledge, 2006) and Eudes Bamberger, introduction to *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. Eudes Bamberger (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981).

[24] See John McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 226-43, and Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian,* 20-4.

[25] Istvan Pasztori-Kupan, *Theodoret of Cyrus* (London: Routledge, 2006). Some scholars think he died 458 CE.

[26] Victor Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif* (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

discusses all the New Testament passages that contain the term *agōn* and its related imagery, and shows how the conceptual metaphor is used by Paul to bolster his arguments. He briefly indicates later use of the *agōn* in the church fathers, but this is another relatively unexplored area which after 40 years is only partially filled by one small article by Sisson.[27] I review scholarship on the agonistic struggle and its relation to asceticism and Hellenism.

Louth and Chitty among others have discussed the neo-Platonic, Stoic, and mystical backgrounds to the monastic tradition in general but have not reflected on the warfare motifs in Aphrahat, Theodoret, and Isaac.[28] Generally, monastic research has focused more on the Greek philosophical elements rather than the Semitic aspects. It is especially notable that no-one appears to have identified *agōn* (struggle) as the dominant metaphor in Theodoret's monastic *Historia*.[29] The research on Theodoret in this thesis begins to correct this omission, and there is a need for the deeper kind of analysis that has recently been undertaken on Ephrem's work.[30]

In relation to the struggle metaphors used by the Sufis whose work I analyse, there has been considerable general research done on al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE), but little on the earlier key Sufi teacher al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857 CE). Winter's analysis of al-Ghazālī shows his connections with Greek philosophy, noting the development of thinking prior to al-Ghazālī, but neither he nor other authors examine al-Ghazālī's concepts of inward spiritual struggle. Picken and Smith extensively discuss and analyse al-Muḥāsibī but they do not address soul-battle metaphors nor possible Syrian influence.[31] Al-Muḥāsibī is still awaiting serious analysis in relation to his ideas of inner *jihād*, and this research begins the process.

Christian-Muslim relations and Near-Eastern cultural interpenetration

Another important contextual aspect of this research is the current re-framing of the relation

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[27] Russell Sisson, "Authorial Ethos in Philippians: The Agon Topos in Paul and Hellenistic Moralists," in *Rhetoric, Ethic, and Moral Persuasion in Biblical Discourse,* eds. Thomas Olbright and Anders Eriksson (London, T&T Clark 2005).

[28] Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966).

[29] Theodoret, *A History of the Monks of Syria,* ed. and trans. R. M. Price (Kalamzaoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985).

[30] See Kees den Biesen, *Simple and Bold: Ephrem's Art of Symbolic Thought* (Piscaway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006).

[31] See Gavin Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam* (London: Routledge, 2009), and Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2003). This is a reprint of her 1931 book.

between Islam and Christianity, which occurs within the broader context of a re-appraisal of the relation between "Abrahamic" religions. Recent works such as *Borderlines* by Daniel Boyarin and the seminal *The Ways that Never Parted* have shown that the interaction between Judaism and Christianity continued far past 70 CE and well into the fourth century CE.[32] Similarly, while late nineteenth and early twentieth century scholarship on Islam emphasized its supposed evolution from Christianity, more recent research has either shown the extent of ongoing interaction between Islam and Christianity or focused on the disjunction between the religions. In the nineteenth century Juynboll and others attempted to show that Islam was simply a deviant Arabic form of Christianity but this viewpoint has now been mostly discredited. Instead, more recently, Baldick, Donner, Griffith, Penn, and others have demonstrated that Islam was a separate religion but with porous edges, and have revealed significant ongoing mutual influence between Christianity and Islam.[33] In contrast, Ye'or and others have recently argued for an almost complete disconnect between the two faiths, but this view has been ably refuted by various authors.[34] In many ways this shift in understanding reflects the situation since the critique of "Orientalism" by Edward Said, as well as the mid-twentieth century development in the economic and political status of Islam and the events of September 11, 2001. This is especially evident in the discussions over the definition of *jihād* itself. Much of the current polemic against Islam attempts to exaggerate the differences between Muslim and Christian views of war. However, "Despite their claims to be religions of peace, Christianity and Islam each have a history of considerable violence, based on scriptural precedents that are taken as sanctions for hostilities."[35] This is important because attempts at inter-faith dialogue are often stymied by exclusivist claims from leaders in both religions.[36] My analysis of the breadth of meaning of battle terms and the surrounding metaphorical language shows that the lines between inner and outer battle were sometimes blurred, and were "fuzzy" in both religions long before the Crusades.

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[32] Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways that Never Parted* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) provides a very useful framework for understanding the somewhat similar issues of early Muslim-Christian relations. Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[33] Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam*; Fred Donner, *Muhammed and the Believers* (London, Cambridge University Press 2010); Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Michael Philip Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

[34] Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude*, trans. Miriam Kochan and David Littman (London: Associated University Presses, 1996), 242-65; Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque,* 160-75; Penn, *Envisioning Islam,* 4-6.

[35] David Thomas, "The Past and the Future in Christian-Muslim Relations," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (18:1, 2007): 33- 42 (42). DOI: 10.1080/09596410601071071, accessed October 15, 2018.

[36] Marianne Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: from Soteriological Openness to Hermeneutical Openness," *Modern Theology* 28:1 (January 2012): 25-52 (27).

Islam is diverse, consisting of many cultures, and is not just a product of supposedly isolated rural Arabs. An ongoing development in history and culture studies has been the growing awareness that Arabia enjoyed a somewhat Hellenised culture significantly interconnected with its surroundings. The frequent earlier assumptions of a mainly nomadic, illiterate, and uneducated Arab population has given way to a more nuanced view that recognises the wider cultural outlook of a mainly urbanised Arab society in places such as Damascus and Najran. At the time of early Islam there was a sizable proportion of Christians who spoke Arabic and whose liturgy was in Syriac and Arabic. Cameron writes that:

> The culture of the Near East in Late Antiquity was a fascinating mosaic …The great difficulty remains of matching modern notions of 'Arab', 'Syrian', 'Semitic' and other such terms, which are still entangled in a mesh of confusion and even prejudice, with the actual situation in our period… there is no simple description which can do justice to the whole picture; one should simply emphasize again the complexities evident in these regions before the Arab conquests, if only to suggest that the latter were not a simple affair of military victory, nor even, given the previous extent of cultural interpenetration, and particularly the role of the Ghassanids and other pre-Islamic Arab groups, altogether surprising.[37]

The Christianised Ghassanid tribe that Cameron refers to was a major actor in Roman-Persian politics and Arab trade. Shahid's monumental set of works on Byzantium and the Arabs of the fourth-sixth centuries shows that "cultural interpenetration" was extensive.[38] Given that there were Christian poets in Arabic prior to Islam, it is surprising that very little research has been done on these Arabic Christian authors and any effects of their texts on Islam. The 2008 reprint of Louis Cheikho's compilation of pre-Islamic Arabic Christian poets is significant but still waits analysis.[39] Research on Arabic Christian writing is still in its infancy and mainly focusses on Christology or general history rather than ascetic themes such as spiritual struggle. My research is hence situated within this re-evaluation of Near-Eastern cultural blending, and demonstrates another angle of this mutual influence and shared worldview in

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[37] Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 185-6. Saleh, "The Etymological Fallacy and Qur'anic Studies," 672-76, 693-94.

[38] Irfan Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984); Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs of the Fourth Century* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984); Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs of the Fifth Century* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2006); Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs of the Sixth Century* (4 vols.) (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2009); See also Cameron, *Mediterranean World,* 193-96.

[39] Louis Cheikho, *Arabic Christian Poets before and after Islam* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2008). This is a reprint of pre-1927 text.

relation to spiritual struggle.

Christian influence on Islam?

This thesis is written in the context of many ongoing debates about the extent of possible early Christian influence on Islam and the nature of early Islamic *jihād*. The whole question surrounding the formation of Islam and early Sufism is in foment.[40] As noted earlier, for some time Islam and Christianity had "blurred" boundaries, and Islam was similar to but different from Christianity.[41] Penn notes the similarity of newer understandings of Christian-Muslim relations with Christian-Jewish connections, since both seemed to have somewhat a gradual "parting of the ways" over centuries. Islam and Christianity were "much less distinct than commonly imagined," and their relationship develops over time.[42]

The first encounters of early Muslims with Christians were with Syriac-speakers, and the Syriac sources show a more positive view of Muslims than do Greek sources, and were not "uniformly hostile." This is important in context of current "clash of civilisations" rhetoric, and thus Penn's book which summarises over 60 key early documents describing early Muslim-Christian interaction is highly relevant.[43] While Penn analyses historical texts, my analysis of ascetic texts expands this knowledge of early Syriac and Islamic interrelations. As late as the 740s CE John of Damascus still lists Islam as a Christian heresy.[44] Even later when the differences were being debated between Timothy 1 and the Caliph, this was in the context of Timothy's "close relationship" with him.[45] Various scholars have suggested multiplicity of influences on early Islam since there was considerable free exchange of religious ideas in late sixth century, especially around apocalypticism.[46] Stroumsa asserts that some Islamic beliefs about Jesus were more likely derived from Jewish-Christian (e.g.

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[40] See for example Patricia Crone, "Problems in Sura 53," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 78, no. 1 (2015): 15–23. DOI:10.1017/S0041977X15000014, accessed October 15, 2018.

[41] Michael Philip, *Envisioning Islam:Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 100-01, 142-47. The story on 156-57 is particularly telling.

[42] Penn, *Envisioning Islam,* 5, see also 4, 11, 51-2, 55-74.

[43] Penn, *Envisioning Islam,* 2-3, 6.

[44] John of Damascus, *Writings by St John of Damascus*, 153-56.

[45] Penn, *Envisioning Islam,* 45; See also Penn, 72, on the major theology debate text concerning the Bēt Ḥālē Disputation of the 720s, and Barbara Roggema, 'The Disputation between a monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab notable', in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1 (600-1500), eds. David Thomas and Barbara Roggema, with Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, Johannes Pahlitzsch, Mark Swanson, Herman Teule, and John Tolan (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 268-73.

[46] Guy G. Stroumsa, "Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins" in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts*, eds. Behnam Sadeghi, Asad Ahmed, Adam Silverstein and Robert Hoyland (Boston: Brill, 2015), 72-96 (79, 82).

Ebionite) traditions, e.g. the *Gospel of Barnabas*.[47] There is some evidence of non-textual inspiration via Muslim contact with wandering Christian monks, and early Sufi centres (*khanaqahs*) may have been institutionally modelled on nearby monasteries.[48] It is difficult, however, to prove any direct or major influence of Christianity on early Sufism due to the almost total absence of any clear evidence. There are some distinct similarities in thought such as the ideas of watchfulness, battle against the lower self etc., but how much this is derived from the Qur'ān rather than from Christians must be considered. Research is needed to demonstrate exactly what aspects of Sufi ascetic practice cannot be clearly built from a base of the Qur'ānic and early *ḥadīth*. When this source of derivation is removed only then can the extra similarities be used as possible evidence. This research has not yet been adequately completed so any argument is mostly speculation. My research on the metaphors used for inner struggle indicates that early Muslims drew these ideas either from Syrian Christians or from the surrounding cultural context. The extent of similarity is significant but does not prove any causation, however, some influence is likely and even probable given other interactions. There is some evidence that various Islamic religious terms may have been derived from Christians, for example Smith says that the Arabic term *ṣalāt* (prayer) does not appear in pre-Qur'ānic Arabic texts, and is derived from the Aramaic *ṣelōtā*.[49] Smith however vastly overstates influence in a view that is now mostly rejected when she asserts that,

> [S]o many of the elements in al-Al-Ghazālī's mystical teaching are to be found in the writings of the Christian mystics of the Greek and even of the Roman Church that we can hardly doubt that he had found inspiration either in Arabic translations of their works or in personal contacts with Christian monks and others.[50]

Whether the influence was large or small, conscious or unconscious, the fact of the comparison possibly matters more than the reason for such overlap.

Significance and Methodology

My research clarifies the meaning of *jihād* as understood in early Sufism through analysis of its metaphorical usage in Arabic. I compare this to the equivalent Syriac words used by

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[47] Stroumsa, "Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins," 72-74.
[48] Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam*, 24-33. For an alternative view see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), xi, note 7.
[49] Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism*, 136.
[50] Smith, *Al-Ghazali, the Mystic* (London: Luzac and Co., 1944), 121.

Christians living in close proximity to early Islam both chronologically and geographically. This fills an important gap in the research on how spiritual struggle was understood in the social context around the emergence of Islam. It also provides valuable information for the debate on the nature of Islam, especially with respect to the relative roles of spiritual struggle and violent warfare, by identifying the original shared cultural framework for the use of the inner struggle metaphor and the term *jihād*.

I analyse texts central to Syrian Christian asceticism and the Sufi tradition, in their original languages and in translation, to determine how the struggle cluster of terms are used. Athletic and military metaphors are often intertwined with the equivalents of *jihād* in the Greek and Syriac writings, and thus a number of related words are discussed in their contexts. The research therefore entails elements of discourse analysis and critical metaphor analysis focused on the conceptual metaphor of struggle. This is far more elaborate than a mere comparative philology of a few texts. I have selected the three main Syrian ascetic authors of the fourth century, namely Aphrahat (d. *c*. 345 CE), Pseudo-Macarius (d. unknown), and the author of the *Book of Steps*. From the fifth century I analyse the ascetic work of John "the Solitary" (John of Apamea, fl. 400s CE), and the *History of the Monks of Syria* by Theodoret of Cyrrhus (d. 466 CE). For the sixth century I briefly engage with two temptation homilies of notable ascetic poet Jacob of Serugh (d. 521 CE). Isaac of Nineveh is the sole representative of the seventh century. I have chosen the main ascetic writers and texts up to Isaac but excluded authors such as Dadisho' and Sahdona, who wrote after the coming of Islam.[51] Almost all of these Syrian Christian writers were monks, and Theodoret, Jacob, Isaac, and probably Aphrahat were bishops. Their audiences were generally fellow ascetics, but they would have known that their works would be communicated to the wider Christian communities, as some amount of asceticism was expected of all Christians in Syria. Some of the authors, such as Theodoret, seem to address the wider church at points. All of these texts were copied and transmitted widely, some more than others, and in most cases have been kept in use till the present. It is significant that Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*, and possibly the *Book of Steps*, were composed before Greek and Western asceticism had developed.

The main Christian documents analysed are the Syriac, Arabic, Greek, and English New Testaments, the *Demonstrations* of Aphrahat, and *The Ascetic Homilies* of Isaac of

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[51] See Sebastian Brock's list of Syriac authors, http://syri.ac/brock/spirituality, accessed October 10, 2018.

Nineveh, in Syriac and English. Several other Syrian authors living between Aphrahat and Isaac are also chosen because they are recognized as key documenters of the Syrian Christian ascetic theology and practice. Language-wise, I briefly analyse texts by John "the Solitary" (fl. fifth century CE) and Jacob of Serugh (d. 521 CE) in Syriac and English, along with the Liber Graduum (*c*. fourth century CE) also in Syriac and English. It is worth noting that while the main language of the region known as Syria (hence 'Syrian") was Syriac, Greek was also significantly used.[52] I thus survey in Greek and English the Syrian author Theodoret of Cyrrhus and his *History of the Monks of Syria,* and the *Spiritual Homilies* of Ps-Macarius (fourth century CE). All these authors span from the fourth to seventh centuries, prior to Islam, except for Isaac who writes roughly 690 CE/70 AH, although some recent scholarship has argued for a pre-Islamic timeframe.[53] From the Sufi tradition, the Arabic Qur'ān (and English translation), and the writings of al-Muḥāsibī (781-857 CE) and al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 CE) in English and Arabic are used, because they are respectively a central collector and the main systematiser of the early Sufi tradition. Their texts are analysed to see how the authors discuss the struggle concept and the *jihād* term, especially in relation to virtue and the attainment of spiritual growth.

My research fills a critical gap in comparative religious textual studies by comparing the Biblical and Qur'ānic term *jihād* and other closely related terms and their cognates. It briefly examines the Greek philosophy of the *agōn* and how this is developed by the Syrian monks into a sophisticated theology and practice of spiritual struggle. The actions and writings of early Sufis are then examined in this light and the many parallels and suggestions of influence are discussed. This fills another gap in the understanding of early Sufism and Islam and may explain several puzzling features of early Sufism. While brief comments have been made by Baldick and Griffith about the similarities between Sufi and Syrian ascetic practice, no work has been done analysing Sufi asceticism in the light of the Christianised understanding of the *agōn*.[54] This is surprising given that the Arabic terms *jihād* and the Syriac *agōna,* and even the ideas of inner spiritual struggle, are equated by Syrian bishop

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[52] It is important to remember this difference between "Syrian," referring to the region or self-identity of the indivudals or the church, and "Syriac," referring to the spoken and written language used both in Syria and further East into Persia.

[53] A draft article "Life and works of St. Isaac the Syrian," on recent Syriac manuscript research seems to indicate that Isaac lived in the sixth century, see В. В Фоминых, *Жизнь и творения преп. Исаака Сирина,* https://freedocs.xyz/pdf-470132310, accessed August 24, 2018.

[54] Baldick, *Mystical Islam*, 3-9; Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque,* 1-3, 9-13.

Hassan Bar Bahlul in his tenth century CE dictionary.[55] It is also significant that the Syriac term *agōna* (the equivalent of *jihād*) played such a central role in Syriac spirituality in contrast to the Latin equivalents in European spirituality. The Latin *Vulgate* for example only once uses *agonia*, the Latin translation of *agōn,* and Augustine with his high Christology does not use the term at all. There are important differences between Syrian Christian and Latin anthropologies related to the agony of the human Jesus, ascetic practice, inaugurated eschatology, and the role of the "holy man."[56] This thesis briefly outlines the implications of a deeper historic contextual understanding of the concepts of struggle and *jihād,* and demonstrates that at certain points Oriental Christianity is closer to Islam than to Western Christianity. This provides pointers for further research into the Middle-Eastern worldview, and thus the motivation and worldview of Muslims.

The evidence of Syriac Christian usage of the *agōna* cluster of terms and metaphors transforms how the West should understand the meaning of *jihād*. Cook and others are not arguing that Islam invented religious warfare *per se* since it is evident that Judaism, Christianity, and other religions have versions of war. They instead assert that an emphasis on the broader more peaceful notion of *jihād* is an historical distortion. The extensive evidence provided that pre-Islamic Christians held a similar concept of holy struggle undermines this conclusion. *Jihād* should be understood as a broad term and the images of violence offset by an understanding of peaceful Sufi practice. Every religion has been co-opted at times to support and legitimate warfare, but this does not mean that they are inherently violent.[57] It must be recognized that, "Violent Islamist jihādists of the present and recent past have created a fictional world of conflict to suit their own interests in seeking power"[58] and likewise some parts of the West have also used a strawman of *jihād* to justify their aggression towards Islam. Healthy dialogue that honestly recognizes similarities and differences can minimize the possibility of violence and increase community harmony. The following chapters therefore illuminate the debates over the nature of *jihād* in early Islam, and its relationship if any to the Syrian Christian ascetic tradition.

The image of an incarnate God who struggles is central to Oriental Christian theology

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[55] Hassano Bar Bahlul, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Paris: Rubens Duval, 1901), 24-25.
[56] Peter Brown, "The Rise and function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies,* Vol. 61 (1971): 80-101.
[57] Desai, *Rethinking Islamism,* 11.
[58] Badawi, foreword, xi.

because it is proof of Jesus' real humanity, and my research extends our knowledge of this in relation to struggle metaphors. Several Eastern theologians prove their points by emphasising Jesus' struggles, e.g. John Damascus and Jacob of Serugh—the metaphor of inner spiritual battle is central to the Chalcedonian and post-Chalcedon debates over the natures in Christ. My textual analysis informs these disputes and provides another lens through which to interpret the arguments.

Structure

Prior to analysing the selected Syrian texts I include a contextual chapter that explains my methodology of critical metaphor analysis, and the historical and theological context of the Christian authors. Asceticism has a long history, and of particular relevance to this thesis is the history of Greek asceticism and *askesis* (originally meaning "practice," "training," or "exercise"). I define the central term *agōn* in Greek (and *agōna* in Syriac) and how it is used in various Greek texts and then in the New Testament. As part of this Chapter One I also note some evidence for a very wide meaning of the term *agōn* in relation to both inner and outer warfare. While there is relatively less material on Syrian Christianity than on the Western or Greek forms, and very little of this related to the *agōna,* there is still sufficient to warrant an overview. I especially note the particular Syrian worldview of warfare and radical asceticism and how this shapes the ideas of the Syrian authors.

In Chapters Two to Four I provide metaphor analysis of the selected Christian authors, proceeding in chronological order as this helps to delineate some developments over time. Chapter Two is a detailed analysis of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*, Chapter Three is a briefer analysis of the ascetic works of five Syrian authors, and Chapter Four is an extensive analysis of Isaac's *Ascetical Discourses*. In Chapter Five I provide a similar broad introductory chapter on Sufi Islam, definitions of *jihād* including its semantic range, and the general context of the Muslim authors. Following this is the textual analysis of the selected Muslim texts on inner struggle—Chapter Six is on al-Muḥāsibī, and Chapter Seven on al-Ghazālī. Literature related to the specific Christian and Muslim authors covered is reviewed as part of the introduction to them.

In my final Chapter (Eight) I compare the struggle metaphors employed and note some broad similarities between the Christian and Muslim authors, especially at the level of

their theological worldviews. I note differences between their metaphors and some possible reasons for this. This leads to a discussion of the implications of my research and some conclusions. I argue that the similarity between the Syrian Christian and Islamic notions of spiritual struggle creates a significant point of connection between the two religions.

1. Metaphors of Struggle: Method and Context

The concept of struggle is often explained by the Syrian Christian and Sufi authors using metaphors. In this chapter I explain the methodology used to analyse the texts—critical metaphor analysis. The many metaphors and images are frequently clustered together around the motif of the soldier or athlete in a fight or race, two variations of the same overall image portraying life as a spiritual battle. I discuss this central imagery or "macrotrope" as an organising concept within the texts. The context of the Syrian authors determines the way they understand and explain the inner warfare of the soul, hence I summarise the background of Hellenism and the *agōn*, the New Testament language concerning struggle, and Christian asceticism in general. This leads to an overview of some specifically Syrian peculiarities related to their interpretation of *agōna,* namely the centrality of spiritual war, eschatology, the body, and sexuality. I provide evidence that the idea of struggle covered both the internal and external aspects of life, an important point in regards to the comparison of *agōn* with *jihād.*

Critical Metaphor Analysis

In the texts I analyse the authors use many terms and metaphors to discuss the concept of spiritual struggle, not just the key terms *jihād* or *agōna*. While there are solid philological reasons for equating the Arabic *jihād* with Syriac *agōna,* the authors frequently rely on a broader cluster of related terms such as swords, fighting, fortresses, guarding, etc. to convey their ideas of struggle. Words and metaphors can have a wide range of meanings. Hence to compare the conceptual frameworks of Islamic *jihād* with Syrian Christian *agōna* requires analysis of the whole gamut of imagery and related metaphors. Metaphor is fundamentally analogical and thus I use analogical identification and dissection to the analyse the text. As Coenen asserts, "verbal imagery, including metaphors, is based on analogy."[1]

My primary methodology is what has been labelled "Critical Metaphor Analysis" (sometimes known as Conceptual Metaphor theory), since the focus is on metaphors and their contexts and meanings.[2] I also use elements drawn from Literary Analysis and Corpus

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[1] Hans Georg Coenen, "Systematizing Verbal Imagery," in *Beyond Cognitive Metaphor Theory: Perspectives on Literary Metaphor*, ed. Monika Fludernik (New York: Routledge, 2011), 19-35 (19).

[2] Jonathan Charteris-Black, *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave

Analysis since single metaphors and language occurrences must be understood in historical context, from a literary perspective, within their entire corpus. This also involves elements of Cognitive Poetics because the chosen authors write within the conventions of Syriac or Islamic textuality which emphasise the poetic use of language. Words in this poetic mindset are not always chosen for technical accuracy but rather for their capacity to rhyme or parallel other words. Scholarly approaches to metaphor have developed a long way since the work of Lakoff and Johnson.[3]

Struggle metaphors work because they draw a parallel between the lived experience of the ascetic and that of soldiers and athletes. Humans can see the analogy and then apply various elements from one aspect of life to another, for example the soldier's fight against an enemy becomes the ascetic's struggle against sin. Coenen adds: "We understand analogy as a symmetrical relationship between two items or item sets in a universe of discourse (*Diskursuniversum*). This relationship is actualized when a description with the same descriptive content applies to both items or item sets."[4] This is similar to Lakoff and Johnson's idea of metaphor mapping where an idea from a source domain is mapped onto the target domain.[5] In the case of asceticism the "struggle" or "fight" is like an on-field battle in that the ascetic is acting violently against his own body or against the demons who attack him. The analogy works because the same descriptive content exists—in both cases the struggle is between two items, either the person against the demons, or the ascetic against the physical elements, or even the person against some aspect of self, such as the "passions." In the music or athletic contests (*agōn*) of ancient Greece the struggle was not militarily "violent" but still involved an "other" that the protagonist fought against in a competition. That the term *agōn* in Greek could mean both warrior contest and musical contest demonstrates the accepted range of the term or its "semantic breadth." Its application to both the military and artistic areas of life demonstrates its semantic "fields" or "domains."[6] What becomes clear is that both for Syrians and for early Sufis, the notion of struggle also crosses several semantic fields including the domains of military violence, athletic exercise,

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Macmillan, 2004).

[3] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By, 2nd edn.*(Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2003).

[4] Coenen, "Systematizing Verbal Imagery," 21.

[5] Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.

[6] Brigitte Le Guen, "Theatre, Religion, and Politics at Alexander's Travelling Royal Court," in *Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century B.C.*, eds. Eric Csapo, Hans Rupprecht Goette, J. Richard Green, and Peter Wilson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 249-74; Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By,* 140-59.

intellectual battle, social disciplining, and psycho-medical healing.

In interpreting metaphors it is also important to recognise that analogies can be either trivial or non-trivial. "The analogy between a hammer and pliers is trivial if based on the descriptive content."[7] For example one can say that both pliers and a hammer are alike (as tools) because "'tool' is a conventional hypernym for both," however, "One could not use the word hammer metaphorically in order to describe pliers, arguing that both are tools."[8] This is an important distinction. Coenen argues that: "Linguistic imagery (*sprachliche Bilder*) is based on non-trivial analogies."[9] Non-trivial analogies usually cross domains. For example one could say that Tom's *argument* was a hammer in that it *beat down* the opposition. This is not trivial in that it requires a little thought to see that the action of physically hammering down is somehow analogical to arguing, with the result of making the opposition lose or "be forced down." In the case of the ascetic metaphor of struggle there is no immediate outward likeness. It requires imagination to see the similarity between a physical fight of one soldier against another and the fight of an ascetic with their passions. The struggle metaphor is used so non-descriptively in ascetic writing and with so many variations, that it must be seen as a non-trivial analogy. The ascetic texts that I analyse use "warfare" and "struggle" as non-trivial metaphors in that the actions of praying and remaining watchful are not immediately evident as in any way physically violent or involving any literal wrestling. However, as soon as the popular literary image of the soldier or athlete is invoked, and the ascetic is described as a "soldier," then the fight against the passions and the defensive watching on guard against Satan makes perfect sense. No further explanation is required to interpret persistent prayer as "fighting on the field of battle" all day long, or as "running a race." The analogy is non-trivial and wide-ranging in application.

As long as there is a cultural history of a metaphorical image, it is easy for readers to relate to a diverse number of mappings across domains, even when the metaphors are highly poetic. English and indeed all poetry is interpretable precisely because they use non-trivial metaphor. Coenen gives the example of the person captured by the passion for the object of his love—"The lover suffers the pain of one subdued in battle, a prisoner of war."[10] In his analysis of one poem, Coenen shows that, "the grace endowed by Amor scorches the heart of

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[7] Coenen, "Systematizing Verbal Imagery," 23
[8] Coenen, "Systematizing Verbal Imagery," 23-24.
[9] Coenen, "Systematizing Verbal Imagery," 23-24.
[10] Coenen, "Systematizing Verbal Imagery," 30.

the beholder, just as the beloved's eyes shoot arrows at the lover, which pierce his soul."[11] This dense text is easily decoded by readers in any way familiar with arrows, prisons, and heat. An Eskimo, however, may struggle to understand this poem, which brings to the foreground two key methodological principles, namely recognising the discourse and cultural contexts.

The struggle metaphors that I analyse all occur in a discursive context of teaching and persuasion. The writers seek to change the behaviour of their readers so that they will win the "spiritual race." The authors therefore use rich rhetoric and metaphor because as Charteris-Black argues, "Metaphor is a figure of speech that is typically used in persuasion; this is because it represents a novel way of viewing the world that offers fresh insight."[12] The authors and readers are familiar with the agonistic metaphors and expect to inspire or be inspired. For anyone reading about asceticism who comes from a cultural world of Hellenic games and heroic battles, the imagery of victorious and honourable athletes and soldiers was appealing and exciting. It is also true that over time some metaphors become so entrenched in a cultural framework that they lose their novelty value, but they also gain import by their traditional status. Metaphors become standardised, or they become a "conventional metaphor."[13] This is the case with the struggle metaphors I discuss as they are used across more than seven centuries by every Syrian writer analysed. Charteris-Black also argues that moral systems are more effectively expressed through metaphor than bald precepts or legal codes, and this is certainly true of the ascetic writings of Isaac and al-Ghazālī etc.[14] Metaphors are a powerful form of persuasion and are "an incongruous linguistic representation that has the underlying purpose of influencing opinions and judgements by persuasion."[15]

The ability to interpret a metaphor depends on shared cultural experience. This is probably why the image of the athlete which figures so prominently in Syrian Christians is

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[11] Coenen, "Systematizing Verbal Imagery," 32.

[12] Charteris-Black, *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis,* 7. Charteris-Black also notes the "emotional impact of metaphor", 11.

[13] Charteris-Black, *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis,* 17.

[14] Charteris-Black, *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis,*11,12. Another author writes of the "power of metaphor, the power to express the emotions of the author and to affect the reader." Elżbieta Chrzanowska-Kluczewska, "Catachresis—A Metaphor or a Figure in Its Own Right?" in *Beyond Cognitive Metaphor Theory: Perspectives on Literary Metaphor*, ed. Monika Fludernik (New York: Routledge, 2011), 36-57 (52).

[15] Charteris-Black, *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis,* 21.

completely missing from Muslim writers, since most early Muslims had no direct experience of Greek athletics. Colson notes that there are many socio-cultural factors which determine how a person may interpret a text, and that metaphors often have multiple layers of cultural meaning.[16] Gerrig and Horton also discuss this idea, using the notion of a "communal common ground" for understanding metaphor.[17] In the case of ascetic struggle, the Middle-Eastern common ground was a rich blend of Greco-Roman, Persian, Arab tribal, and Semitic cultural history. As Shahîd and others have argued, there was much cultural transfusion in this region over many centuries. Beyond similarities in language, centuries of shared history made the common ground for Christianity and Islam rich and deep.[18] This commonality was also heightened by the fact that the main regional languages, namely Aramaic (the trade language of the Middle East from 900 BCE to 800 CE), Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic), Hebrew, and Arabic all derive from the same root language and thus share many linguistic features.[19] As Katz notes, all words and meanings are "embedded" within a shared "cultural context," and Syriac and Arabic have such a shared cultural context.[20] If the speaker shares the culture and is trusted and known to use metaphor, then metaphor can be easily read.[21]

Critical metaphor analysis is a "way of revealing underlying ideologies" which provides valuable insight into links between language, context, and politics.[22] I adopt this method for analysing my texts as the meaning is encapsulated in complex culturally-determined motifs and terminology. The metaphors reveal a worldview filled with assumptions shared by the author and reader. "Literary scholars generally agree that context is very important for metaphor comprehension (e.g. Punter 2007: 144), but the dynamics of relevant information retrieval indicate that it is indispensable for the perception of literary metaphor."[23] This complexity of interpreting metaphor was understood as far back as

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[16] Herbert Colson, "On Sociocultural and Nonliteral: A Synopsis and a Prophesy," in *Figurative Language Comprehension*, eds. Herbert Colston and Albert Katz (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 1-18 (8-9).

[17] Richard Gerrig and William Horton, "Contextual Expressions and Common Ground," in *Figurative Language Comprehension,* 43-71 (44-46).

[18] Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* vol. 2, part 2 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2009), Xiv. Shahîd in the four volumes of this title presents hundreds of pages of extensive evidence.

[19] Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic share many of the same triliteral roots, for example "prayer" is based on the root s-l-, *sleota, ṣelota, and salah*.

[20] Albert Katz, "Discourse and Sociocultural factors in Understanding Nonliteral Language," in *Figurative Language Comprehension,* 183-207 (183).

[21] Katz, "Discourse and Sociocultural factors in Understanding Nonliteral Language," 193-195, 198. See also Giles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities. (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

[22] Charteris-Black, *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis,* 42.

[23] Benjamin Biebuyck and Gunther Martens, "Literary Metaphor between Cognition and Narration: 'The

Aristotle who wrote that, "metaphor is something that happens to the noun,"[24] and this can even be seen in English where the noun *agony* (pain or struggle) can be used as a verbal metaphor such as "she was agonising over her chapter." The underlying ideologies are evident in the *agōna/jihād* metaphors, which are built on a conception of masculine power and victory.[25]

The macrotrope

Research indicates that there are levels of metaphor, ranging from a singular usage up to the major organising concept of whole literary works. Chrzanowska-Kluczewska calls these higher level over-arching metaphors "macrotropes," arguing that, "Macrotropes, in turn, organise sequences of sentences, i.e. fragments of texts or even whole texts … They are best illustrated by extended similes and extended metaphors, with roots traceable to Homeric figuration."[26] These metaphors carry within themselves the ideas of a whole narrative, and there, "usually exists a *master trope* which organises the entire narrative structure."[27] When the specific struggle metaphors are explored in the ascetic writers in this thesis, it becomes evident that "spiritual life is struggle" is the overall organising trope or *macrotrope*, as the authors return to it again and again. The authors that I analyse use a panoply of imagery related to struggle such as fighting, swords, shields, victory, wounds, and healing, so centrally and ubiquitously that the macrotrope of "struggle" is easy to identify. Macrotropes also often map onto a range of target domains, but these are not arbitrary as they share certain defining features with usually a central concept that is exemplified by a prototypical model.[28] I show that the struggle macrotrope maps onto the target domains of military fighting, racing in the arena, social discipline, and occasionally even labouring in the field. The "life is struggle" macrotrope can be seen across time, and is central to the ascetic and historic context I discuss below. The *Aphorisms of Hesiod* for example, includes six aphorisms with variations of the struggle motif, such as, "neighbour competes with neighbour," and "strife is

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Sandman Revisited'," in *Beyond Cognitive Metaphor Theory: Perspectives on Literary Metaphor,* ed. Monika Fludernik (New York: Routledge, 2011), 58-76 (62).
[24] Aristotle, *Rhetoric,* cited in *The Rule of Metaphor*, Paul Ricoeur, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (New York: Routledge,1977), 17.
[25] Michael Stewart, *The Soldier's Life: Martial Virtues and Manly Romanitas in the Early Byzantine Empire* (Leeds: Kismet, 2016), 43-59. Stewart notes that "Stoic and Christian intellectuals had popularised codes of masculinity centred on self-control … (shown by) fighting internalised 'battles,'" 59.
[26] Elżbieta Chrzanowska-Kluczewska, "Catachresis—A Metaphor or a Figure in Its Own Right?" In *Beyond Cognitive Metaphor Theory: Perspectives on Literary Metaphor,* ed. Monika Fludernik (New York: Routledge, 2011), 36-57 (37).
[27] Biebuyck and Martens, *Literary Metaphor between Cognition and Narration*, 64.
[28] Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 70.

good for mankind."[29] The struggle macrotrope is also very apparent in contemporary discussion of politics and sport, for example, "Team X is threatened with annihilation in its fight with Team Y," is a variation of "Sport is a struggle for survival," or "sport is war."[30]

Cultural Universals?

Culture and metaphor are closely linked. The particular metaphors that people use shapes how they think about life and meaning.[31] Language is not neutral, but pre-determines cognitive frameworks and activity; central concepts pre-dispose users of those concepts to interpret reality in specific ways. Thus the metaphor of the ascetic Christian life as "struggle" must be seen as connecting the single ascetic to a whole history of heroic agonistic battle. This spiritual warfare is a painful "fight" that requires a highly disciplined lifestyle. Cognitive psychology has recently shown that some metaphors are cross-culturally universal since they develop from the shared lived experiences of infant humans. "Struggle" is such a form of "primary metaphor" since the idea that "life is struggle" arises from the common and basic experiences shared by babies and young children of "struggling" to sit up or reach for items, and later wrestling with their siblings.[32] Kövecses notes that life is often viewed as "struggle" in many cultures, although more prominently in some than others.[33] Struggle is indeed the primary metaphor in some cultures including the Greek and Middle-Eastern. These both had much influence on Syrian Christianity and especially on the ascetic texts presented below.[34]

In the textual analysis that follows I thus discern the "rhetorical and ideological characteristics of metaphor" via a "close reading" of texts as understood within their historical milieu.[35] The chosen writings were mostly originally spoken texts read in monasteries or Sufi *khanaqah* (lodges or retreat centres), and memorised and recited by followers. They include many elements of poetry, pithy statements, metaphors, and

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[29] Charles Rowan Beye, *Ancient Greek Literature and Society* (New York: Anchor Books, 1975), 102.

[30] Charteris-Black, *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis*, 129.

[31] Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture,* 1.

[32] Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture,* 38. See also Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 146-49. Charteris-Black adds that all struggle involves effort to overcome obstacles, cf. neuro-cognitive linguistics research, *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis,* 246.

[33] Kövecses notes that its incidence is higher in Hungary than in the USA. Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture,* 71. He notes that there is a concept in Hungary of having a "Struggle with himself," 61, which compares with the French *lutte* in *Jane Eyre,* and may be related to having a linguistic tradition basd on the Latin classics.

[34] Jacob Burkhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, trans. Shiela Stern (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998), 162-88 ; Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture,* 71;

[35] Charteris-Black, *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis,* 34-35; Stephen Greenblatt, *The Greenblatt Reader*, ed. Michael Payne (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 12-13.

aphorisms which aided memorisation, and this is true for both the Syrian Christians and the Muslims. While I shall especially focus on terms such as *agōna* and the related cluster of words meaning fight, battle, compete, etc., there are times when writers describe the struggle using metaphors that do not contain these words, so my analysis focusses on imagery rather than specific words *per se*.

Historic and Cultural Context

The historic context of the Syrian authors varies somewhat over the centuries but is admirably discussed in Averil Cameron's *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity* and in Philip Rousseau's *A Companion to Late Antiquity*.[36] Syria as a region and Syriac as a language were often split between the Roman and the Persian Empires, and the area was quite multi-cultural and multi-lingual. Syria was a rich agricultural borderlands and it was often the scene of battle—it was a "region in ferment."[37] For the earlier Syrian texts that I use, such as Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* and the *Book of Steps*, the context was one of a long history of "constant large-scale warfare" and frequent persecutions, and it is possible that this accentuated the amount of warfare language and metaphor used by the Syrians.[38]

Drijvers discusses Syria as a buffer zone between the Roman and Sasanian empires, a factor resulting in a distinctive multi-cultural Syriac worldview which drew from both empires, encapsulated in the language. Syriac imbibed some Persian military terms, and many Greek words for particularly Greek philosophical and military concepts. Other conceptual domains, however, evidence a rich treasure of Syriac words able to effectively describe life without Greek intrusion.[39] The Syriac language roughly overlaps with Syria as a region, and is a dialect of Aramaic, an important trade and diplomatic language widespread across the Near East from 500 BCE. As Fox notes, at the time of Alexander, Aramaic was "the language used by secretaries all the way from Egypt to India." This cosmopolitan

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[36] Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity: AD 395-700 2nd ed.* (London: Routledge, 2012); Philip Rousseau, ed. *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012). See also Beate Dignas and Englelbert Winter, *Rome And Persia In Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[37] Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity,* 168-90.

[38] Geoffrey Greatrex, "The Romano-Persian Frontier and the Context of the *Book of Steps*", in Kristian Heal and Robert Kitchen, eds., *Breaking the Mind: New Studies in the Syriac "Book of Steps"* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2014), 9-31 (20).

[39] Jan Willem Drijvers, "Rome and the Sasanid Empire: Confrontation and Coexistence," in *A Companion to Late Antiquity,* ed. Philip Rousseau (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 441-54.

language continued to influence Syrian Christianity for centuries.[40] Along with Hellenism, Persian culture also affected Syria since despite the frequent periods of war between Rome and Persia there were significant times of cultural interaction. Drijvers speaks of "long periods of [Roman-Persian] cooperation, which comprised active cultural, religious, economic, and diplomatic exchange."[41] He also discusses the sources for this interaction and the complex historiography regarding Roman-Persians relations, focussed as it was until recent decades on warfare.[42] Both in Persia and Eastern Syria, Zoroastrianism was a major religion prior to Christianity and continuing till early Islam. This religion features the belief that Good and Evil are in a constant battle, but that the fight is an unequal one since Good is assured of triumph. It is entirely possible that this cultural flavour may have added weight to struggle metaphors in Syria, and this is a topic requiring study. According to Zoroastrianism, in the cosmic struggle humans must enlist the help of the Ahura Mazda because of their capacity of free choice, and this connection between free will and ascetic effort is very similar to the Syrian authors.[43] Overall, Syria and Syriac had a long history and rich tradition that was shaped by many issues and events. Christine Shepardson concisely discusses these historical, geographical, and cultural factors in her chapter and notes the recent changes in Syrian historiography.[44] Syria is no longer seen as an uninteresting backwater but should be read as a liminal zone close to the effective centre of a Eurasian world criss-crossed by trade routes that often went through Syria, a world that existed from China to Britain.[45]

Asceticism, War, and Struggle

The Syriac word *agōna* derives its central meaning from the Greek *agōn.* In approaching the Syrian writers it is therefore essential to understand the previous history of asceticism and the place of the *agōn* within Hellenistic culture. War and struggle was a central feature of ancient and late Antique Greek civilisation, even being reflected in the topics considered worthy of

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[40] Robin Lane Fox, *The Classical World: An Epic History from Homer to Hadrian* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 267.

[41] Drijvers, *Rome and the Sasanid Empire*, 441.

[42] Drijvers, *Rome and the Sasanid Empire,* 441-42.

[43] Marietta Stepaniants, "The Encounter of Zoroastrianism with Islam," *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 52, No. 2 (Apr., 2002): 159-172, and Abraham Valentine Williams Jackson, *The Zoroastrian Doctrine of the Freedom of the Will*, http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Zarathushtrian/freedom_will.htm, accessed September 27, 2018.

[44] Christine Shepardson, "Syriac, Syria, Syrian: Negotiating East and West," in *A Companion to Late Antiquity,* ed. Philip Rousseau (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 455-66.

[45] Peter Frankopan, *The Silkroads: A New History of the World* (Vintage, 2017).

historical depiction. When Hellenes were writing history the primary theme was warfare.[46] For the Greeks, "Life was viewed as a constant battle, the moral problem of which was excessive pleasure, that is, enslavement to desire, and the moral aim was … mastery over one's own desires."[47] The large collection of essays, *Asceticism*, edited by Wimbush and Valantasis, is possibly the best introduction to this topic, and contains numerous authors who discuss various aspects of ancient and Late Antique asceticism and its importance for the Greeks and Christians.[48] Everett rightly summarises that for the ancients, asceticism was "a way of life," and this is especially so for the Stoics, Cynics, and early Christians.[49] Physical asceticism was understood as demonstrating a life ordered according to the virtues, and also as a training in difficulties to prepare for the inevitable human sufferings. In an early metaphor for inner struggle, the NeoPlatonic philosopher Porphyry (234-305 CE) urged a wealthy Roman to "go stripped, without tunics, to the stadium, to compete in the Olympics of the soul."[50] According to Finn:

> Porphyry understood the goal of philosophy as that contemplation in the soul of divine truth which was also an act of union with the divine … The [athletic] metaphor further located this goal as the fruit of a strict training (in Greek *askesis*) comparable to the diet, sexual abstinence, and exercises of the naked Olympic athlete. It was an apt metaphor in as much as the philosopher had to divest his mind of the multiple concerns and passions which distracted it through its relationship to the body; such concentration could easily be envisaged as a stripping naked of the self, because Plato had long since characterized the body as clothing worn by the soul.[51]

There are a surprising number of ideas here that reappear in the Syrian writings— contemplation, union with God, ascetical training, sexual abstinence, fasting, and the soul loosely wearing the body. In Greek thought, the New Testament, and in the Syrians,

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[46] Arnaldo Momigliano, "Popular Religious Beliefs and the Late Roman Historians," in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 141-59 (141).

[47] Abraham Smith, "'Full of Spirit and Wisdom': Luke's Portrait of Stephen (Acts 6:1-8:1a) as a Man of Self-Mastery", in *Asceticism and the New Testament,* eds. Leif E. Vaage and Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Routledge, 1999), 97-114 (99). For the cultural background and Syrian appropriations see Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* vol. 1 (Louvain: Peeters, 1958).

[48] Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis, eds. *Asceticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). See also Vincent L. Wimbush, ed. *Ascetic Behaviour in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990).

[49] J. Duncan Everett, "Primitive Christianity as an Ascetic Movement," in *Asceticism,* 88-107 (88).

[50] Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, 1.31.3, trans. G. Clark (London: Duckworth, 2000), 43 Cited in Richard Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9.

[51] Finn discusses the range of sources that Porphyry uses to justify his teaching, ranging from Platonists to various Stoics, Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World,* 9-11.

asceticism is also closely related to attaining virtue.[52] Patterson goes as far as to suggest that "asceticism is an appropriate framework for understanding" the early Christian movement, and this is especially true for the Syrians.[53] Finn's summary about the Greeks could also apply to the Christians: "They saw in their asceticism the proper instrument for the formation of virtues traditionally held central to the moral worth of a Greek aristocratic male and ruler: self control with respect to sexual pleasures, food, and drink (*enkrateia*), endurance of hardships and frugality."[54] These connections between virtue and asceticism were not unique to the Greeks but existed in Jewish asceticism, as seen in Philo, the Nazarites, the Maccabeans, and Second Temple Judaism, and they migrated into Christianity because the religions were not sharply divided.[55] Thus in interpreting the Syrian writers it is important to understand that many of their references and allusions are rooted in a long tradition. Their readers will have been generally familiar with the ascetic struggle motifs they use.

The Hellenist *Agōn*

Central to the macrotrope of ascetic struggle is the Greek term *agōn.* The consistent word used to translate this into Syriac is the cognate *agōna*, which was derived from the Greek, with the meaning in both languages of strife, struggle, conflict, fight, or contest.[56] Payne Smith has for *agōna*: "A trial of skill or strength, a contest, struggle," and its use in Theodoret, Isaac etc. shows it to be equivalent to both *agōn* and *jihād*. Smith also notes that *agōna* is used metaphorically for "mental struggle," "ascetic training," and "the ascetic life," thus locating the term within the monastic worldview.[57] What is most significant, and a theme to which I return, is that *agōn* and *agōna* are consistently translated by Christians using the Arabic word *jihād*. The *agōn* was used by Greeks for the populace united in battle, and for all kinds of civic contest, which parallels the Islamic conception.[58] Closely associated with the *agōn* are also the themes of excelling in exertion, and accomplishing the heroic feat or quest,

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[52] See for example Anthony Saldarini, "Asceticism and the Gospel of Matthew," in *Asceticism and the New Testament,* 11-28; Turid Karlsen Seim, "Children of the Resurrection: Perspectives on the Angelic Asceticism of Luke-Acts," in *Asceticism and the New Testament*, 115-26.

[53] Stephen Patterson, "Askesis and Early Christian Tradition," in *Asceticism and the New Testament*, 49-70 (50).

[54] Richard Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 22-23.

[55] Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World*, 3-6, 34- 46. Finn also covers the Essenes, Qumran communities, the Talmud, and various other writings which all have elements of ascetic practice in them, 47-57. Finn in several chapters describes various approaches to Christian asceticism practised in different parts of the Roman Empire in the first four centuries, and has extensive references.

[56] William Jennings *Lexicon to the Syriac New Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 14; He lists Ἀγῶνες games; Ἀγωνία agony, anguish, pang; Ἀγωνιστής combatant, contender, contestant, fighter. Also see George Divry, *English-Greek and Greek-English dictionary* (New York: Divry Inc., 1974), 396.

[57] Jesse Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 3.

[58] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif,* 1-3, 16. The *agōn* is a key idea in Stoic moral philosophy.

as seen for example in Homer's *Iliad*.[59] This is similar to the semantic breadth seen later in the Arabic term *jihād*.

Athletics was a common and popular aspect of Greek life, and importantly, the Greek games (*agones*) were understood as holy (*ieroi*) because they were conducted under the protection of the gods. This relation to the cult of the gods included the reward usually being a wreath cut from a sacred grove.[60] This notion of struggle as holy is evident later in both the Syrian monks and in the Arabic notion of the *jihād* that pleases God. Importantly, in Greek athleticism the competition with others was one of the main factors motivating to high achievement, and this idea is also seen in the friendly competition of the ascetics.[61] In Greek literature, *agōn* was typically used in the expression *agōnes gumnastikoi* (gymnastic struggle).[62] This is understandable because, "The gymnasium was a focus of civic life, passing on Greek values and learning."[63] The gymnasium was the place of education for the children of the elite, where they were taught grammar, music, and athletics. It was a highly competitive venue where students underwent "continual painful exertion" with the aim of reaching perfection.[64] These themes of perfection, competition, the gymnasium, and painful exertion are frequently seen in the Syrian monastic literature. The *agōn* was such an important cultural glue and symbol that among the first major actions of Alexander after he captured each city on his way to India, was the hosting of horse-riding, musical, and athletic *agone*. LeGuen notes that the theatre and the gymnasium were the "two central institutions of Greek culture," and that these *agone* were performed for political and socially-unifying purposes.[65]

But while the *agōn* was definitely external in warfare and athletic and musical contests, it was also conceived of as internal, various philosophers even privileging this aspect. Aristotle writes that the irrational aspect of the soul "fights" (or struggles, Greek

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[59] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif,* 17, 18.
[60] Pindar, *Odes of Pindar* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), 19, 22, 26 etc.; Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif,* 6, 17-19. *Αγωνης, ιεροι.*
[61] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif,* 16.
[62] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif,* 16, *αγωνης γυμναστικοι.*
[63] Fox, *The Classical World*, 269.
[64] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif ,* 21.
[65] Brigitte Le Guen, "Theatre, Religion, and Politics at Alexander's Travelling Royal Court," in *Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century B.C.*, eds. Eric Csapo, Hans Rupprecht Goette, J. Richard Green, and Peter Wilson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 249-74 (260, 271-73). See the table of locations and types of *agone*, 251-55.

máchetai) against the rational.[66] In this he agrees with Heraclitus that it is "hard to fight (*máchesthai*) against emotion … [and] pleasure."[67] Because of this inner fight, according to Aristotle, it is necessary to be properly trained in some way from infancy, and we see this connection between fighting and training frequently in the Syrians.[68] Aristotle also writes in parallel in regards to the courage of "soldiers" and "athletes," as both are "contests," showing their close association, a similarity also shown in the Syrian ascetic authors.[69] The *agōn* is also the term used for the "long debating scene" "in the middle" of later Greek tragedies, and this foreshadows the internal intellectual battle of the Syrian ascetics as well as the Islamic concept of "intellectual *jihād*" (sometimes but not always explained with the term *ijtihād*).[70]

The *agōn* is often closely associated with the hero and heroic action. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* highlight the role of heroes, and emphasise their courage, wounds, and healing.[71] Fox asserts that central to Greek thought is the Homeric epic and the struggles of its heroes for justice.[72] Significantly for understanding the Christian *agōn* is that Homer's epics recount an heroic journey, either physical (for example Odysseus) or mental (for example Achilles in the Iliad) or both. Both Jesus and Paul are described in the New Testament using Greek heroic imagery, and both underwent great hardships and much journeying.[73] This hero motif is often referred to in the Syrian ascetic authors. Heracles is a Greek hero known for his "Twelve Labours" (*athlon-* the word is also used for athletics), a concept very closely related to the *agōn* and part of the macrotrope of struggle. In punishment, a god intervened and, "As a second labour he ordered him to kill the Lernaean hydra."[74] While four of the labours were killing of various monsters, eight of the twelve required capturing animals, stealing objects, or even cleaning the Augean stables in a single

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[66] μάχεται. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. J.A. K. Thomson (New York: Penguin, 1955), Book 1.xiii (Thomson, 89). NE 1102b.15 (Becker numbering according to *Aristotle's Ethica Nicomachea*, ed. J. Bywater (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1894)).

[67] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. J.A. K. Thomson (New York: Penguin, 1955), Book 2.iii (Thomson, 96). Nic. Eth. 1105a.5, μάχεσθαι.

[68] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* Book 2.iii (Thomson, 95). Nic. Eth. 1104b.10 διὸ δεῖ ἦχθαί πως εὐθὺς ἐκ νέων ὀρθὴ παιδεία.

[69] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. J.A. K. Thomson (New York: Penguin, 1955), Book 3.vii (Thomson, 132). Nic. Eth. 1116b.10. Ὅπλοις, ἀθληταὶ, ἀγῶσιν.

[70] Fox, *The Classical World,* 139. Note that *ijtihad* derives from *jihād*.

[71] Robin Lane Fox, *Travelling Heroes: In the Epic Age of Homer* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 4-8.

[72] Robin Lane Fox, *The Classical World*, 13-22.

[73] A. J. Mattill, Jr., "The Jesus-Paul Parallels and the Purpose of Luke-Acts: H. H. Evans Reconsidered," *Novum Testamentum* Vol. 17, Fasc. 1 (Jan., 1975): 15-46.

[74] δεύτερον δὲ ἆθλον Apollodorus 2.5.2 http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0548.tlg001.perseus-eng1:2.5.2, Citing Apollodorus, *Apollodorus, The Library, with an English Translation by Sir James George Frazer, FBA., FRS. in 2 Volumes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), accessed July 8, 2018.

day. The labours thus are far broader than killing but always involve some element of difficult exertion with attendant risk. According to the Odes of Pindar, after his feats of killing and endurance, Heracles then founded the Olympic Games, providing a link between labour, *agōn*, fighting, and athletics.[75] These earthly games were in a sense a copy of the contests of the gods on Mount Olympus which they frequently fought.

The heroic male is in mind when the Syrians use their soldier and athlete struggle metaphors. Michael Stewart discusses the similar Roman idea of manliness as heroic courage in a recent work and shows how the Greco-Roman ideals were appropriated by the Church. He summarises that the Christian "heroic and manly conduct" included "one's self-mastery and displays of 'courage' in the face of adversity," a trope very applicable to ascetics.[76] This can be compared to Aristotle who, when discussing courage, likens it to athletic contests (*gymnikois agōsi*) where the end is the "crown" (*stephanos*), another symbol referred to often by the Syrian Christians.[77] This heroic athlete and warrior theme is used in the New Testament as we shall see below, and also in the Greek and Syrian ascetic writers. Gillian Clark notes that writers of the fourth and fifth centuries such as Athanasius and Basil "present the ascetic as hero or heroine, as the standard of true Christian commitment," in a time where martyrdom had mainly ceased inside the Roman Empire.[78] Yet somewhat ironically, the heroic "holy man" is a "man of power" and exerts influence, often standing up as a hero against injustice.[79] Asceticism in Late Antiquity did not exist in a vacuum—the ascetic had political power, usually unsought, but controversial and effective none the less. The ascetic practices of monk-bishops placed them in a particular place of conflict. While hermits could avoid issues of power, the role of bishops as representatives of their communities meant that they sometimes conflicted with the governors and emperors of their day. This means that the spiritually-powerful ascetic who was known for their victorious battles with the flesh was often also a locus for political power both within the church and against the state. This was true of both Christian and Muslim ascetics, and Simon Stylite, Isaac of Nineveh, and Hallaj

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[75] Pindar, *The Odes of Pindar*, ed. and trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), 5, 17.

[76] Michael Stewart, *The Soldier's Life: Martial Values and Manly Romanitas in the Early Byzantine Empire* (Leeds: Kismet Press, 2016), 6-8, 134.

[77] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* J.A. K. Thomson trans. (New York: Penguin, 1955), Book 3.vii (Thomson, p.134). Nic. Eth. 1117b.1-4. γυμνικοῖς ἀγῶσι; στέφανος.

[78] Gillian Clark, "Women and Asceticism in Late Antiquity: The Refusal of Status and Gender," in *Asceticism,* 33-48 (33).

[79] Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 114-17, 121, 123.

exemplify this.

Agōna and Jihād in the Syriac and Arabic New Testaments

Luke writes about Jesus that, "being in an *agony* he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."[80] The use of *agōn* in Luke 22:44 and its later translation to *agōna* and *jihād* is extremely significant in the context of this research. For the Church, Jesus' actions are paradigmatic for virtuous behaviour, and thus his very physical and emotional wrestling with temptation is possibly the unassailable Christian definition of *agōna/jihād*. This usage is in the context of the Luke 22: 39-46 passage where Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane wrestling with his choice to accept death by crucifixion. Christ reveals the depth of his agony when he says in the immediately preceding verse, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will, but Yours be done." Jesus has almost concluded his life work, and in terms of the *agōn*, has almost completed the race.[81] In continuation of the Greek philosophical and heroic tradition of the role of the *agōn*, this moment of very personal wrestling with temptation is the climax in Luke's account of Christ's agony in the garden. After this choice, the crucifixion quickly unfolds after a series of conflictual encounters between Jesus and the human powers. Significantly, unlike the other gospels, the trial and crucifixion events are treated relatively briefly in Luke. Whereas Matthew explains the stories of Jesus, Peter, and Judas in depth, Luke is brief, factual and far less emotive. His attention is on the *agōn*, and the results of Jesus' choice are presented as an almost inevitable post-climactic death and resurrection. Matthew's parallel passage explains Jesus' agony a little differently, and has Jesus saying, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death."[82] In both writers, the *agōn* is intense, and like the later *jihād*, means death to both soul and body. The author of Luke is almost universally accepted as being Luke the disciple and fellow-missionary with Paul, author of the Luke-Acts pair of works. However, irrespective of actual authorship it is accepted that

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[80] Luke 22:43, 44, Syriac ܐܓܘܢܐ, Greek αγωνία, Arabic جِهَادٍ . These words are only found in Luke's gospel but are found in most early manuscripts, including Sinaiticus but not Alexandinus. It is quoted extensively however by early authors such as Irenaeus, Justin, Hippolytus and Origen. John Chrysostom evidently knew these verses as shown by his references to the angel strengthening Jesus and to Jesus sweating of great drops of blood. Interestingly, Chrysostom refers to these events in his commentary on Matthew (Homily 83) even though they are not recorded in that gospel. NPNF 1.10*: St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew,* 497. It is possible that the Hebrews 12:4 reference to resisting temptation and to Jesus "shedding great drops of blood" was the cause of a later first century CE insertion into Luke. This does not, however, impact on the great importance attached by the monks to this event.
[81] Susan R. Garrett, 'Beloved Physician of the Soul? Luke as Advocate for Ascetic Practice," in *Asceticism and the New Testament,* 71-96 (83-84).
[82] Matt. 26:38.

Luke is a product of the Pauline school and inherits the same ascetic mindset. Thus this passage and the later verses from the Pauline letters must be understood in relation to each other and to the Greek philosophy that Paul was so familiar with. In relation to my argument it ultimately matters little whether Luke or Paul themselves penned these works, as it is the frequent use of philosophical metaphor of virtuous struggle across so much of the New Testament which becomes a defining framework for the later ascetics.

This worldview of spiritual struggle has both a personal and a cosmic dimension and this is seen in Luke. In Luke 22:44 the author shows Jesus wrestling with the temptation to avoid crucifixion, and also fighting evil forces and even death itself.[83] The struggle is a personal human battle with cosmic significance, a theme later used to depict the monks at prayer. The concept of agony is here also set within the broader context of Luke's portrayal of the very human Jesus the man who suffers, and who is thus the examplar for all Christians. It also continues the recurring theme of spiritual warfare seen throughout Luke, for example in Luke 4:31-37 where Jesus casts out demons, Luke 9:1 where he gives his disciples the same authority to fight demons, and Luke 13: 10-17 where Jesus says that he releases a woman from the "bondage of Satan." Jesus' struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane at the very end of his ministry in some ways parallels the battle with Satan in the wilderness temptation at the beginning of his ministry. Such "book-end" or chiastic passages are a common gospel occurrence and signify important themes. In both passages angels strengthen or protect Jesus in his temptation. In Luke 4:1-13 Jesus is tempted by the devil (a form of attack according to later Syrian writers), but chooses to resist the temptations of comfort and power. This story parallels the Luke 22 passage where Jesus prays through the night and resists sleep and the opportunity to avoid death.[84] Thus his struggle is both internal personal-psychological and a battle with external supernatural forces, a pairing also commonly seen in the Syrian authors.[85]

Significantly, Luke understands Jesus' ministry as a fulfilment and parallel of Moses' ministry. Luke 8:1-39 has Jesus stilling the sea and then overpowering the demons who are destroyed in it. To Jews, such demonstrations of divine power are clearly reminiscent of

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[83] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif,* 131.
[84] See also Hebrews 12:1-4.
[85] Syrian Christians usually understand these supernatural demonic forces as "external," and thus Jesus and monks fight a spiritual battle against demons not using real swords but rather the metaphorical sword of prayer. See for example Theodoret's writing of "demons making war from the outside" (*exōthen polemousi daimosi*). Theodoret, *History, trans.* R .M. Price, *A History of the Monks of Syria* (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1985), Prologue.6 (Price, 6), ἔξωθεν πολεμοῦσι δαίμοσι.

Moses who splits the Red Sea and then drowns the armies of Pharaoh. Thus Jesus' power must be understood as standing within the history of divine warfare in the Pentateuch. His struggle with evil has both personal dimensions of healing as well as supernatural elements in relation to demons and the environment. This is important because the same conjunction of ideas is exactly what the later monks understood their prayer to demonstrate. The struggle is an internal psychological wrestling but with an element of conflict with external human and demonic powers. Jesus' *agōn* becomes a key motivator and example for the monks who frequently cite Jesus words in the Garden, "Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation."[86] Thus when Isaac the Syrian challenges his readers to watch and pray he is calling to their remembrance Jesus' own struggles, and calling them to share the struggles, as Paul also encourages in his letters.[87] For the Syrian ascetics, Jesus' personal and cosmic *agōna* is of profound relevance because they understand that Jesus suffered as a human like them, and yet resisted temptation even to death, and thus they seek to emulate his struggle.

The Garden of Gethsemane scene is referred to again in Hebrews 12:1-4 which includes two uses of the struggle word. Heb. 12:1 has, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance *the race* that is set before us."[88] This image of the race is explicitly linked to fighting sin and temptation in verse four: "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your *striving against* (*antagonizomenoi*) sin."[89] As noted earlier, this imagery of the painfully fighting hero struggling even to death is very Hellenistic and would have been vivid for hearers and readers. The author is invoking a rich set of metaphors and makes Jesus into a new Hercules. The author in Heb. 12:1 uses the term "witnesses," that is those who watch the events in the arena, so he is connecting Jesus' resisting of passions with the arena where many Christians were suffering, which both humanises Christ and draws him close to the persecuted believers.[90] These military fighting metaphors are further used by Paul in several places. He writes, "*Fight* the good *fight* of faith, take hold of the eternal life to which you were called."[91]

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[86] Matt. 26:41.
[87] Rom. 15:30.
[88] Heb. 12:1 (emphasis mine), ܪܗܛܐ . Note the Arabic Bible has الْجِهَادِ Significantly, the witnesses are *mujāhidīn* مُجَاهِدِينَ .
[89] Heb. 12:4 (emphasis mine), ανταγονιζομενοι, contending against. Syriac ܪܗܛܐ , Arabic مُجَاهِدِينَ .
[90] In Syriac *sāhdē* root s-h-d.
[91] 1Tim. 6:12 (emphasis mine), Syriac ܟܬܫܐ ܛܒܐ The Arabic uses the noun and verb forms of *jihād,* جِهَادَ جَاهِدْ cf. 1 Tim. 1:18 "fight the good fight," Greek: *strateuē tēn kalēin strateian,* lit. to fight the good warfare,

There are a number of other important metaphors relevant to inner spiritual struggle which recur in the New Testament but use terms other than *agōna*. A passage that is frequently cited by the Syrian Christians is Ephesians Six where Paul invokes the macrotrope of the Christian as a fighting soldier and starts by emphasising what the spiritual fight is against. He writes, "Put on the full armour of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our *struggle* (Greek *palē*; Syriac *taktōša*) is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the *spiritual forces* of wickedness in the heavenly places."[92] He then elaborates over several verses and links many parts of a soldier's clothing with elements of Christian practice:

> Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.[93]

In a further (but less obvious) military allusion, in the following verse Paul continues, "Be on the alert," where alertness is the watchful stance of the soldier who has completed the previous preparations.[94] Paul demonstrates here that he has considered at some depth this struggle motif, and has developed a practical application of every aspect of a soldier's armour to the spiritual fight.

This fight is also not just against the external demons or against sin, but sometimes encompasses battles regarding prayer, emotions, and the intellect, which later Sufis describe as the "*jihād* of the heart." Paul uses *agōn* in relation to this broader conceptual framework when he says, "Now I beseech you, brethren … that ye *strive together* (*sunagonisasthai*) with me in [your] prayers to God for me."[95] The struggle of prayer is also referred to when Paul says, "For I would that you know what great *conflict* (Syr. *agōna*) I have for you, and for

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Syriac: fight (v), lit. serve, work ܕܐܬܟܬܫ in the fight (n), lit. warfare, ܩܪܒ.
[92] Eph. 6:11-12, part of a whole passage using this imagery, 6:11-17. For "struggle," Greek: *palē* wrestle, Syriac: ܕܐܬܟܬܫܘ *taktōšā*, root k-t-š, contest, fighting, strife, struggle, Arabic: مُصَارَعَتَنَا فَإِنَّ the wrestle/struggle.
[93] Eph. 6:14-17.
[94] Eph. 6:18.
[95] Rom. 15:30, συναγονισασθαι, verb aor. mid. decl. from *agōn*.

them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh."[96] It is noteworthy that just previously in Col. 1:29 Paul writes of one who strives, in the context of sufferings (cf. 1:24) and here the Arabic used is *mujāhidīn* (the one who does *jihād*).[97] In the current climate of Islamic terrorism this translation choice is very significant—it shows that Christian Arabic speakers have always considered that there is an appropriate internal spiritual fight undertaken by Christian *mujāhidīn.*

Paul also uses this concept of struggle in relation to his missionary ministry and as a challenge to other Christians. In Phil. 1:30 he writes, "Having the same *conflict* which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me."[98] Paul was probably dependent on Philo and the Stoics and the images from 4 Maccabees in his thinking.[99] Elsewhere, Paul describes a Christian as a "fellow-soldier" because of intellectual opponents they faced together, indicating a metaphorical fight for truth.[100] This theme of intellectual fighting seems to be mentioned also when Paul writes, "But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention (*agōni*)."[101] He uses athletic terminology when he writes of one who "shared my struggle" (*sunathlesan*).[102] In summing up his whole life Paul returns to this struggle metaphor referring both to the fight and to the race, showing just how central it is for him. He writes, "I have *fought* a good *fight*, I have finished my *course*, I have kept the faith."[103]

Along with the most common words for struggle, there are other terms describing the same macrotrope in the New Testament. A near equivalent to *agōna/jihād* is the Syriac *qrābā* (n. war, fight, battle, v. attack, draw near).[104] Like *jihād* in the Qur'ān, *qrābā* is used in the

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[96] Col. 2:1 Arabic: جِهَادٍ Syr: ܐܓܘܢܐ .

[97] Col. 1:29, note the Arabic مُجَاهِدًا .

[98] Syriac *agōna* ܐܓܘܢܐ , Arabic الْجِهَادُ .

[99] Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif ,* 5.

[100] Phil. 2:25 Arabic: جِهَادٍ تُجَاهِدُوا .

[101] 1Thess 2:2 Greek αγωνι, Syriac ܒܐܓܘܢܐ , Arabic جِهَادٍ .

[102] Phil. 4:3 συνηθλησαν, lit. athletes together, cf. Phil. 3:8, 12-16 with its image of suffering in a race. Also cf. Phil. 2:27, 30, being close to death, and being citizens of heaven, paralleling Jesus before Pilate etc. 3:20,2. Paul also uses other Greek philosophical concepts like "contentment," Phil 4:1, and courage/fearlessness when he praises, "not being alarmed by opponents."

[103] 2Tim. 4:7 (emphasis mine), αγωνα ... εγωνισμαι, Arabic: قَدْ جَاهَدْتُ الْجِهَادَ الْحَسَنَ، أَكْمَلْتُ السَّعْيَ، حَفِظْتُ الإِيمَانَ Syr. ܐܓܘܢܐ Cf. Phil 3:12ff with its eschatological focus, and Phil. 3:13-14, "Chasing the prize." On these verses see Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif,* 10.

[104] Jennings, *Lexicon,* 197. Qraba occurs 19 times in the NT. Note that one Akkadian word for battle is *qarabu* with the same root of *q-r-b,* and with almost the same semantic range of *qrābā* ie both "battle" and "drawing close to someone" i.e. wrestling/struggling. Akkadian is a mother language of both Arabic and Syriac.

Syriac New Testament with both the inner and outer meanings. With the meaning of the external battle, *qrābā* is used for example in Mark 13:7, "And when you hear of wars and rumours of wars do not be frightened."[105] Significantly, *qrābā* is used in a verse that links the internal and external battles, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that *wage war* in your members?"[106] Possibly the struggle concept most often referred to by later Syrian ascetics is this war with the passions, which has several New Testament precedents. Along with the mentions of struggling with sin above (Heb. 12:1, 4), Paul also speaks of part of his being fighting against (*antistrateuomenon)* his true desires.[107] Along with Paul, James and Peter also speak of the "war with the passions," which demonstrates the popularity of this imagery. James writes of the, "Passions/pleasures which wage war (Gk. *strateuomenōn*) against your members," and Peter of, "fleshly lusts … wage war (*strateuontai*) with your soul."[108] The New Testament thus is a rich source for the Syrian ascetic authors and demonstrates a wide selection of metaphors and terms used to describe the struggle. The spiritual battle is conceived of as occurring in several domains, and so, understandably, we see similar struggle language and metaphors in the Syrian Christian writers.

Divine Warriors

These New Testament references not only follow Greek ideals but also reflect an Old Testament conception of God as the Divine Warrior, a theme also present in relation to Christ. There is thus continuity between Old Testament struggle and warfare metaphors and those in the New Testament. Schellenberg's thesis on the Divine Warrior motif shows how the image of the God who fights is central to apocalyptic material from Daniel through to Revelation.[109] In an older book, Neufeld discusses the imagery of the armour of God in Isaiah, and Paul's reuse of this in Ephesians and 1 Thessalonians.[110] Paul's adaptation of Divine Warrior motifs has been only barely studied, although there is significant work on Christ as the new Divine Warrior. Duff discusses Jesus' entry to Jerusalem as a reflection

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[105] Mark 13:7. See also 1 Cor. 14:8 "For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?" Rev. 12:7 "And there was a war in heaven…" and 2 Cor. 7:5.

[106] James 4:1 (emphasis mine), πολεμοι Syr. ܩܪܒܐ The Arabic uses the verb and noun from the same root q-r-b as the Syriac, ie. *qurub* and *qraba*.

[107] Rom. 7:23, αντιστρατευομενον, Syr. ܡܬܟܬܫ, Arabic: جُحَادِبُ .

[108] τρατευομενων, στρατευονται- both from same root, James 4:1; 1 Pet. 2:11, Syr. ܩܪܒܐ Arabic: المُجَادِبَة

[109] Angeline Janel Falk Schellenberg, "The Development of the Divine Warrior Motif in Apocalyptic Literature" (Thesis, 1999). Her bibliography is particularly extensive although dated.

[110] Thomas Yoder Neufeld, *"Put on the Armour of God": The Divine Warrior from Isaiah to Ephesians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

both of Jewish and Roman imagery of the victorious King entering in triumph.[111] In this reading, Jesus' destruction of the pigs in the sea in Mark 5:13 parallels God's destruction of the Egyptians in Exod. 14:27. Christ is the Divine Warrior who will render judgement both now and especially finally at his second coming when, "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God."[112] There are many other Old Testament references that expand these metaphors such as when David describes God as a "shield," a "fortress," and "stronghold."[113] David understands God as a warrior both externally and internally in his heart. He writes that God will "strike" all his "enemies" and that, "The Lord is strong and mighty … mighty in battle," and then when David sins he says that God sends "arrows" against him, a metaphor for presumably some kind of guilt or emotional punishment.[114]

That Christians saw themselves as inheritors somehow of Christ's warrior status is shown by Paul who writes, "We do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses … destroying speculations … taking every thought captive to Christ."[115] The wording here of "war" (Gk. *strateuometha*, Syr. *pālḥīnan*), "destruction of fortresses" (Gk. *kathairesin oxurōmatōn*, Syr. *kāḇšīnan ḥesne*), "weapons (Gk. *opla*, Syr. *zayna*) of our warfare (Gk. *strateias*, Syr. *d-pālḥūṯan*)," "destroying," (Gk. *kathairountes*, Syr. *sāṯrīnan*) and "taking captive," (Gk. *aixmalōtizontes*, Syr *šāḇēnan*) all extend this military metaphor.[116] Because Jesus' victory is not fully present until the second coming, in the interim Christians need to continue the struggle, especially against the traditional foes of the "world, flesh, and devil." The divine warrior motif thus informs ascetic practice: the Orthodox Christology of a partial present victory necessitates their daily life of spiritual battle.

One particular part of the Orthodox Old Testament that influenced the Syrian ascetic

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[111] Paul Brooks Duff, "The March of the Divine Warrior and the Advent of the Greco-Roman King: Mark's Account of Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem," *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 111, No. 1 (Spring, 1992): 55-71. See also Edward Adams, "The Coming of the Son of Man in Mark's Gospel," *Tyndale Bulletin* (56.1, 2005): 39-61; Scott Ryan, "Cosmic conflict and the divine warrior in Paul's letter to the Romans" (Thesis, Baylor University, 2017); Delnora Williams, "Portraits of Christ in Revelation" (Thesis, Regent University, 2017).

[112] 2 Thess. 1:7-8. For further examples in early Syrian writings see Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 169-71.

[113] Ps. 3:3, 18:2.

[114] Ps. 3:2, 24:8, 37:2.

[115] 2 Cor. 10:3-5.

[116] Gk. στρατευομεθα, καθαιρεσιν οχυρωματων, οπλα … στρατειας, καθαιρουντες, αιχμαλωτιζοντες; Syriac: ܡܚܐܪܝܬܢܐ arms/the weapons; ܐܢܟ ... ܣܘܗܠܐܡܝ ... ܥܚܢܝ Fight; Arabic: نُحَارِبُ Fight; إِذْ أَسْلِحَةُ arms/the weapons; مُحَارَبَتِنَا our fight.

tradition is the story of the Maccabees. This strand of Hellenised Jewish teaching is frequently referred to in the early church especially in the Syrian tradition, and had a significant influence on ideas of martyrdom and virtue. The martyr stories in Two Maccabees and Four Maccabees are celebrated in liturgies and in iconography, and the martyrs are held up as ascetic models to imitate.[117] Two Maccabees 7 tells the story of a mother and her sons who heroically resist the temptation to renounce their faith, and this story is repeated with elaboration in Four Maccabees. Their struggle is an *agōn* and shows the "steadfastness of the mother … in the face of a flood of passionate impulses."[118] The martyrs demonstrate the ultimate control over their emotions so they are logical models for the later ascetic resisting their own passions.[119] The Maccabean story was an important foundation for Syrian church understandings of martyrdom and ascetic practice. The story of the mother and her seven sons martyred by Antiochus was celebrated as a motivation to imitate their bold and courageous stand. This story also exhibits important Stoic ideas of overcoming the emotions by using reason and thus is a foretaste of the Syrian Stoic emphasis of Isaac. The concept of the righteous resistance to idolatry, which leads to martyrdom, is also frequently found in other deuterocanonical books. These works were well known in Syrian circles and display Semitic elements not so evident in the Greek and Latin traditions.[120]

The Syrian Theological Context

Aphrahat and Isaac write within specific theological contexts that flavoured the tradition of asceticism and spiritual struggle that they inherited. The Syrian church had a particular eschatological emphasis and anthropology, discussed below. In general they shared the

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[117] Elias J. Bickerman, *The God of the Maccabees,* trans. Horst Moehring (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 114, 158; James Charlesworth, *The Old Testament pseudepigrapha and the New Testament* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 86; Martin McNamara, *Intertestamental literature* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier Inc., 1983), 233; H. F. Henderson, *The Age of the Maccabees* (London: J.M. Dent and Co., n.d.), 42-47; Jan Willem van Henten, The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 & 4 Maccabees (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 3-7.

[118] William Fairweather, *Background to the Gospels, or Judaism in the period between the Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1908), 348.

[119] R. Hiers, *Reading the Bible book by book* (Philadelphia: Fortress Books, 1988), 139; Martin McNamara, *Intertestamental literature*, 235. The Syriac translation of these books (known as the Peshitta) uses words that capture specifics that are not always present in the Greek. For example in 2 Maccabees 7:15 we see the fifth son being "mangled" or "tortured" in various English translations. Yet the Syriac has *mangrin* and *altsin*, which mean "stretched on a mangonel" and "pressed," evoking vivid imagery of specific torture devices. This is somewhat different to the Septuagint version which uses *prosagontes* (from *agōn*), which certainly captures the meaning but does not convey the same literal machine imagery. *The Old Testament in Syriac: Peshitta Version Part IV: Ezra and Nehemiah 1-2 Maccabees* (Leiden: Brill, 2103). The Syriac language around this and other stories reveals fascinating insights into Syriac theology and culture.

[120] Of significance also is the role of the woman as greatest in faith, as in 4 Maccabees 15:30 she is described as "more noble than males in steadfastness," a role reprised by Mary in the Syrian worldview.

perspectives of the wider Christian communion including theological features relevant to ascetic struggle. The best and most extensive collection of articles on the Church background up to the fourth century is in the volume *Early Christian Literature*, which notes the social and theological issues that were shared by many early Syrian authors.[121] From the fourth to seventh centuries Syrian Christian authors increasingly construct their theological framework by drawing on ideas used in NeoPlatonic philosophy, and they sometimes add cultural elements from Judaism and other religions.[122] Syrian authors compose ascetic histories and draw from shared symbols such as the military and the gymnasium to appeal to their audiences. Brock presents a good summary of these various ascetic histories.[123] As noted earlier, there were somewhat fluid boundaries between religions—Fowden notes for example that the shrine of the Christian ascetic Sergius was visited even by non-Christian Persians and Arabs, and later also by Muslims.[124] As the Roman Empire became increasingly Christianised more imperial concepts and practices were embraced by the church including in the liturgy and in its doctrine of war.[125]

Between the fourth and seventh centuries there were a number church councils held by the Chalcedonians that were rejected by the other Orthodox of Syria. These councils touched on many issues related to asceticism, mainly concerning the continuing disagreements and council statements over the relation between the divine and human natures in Christ.[126] Human nature, the body, asceticism, and free will thus were continuing areas of imperial and leadership debate while monastic practices continued at the grass-roots level. Hannah Hunt's *Clothed in a Body* provides an excellent introduction to early Christian body

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[121] Frances Young, Lewis Ayres and Andrew Louth, eds., *Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004); See especially Sebastian Brock, "Ephrem and the Syrian tradition," 362-72, and Andrew Louth, "The Literature of the Monastic Movement," 373-81.

[122] George Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins: Diversity, Continuity and Transformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). See also Cameron, *The Mediterranean World.*

[123] S.P. Brock, "Syriac Historical Writing: A Survey of the Main Sources", *Journal of the Iraq Academy*, Syriac Corporation 5 (1979-1980): 1-30. See also Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993); Geoffrey Greatrex, "The Roman-Persian Frontier and the Context of the *Book of Steps,"* in *Breaking the Mind: New Studies in the Syriac "Book of Steps,"* eds. Kristian S. Heal, Robert A. Kitchen, (np: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 9-31.

[124] Elizabeth Key Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius Between Rome and Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 4, 7, 133-139. See also: J. H. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

[125] John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1989), 5-38; and vice versa, as Schrier asserts, "In the Byzantine view, therefore, the war of 421-422 was certainly fought for the sake of Christianity." Omert J. Schrier, "Syriac Evidence for the Roman-Persian War of 421-422," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 33.1 (Duke University, 2005): 75-86 (78); See also K. C. Holum, "Pulcheria's Crusade A.D.421-22 and the Ideology of Imperial Victory," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 18 (1977):153-72.

[126] See Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, 165-292 for an extensive discussion of these issues.

theology especially as it impacts on asceticism.[127] She supplies a very good summary of Greek philosophical thinking about the body, and explains how it became the basis for Christian theology.[128] Hunt discusses the theology of the soul working in harmony with the body, leading to its transformation, and how asceticism is seen as a continuation of martyrdom.[129] She is incorrect that Christian doctrine says that "Jesus' humanity ends with His assumption into heaven, while His divinity endures," but is right that the Fathers saw the incarnation as elevating the flesh as good and transformable.[130] For the Eastern Church, human nature is basically good, and divine grace is needed, but a synergistic struggle is the path of salvation. In this Syrian perspective human effort is elevated in a way that is quite contradictory to that of Augustine, and I discuss this contrast in my final chapter after analysing the concept of struggle in the Syrian and Muslim authors.

By the late fourth century, monasticism, and asceticism generally, were becoming prominent in the church. The biography of St. Anthony by Athanasius propelled ideas of frugal living, prayer, and the spiritual struggle to the forefront. Anthony especially became known for his combats with the devil and his demons.[131] This fight against the demons was based on the "desert spirituality" of Judaism. Elijah and John the Baptist are central models in this tradition, being prophets who deliberately retire to the desert to battle the demons. The demons were understood to make their home there (e.g. Matt. 12:43), hence desert spirituality was a direct spiritual attack on the demons' home. Jesus' forty days of temptation and struggle against Satan continues the tradition and provides the model for the ascetic "soldiers of the desert."[132]

Katherine Smith has well-summarised the idea of the "soldiers of Christ" (*miles Christi*) especially in the Latin Christian tradition, but also notes the concept in various Greek church fathers as well. This understanding that training for spiritual battle against the passions is an *agōn,* was well-established during the third and fourth centuries.[133] Smith notes

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[127] Hannah Hunt, *Clothed in a Body: Asceticism, the Body and the Spiritual in the Late Antique Era* (Ashgate, 2012).

[128] Hunt, *Clothed in a Body,* 9-29. She also notes the apparent contradiction between insistence on a real human nature and body in Christ, yet suppression of the body by ascetics, 1.

[129] Hunt, *Clothed in a Body,* 47-8, 79-92. Hunt's discussion of the body in the writings of John Climacus, a seventh century monk, is possibly the definitive summary.

[130] Hunt, *Clothed in a Body,* 53-4, 82, 85.

[131] Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 2-4.

[132] Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality,* 5-8.

[133] Katherine Allen Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), 9-

Anthony's place in the developing metaphor of the ascetic saint fighting Satan and defending the spiritual fort in the desert, and also the important role of soldier-saints such as Martin in reflecting this ideal. This fight metaphor was also attached to a theology of the ascetic's imitation of Christ who was the conquering spiritual warrior. Smith asserts that (emphasis hers):

> As members of the *militaria Christi*, believers were not merely soldiers of Christ but soldiers *like* Christ, who had, in the words of Cyprian, 'walked first in that very warfare, so that what He taught was to be done, He did first,' by triumphing over death and the devil.[134]

This conception is especially prevalent in the Syrian tradition and is reflected in most of the authors I analyse. This tradition is based on a significant number of New Testament references as I have shown earlier, and the Greek Bible text exhibits the same words and metaphors found in earlier Greek philosophical writers. Luke especially emphasises the ascetic dimension of Christ's life and teaching. He is the only gospel-writer who has Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane in an *agonia*.[135] Garrett argues that this story shows Jesus' ascetic self-mastery, and is "best understood against the background of the philosophical contest or gymnastic exercise." For Luke, prayer is a form of *askesis*, and the ascetic way is central to the Christian life.[136] For the Syrians, this example of Christ as the heroic and ascetic true philosopher becomes paradigmatic for every ascetic in their own struggle.

When dealing with the notion of struggle, it is important to recognise that while the modern Western reader sometimes sees asceticism as just one optional aspect of a broader concept of "spirituality," for the Eastern Church there was no linguistic equivalent to "spirituality," but rather *askesis* (asceticism) was the focus of the life in the Spirit.[137] This

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38, 71-94. Finn describes Egyptian and Syrian monasticism and ascetic practice at length in Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World*, 131-43. See also http://www.syriacstudies.com/2012/10/11/egyptian-and-syrian-asceticism-in-late-antiquity-jeffrey-conrad, accessed October 15, 2018.

[134] Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture,* 110, citing Cyprian, Letter 58.2, in *Letters 1-81*, trans. Rose Donna (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1965), 165.

[135] Susan Garrett, "Beloved Physician of the Soul: Luke as Advocate for Asceticism," 71-95 (83).

[136] The theme of watchfulness or attention is seen earlier in Epictetus. Garrett, *Beloved Physician,* 85. See also Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Elm discusses Christian ascetic practice, which she says is based on "distinct Stoic-Platonic notions," 13-14.

[137] John Chryssavgis, "The Spiritual Way," in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology,* eds. Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008):150-163 (150).

askesis is most commonly described as the fight against the demons and the passions. Chryssavgis makes the point that the writers are not unified on which are the exact enemy in the struggle with passions- some writers describe them all as negative, following the Stoics, while others see passions as neutral and simply expressed both as good or bad, following Aristotle.[138] Either way, for the Syrians ascetic achievement is central in a way that the Stoics would have understood.

Distinct Syrian ascetic emphases

Syriac ascetic texts and indeed Syrian spirituality has been "barely explored" but has a distinct flavour, even among the less-educated.[139] Vööbus in his monumental work discusses at length the particular emphases of the Syrian church, noting their great focus on asceticism, proto-monasticism, fasting, self-mortification, and spiritual war.[140] The concept of "proto-monasticism" is used in relation to Syria because in the fourth century there were large numbers of ascetics but no organised settled monasteries nor clear rules or orders. This form of asceticism was very individual rather than communal, as is evidenced by the language used in Aphrahat where one term for ascetics is *iḥidāye* (singular *iḥidāyā)*, meaning *"single ones."*[141] Monasticism in Syria was never as clearly delineated from the laity as in the West because all Syrian Christians were expected to be somewhat ascetic.[142] Barnard argues that this pre-monastic movement arose in the third century in Syria possibly shaped by the large Jewish population in Edessa.[143] He notes that in the writing of Aphrahat the idea of the *Bnai Qyama* (sons of the Covenant) especially bears a distinct similarity to the ascetic Jewish *Manual of Discipline* from Qumran, and that the third century CE Syriac language *Odes of*

He adds that even *theosis* comes only through asceticism, 160-2.

[138] Chryssavgis, "The Spiritual Way," 156. See also the ascetic discourse of Abba Isa of Scesis discussed by Chryssavgis.

[139] Grigory Kessel and Karl Pinggéra, introduction to *A Bibliography of Syriac Ascetic and Mystical Literature* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 7. There does not seem to have been as much range of views among the Syrians compared to the Latins or Greeks in regards to asceticism, or at least, this has not been documented.

[140] Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* vol. 1 (Louvain: Peeters, 1958), 12-25, 67-89, 106-07, Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* vol. 2 (Louvain: Peeters, 1960), 19-34, 256-300;

[141] Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), xxi-xxv; Susan R. Garrett, 'Beloved Physician of the Soul? Luke as Advocate for Ascetic Practice," 71-96 (76-9); Adam Lehto, introduction to Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, trans. Adam Lehto (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010), 34-41; See also Hannah Hunt, *Clothed in a Body: Asceticism, the Body and the Spiritual in the Late Antique Era* (Ashgate, 2012), 103-06 on the *iḥidāye* and *Bnai Qyama*.

[142] This is especially evident in the Book of Steps where all Christians are assumed to be ascetic. See Robert Kitchen, introduction to *The Syriac Book of Steps,* ed. and trans. Robert Kitchen (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009), viii.

[143] L. W. Barnard, Studies in Church History and Patristics, *Analecta* 26 (Thessalonika: Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, 1978), 194-223 (199-206).

Solomon and *Acts of Thomas* demonstrate the views of a Jewish-Christian movement with a particular ascetic flavour.[144] Whether it was Christian converts from Judaism or simply the Syrian cultural milieu, the Syriac-speaking Christians developed a greater appreciation for intense spiritual discipline and warrior saints. For example, whereas the Greek Church rarely mentions the Maccabees or the forty martyrs of Sebaste, the Syrian church shows a high regard for them as seen in the frequent literature references and iconography.[145]

Syrian asceticism is somewhat different to Egyptian monasticism, whose writings emphasise quality of the communal relations and the theme of forgiveness between monks. Although Athanasius' biography of the lone monk Anthony highlights his spiritual battles with demons, later writings move more to communal themes.[146] Brock notes that Syrian asceticism was not derived from Egypt but had its own separate history right back to the New Testament, and evolved a strong encratic (self-denying) influence in imitation of John the Baptist.[147] This self-denying conception is clear in Tatian's *Diatesseron*, and was so extreme that in some parts of the Syrian church, "celibacy was considered as an essential condition for baptism."[148] Thus by the time of Islam there was a long Syrian ascetic tradition of individual non-communal self-denying struggle and "spiritual battle." Bamberger is accurate in his assessment that, "There was a ruling concept in the early church that the ascetic life is a war against demons," and this spiritual warfare concept was especially strong in Syria.[149] It is hard to determine why Christianity in the Middle East used more militant terms for spirituality than in the Roman Empire. It may be because of the relatively greater number of wars that directly affected Antioch and Edessa than Rome and Constantinople, or just

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[144] Barnard, *Studies in Church History and Patristics,* 195-97, 204-05. He adds that the Syrian writers Tatian and Bardaisan also have distinct ascetic emphases, 207-14. Because Syriac is closely related to other ancient Middle-Eastern languages and maintained some cultural continuity, precursor texts are also relevant. Murray even notes that, "there is an extraordinary continuity of feeling between some ancient Sumerian litanies and passages in the [Syrian] Acts of Judas Thomas." Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 160.

[145] John D'Alton, "The Asceticism of Severus: The Forty Holy Martyrs of Sebaste," in *Severus of Antioch: His Life and Times*, eds. John D'Alton and Youhanna Youssef (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 47-64.

[146] See for example Armand Veilleux, trans., *Pachomian Koinonia* vol. 3 (Kalamzaoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982), although see the many mentions of spiritual battle in the Letter of Pachomius, Pachomius, "Instruction Concerning a Spiteful Monk," 13-41.

[147] Sebastian Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20:1 (Apr. 1973):1-19 (3-5). See also Jeffrey Conrad, *Egyptian and Syrian Asceticism in Late Antiquity,* http://www.syriacstudies.com/2015/09/16/egyptian-and-syrian-asceticism-in-late-antiquity-jeffrey-conrad-2/, accessed October 10, 2018.

[148] Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 7. Brock discusses possibly the best well-known example of this style of individual encratic asceticism, Simeon the Stylite, as a contrast to the dominant Western communal monastery, in 13-19; Hannah Hunt, *Clothed in a Body*, 95-6 discusses the singular Semitic influence on the Syrian church; Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, "*Asceticism and Anthropology*: *Enkrateia and 'double creation' in Early Christianity,*" in *Asceticism,* 127-46.

[149] John Eudes Bamberger, introduction to *The Praktikos Chapters on Prayer* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cisterian Publications, 1981), 5.

because warfare metaphors encoded the self-denying themes so well. Certainly, the inclusion of warfare as central to Christian faith—it is one of the 22 chapters of Aphrahat's "Demonstrations," which is unequalled in the West.[150] Murray is correct in summarising, "Aphrahat's whole ceremony is a call to 'holy war' … [and] celibates … participate in the eschatological holy war."[151]

Christology has a particular shape with the Syrians. The incarnation is understood to be Christ being "clothed in a body."[152] The incarnation of Jesus is thus seen as a reversal of Adam and Eve's wearing of garments which they received due to their sin in the Garden. The theme of the garment is also very evident in the motif of "putting on" Christ at baptism and "putting on the robe of glory"- one of the goals for ascetics.[153] The body is thus sanctified, potentially pure, and hence the Christian body as a temple is used in prayer and is even an aid to spiritual growth.[154] This is quite unlike the common Western conception of the body as a locus of evil. The Syrian writers have a positive view of disciplining the body so that the united body-soul can win the fight for holiness. In this unique way, "embodiment is at the heart of Syrian theology and anthropology."[155] A closely-related outworking of this view of Christ's incarnation as "putting on a body" is that the real humanity of Jesus is emphasised. Because of the appropriation of human nature, Christ Himself serves as the "perfect human example and precedent" and as "the primary model for our imitation."[156] This perspective appears to stem from the exegetical approach of the Antiochian tradition which focussed on the human attributes of Christ including his human struggles. Theodore of Mopsuestia's exegesis is central in this, and among the Syrians his exegesis was not as counter-balanced by the "high Christology" of the Alexandrian school as it was with the Greeks.[157] This idea is later evidenced in the Arabic version of the Nicene Creed which translates the usual, "and He

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[150] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, in ANF vol 13, eds. and trans. P. Schaff and H. Wace (Peabody, 1994), 345-412.

[151] Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 15-17, see also Lehto, introduction, 46-48; For the importance of war imagery in Syrian Christianity and a possible Manichaean background see Susan Ramsey, "Exploring the Harbour of Rest: The Significance of αναπαυσις in the Theology of the Pseudo-Macarian Corpus" (PhD Thesis, Marquette University, 2012), 147-51.

[152] Hannah Hunt, *Clothed in a Body: Asceticism, the Body and the Spiritual in the Late Antique Era* (Ashgate, 2012), 144-52, Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 69-81.

[153] Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), xxii-xxiv.

[154] Brock, *Syriac Fathers,* xxiv-xxv; Hunt, *Clothed in a Body,* 101-03.

[155] Hunt, *Clothed in a Body,* 137.

[156] Roberta Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and Jacob of Sarug* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 47.

[157] Norris, *Manhood and Christ: A Study in the Theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), xi, 173-89.

suffered," with the sense of "He was knocked down."[158]

The concept of "inaugurated eschatology" features prominently in the Syrian ascetic tradition, and is of particular significance for my analyses of Aphrahat and some of the Syrian authors. Inaugurated eschatology is the Christian belief that the future times have already begun in Christ's life on Earth, and so there are "already" and "not yet" dimensions to the Kingdom of God.[159] According to this theological perspective, the future heavenly state is already partially present now on earth, especially among ascetics who imitate Christ. In this framework the angels are "models" for the ascetics to "imitate."[160] Victory in the present ascetic struggle means that people can have a foretaste of heaven now. Syrian hagiographies abound with heaven-like stories of the wild beasts being at peace with holy ascetics, e.g. the life of Thecla.[161] This inaugurated eschatology was also by the time of Isaac closely linked to a strong apocalypticism and an expectation that the world would end soon, a perspective also seen in early Islam.[162] Because this view is so integral to Aphrahat's texts on struggle I shall elaborate more in his chapter.

Another distinctive of Syriac ascetic literature is that, unlike in the West, ascetical training was seen as essential for *every* Christian, not just the monks. There was not the same divide seen in the West between monks and laity, and the early Syrians only had various classes or levels of attainment of the perfection which was expected of all. This is especially clear in the *Book of Steps* where there are only two classes of Christians (in Syriac *Mšiḥāyuṯā*, meaning "Messiah ones"), the Upright and the Perfect, and both are expected to be quite ascetic.[163] It is only later that a separate monastic identity becomes more clearly formed, but never as distinctly or as ordered with rules as with the Greek Church or in the West. The very idea of a non-ascetic Christian was an anomaly in Syrian Christianity, hence the emphasis on spiritual struggle, fasting, and prayer is seen in all the Syrian writers and addressed somewhat to all Christians. This is due in part to the soteriology of the East, where Christ is seen as the model, and salvation is understood as a process of imitation of Christ in

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[158] وتألّم .

[159] George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1993), 70.

[160] Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies,* 48.

[161] Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies,* 53.

[162] Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 33.

[163] ܟܐܢܘܬܐ On the Upright and the Perfect see Robert Kitchen, introduction to *The Syriac Book of Steps,* viii; Hunt notes that the Syrian church later rejected the encratite position that all were called to be ascetics but that this idea still had some influence. Hunt, *Clothed in a Body,* 97-101.

his struggle against sin.[164] The frequent references to Jesus' *agōn* in the Garden of Gethsemane is one aspect of this, as is the commonly quoted verses from Hebrews 12 about imitating Jesus who ran the race and underwent agony.

The teachings of Evagrius, the highly influential fourth-century monk and author (345-399 CE), played a major role in shaping Syrian (and Greek) monasticism.[165] Although better known for his speculative mysticism, Evagrius also writes extensively on the spiritual battle of the ascetic.[166] Bamberger notes the divorce in Evagrius' writings between his philosophical and desert sayings, which highlights the different worldviews of classical Greek speculation and the Coptic and Syriac ascetic praxis.[167] If the Syrians ignored his philosophical speculation, they thrived on his ascetic writings, and preserved them even when Evagrius was condemned in the Greco-Roman church. For Evagrius, as for most early monks, the ascetic life is a battle, a "striving after virtue," and specifically a "combat with demons."[168] Daily spiritual life is a "combat" and an "open fight," themes that persist in the Syrian writers. Even anger is a tool used to "fight against the demons and strive for every pleasure."[169] Evagrius certainly is foundational for many of the Syrians, and they use the same struggle, warfare, and athlete language, especially Isaac for whom Evagrius is a major source.

The concept of struggle is often related in Syriac Christian ascetic writings to the *sahda* (martyr, cf. Arabic *shahīd)* and to the *athloi* (athlete). These terms gained currency from the early persecutions of Christians and are used by Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius etc.[170] The executions of Christians for their refusal to worship idols, especially under Diocletian, were "highly theatrical affairs," and so their witness to their faith and courageous

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[164] Brock, *Syriac Fathers,* xxv; Hunt, *Clothed in a Body,* 93- 94 notes that Syrian asceticism has many complexities and that the more distinct Syrian culture of the fourth century was increasingly mixed with Greek theology by the sixth.

[165] John Eudes Bamberger, introduction to *The Praktikos Chapters on Prayer* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cisterian Publications, 1981), li; A. M. Casidy, *Evagrius Ponticus* (London: Routedge, 2006), 3, 21-22.

[166] See Evagrius' "Praktikos", "Chapters on Prayer", and "Sentences for monks". It may be indicative of a military worldview that Evagrius devised the genre of *sentences* (groups of 100 sayings) for his works on the spiritual battle, given that the century was the standard Roman military unit of 100 men.

[167] Bamberger, *The Praktikos Chapters on Prayer,* xxxiv, lxviii. Bamberger notes that no "modern scholar has so far been able to demonstrate the organic unity of Evagrius the Hellenistic thinker with the monk Evagrius," lxxii.

[168] Bamberger, *The Praktikos Chapters on Prayer,* 6.

[169] Evagrius, *The Praktikos Chapters on Prayer,* 16, 23; Evagrius, "Eulogios," in *Evagrius of Pontus*, ed. and trans. Robert Sinkewicz (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2003), 29.

[170] Clement, "The Instructor," ANF vol. 2, eds. and trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 2004), 224, and Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs of Palestine,* trans. William Cureton (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861), 3, 6, 11.

acceptance of death was understood as a *martyrios* (martyrdom or witness).[171] The concept of martyr is closely connected with that of athlete due to the physical endurance of the martyrs and the frequent location of the sufferings in the arena. Martyrs were described as "soldiers of the arena" and "athletes (*athloi*) of God" for their willingness to undergo struggles for their faith.[172] This is natural since both athletes and martyrs "performed" in the arena. These three terms therefore must be surveyed together both in Christianity and Islam as the images of martyrdom and athleticism are closely linked with that of combat or battle against the passions. At times the three ideas are virtually synonymous and they are often used together in the Syrian writers. Theodoret, for example, calls ascetics "athletes of virtue" numerous times, including in his opening sentence where he introduces the subject of these "excellent men" who are worthy of imitation.[173] At various times he also describes the monastery as a "wrestling school," "wrestling-ground" and "stadium," and the monastic leader as a "gymnastic trainer."[174] Both *athloi* and virtue are terms from Greek philosophy and Theodoret is thus using a rich metaphor in his praise of the monks.

Agōn, labouring in the fields, and the angelic life

As well as the link to athleticism and martyrdom, struggle is intertwined with the imagery of labouring. While labouring as an *agōn* is not seen in the Sufis, it is such an important aspect of the Syrian anthropology of struggle that it needs explanation. In 2 Timothy Paul expands the fighting metaphor to prove his assertion that the Christian must, "Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."[175] He uses three illustrations in an example of synthetic parallelism to emphasise his point. He writes :

> No *soldier* in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes as an *athlete,* he does not win the prize unless he *competes* according to the rules. The *hard-working farmer* ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.[176]

The close connection between the soldier and athlete has already been mentioned, but the

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[171] Michael Bonner, *Jihād in Islamic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 74.

[172] Bonner, *Jihād in Islamic History,* 73-74.

[173] Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria,* trans. R.M. Price (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 3, 39.

[174] Theodoret, *A History of the Monks of Syria,* 50, 56, 100.

[175] 2 Tim. 2:3.

[176] 2 Tim. 2:4-6 (emphasis mine).

similarity to the farmer labouring in the field is not immediately obvious. Peter Brown notes that the Jews and then the Syrians saw the Fall as primarily related not to guilt or inherited sin but rather to drudgery (Greek *ponos*, Syriac ʿ*amla*). The result of Adam and Eve's sin was that the ground would be worked with great difficulty "by the sweat of your face" and in "toil/labour/pain/sorrow" (Heb. *b-otzbun*), in a kind of struggle.[177] Viewing farming as a painful struggle thus establishes the connection between the military, athletic, and farming *agōn* motifs.[178] Brown adds that daily drudgery was very evident for the agrarian Syrians and thus they aspired to a heaven where there was no need to labour. A further link is that the ascetics instead of physical work spent their time in prayer, seen as a new kind of labour, one also called an *agōn* and thus a heroic form of work. This connection partly explains why the Syrian monks who did not work (unlike the Egyptian monks), were understood as being "like the angels" in heaven. They were considered to be living on Earth a partial fulfilment of the non-working prayerful heavenly state. The other angelic aspect of these monks is their celibate nature which also makes them like the angels, since the angels in heaven do not marry.[179]

These two themes of celibacy, and of prayer being a kind of work, were understood as aspects of the "angelic life," and repeatedly appear in the Syrian ascetic writings. For example, the image of Paradise as a drudgery-free existence appears several times in the *Book of Steps* (fourth century). According to the anonymous author, before the Fall, Adam and Eve engaged only in "the work of angels" (*pūlḥono d-malākē*), and the Perfect are meant to return to this work.[180] Further, "God … wanted all humanity to praise him without having to work (*oplo*). It would have been so if Adam had only remained straight."[181] The imperfect

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[177] Gen. 3:17-19.

[178] Peter Brown, "Wealth, Work and the Holy Poor: Early Christian monasticism between Syria and Egypt." (Lecture, 2014), https://theology.georgetown.edu/sites/theology/files/Brown%20-%20Alms%2C%20Work%2C%20and%20the%20Holy%20Poor_1.pdf, accessed October 15, 2018.

[179] Luke 20: 34-6. The angels in heaven do not marry. In this scheme Adam and Eve did not know drudgery and they only had the labour of angels. Brown also suggests that people supported the monks because they represented a taste of renewed paradise, cf. the Manichean monks who also did no work. Brown, "Wealth, Work and the Holy Poor: Early Christian monasticism between Syria and Egypt." Brown adds that "The careworn inhabitants of these regions of intensive agriculture had long wondered why it was that human beings had come (in the words of the Sumerian Atrahasis) 'to bear the drudgery (the dullum) [passed on to them] by the [toil-less] gods.'" See also Hesiod, *Works and Days*, ll. 42-53. trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/works.htm, accessed May 9, 2018.

[180] *Syriac Book of Steps*, Facsicle 3, trans. and introduction, Robert Kitchen and Martien Parmentier (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias 2014), Memra 25.8 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 132), ܦܘܠܚܢܐ ܕܡܠܐܟ̈ܐ .

[181] *Syriac Book of Steps*, Facsicle 1, trans. and introduction, Robert Kitchen (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias 2009), Memra 3.15 (Kitchen, 66), ܐܘܦܠܐ The author adds that the Perfect will be restored even now on Earth to the Paradisical perfection of angelic work. He has God saying that, "I will also perfect you because you have …

are those who "are always handicapped by various shortcomings due to the fact that they labour in earthly spheres and consequently cannot follow the whole truth, toiling (*daʿmīlīn*, from *ʿamla*) as they are in [worldly] anxiety."[182] These are contrasted with the "Perfect" (*gmīrē*) who in prayer are "contesting and wrestling like athletes (*d-b-qrobo qoymīn atlīṭe w-bagūnō*)," demonstrating the frequent connection in the Syrians between the heroic *agōn* and the achievement of perfection via labouring in prayer.[183] Struggle metaphors related to farming are closely connected to an eschatological vision and the work of angels.

Sexuality and Struggle

A major theme in Syrian asceticism that has a significant influence on how they understand ascetic struggle is sexuality.[184] Such an emphasis seems to be non-existent in Sufi writings but is so pervasive in Syrian asceticism that this anthropology must be addressed. The East was beset for several centuries by the teachings of Messalianism, a lay ascetic movement which rejected the sacraments and all sexual activity for Christians.[185] The Council of Gangra (340 CE) specifically dealt with these teachings, and Aphrahat writes within this context, although later authors are less affected. By Aphrahat's time, however, many of the questions raised by Messalianism were unanswered, so he addresses a deep concern about the need for celibacy of ascetics without rejecting marriage. I shall discuss various aspects of these issues when they are raised by Aphrahat's text but for now it is worth noting the general trend within the Syrians.

Kari Børresen argues that women's bodies and sexuality in general became issues in early monasticism for a number of reasons. She finds a "pervading dualism between the soul and body and a conflict between god-love and sexual love."[186] This is generally true as seen

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pursued the Perfection of the heavenly angels from which Adam your father fell. I will make you and your father Adam ascend to the height from which you have fallen." *Syriac Book of Steps*, Facsicle 1, Memra 9.12 (Kitchen, 186).

[182] *Syriac Book of Steps*, Facsicle 1, Memra 3.3 (Kitchen, 44), ܕܥܡܝܠܝܢ .

[183] *Syriac Book of Steps*, Facsicle 1, Memra 3 (Kitchen, 44), ܐܬܠܝܛܐ ... ܕܩܪܒܐ ܩܝܡܝܢ ܐܠܗܐܝܬ ܘܒܐܓܘܢܐ .

[184] Susanna Elm, *'Virgins of God': The Making of Asceticism in Late* Antiquity (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 190-6. This is an excellent introduction to asceticism and the body in late antiquity but somewhat ignores the Syrian context.

[185] Messalianism is mentioned early by Ephrem and Ps.-Macarius, and possibly alluded to earlier by Aphrahat and in the *Book of Steps*. The movement's name derives from the Syriac ܡܨܠܝܢܐ meaning one who prays (i.e. alone, as opposed to joining with the church's sacraments). For a good introduction to Messalianism see Marcus Plested, *The Macarian Legacy: The Place of Macarius-Symeon in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Oxford Theological Monographs, 2004), 16-27.

[186] Kari Elisabeth Børresen, "Sexual Difference in Christian Doctrine and Symbolism: Historical impact and

for example in Aphrahat, yet Børresen overstates the dualism somewhat. In the Syrians there certainly is some conception of an "antagonism" between soul and body, and she is correct in asserting that this reflected the sense of a "cosmic strife between good and evil powers," however for the Syrians the body could aid the soul in this conflict, and the battle was not one of two equal forces.[187] While this idea of cosmic battle is muted in the Syrian fathers in comparison to Zoroastrianism, the Syrians do follow the New Testament perspective of preferring celibacy over marriage, as evidenced in several passages.[188] Syrian ascetic teaching thus allowed for sexual practice but considered it a hindrance to the higher spiritual attainment, and this is reflected in the *Book of Steps* and Aphrahat. The mainstream church's version of *enkrateia* was however less extreme than that of the Messalians who were far more dualist. Hunt rightly suggests that Aphrahat sees men especially as at risk of lust, and this is evident in his greater level of exhortation directing them to struggle for sexual purity.[189] At the same time, especially in Aphrahat, it is clear that women ascetics also must struggle to remain celibate, and this is occasionally part of his teaching on the internal battle.

Finally, writings in the Syrian ascetic tradition often use a distinct style of communication, a mix of narrative or poetry heavily influenced by the Semitic style of synthetic parallelism, with a small amount of Greek rhetoric.[190] Such parallelism is often seen in the Psalms, and this means that Syriac theology is encapsulated in a different way than in the Greek or Latin traditions. Syriac Christianity needs to be studied as a distinct field, "rather than as an interesting adjunct to a normative Greek and/or Latin western Christianity."[191] A fitting conclusion to this brief summary of distinct Syrian themes is given by Burns:

> A convergent spirituality, drawing on an encratic tendency within the populace, and
> encompassing the whole person, as understood in the biblical concept of the heart …

Feminist Critique," in *Dynamics of Difference: Christianity and Alterity: A Festschrift for Werner G. Jeanrond*, eds. Ulrich Schmiedel and James M. Matarazzo Jr. (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 161-72 (161).

[187] Børresen, *Sexual Difference*, 161. I discuss this aspect of the Syrian view later.

[188] 1 Cor. 7:1-3, 25-35.

[189] Hannah Hunt, *Clothed in a Body,* 58. Hunt also says that some writers considered women ascetics as becoming like men, while others emphasised their (along with men) attainment of a de-gendered angel-like identity, 63-77.

[190] Murray, Symbols of Church and Kingdom, 16-19, 42; For "Synthetic Parallelism" in Hebrew and Syriac see Theophile James Meek, "The Structure of Hebrew poetry," *The Journal of Religion* (1929): 523- 50. See also Claudia Chiancaglini, "Syriac Language 1: Iranian Loan words in Syriac," http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/syriac-language-i, accessed October 15, 2018.

[191] Anna Silvas, introduction to *Basil of Caesarea- Questions of the Brothers: Syriac Text and English Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 2, 23.

Ascetically sympathetic with formative proto-monastic adherents. Theologically perpetuated via a linguistic mode that was memorable and accessible to the majority of the population, espoused in paradoxical statements rather than dogma … Showing strong Judaic influence combined with Mesopotamian traditions.[192]

The breadth of the struggle metaphor

The concept of struggle is broad in both Christian and Muslim usage, as evidenced in the texts following. Earlier I discussed how the ancient Greeks used the term *agōn* for military, athletic, musical, and other kinds of struggle. *Agōn* and related terms were also used in the New Testament for intellectual and emotional battle, and even the warfare of prayer. Importantly, even during Late Antique times the Greek word *agōn* continued to be used in a broad sense of both interior and exterior battle- this becomes significant when I compare the Islamic usage later.

Procopius, writing in the sixth century, still uses the *agōn* cluster of terms with a wide range of meaning when he parallels his struggle against the inanimate sea with the war against the Vandals. He writes about, "struggling (*diamachomenoi* from *machomai*) both against the waves and against the Vandals," immediately after mentioning the "struggle (*agōn*) we shall have" and being "engaged in conflict (*agōnizomenois*)," both times using a variation of *agōn* which in this case seems to be also a parallel term to *machomai*.[193] The fifth century Sozomen praises Theodosios because he undertakes daily "military and bodily exercise (*hopla kai to sōma askein*)."[194] At the same time, in discussing the problems of the church he writes of "conflicts with enemies," and of Christian martyrs suffering in the contest of the struggle (*athlōn ton agōna*).[195] As the Eastern Roman empire became increasingly Christianised, so did external warfare become more sanctified by the Church. Thus connections between inner and outer warfare developed such as later occurs in Islam. The internal and external fight themes are seen meshed in many places, for example Orosius (d. 418 CE), writing shortly after the events, says that Theodosius prostrated himself at the scene of the battle and maintained a night vigil, leaving "pools of tears which he had paid as the

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[192] Stuart Burns, "Charisma and Spirituality in the Early Church: A Study of Messalianism and Pseudo-Macarius" (PhD. Thesis, University of Leeds, 1999), 100.

[193] Procopius, *History of the Wars,* 3:15.26-28, trans. H. B. Dewing (London: William Heinemann, 1916), 137-38. διαμαχομενοι, ἀγὼν, ἀγωνιζομέοις.

[194] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History,* PG 67, ed. and trans. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1864), PG 67:847-48. ὅπλα καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀσκεῖν.

[195] ὅσοις τε ἐχθροις ὑπαντήσασα; ἄθλων τὸν ἀγωνα; Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History,* PG 67:849-50; 857-58.

price for heavenly assistance."[196] Stephenson adds that:

> Maurice further required that the standards be blessed a day or two before battle; that the "Trisagion" ("Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us") be sung by each unit early in the morning and late at night, before and after all duties; and that as each unit marched out of camp, it should cry in unison, "God is with us" three times.[197]

A direct connection was often made between inner spiritual purity and the successful battle outcome. All soldiers had to be moral otherwise their sin could lead to defeat. In 741 CE, Leo III and Constantine V write that, "Those who go to war against the enemy must protect themselves from every evil word and deed and keep their mind on God alone … for victory in battle depends not on the size of the army but strength comes from God."[198] Leo's *Taktika* (Emperor Leo VI, 886–912 CE) instructs generals to ensure the purity (καθαρὸν) of the army and to pray fervently through the night. The general must ensure "that everyone is purified [or sanctified, ἁγιασθῆναι] by priests, and that they believe completely in words and deed that they have divine help."[199] Significantly, Leo's *Taktika* has a section specifically on the Arabs (called "Saracens") which urges the Byzantines to "emulate the infidel." [200] Leo knows that Muslims gain spiritual rewards if they die in battle and calls their reward *misthos* (μισθὸς), which according to Stephenson means "wage" or "the recompense given (mostly by God) for the moral quality of an action," and "corresponds to the Arabic term *ajr*."[201] Leo goes still further:

> If with God's help as an ally, properly armed and arranged, *making an assault* well

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[196] Paul Stephenson, "Religious Services for Byzantine Soldiers and the Possibility of Martyrdom, c. 400–c. 1000," in *Just Wars, Holy Wars, and Jihāds: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Encounters and Exchanges,* ed. Sohail H. Hashmi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25-46 (27).

[197] Stephenson, "Religious Services," 28.

[198] Ludwig Burgmann, ed., *Ecloga: Das Gesetzbuch Leons III und Konstantinos V, Forschungen zur Byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte* 10 (Frankfurt: Löwenklau, 1983), 244.

[199] Stephenson, "Religious Services," 35, citing Leo's *Taktika.*

[200] Stephenson, "Religious Services," 36 writes "The Byzantines understood Islamic institutions and doctrines and how they underpinned the Arabs' war efforts … Moreover, and exceptionally, the Christian emperor, while offering the usual condemnation of the 'barbarous and impious race,' recommends that the Byzantines emulate the infidel."

[201] Stephenson, "Religious Services," 36. Stephenson also writes, "Leo ordered that the general must be instructed in the correct faith of the Christians, as must his commander and all of his men, so that 'all who fight through Christ our Lord and on behalf of their families and friends and country and for the whole Christian people will easily overcome the distress of thirst and the lack of food, and of excess cold or heat … and for their pains they will store up compensations [μισθῶν] from God himself and from his kingdom.'" Leo, *Taktika,* PG 18:19, cited in Leo, *The Taktika of Leo VI,* trans. George Dennis (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014), 444–45.

and bravely against them, *fighting* for our spiritual salvation [ὑπὲρ τῆς ψυχικῆς ἡμῶν σωτηρίας … ἀγωνιζόμενοι] just as for God himself, for our families and for our other Christian brothers, placing hopes unhesitatingly in God, we shall not fail but rather shall triumph completely against them.[202]

Leo intimately links the reward for the victorious military warriors with "fighting for our spiritual salvation." In a passage that shows close parallels to later Islamic texts on *jihād*, Leo says:

> It is your duty after the battle, O general, to console those soldiers wounded in it, and to honour those who fell in the battle with burial, and to consider them perpetually blessed [μακαρίζειν διηνεκῶς], since they did not esteem their own lives above their faith and their brothers. This blessed act enhances the zeal of the living.[203]

When Leo instructs that those who die in battle should be considered perpetually "blessed," *makarios*, he is using a term most frequently applied in patristic writings for the saintly "martyr." This is highly suggestive, and more work is needed to compare such "Christian" texts with those of Islam. [204] These passages demonstrate the intimate link between internal and external battle, and my text analysis demonstrates that there is a similarity between Christian and Muslim understandings—both share a broad semantic range for the struggle and warfare language.

Conclusion

Syrian Christian and Sufi authors mostly discuss the concept of spiritual fighting using a cluster of metaphors and terms. Critical Metaphor Analysis is therefore used to interpret the chosen texts, requiring an understanding of literary and social contexts which I have outlined. I have provided a brief introduction to principles of interpreting metaphorical language in relation to the concept of struggle, including the role of the macrotrope as an organising motif

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[202] Stephenson, "Religious Services," 36, citing Dennis, *The Taktika,* 484–85, PG 18: 127 (emphasis mine).

[203] Stephenson, "Religious Services," 36-7, citing Dennis, *The Taktika,* 484–85, PG 18:127.

[204] Somewhat later, the emperor Constantine writes to the troops who were about to fight the Muslim forces of the emir of Aleppo: "We will embrace you as victors appearing as triumphant conquerors against the enemy and receive you with joyful acclamations as you return. We will kiss your bodies wounded for the sake of Christ in veneration as the limbs of martyrs, we will pride ourselves in the defilement of blood, we will be glorified in you and your valorous accomplishments and struggles." Stephenson, "Religious Services," 37, citing Dennis, *The Taktika,* 484–85, PG 18:127.

for the cluster of fighting words and images. Culturally, Hellenist and Semitic ideas of warfare, asceticism, the divine warrior, and New Testament ideas and literary forms shaped the Syrian authors so I have explained relevant literary and historical issues. The Syrians share particular ascetic emphases regarding inaugurated eschatology, the role of the body, the labouring farmer metaphor, and the place of sexuality in the spiritual struggle, and these have been summarised. Both the internal and external worlds are covered by the struggle motif, so I reviewed some Christian military texts that are roughly contemporary with the Syrian writers that exhibit the broad semantic range for the struggle metaphor, in a way that is similar to the Islamic authors. Having introduced the context, I shall now analyse the chosen Syrian Christian texts in the following three chapters.

2. Metaphorical Struggle in the *Demonstrations* of Aphrahat

You who have put on the armour (*zayneh*) of Christ, learn the intricacies of war (*qrobō*), so that you may not be defeated and weary (*šapple*) in the struggle (*baīgūnō*). Our enemy is cunning and clever, but his armour is inferior (*šapal*) to ours.[1]

Spiritual struggle is a central concept and recurring imagery in the writings of Aphrahat (d. *c.* 345 CE), a Persian Christian ascetic likely born in the late third century, and active in the first half of the fourth century before so many of the great Greek and Latin Church fathers. Aphrahat's terms and metaphors for struggle evidence marked similarities to the early Sufi writers. With a name that literally means, "The Wise" in Persian, Aphrahat is a very important figure in the Syrian ascetic tradition.[2] The *Demonstrations* (Syriac *taḥwita*) of Aphrahat provide a wide-ranging discussion of numerous aspects of the Christian life grouped into twenty-three chapters, corresponding to the twenty-two letters of the Syriac alphabet, plus one added final Demonstration. Writing in the context of Persian persecution of a somewhat Romano-Hellenised yet distinctly Syrian church, Aphrahat uses a whole cluster of related concepts and terms related to soldiers and athletes to articulate his vision of successful spiritual fighting. In this chapter I introduce Aphrahat and his significance and context, demonstrate the logic of his theology and the place of struggle within it, and undertake an extensive textual analysis leading to an evaluation of the distinct Syrian anthropological perspective and hence the centrality of struggle metaphors.

Aphrahat was apparently a leader in the Syrian church, probably a bishop. He writes his twenty-three *Demonstrations* in two stages in 337 and 344 CE to clarify the teaching of the Syrian church, and claims to speak on its behalf.[3] Aphrahat's claim has led one scholar to suggest that he was even reporting the outcomes of a church council.[4] Either way, Aphrahat

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[1] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 7.7 (PS 1.1:321; Lehto, 203). Verses from Aphrahat throughout this thesis that are quoted in English are mostly from Adam Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010). The Syriac is from *Patrologica Syriaca,* 1.1 and 1.2, ed. Ioannes Parisot (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894), hereafter "PS 1.1:nnn or PS 1.1.2:nnn". ܐܢܬ ... ܗܕ̈ܢܬ ... ܩܠܒ̈ܟ ... ܟ̈ܢܝܚܘ̈ܬܟ ... ܟܦܠ .

[2] Adam Lehto, introduction to Aphrahat, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage,* ed. and trans. Adam Lehto (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010), 4; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* rev. edn (New York: T&T Clark, 2002), 28.

[3] Lehto, introduction, 5-18 has an excellent introduction; T.D. Barnes, "Constantine and the Christians of Persia," *Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 75 (1985), 126-136 reviews the evidence for the dating.

[4] Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 28-29.

is a leader, theologian, and ascetic, whose works claim to make clear the teaching of the church. In his instruction he calls the faithful to deeper commitment using a wide range of metaphors, many of which relate to spiritual struggle and using the body in ascetic ways. Aphrahat reflects a more Jewish rather than Greek form of asceticism and eschatology, which sees the body and soul as an integrated whole, and the body as a major positive contributor in the attainment of holiness.[5]

Aphrahat is highly significant because he writes the first extensive and still extant theological and ascetic works in Syriac. His writings reflect a unique and somewhat less-Hellenised form of early Christianity.[6] Aphrahat is often compared to Ephrem, a roughly contemporary Syriac teacher who lived from 306 to 373 CE and who wrote many poems, hymns, and sermons, and a commentary on the *Diatesseron* (the four gospel synthesis). Ephrem writes in his *On Hermits and Desert Dwellers* that the monks "are like spirits, though among mortals; and like angels in heaven, though among men on earth."[7] This description neatly captures the approach of Aphrahat as well—the celibate life of the angels can be lived on earth, but only by the ascetics who win the spiritual struggle against sin, especially sexual sin. Also of note is that Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* discuss monastic practice over 20 years before Athanasius writes his famous Life of St Anthony (written between 356-362 CE). Athanasius describes Anthony's previous life in the desert and sees him as the founder of monasticism, but Aphrahat discusses ascetic individuals and practices that appear to have become fairly well established by his time. This early date for the *Demonstrations* has led some scholars to posit a Syrian source for monasticism or at least a separate source to the Egyptian and Latin sources.[8]

Relatively little research has been done on Aphrahat despite all these points. It is

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[5] Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The spiritual world vision of Saint Ephrem* (Kalamazoo: MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992) 14-15, 139-141; Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 31-36; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 69-86, and see discussion further below.

[6] Sebastian Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen*, 20:1 (1973:Apr.): 1-19, especially 9; Lehto, introduction, vii; Ute Possekel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), has demonstrated that near-contemporary Ephrem is not as untouched by Hellenism as often claimed, and I would suggest such analysis of Aphrahat may show the same, although to a lesser degree. Although Ephrem is very Semitic in approach, there is still a subtle shift from Aphrahat to Ephrem. For an excellent overview of these issues see Christine Shepardson "Syria, Syriac, Syrian: Negotiating East and West", In *A Companion to late Antiquity,* ed. Philip Rousseau (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 455-66.

[7] Joseph Amar, "On Hermits and Desert Dwellers," in *Ascetic Behaviour in Greco-Roman Antiquity,* 66-80.

[8] Lehto, introduction, 41; Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian), xxi, xxxiii.

telling that the best general introductions to the author and his work are both relatively brief: The 1991 German *Einleitung* by Bruns and the excellent 2010 introduction by Adam Lehto are both less than seventy pages in length.[9] Although Lehto lists in his Bibliography over 250 references on Aphrahat spanning 110 years, some of these sources are brief paragraphs, and none discuss his views on spiritual struggle in any depth. A considerable portion focus on Judaism, exegesis, sexuality, celibacy, the identity of Aphrahat's "Sons of the Covenant" (*bnai qyama*), and other peculiarities of Aphrahat, but not on his metaphorical world of struggle. A number have covered aspects of Aphrahat's eschatology and anthropology but have not made connections to his teaching on the *agōna*. Lehto ably summarises the spiritual warfare theme of Demonstration Seven in a brief paragraph, but most other authors have ignored this theme entirely. One exception is Arthur Vööbus who notes the distinctive Syriac ascetic warfare emphasis at points in his *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient,* volumes One to Three.[10] His discussion of the distinctive Syrian emphasis on celibacy and covenant is also relevant to Aphrahat, although some of his conclusions are now outdated.[11]

In another significant contribution, Christopher Garland reviews the debates over the status of the celibate *bnai qyama* with respect to the rest of the church, and positions them as representative warriors in a way reminiscent of the Jewish warriors of the Qumran War scroll.[12] Garland notes that in Demonstration Seven there are "strong allusions" to three Old Testament passages that are used both in the War Scroll and in 1 Maccabees concerning the recruitment qualifications of the holy warriors, a point to which I shall return. He also mentions that, "Aphraates uses language of a 'contest' consistent with a holy war," but does not expand on this.[13] Diana Juhl explores various aspects of the Christology, soteriology and eschatology implied in Aphrahat and briefly mentions themes of ascetical warfare, for example the "war against Satan's temptation" (*Kampf gegen die Versuchung des Satans*).[14] There is also much general useful background material on asceticism, celibacy, fasting, and the *Bnai qyama* etc. in the works of Brock, Koch, Murray, and Schwen.[15] Brock in particular

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[9] Peter Bruns, *Aphrahat Demonstrationes Unterweisungen 1* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991); Lehto, introduction.

[10] Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* (Lovain: Peeters), Vol. 1, 1958; Vol. 2, 1960; Vol. 3, 1988, see 1:13; 3:8, 9.

[11] Also helpful is Arthur Vööbus, *Literary, critical and historical studies in Ephrem the Syrian* (Stockholm: ETSE, 1958), especially 94-109.

[12] Christopher Garland, "Ascetics as Representative Warriors," *Expository Times* 109 no.9: 266-268. This responds to earlier material from Burkitt, Vööbus, and others which is now somewhat discredited.

[13] Garland, "Ascetics as Representative Warriors," 268.

[14] Diana Juhl, *Die Askese im Liber graduum und bei Afrahat* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 118.

[15] Sebastian Brock, Early Syrian Asceticism, *Numen*, 20:1 (1973:Apr.): 1-19; Hugo Koch, "Taufe und Askese

mentions the "contest" language of the Syriacs and the worldview of the "anticipated" eschatology of John the Baptist as important in the Syrian approach. Tjitze Baarde provides a good brief introduction to Aphrahat, and Jacob Neusner's study of the anti-Jewish parts of Aphrahat is rich, but neither discuss the struggle. [16] Christopher Buck notes the significance in Syrian Christianity of "native metaphors, rooted in Semiticisms" and how these are used in Aphrahat, which is relevant to my study.[17] He also discusses the role visual symbol and synthetic parallelism plays in Syriac literature in contrast to the more abstracted thought of Greek material.[18] Yet while Buck analyses Syriac concepts such as the pearl and the robe, he does not cover the *agōna*. This is similarly true of many other articles and books on Aphrahat or early Syrian Christianity. Although many have noted the significance and particular flavour of Aphrahat, other than a few mentions, none explore *agōna* in any depth.

The *Demonstrations*: Context and Form

The titles of *The Demonstrations* in English do not appear to follow any order that is logically obvious to a modern reader. There is however some logic to this structure and I demonstrate this in my analysis of struggle themes. It is sufficient to note that aside of a large number (roughly ten depending on viewpoint), that directly reply to various arguments against Christianity made by certain "Jews," the rest cover the Christian virtues and some aspects of ascetic practice. The *Demonstrations* are titled in English:[19]

1. On Faith
2. On Love
3. On Fasting
4. On Prayer
5. On Wars
6. On Covenanters (Bnai Qyama)
7. On the Penitent
8. On the Dead Coming to Life (Resurrection of the Dead)

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in der alten ostsyrischen Kirche," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* (Volume 12, Issue 1): 37–69; Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Paul Schwen, *Afrahat: Seine Person und Sein Verständnis des Christentums* (Berlin: Trowitzsch & Sohn, 1907).

[16] Tjitze Baarde, *The Gospel Quotations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage* (Amsterdam: Krips Repro B.V., 1975), 1-10; Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1971).

[17] Christopher Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Bahai Faith* (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 5.

[18] Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm*, 30-32.

[19] Here I am using the titles given by Lehto in Lehto, *Demonstrations*.

9. On Humility

10. On Shepherds (Pastors)

11. On Circumcision

12. On the Passover (Pascha)

13. On the Sabbath

14. An Argument in Response to Dissension (elsewhere called "Exhortation")

15. On the Distinctions among Foods

16. On the (gentile) Peoples in place of the (Jewish) People

17. On Christ, who is the Son of God

18. Against the Jews, on Virginity and Holiness (Continence)

19. Against the Jews who say that they will be yet gathered together

20. On the Support of the poor

21. On Persecution

22. On Death and the End Times

23. On the Grapecluster.

Aphrahat writes his *Demonstrations* during a period of upheaval and persecution in the Syrian church.[20] He explicitly mentions this persecution in his Demonstrations 21 and 23, *On the Grapecluster* and *On Persecution*. Although part of the Syrian church existed within the boundaries of the Roman Empire, most was within the Sassanian Persian Empire. Drijvers argues that although Christians were persecuted at times in Syria they were generally well-treated especially by the later Sassanian empire.[21] The persecutions of the fourth century were more a political issue rather than religious *per se*, since it was assumed by the Persians that Christians were loyal to Rome and thus traitors.[22] Buck goes too far in suggesting that Syrian Christians existed in a very liminal state under the Sassanids, as there was actually extensive exchange of ideas between the Syrians and Persia and Rome during these early Christian centuries, and frontier towns were places of philosophical and theological interchange.[23] The Christian theological schools of Nisibis and Edessa had a significant number of Persian

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[20] T.D. Barnes, "Constantine and the Christians of Persia," *Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 75 (1985), 126-36. Aphrahat writes in two stages in 337 CE and 344 CE.

[21] Jan Willem Drijvers, "Rome and the Sassanid Empire: Confrontation and Coexistence," in *A Companion to Late Antiquity,* ed. Philip Rousseau (Blackwell, 2009), 441-54. The article by Drijvers is an excellent summary of the primary and secondary sources.

[22] Drijvers, "Rome and the Sassanid Empire," 443, 445; Similarly, Manichaeism was seen as a fifth column in the Roman Empire.

[23] Christopher Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm,* 65-8.

students and thus at the theological and educational levels the church was quite connected.[24] A good example of this cultural interplay is the Middle Persian (400 BCE to 600 CE) word *qtrywn,* meaning 'centurion'. This is a loan-word from Syriac, and ultimately from Latin.[25] It is also significant that Middle Persian script is actually a variation of the Aramaic (Syriac) script.[26]

The Syrian Church in Aphrahat's time was becoming well-established but was still resolving some aspects of practice especially regarding asceticism and sexual abstinence, partly in response to the Manichaeans who rejected most sexuality and considered the body as mostly evil.[27] This is evident in Aphrahat and in the decisions of various local Syrian church bishops and councils later in the fourth and fifth centuries, both of which condemn such views of the body.[28] It is unclear to what extent the Messalians were active in Aphrahat's time and his work does not directly respond to them. The church in the fourth century however did exhibit many aspects of a quite severe asceticism, features of which are discussed at length in Vööbus, Brock, and others.[29] There was also concern that Christians would revert to Judaism since they had so many features in common.[30] It is clear that Aphrahat is responding directly to Jewish arguments in almost half of all the Demonstrations and that he has a quite nuanced understanding of Jewish teaching. He explicitly mentions his dialogue with a Jewish scholar in Demonstration 21.[31] This topic has been extensively researched by Jacob Neusner, and the works of Naomi Kultun-Fromm are also noteworthy.[32] These Demonstrations appear to have little connection to the others, and barely mention struggle at all. Of more significance in relation to Judaism is that Aphrahat uses very Semitic thought-forms and exegetical approach, including in his treatment of spiritual battle. Salomon

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[24] Drijvers, "Rome and the Sassanid Empire," 450-2.

[25] Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, *Dictionary of Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian* (Brepol, 2004), 209.

[26] "History of the language," http://sites.la.utexas.edu/persian_online_resources/history-of-the-language/, accessed October 15, 2018.

[27] Cosmogony and Cosmology iii, in "Manicheism," *Encyclopædia Iranica,* http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cosmogony-iii, accessed 25 September 2018; "Manichaeism," *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?eu=51774&sctn=1&pm=1, accessed September 25, 2018.

[28] See the rules of Bishop Rabbula and the Acts of the Council of Gangra which occurred sometime between 340 and 370CE, in Arthur Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic documents regarding legislation relative to Syrian Asceticism* (Stockholm: ETSE, 1960).

[29] See Brock, *Early Syrian Asceticism*, 1-19; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, Vol. 1, iv, 12f, 32-54, etc. Vol. 3, 24-41.

[30] Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 19.

[31] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 21.1 (PS 1.1:932; Lehto, 438).

[32] Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); Naomi Kultun-Fromm, "Sexuality and Holiness: Semitic Christian and Jewish Conceptualizations of Sexual Behavior," *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (2000): 375-95.

Funk demonstrates that Aphrahat uses Haggadic-like argument and phraseology numerous times even when he is not directly addressing Jewish themes.[33] Murray notes that a "striking feature of early Syriac bible exegesis is acquaintance with Jewish traditions in targums and midrash."[34] This Semitic worldview shapes the kinds of metaphors used by Aphrahat, yet it is also true that in some places he uses terms that have a Greek provenance. An example showing both cultural influences is evident in Demonstration Seven where Aphrahat extensively allegorises the Old Testament story of Gideon and the 300 soldiers at Jericho, and he also describes this as a type (*ṭūpsō*, from the Greek *tupos*).

The Christian Scriptures feature prominently in some parts of Aphrahat's work. He quotes from or alludes to almost every Old and New Testament book and from a wide range of chapters.[35] He regularly uses Jewish synthetic parallelism, where the same concept is repeated in two or more phrases, with each phrase having synonyms of the relevant nouns, adjectives, or verbs.[36] His approach to the Old Testament especially in regards to spiritual warfare is often to use typological exegesis, for example he uses the story of Gideon and his (external) battle as an extended metaphor for the inner spiritual warfare.[37] Aphrahat also uses quite sophisticated forms of Greek rhetoric.[38] His writing especially shows usage of *exergasia*, a repetitive style often used for providing evidence for an argument.[39] Syria was not an isolated area but by this time had been exposed to several centuries of Hellenism and Greek philosophical schooling especially among the educated elite. Kitchen notes that even the Syrians Bardaisan and Tatian, writing in the second and third centuries, use extensive Greek rhetoric, showing evidence of the penetration of Hellenised education well before Aphrahat. Drijvers argues convincingly that in Syrian Edessa there was training in Greek rhetoric and literature from the mid-second century, and Hoeller says that Bardaisan was "a master of Greek style and rhetoric."[40] The use then by Aphrahat of several Greek styles and

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[33] Salomon Funk, *Die Haggadischen Elemente in dem Homilien des Aphraates, der persichen Weisen* (Piscataway, NJ:Gorgias Press, 2010), a reprint of an 1891 PhD thesis originally published in Vienna. See also Garland, "*Ascetics as Representative Warriors,*" 266-8; Stephanie Jarkins, *Aphrahat the Persian Sage and the Temple of God* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008), 34; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 280.

[34] Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 18.

[35] Except the NT books not considered canonical by the Syrian church e.g. 2 Peter and Revelation.

[36] Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 42.

[37] See Lehto, introduction, 29-33; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 290-98.

[38] Kristian Heal, *Joseph as a Type of Christ is Syriac Literature* (BYU Studies 41, No. 1, 2002), 29-49 (30-31).

[39] *Exergasia* is in Greek literally "amplification," and is, "a device by which a number of figures of speech amplify a point and embellish a passage." J. A. Cuddon, "Exergasia," A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, fifth edn. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 259.

[40] Hans Drijvers, "The School of Edessa: Greek Learning and Local Culture," in *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East,* eds. Hendrik Jan Willem Drijvers, Alasdair A.

words is evidence of this extensive Hellenist penetration.

At times Aphrahat's writing is almost poetic. In this and other ways Aphrahat can be compared to his near-contemporary Ephrem (c. 306-373 CE). Ephrem writes extensive Christian poetry in Syriac and is an expert in symbolical theology—his poetry is often described as both "poetic theology" and "theological poetry."[41] Aphrahat adopts a number of rhetorical devices to convey his message including *exergasia*, paradox, and *hyperbole*. These are common in Syriac poetry and are frequent in Ephrem's work, often co-existing in the same passage.[42] Aphrahat is less poetic than Ephrem but still uses many of the same devices. Aphrahat employs a common Syriac (and Second Sophistic) rhetoric of repetition and exaggeration, and a very poetic style to argue for his ascetic ideals. The aim of this rhetoric is to persuade readers to change their behaviour, and is deliberately manipulative, selectively using evidence.[43] Such language often makes a point by giving multiple examples that "prove" the assertion in a way that appears extreme.[44] Aphrahat appears well educated and is clearly proficient at using both *exergasia* and *accumulatio*. *Exergasia* is a "repetition of the same idea, changing either its wording or delivery,"[45] while *accumulatio* is defined as "bringing together various points made throughout a speech and presenting them again in a climactic manner."[46] This type of rhetoric also sometimes includes *hyperbole* along with its repetition.[47] Aphrahat uses these three rhetorical devices frequently in relation to many topics, and several times directly related to the *agōna*.

The *Demonstrations*: Themes, Structure, and the place of struggle metaphors

The main themes in Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* closely connect to struggle. Lehto and others have noted the importance of asceticism, spiritual battle, eschatology, and Christology in

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MacDonald (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 49-59; Stephan Hoeller, *Gnosticism* (Quest Books: Wheaton, 2002), 107; Dimitrios Karadimas, *Tatian's Oratio Ad Graecos: Rhetoric and Philosophy/theology* (Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003), 4.

[41] Kees den Biesen, *Simple and Bold* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2006), 25, 47-48.

[42] Den Biesen, *Simple and Bold,* 53.

[43] Aristotle, in his essay *Rhetoric Book 1, Chapter 2*, states that rhetoric is "...the power of perceiving in every thing that which is capable of producing persuasion." Aristotle, *The Rhetoric, Poetic and Nichomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: James Black and Son, 1818), 7.

[44] For the importance of recognising rhetoric for the correct interpretation of Christian texts see Amos N. Wilder, Scholars, Theologians, and Ancient Rhetoric, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (Mar., 1956) 1-11.

[45] Gregory T. Howard, *Dictionary of Rhetorical Terms* (np:Xlibris, 2010), 107.

[46] Howard, *Dictionary of Rhetorical Terms*, 17.

[47] Howard, *Dictionary of Rhetorical Terms*, 127.

Aphrahat, along with anti-Judaising rhetoric.[48] In relation to spiritual struggle, Aphrahat's theology of asceticism in the *Demonstrations* is intertwined with inaugurated eschatology and is characterised by five points: an anthropology of a present lived experience of the future resurrection, exhibiting a likeness to the angels, watchfulness (which is also an attribute of the angels), virginity (or at least celibacy), and victorious spiritual battle against sin. These five inaugurated eschatology themes are frequently emphasised by the use of the key motif of the heavenly eschatological marriage with the Bridegroom. The wedding imagery is closely linked to two Biblical stories in Aphrahat—the marriage of the five faithful virgins, and the question of which husband the wife who on Earth had seven husbands will have in heaven. This last story contains a key verse about Christians in heaven, "for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being 'sons of the resurrection' (*bnai qyamtha*)," which contrasts these people with the "sons of this age."[49] This identity as "sons of the resurrection" is central to Aphrahat's anthropology, and informs his approach to the ascetic combat. It refers both to the future resurrection but also to Christ's resurrection which enables a present transformed life. Inaugurated eschatology is closely tied to Aphrahat's understanding of the reason and effectiveness of spiritual combat.

The best way to understand Aphrahat's teaching on struggle is to analyse Demonstrations Six and Seven, titled *On the Sons of the Covenant* (*bnai qyama*) and *On the Penitent* (*tayoba*).[50] Before this however, it is important to appreciate how his ascetic worldview is reflected across his whole work thematically, and how this affects the structure of the *Demonstrations*. At this point it is appropriate to consider the question of the logic of Aphrahat's text as a whole. In structure, the *Demonstrations* appear at first somewhat disordered. Lehto has recently summarised the evidence by saying that "…coherence may not be obvious to the modern reader," and that Aphrahat's "discussion of wars appears out of place."[51] He analyses key themes in Aphrahat but does not propose any overall logic to the structure.[52] However, Aphrahat's inaugurated eschatological framework makes some sense of the placement of material. Aside from the well-discussed anti-Jewish polemic Demonstrations,[53] the other chapters form a cohesive unit arranged around asceticism and

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[48] Lehto, introduction, 32-62; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 11-19, 41-68; See also discussion throughout Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*.
[49] Luke 20:34-36.
[50] ܬܝܒ̈ܐ ; ܒܢܝ ܩܝܡܐ ,.
[51] Lehto, introduction, 24-25.
[52] Lehto, introduction, 27-62.
[53] See especially Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*.

eschatology.

Lehto says that "eschatological expectation … pervades the whole of the *Demonstrations*."[54] But Aphrahat's work shows more than a concern for a soon-coming of Christ, rather, it conveys a whole new mindset, where, as Letho says, "ascetics … in their way of life anticipate the life of heaven." Aphrahat believes that this anticipatory life is possible because the Kingdom of God has already partly appeared—it has been "inaugurated." According to George Eldon Ladd, because of the resurrection of Jesus, the Kingdom of God is "not only an eschatological gift belonging to the Age to Come; it is also a gift to be received in the old aeon."[55] This theme is very closely related to struggle, as we shall see in discussing the main themes of the first ten Demonstrations. These ten were written a few years before the last thirteen, and contain none of the anti-Jewish rhetoric that dominates the last Demonstrations, and thus must be considered as a somewhat distinct unit.

Demonstrations One to Four are on faith, love, prayer, and fasting, which are core Christian beliefs and ascetic practices. The first two Demonstrations*, On Faith* and *On Love* introduce the rest and also lay the foundation of the Christian teaching. Demonstration Three, *On Fasting* and Demonstration Four, *On Prayer* teach the value and nature of Christian practices, while the last of the first set of Demonstrations, Demonstration Ten *On Pastors*, relates to the practical task of leading the flock. This leaves a group of five *Demonstrations* in between that appear unconnected, but if seen in the light of an asceticism driven by Syrian eschatological theology, they do form a pattern.

Demonstration Five, *On Wars* seems to be the start of a new focus for Aphrahat. There is no discernible connection at the end of Demonstration Four to *On Wars*, nor is there any reference in Demonstration Five back to *On Prayer*. There is however a thematic link between the last sections of Demonstration Five and the themes in Demonstration Six. In *On Wars,* Aphrahat discusses the current Roman-Persian wars in the context of salvation history, especially the prophecies of Daniel.[56] He discusses the history of persecution of the Jews and analyses the Daniel's beasts and kingdoms. His major thesis is that all these events, "have

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[54] Lehto, introduction, 46.
[55] George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 70.
[56] T.D. Barnes, "Constantine and the Christians of Persia," *Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 75 (1985): 126-36.

been set in place beforehand by God."[57] In section 23 he moves to a conclusion and states that Christians are the "holy people, who were chosen instead" of the Jews, and who have a new covenant (*qyama*) with God.[58] This is a clear link to the next Demonstration which focusses on these new covenant people, the *bnai qyama* (sons of the covenant). He then a few sentences later says, "Take note that the children of the kingdom have been marked, and they have *received their liberation from this world*."[59] This "liberation" which has already been received is thus not future but somehow present. Aphrahat is giving a foretaste of the next Demonstration, which emphasises the life of the "sons of the covenant" who are already partly living in the eternal heavenly kingdom and thus live somewhat like the angels. In the next section Aphrahat describes Jesus as a great warrior, a "mighty champion" (*gabro ganebro*) in his "armour" (*zayneh*), and his people as those who are "clothed with his armour (*zayneh*) and will not be defeated by war (*ḥoyabīn ba-qrobō*)," an image he repeats several times in both Demonstrations Six and Seven.[60] He finally warns his readers to be holy and humble (*makak*) so as to receive the Kingdom.[61] The word used here has the same root as in the title of Demonstration Nine *On Humility*, directly connecting these two Demonstrations. Hence, *On Wars* serves as an introduction to Demonstrations Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine by placing eschatology, humility, and the spiritual warfare of the *bnai qyama* at the forefront.

Demonstration Six, *On the Sons of the Covenant* continues this theme of eschatology and asceticism by discussing the importance of virginity for the "Covenanters," the *bnai qyama*. Because of the ambiguous nature of the people addressed in this Demonstration, most research on it has focussed on the identity of these people. Nedungatt and Lehto summarise the debates well, showing that these were a specific group who had made a covenant of chastity, but discussions of the *bnai qyama* in Demonstration Six have tended to sideline the relevance of the *qyamtha*. Griffith and Nedungatt have noted that there is some related idea of resurrection (*qyamtha)* in this term *qyama*.[62] This connection is because the Syriac for resurrection is *qyamtha*, derived from the same triliteral root as *qyama* (covenant) where the root means to "stand up," and covenants were often signified by erecting standing stones.

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[57] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 5.1 (PS 1.1:184; Lehto, 148).

[58] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 5.23 (PS 1.1:232; Lehto, 165), ܩܝܡܐ.

[59] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 5.23 (PS 1.1:232; Lehto, 166) (emphasis mine).

[60] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 5.24 (PS 1.1:233; Lehto, 166-7), ܙܝܢܗ ܚܝܠܐ ܐܢܫܐ; ܢܣܒ ܚܝܠܐ.

[61] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 5.25 (PS 1.1:237; Lehto, 168), quoting Luke 14:11, ܡܟܟ.

[62] J.J. Nedungatt, *The Covenanters in Early Syriac Christianity*, Orientalia Christiana Periodica (Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies, Rome. Vol. 39): 191-215 and 419-44; Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, 32-46; Sidney Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria," in *Asceticism*, eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford University Press, 2002), 220-45.

Thus to a Syriac audience there is an immediate link between 'sons of the resurrection' (*bnai qyamtha)* and 'sons of the covenant' (*bnai qyama)*. Further, Nagel has shown that there is a clear link between the *bnai qyama* and the *bnai qyamtha* since both terms relate to the state of Christians within the framework of inaugurated eschatology and living like the angels.[63] What scholars have missed however is just how important this link is for Aphrahat. They have been unable to explain the proximity of Demonstrations Five, Six, Seven, and especially Eight, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, and Nine, *On Humility*. My analysis of Demonstrations Five to Nine shows that these five Demonstrations are intimately related, and are also thematically connected to Demonstrations 18, 21, 22 and 23.

Demonstration Six is a theological and practical exposition of the identity and suggested praxis of the Covenanters. It builds on the Demonstration *On War* by shifting to metaphorical war, and leads in to the following *Demonstrations* which emphasise particular aspects of spiritual battle, that is, virginity, penitence, humility, and remembering death and the last things etc. Rather than being "out of place," *On the Resurrection* and *On Wars* should be seen as closely related to the theme of the virginal state and angelic life of the *bnai qyama* of Demonstration Six.[64] I would suggest that Nagel and Griffith are correct and that the "Sons of the Covenant" should also be understood in a secondary sense as being the "Sons of the Resurrection."

Aphrahat writes numerous sentences in Demonstration Six that emphasise his eschatological vision, for example, "Let us lift up our wings like eagles, so that we may see the body where it is," and "Let the one who is training for the contest keep himself from the world… Let the one who wishes to receive a crown, run as a champion in the competition… Let the one who takes on the image of angels be a stranger to people."[65] This "image of angels," elsewhere translated as "likeness to angels," is a reference to Luke 20:34-36 which

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[63] Peter Nagel, "Zum Problem der 'Bundessohne' bei Aphrahat," *Zeitschrift für KirchenGeschichte* (ZKG) (1962): 152-154.

[64] Lehto, introduction, 25.

[65] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 6:1 (PS 1.1:248; Lehto, 173-4). Pak-Wah Lai, "John Chrysostom and the Hermeneutics of Exemplar Portraits" (Phd. Thesis, Durham, 2010), 64, note 175, writes about references to the monks living "the angelic life." Lai, 65, adds that Gregory of Nazianus believes that the baptized have attained equality with the angels, and that "he also agrees with Basil that the ascetics participate uniquely in the life and duties of the angels, be it worship, prayer or even in their wondrous gifts and visions." On monks as successors of the martyrs, see Edward E. Malone, "The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr," in *Studies in Christian Antiquity*, vol. 12, ed. Johannes Quasten (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1950).

also calls Christians "sons of the resurrection."[66] Having this new identity the Christian is thus obliged to struggle against sin, especially sexual temptation. This emphasis explains the relationship to the following Demonstration Seven which expands on Demonstration Six by discussing several metaphors for spiritual struggle suitable for the "sons of the covenant." I analyse this Demonstration which is replete with agonistic language and also continues the theme of inaugurated eschatology.

On the Resurrection of the Dead, Demonstration Eight, despite its apparent unusual inclusion, again makes sense in light of the theme of resurrection and its links to inaugurated eschatology. Given that a partial current experience of the future resurrection is central to Aphrahat's vision of asceticism, the reality of the future resurrection is thus vital. This resurrection had been challenged by some doubters in Aphrahat's time, and so he urges his readers to, "believe that on the day of resurrection your body will rise up in its entirety. You will receive the reward for your faith."[67] This quote from his concluding section shows the link between current spiritual effort and future resurrection. This is also evident when Aphrahat discusses reward and resurrection, and even notes that he has, "explained this topic to you in [my] demonstration on the single ones" (that is, Demonstration Six *On Covenanters*). I return to this close connection between resurrection and ascetic struggle later.

Demonstration Nine, *On Humility* concerns the virtue which is considered to be central ascetics, but Aphrahat here links it explicitly to struggle. Humility is important for Aphrahat because as he says early in the Demonstration, "Humility (*makīkwato*) pulls down (*sotro* lit. overthrows) strongholds and overcomes (*mahapno*) passion (*ḥašne*) and enmity."[68] This is clearly following the theme of ascetic warfare in *Demonstrations* Six and Seven. He also connects humility to eschatology in Section Four when he adds of the humble that, "they are quiet and gentle, and they wait for the Bridegroom."[69] Further, "their minds have been captured (*met-hapkīn*) by what is above and are set there, for they are waiting to enter the holy place. Their eyes are open and they gaze on that place and see the bridegroom who is

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[66] Jesus said to them, 'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.' Luke 20:34-36.

[67] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 8.25 (PS 1.1:405; Lehto, 236).

[68] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 9.2 (PS 1.1:412; Lehto, 239), ܢܣܚܘܦ ܚܣܢܐ ܘܚܝܠܬܢܐ; ܡܗܦܟ; ܗܝ; ܘܕܒܒܘܬܐ .

[69] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 9.4 (PS 1.1:413; Lehto, 240).

preparing himself."[70] One of Aphrahat's examples of humility is Job, who he says "loved humility." Because of this "Satan … contended with him," again linking humility back to Aphrahat's central theme of spiritual warfare.[71] It is also possible that this Demonstration is meant to connect with the Demonstration 14 *On Dissension* because Aphrahat here adds, "be on guard (*sepwotok* lit. be delivered) against dissension," which appears to have been a major problem in the church, and is the opposite of the ascetic virtue of humility.[72]

When it is considered that Aphrahat was explicitly writing a summary of the main points of Christian living and belief for his context, the extent of his emphasis on inaugurated eschatology and the related struggle and virginity is noteworthy. This approach is less common in other forms of Christianity, although generally normal for early Syrians as I noted in the first chapter. His understanding of a resurrection-based asceticism must be seen as a development of earlier Jewish apocalyptic, with some similarities to Chrysostom, but in contrast to most Latin church fathers. Aphrahat's vision of attaining to a present level of holiness like the angels inspired monastics in the Syrian tradition to high levels of attainment.

That all these first ten Demonstrations are meant to be linked somehow is evidenced by Aphrahat's words in Demonstration Ten, which was the initial conclusion of his work. He writes "I wrote to you my friend [here he refers back to his introductory comments to his "friend"], to remind you about the disciplines (*d-waborre*) that are appropriate for the whole flock."[73] Given Aphrahat's use here of "disciplines" it seems evident that ascetic practice is his main focus, of which struggle is a repeated element. He adds later, "These ten small books I have written to you borrow from each other and build upon each other; do not separate them from each other," showing that in his mind they are indeed connected. The rationale for the structure of Aphrahat's 23 Demonstrations continues to elude scholars, but a close reading of Demonstration Six and its emphasis on inaugurated eschatology provides an interpretive key. This summary of the main issues of the first ten Demonstrations with their focus on an asceticism driven by a lived experience of resurrection, provides a cohesive framework and a way to understand the place of many other of the unexplained inclusions. It also shows the context and centrality of the *agōna* in the daily practice of the sons of the covenant/resurrection.

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[70] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 9.4 (PS 1.1:416; Lehto, 241), ܚܘܬܟܐ.
[71] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 9.13 (PS 1.1:439; Lehto, 249).
[72] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 9.10 (PS 1.1:432; Lehto, 247), ܣܦܘܬܟ.
[73] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 10.7 (PS 1.1:457; Lehto, 257), ܕܘܒܖ̈ܐ.

There are a number of other ascetic themes that persist throughout Aphrahat's work that impinge on his teaching on struggle, and which provide the context for his many metaphors. In common with some other early Syrian writers, Aphrahat discusses the *iḥidāye* "single ones," and virginity (or celibacy, *betuluta*).[74] The concept of the *iḥidāye* is important because this term is both used as a title of Christ, and also of the ascetics who are specifically addressed by Aphrahat in Demonstration Six.[75] Aphrahat says of the single ones, "Any man who is a covenanter or a holy one who loves singleness yet wants a female covenanter to live with him, it would be better for him to take a wife openly and not become wild with lust. Likewise for the woman."[76] The importance of this term is also shown by its frequent close association with "covenanters," those addressed by Demonstration Six, and the "holy virgins." As well as the already quoted verse, Aphrahat starts 6.8 with, "Pay attention to what I am writing to you concerning what is appropriate for single ones (*iḥidāye*), the covenanters (*bnai qyama*), and holy virgins (*betule w-qadīsha*)."[77] Then after giving extensive teaching on proper behaviour worthy of an ascetic, he concludes the whole section with, "These things are fitting for the single ones (*iḥidāye*), those who have received the heavenly yoke and have become disciples of Christ. It is fitting for disciples of Christ to be like their Lord."[78] This effectively equates the "single ones" with true disciples, and makes clear the relationship between the agonising single ascetics and their example who is Christ the exemplar Single One. Others have noted these interconnections of the ascetical single ones, Christ Himself, the covenanters, and "eschatological holy war."[79] The exact identity of these "single ones" has been the subject of an overwhelmingly high proportion of research on Aphrahat so I do not explore this further.[80] It is sufficient to note that for Aphrahat, since Christ was "single" and celibate, dedicated ascetics – the "covenanters" – should likewise be "single" and celibate. This is a major goal in Demonstration Six and is the reason why the ascetic must constantly struggle.

Such celibacy also reflects the practice of the "Heavenly Adam," (*Adam shmayono*)

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[74] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.20 (PS 1.1:312; Lehto, 198), ܒܬܘܠܘܬܐ lit. virginity, also implies celibacy for the married.
[75] Lehto, introduction, 34-35.
[76] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.4 (PS 1.1:260; Lehto, 179).
[77] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.8 (PS 1.1:272; Lehto, 184), ܠܝܚܝܕܝܐ ܒܢܝ ܩܝܡܐ ܘܒܬܘܠܐ ܘܩܕܝܫܐ .
[78] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.8 (PS 1.1:276; Lehto, 185), ܠܝܚܝܕܝܐ .
[79] Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 13-17.
[80] See for example Lehto, introduction, 33-43; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 13-16; Nedungatt, *The Covenanters in Early Syriac Christianity*, 191-215; and several mentions in various articles by Sebastian Brock etc.

another denotation of Christ with important ascetic implications. Aphrahat mentions Christ as such in the context of ascetic struggle and celibacy.[81] Murray explains how the Judeo-Christian corporate understanding of the nature of Christ and the Church, links the present existence of Jesus in heaven with His body, that is, the church. In this theology, Jesus has become the New Israel and fulfils what Israel failed to do in obedience to God. Christ recapitulates the fall of Adam by being the perfect "athlete" and victoriously agonising in the Garden etc.[82] Ascetic struggle including celibacy is thus central to both Christ's identity and the role of the follower, within an inaugurated eschatology framework. In discussing this eschatological insight, Aphrahat quotes the New Testament story of the Foolish Virgins again, linking this struggle for sexual purity once more to eschatology.[83] As I have discussed above, Aphrahat frequently refers to ascetics living in the likeness of the angels, being without gender and sexual relations.

In relation to "Heavenly Adam" theology, Jarkins summarises Aphrahat's soteriology and anthropology saying, "salvation is dependent on changing one's sinful nature from that of Adam to the heavenly Adam, Christ, and thereby becoming a divine temple."[84] The image of the church as divine temple stems from Paul's letters, and is taken up by Aphrahat in several places.[85] Jarkins discusses this theology at length with many quotations from Aphrahat that show how holiness is central to temple imagery, and holiness requires struggle.[86] She notes many passages about the person as the temple of God, including the opening summary of the faith in Demonstration 1:3.[87] Here we see two central motifs in Aphrahat, that is, the person as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and the natural progression from justification to perfection via ascetic struggle. Jarkins assertss that the most important Pauline passage for Aphrahat is 1 Cor 3:16-17 where Paul refers to the church as the "temple of God."[88] This focus on the person as temple, which includes the body, implies for Aphrahat an exaltation of celibacy as the way to keep the body/temple pure, and thus the necessity for daily spiritual

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[81] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.18 (PS 1.1:304, 305; Lehto, 196, 197), cf. 1 Cor. 15: 49; ܐܢܫܐ ܫܡܝܢܐ .

[82] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 23.49 (PS 1.2: 96; Lehto, 513), *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 82-86.

[83] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.6 (PS 1.1:265-69; Lehto, 181-3).

[84] Stephanie Jarkins, *Aphrahat the Persian Sage and the Temple of God* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008), 35.

[85] For usage in Paul, see 1 Cor 6:19; Clark, *Reading Renunciation,* 212-19; Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.12-18 (Lehto, 189-97).

[86] Jarkins, *Aphrahat and Temple,* 35-43.

[87] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 1.3 (PS 1.1:8-9; Lehto, 69), Jarkins, *Aphrahat and Temple,* 30-31. There are five key Bible verses on this theme that Aphrahat repeatedly uses and Jarkins lists the many occurrences of these proof texts.

[88] Jarkins, *Aphrahat and Temple,* 33.

struggle to avoid sexual temptation.[89]

This particular approach to soteriology was not unique to Aphrahat and was held also by other Syrians.[90] Because this same anthropology is expressed by the later Syriac writers, and especially clearly in Isaac, I discuss the place of the *agōna* within Aphrahat's framework later in this chapter. I also overview various Syrian anthropological perspectives in more depth at the end of Chapter Four. Of relevance here is that Aphrahat says that the way to become this heavenly person now on Earth is to live as a "son of the covenant" (and "son of the resurrection") and thus to be celibate, which can only be achieved by a struggle/*agōna*. Jarkins also states that this approach is, "most prominently displayed in Demonstration Six," which is one of the two central Demonstrations on struggle and ascetical identity and praxis, again showing the close link between Aphrahat's soteriology and *agōna*.[91] Jarkins argues that, "the return to the pre-lapsarian state of Adam is key to understanding Aphrahat's concerns about the state of humans."[92] One aspect of this return is the issue of celibacy to which I shall return after the textual analysis.

Textual Analysis of Struggle Ideas and Metaphors in Demonstration Seven

The theme of spiritual battle is seen in a number of Aphrahat's Demonstrations and I shall start with an investigation of Demonstration Seven "On the Penitent" because this contains many of Aphrahat's clearest statements about the practice of spiritual combat. I then explore Demonstration Six because it provides the context for Seven, and because it presents a broader eschatological perspective for the *agōna*. After this there are brief analyses of Demonstration Fourteen and several others. The analysis of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* proceeds from a thematic perspective, showing how struggle and inaugurated eschatology are linked to a particularly Syriac anthropology and soteriology.

The theme of spiritual struggle is evident in Demonstration Seven *On the Penitent* where Aphrahat ties together the whole notion of forgiveness of sin with the daily battle with Satan and temptation. This Demonstration consists of twenty-seven sections dealing with the person who sins, the battle with sin, examples of this fight, and advice to pastors when

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[89] This is similar to Ps-Macarius on temple imagery and holiness; See also Jarkins, *Aphrahat and Temple,* 60.
[90] Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 5, 11.
[91] Jarkins, *Aphrahat and Temple,* 40. Aphrahat explicitly argues this at length in *Demonstrations* 6: 14, 18.
[92] Jarkins, *Aphrahat and Temple,* 42. Aphrahat says about Jesus that, "The body that he put on is the beginning of our resurrection." Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 23.50 (PS 1.2:97; Lehto, 514).

dealing with the penitent. Aphrahat noticeably uses many Old Testament quotes and examples to make his argument, although his pre-eminent example is Jesus Christ. The whole work reveals many metaphors and examples of struggle, using the Syriac words *agōna*, *qraba*, *qitāl*, and *zakī,* and others related to conquering, crowns, fighting, wounds, and many related ideas, which I now analyse section by section.

Aphrahat starts his Demonstration by arguing that all people sin, and that only one person has been sinless, namely Jesus Christ, who has, "overcome the world (*deno zakīteh l'olmō*)," quoting John 16:33 with its military conquest allusion.[93] He adds that, "Many run the race, but only one takes the crown (*d-sagīlīn d-rohṭīn b-esṭadyo elo ḥad hawa noseb leh kalīlo*)," quoting Paul and the agonistic imagery of the runner, race, and crown.[94] This verse is followed in Paul with several more that mention the race intermingled with the word struggle (*agōna*), and Aphrahat's readers would have known this. Aphrahat makes this connection very clear when in the next sentence he explicitly says that no-one else but Christ has gone, "into the struggle (*b-līgōnō*, from *agōna*)," without being "beaten and struck" (*meṭmaḥe w-bola'*) where *bola'* also has the sense of "wounded."[95] Further, although many had "struck" (*bola'*) sin, sin had "beaten" (*mamaḥō*) many, and "killed" (*qeṭlat*) many, and no-one was able to defeat sin, "until the coming of our Saviour, who lifted it up and nailed it to his Cross."[96] These few sentences in this opening section portray spiritual life as an ongoing history of battle against sin that is only won by Christ. Sin and salvation are solely identified with an agonistic metaphor, to which Aphrahat returns in almost every following section. Given that this Demonstration and the similarly struggle-orientated Demonstration Six are the two wherein Aphrahat deals with sin and salvation, it is not an overstatement to say that Aphrahat's predominant understanding of salvation centres on a cosmic yet personal daily war with sin.

In the second section Aphrahat returns immediately to this military metaphor. He writes, "for those who have been struck (*ladmet-mḥeyn*) in our struggle (*baīgūno*, from *agōna*) there is the remedy for repentance, which can be provided by wise physicians

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[93] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.1 (PS 1.1:313; Lehto, 200), ܕܐܢܐ ܙܟܝܬܗ ܠܥܠܡܐ .

[94] 1 Cor. 9:24. Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.1 (PS 1.1:313; Lehto, 200), ܕܣܓܝܐܝܢ ܕܪܗܛܝܢ ܒܐܣܛܕܝܐ ܐܠܐ ܚܕ ܗܘ ܗܘܐ ܢܣܒ ܠܗ ܟܠܝܠܐ .

[95] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.1 (PS 1.1:313; Lehto, 200), ܒܐܓܘܢܐ ... ܡܬܡܚܐ ܘܒܠܥ .

[96] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.1 (PS 1.1:313, 316; Lehto, 200), ܠܕ ; ܡܚܣܢܐ ܩܛܠܬ .

(*osawoto*).”[97] Physicians were essential on the battlefield because injury was so common, so this linking of military and medical imagery is logical, and one that we see later in Isaac and the Sufi writers. Aphrahat continues this metaphor, “For when a wise physician is found for those warriors (*qrabtone*, from *qraba*) who have been struck (*dblʿīn*) in the struggle (*ba-qrobō*) by the one who has fought (*d-met-katash*) against them, a medicine that heals the wounded (*lammaḥayo*) is distributed.”[98] This continues for a few more sentences that includes further references to the spiritual soldier who has been “injured in the war” (*dablaʿ ba-qrobō*), and who “labours in the struggle” (*dʿomel baīgūno*), against the “Enemy” who “injures” him.[99]

Shame in battle is the theme of the following section, where Aphrahat suggests that the wounded soldier should not be ashamed to seek the physician due to his being “wounded in the war (*dablaʿ ba-qrobō*).”[100] The penitent is not wholly to blame because, “the war (*qrobō*) overcame him and wounded (*malaʿ*) him.”[101] There is no need to feel shame because, “the King will not reject him, but will count him and include him in his army (*ḥayleh*).”[102] This imagery extends the idea of the soldier to include the whole army of which he is part, and the King for whom he fights. Aphrahat sees the struggle in very rich and colourful terms as he continues, “whoever is ashamed to show his abscess (to the doctor) ends up suffering from gangrene (*l-ḥalodīto*).”[103] This discussion of wounds and gangrene reveals that Aphrahat’s usage of struggle metaphor is not an isolated word or two but a detailed story of fighting and woundedness that he is conveying to his readers. He ties in many aspects of agonistic battle into his teaching on the war against sin, both the preparations before battle as well as the results of the war. Section Three continues for a few more sentences which include further references to the “struggle (*baīgūno*),” being “defeated (*d-mezdke*) in struggle (*baīgūno*),” being “healed (*dnetasea*),” and “wounded (*dmetmḥeyn*).”[104]

Section four is the reverse of the previous section as it speaks to the physicians (*osawoto*) who heal the wounded, and who are disciples of the “glorious Physician (*dosyan*

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[97] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.2 (PS 1.1:316; Lehto, 201), ܟ̈ܘܪ̈ܗܢܐ ... ܟܢ̈ܝ̈ܟܬܐ .

[98] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.2 (PS 1.1:316; Lehto, 201), ܡܐܣܘܬܐ ... ܕܒܠܥܝܢ ... ܒܩܪܒܐ ... ܩܪ̈ܒܬܢܐ ... ܠܡܚ̈ܝܐ .

[99] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.2 (PS 1.1:316; Lehto, 201), ܒܩܪܒܐ ... ܕܒܠܥ ܒܓܘܢܐ .

[100] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.3 (PS 1.1:317; Lehto, 201), ܒܩܪܒܐ .

[101] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.3 (PS 1.1:317; Lehto, 201), ܩܪܒܐ ... ܡܠܥ .

[102] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.3 (PS 1.1:317; Lehto, 201), ܚܝܠܗ .

[103] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.3 (PS 1.1:317; Lehto, 201), ܠܚܠܕܝܬܐ .

[104] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.3 (PS 1.1:317; Lehto, 201), ܒܓܘܢܐ ... ܕܐܬܟܬܫ ... ܘܕܢܬܐܣܐ ... ܕܡܬܡܚܝܢ .

naṣīḥo)."[105] These doctors must heal and also advise the wounded not to conceal their injuries when seeing the doctor. But the physician must "not make it known" lest the "whole camp (*kaloh mašdīto*)" receives a "bad name" (*šmo bīšo*).[106] In this case the "King who leads the army" (*malko mdabroneh d-ḥaylo*) "will be angry at those who exposed his camp (*mašdīteh*)."[107] Here Aphrahat links woundedness with shame, the value of morale, and military intelligence. He also mentions "the line" [of battle](*sedro*), "victors" (*zakoyye*), "enemies" (*ḥayyobe*), "adversaries" (*sonnle*), and "the slain are falling" (*daqṭayīle noplīn*).[108] These multiple additions to the struggle metaphor demonstrate that Aphrahat has thought intensely about his writing and use of the agonistic trope. He draws in every possible aspect of the metaphor to teach his audience.

In the case of those who "do not wish to reveal their injuries," Section Five warns that "the doctors are not to blame for not healing" these secretly sick who have been "wounded (*detmaḥīq*)."[109] These foolish people because of their unhealed wounds can "no longer put on their armour (*zayno*), since they have developed gangrene (*ḥalodīto*)," an addition of armour into the metaphor, and returning to Aphrahat's previous mention of gangrene.[110] He adds that if they do succeed in putting on their "armour" (*zayno*), "when they enter into the struggle (*b-aīgūnō*), their armour (*zaynhun*) will heat them up (*maḥem*), their abscesses will become putrid (*sorīn*) and decay (*metmasīn*), and they will be killed (*metqaṭlīn*)."[111] Here, unrepented sin is seen as a festering wound and a cause of death, and Aphrahat uses the Galenic theory of "heat" in regards the wound.[112] Again, Aphrahat extends the imagery with vivid teaching based on concrete experiences of warfare wounds, presumably well-known to his readers, otherwise he would have had to explain references to heat inside armour.

The following two sections Six and Seven are both brief, each consisting of just a few sentences. In section Six, Aphrahat warns that the soldier must "be attentive to the healed area, so that he might not be struck (*nebla*ʿ) there a second time."[113] He warns that the wound "struck twice" (*dablaʿ tarten zabnīn*) cannot easily be healed, and that over such a wound

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[105] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.4 (PS 1.1:317; Lehto, 202), ܐܬܚܐ ܝܒ ܐܬܗܡܐ ... ܐܬܘܡܡܐ .

[106] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.4 (PS 1.1:320; Lehto, 202), ܐܬܥܒ ܐܬܚܥ ... ܐܬܝܕܚܡ ܗܠܟ .

[107] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.4 (PS 1.1:320; Lehto, 202), ܗܬܝܕܚܡ ... ܠܒܥܢ ܗܬܘܒܕܡ ܐܟܠܚ .

[108] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.4 (PS 1.1:320; Lehto, 202), ܝܠܦܢ ܠܝܛܩܕܐ : ܐܟܠܡܐ : ܐܟܠܢܥ : ܐܟܚܐ : ܐܪܕܗ .

[109] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.5 (PS 1.1:320; Lehto, 202), ܡܢܝܚܒܬܐܕ .

[110] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.5 (PS 1.1:320; Lehto, 202), ܐܬܢܕܠܚܕ ... ܐܢܐ .

[111] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.5 (PS 1.1:320; Lehto, 202), ܐܢܐ ... ܐܬܝܚܥܐ ... ܐܬܡܣܐ ... ܡܚܡ ... ܝܦܘܗ ... ܝܠܛܩܬܡܘܗ ... .

[112] R.J. Durling, "The Innate Heat in Galen," *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 23.3 (1988): 210-12.

[113] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.6 (PS 1.1:321; Lehto, 202), ܒܠܬܢ .

even when cured, "armour (*zayno*) cannot be worn."[114] Sin thus has affects on the soul like a wound has on the body. Repeated serious sin leaves a dangerous scar that reduces the protection against further sin. This is sound psychological advice and the metaphor is quite appropriate.[115] Section Seven briefly adds an encouragement, possibly to balance the previous warning section. It is so full of military imagery that it is worth quoting in its entirety:

> You who have put on the armour (*zayneh*) of Christ, learn the intricacies of war (*qrobō*), so that you may not be defeated and weary (*šapple*) in the struggle (*baīguno*)! Our enemy is cunning and clever, but his armour is inferior (*šapal*) to ours. It is right for us, therefore, to turn against him and to take away his weapon (*zayneh*) (which is sleep) with vigilance (*b ʿīruto*). He is invisible when he attacks (*maqreb*) us, but let us turn to the one who sees him, so that he might remove him from us.[116]

This passage refers to so many of Aphrahat's favourite aspects of his struggle metaphor that it could almost be a summary of this Demonstration. Here is a rousing call to arms with the assertion that Satan's armour is "inferior." It is easy to imagine that such language was used by leaders on all sides in military conflicts to inspire their soldiers to bravery. Such an evaluation of Satan conforms to Orthodox theology and connects with Aphrahat's start to the whole Demonstration, where Christ has conquered Satan. Aphrahat also extends his central metaphor further here by referring to "sleep" and "vigilance," themes that Isaac later develops at great length. For now it is sufficient to note that the soldier who was on duty guarding against enemy attack at night had to maintain great vigilance and avoid sleep at all costs. Further, at night these attacks were "invisible" due to the dark, thus equating the hidden sins inside the soul with night attacks. The metaphorical links in each case here are so understandable that Aphrahat nowhere explains them. He is using commonly understood military imagery yet applied to the internal world. In making this connection he explicitly hearkens back to the New Testament, as the first sentence starts with a quote from Paul's passage about spiritual warfare in Ephesians.[117]

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[114] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.6 (PS 1.1:321; Lehto, 202), ܐܢܫ ... ܐܚܦܝ ܗܕܡ̈ܘܗܝ ܕܰܟܠ .

[115] Lehto notes that it was probably serious sins that Aphrahat refers to here, such as sexual sin, whereby the ascetic's vows could not be restored after being broken, Lehto, *Demonstrations,* 202, footnote 11.

[116] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.7 (PS 1.1:321; Lehto, 203), ܐܢܘܢ ... ܘܢܣܒ ... ܥܩܠܬ ... ܘܐܬ̈ܟܣܝܢ ... ܡܪܟܒ ܐܢܘܢ ... ܘܐܬ̈ܦܢܐ ... ܡܢܢ.

[117] Eph. 6:11.

In Section Eight Aphrahat briefly returns to his theme of being "wounded" (*d-metmḥeyn*), but not ashamed of admitting to having "yielded in the struggle (*d-ašpeln baiguno*)."[118] He uses the examples of Adam and Cain who both refused to admit their sin and thus suffered terrible consequences, to urge his readers to repent. Again Aphrahat follows this warning section with a contrasting positive Section Nine, in this case showing examples of those who did repent and of how God was compassionate to them. He uses examples of the Ninevites, Israel, and Jerusalem, and although there is no explicit usage of the term *agōna*, the whole section is exhortation and commentary on those who have been wounded in the struggle.

Sections Ten and Eleven form a further pair, with Ten another warning to the unrepentant, and Eleven a reminder to priests as "those who hold the keys to the gates of heaven" to "open the gates for those who repent." This is a metaphorical reference to the need to open the closed-in-wartime gates of the city for returning wounded soldiers. Here the Church is likened to the city, the priest to the gatekeeper, and the sacrament of confession to opening the gates. Aphrahat is thus linking key ecclesiological concepts with the struggle metaphor. He emphasises his point by quoting Paul that, "If anyone among you is struggling (*netʿeml*, lit. labouring, toiling) with wrongdoing those who are spiritual should lead him back with a humble spirit." [119] The Syriac here has a nuance that is missing in the Greek which only says "overtaken" by sin, and I discuss this Syrian extra emphasis on struggle further below when discussing Aphrahat's anthropology.[120] The priest is further urged "not to treat as an adversary (*bʿeldbobo*) the one among you who is struggling with wrongdoing," for when you "separate him from yourselves, he will be attacked (*metblaʿ*) by Satan."[121] Whereas before we saw the gate being opened for the repentant, here Aphrahat is using the opposite aspect of the metaphor—if the wounded is kept out of the city (the church) he will be vulnerable and thus surely attacked.

Sections Twelve through Sixteen continue this same metaphor of struggling with wrongdoing, using multiple mostly Old Testament references to exemplify the need to repent. There is no mention of spiritual struggle *per se* but repeated calls to repentance. Section

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[118] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.8 (PS 1.1:321, 324; Lehto, 203), ܕܐܬܡܚܝܘ ... ܕܐܫܦܠ ... ܟܐܝܟ̈ܬܐ .

[119] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.11 (PS 1.1:329; Lehto, 206), ܢܥܡܠ cf. Gal. 6:1.

[120] Greek προληφθη. It is curious that even the common Syriac version does not have this reading so Aphrahat is either using an unusual translation or is interpreting this passage within his agonistic worldview.

[121] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.11 (PS 1.1:332; Lehto, 206), ܡܬܒܠܥ ... ܒܥܠܕܒܒܐ .

Seventeen then explicitly takes up the theme of fighting again, with Aphrahat urging, "Gird yourself with your excellent armour (*b-zaynok šapīr*) so that you might not be struck (*tetmḥe*) in war (*ba-qrobō*)."[122] This returns to the language of earlier sections and repeats the point about the Christian's armour being excellent and superior to Satan's. The whole section emphasises that the Christian need not fall, and that it is better to not need repentance in the first place. Aphrahat also makes an important connection here by writing immediately before this, "You have taken delight in the portion that is above (*mnoto ʿeloyto*); keep yourself free from all degeneration."[123] This links the inaugurated eschatological mindset of "living like the angels" that is evident in Demonstration Six with the real possibility of present victory over temptation.

Sections Eighteen through Twenty-Two form a unit as they all deal with the story of Gideon and his battle as a metaphor for the spiritual struggle. Aphrahat begins Section Eighteen saying, "O you who have prepared yourselves for the struggle (*l-aīgono* from *agōna*): listen to the sound of the trumpet and take heart."[124] Here Aphrahat adds to all the previous aspects of the warfare metaphor the trumpet and its call—a central feature of the story of Gideon. He also extends the audience to include not just the penitents but also the priests by adding, "I speak also to you who hold the trumpets (*qarnoto*): priests, deacons and sages."[125] According to Aphrahat, just as Gideon had to select from the ten thousand just those three hundred who were fit for battle, so must the leaders do the same with "all the people," presumably meaning the church. If the leaders do not warn people then they will "suffer defeat" (*wanḥub*) in the "war" (*b-qrobō*).[126] The person who has planted a vineyard, married a wife, or is building a house, should return to these rather than fight, "lest he call it to mind and not fight (*netkataš*) with full attention."[127] This single-minded attentiveness is a recurring motif in the Syrians. For Aphrahat, "It is the single ones (*l-iḥidāye*) who are ready for the struggle (*aīgonō*)," directly connecting the single ones of Demonstration Six with the fight metaphor, as it is only those who are single-minded in their struggle who will gain "plunder" (*dbozīn*), likening ascetic achievement to war booty.[128] Aphrahat completes this section in a few sentences that are addressed to the leaders:

[122] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.17 (PS 1.1:340; Lehto, 209), ܚܐܝܢܝ ܬܚܙܐ ... ܐܠܐܚܕܝܟܐ ܒܙܝܢܟ .

[123] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.17 (PS 1.1:340; Lehto, 209), ܒܬܪܐ ܐܠ ܝܐܬܐ .

[124] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.18 (PS 1.1:341; Lehto, 210), ܠܐܝܓܘܢܐ .

[125] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.18 (PS 1.1:341; Lehto, 210), ܩܪܢܬܐ .

[126] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.18 (PS 1.1:341; Lehto, 210), ܒܩܪܒܐ ܘܢܚܘܒ .

[127] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.18 (PS 1.1:341; Lehto, 211), ܢܬܟܬܫ .

[128] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.18 (PS 1.1:344; Lehto, 211), ܠܐܝܓܘܢܐ ... ܕܒܘܙܝܢ ... ܠܬܚܬܐܝ .

I say to you who sound the trumpets, that when you have finished issuing warnings (*lamzahorū*) keep watch (*ḥzaw*) over those who have returned, care for those who remain, and send down to the waters of testing (*l-mayyō d-būqyonō*) those who have vowed themselves to war (*la-qrobō*).[129]

This makes clear the connection with the waters of testing by Gideon—the leaders must be selective and only appoint as ascetics the truly prepared and dedicated who are ready to fight the spiritual war. Aphrahat continues his exhortation in Section Nineteen by drawing several parallels between the present situation of penitents and the story of Gideon. He begins:

Understand this mystery (*idozō*), my friend, whose image (*d-mūteh*) Gideon has shown beforehand. When he assembled the people for war (*la-qrobō*), the scribes admonished [them] with the words of the Law … after which a large number of people left the army (*ḥaylo*).[130]

He continues by quoting the Old Testament about the testing at the waters, stating that this is a "type (*ṭūpsō*) of baptism, and a mystery (*i-rozeh*) of the struggle, and an image of the single ones."[131] Even though all Christians are baptised in the water, only a select few are the current equivalent to the three hundred who lapped the water like dogs and were thus alert. Aphrahat is once more drawing a connection between the struggle and the sacrament of baptism—baptism is only the starting point of the fight, and among the baptised there are only a few "single ones" who were "chosen to enter the struggle (*laīgūnō*)."[132] It is also interesting that Aphrahat uses a form of parallelism that shows his awareness of the similarities between a "type," "mystery," and "image."[133] He is consciously using various literary devices to convey his points to his readers, and his sophisticated metaphorical language is central to this approach. Section Twenty explains further Aphrahat's theme and ties this section back to the whole of Demonstration Six. Referring to the immediately preceding Gideon story, he writes:

On account of this, it is fitting that those who sound the trumpets, the preachers of the Church, should call and warn all those who have made a covenant with God (*qyomeh*)

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[129] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.18 (PS 1.1:344; Lehto, 211), ܠܡܙܗܪܘ … ܗܘ … ܠܐܬܝܢ ܕܚܦܡܝܢܟ … ܠܩܪܒܐ .

[130] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.19 (PS 1.1:344; Lehto, 211), ܐܝܕܥܐ … ܕܡܘܬܗ … ܚܝܠܐ .

[131] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.19 (PS 1.1:344; Lehto, 211), ܠܛܘܦܣܐ … ܐܪܙܗ *Tupso* is derived from the Greek *typos*.

[132] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.19 (PS 1.1:345; Lehto, 211), ܠܝܚܝܕܐ .

[133] Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm,* discusses this use of *razi* etc. See also Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 243-44, 292-94.

in advance of baptism, those who have vowed themselves to virginity and holiness, young unmarried men and women, and holy ones.[134]

This is the clearest definition we have of who the Covenanters are, and includes all the various wordings that Aphrahat uses elsewhere for the celibate as well. Only these select few are ready for ascetic celibate struggle, and Aphrahat commands, "Let the preachers warn them and say: 'Whoever has set his heart on the state of marriage, let him be married before baptism, lest he fall in the struggle (*b-aīgūnō*) and be killed (*netqaṭel*)'."[135] This makes clear the reason for the inclusion of Demonstration Six and the connection between it and Demonstration Seven—these celibate "single ones" are the people who are key to the church's daily battle against sin, presumably because of their prayer, fasting and holiness.

Immediately following this, in Section Twenty, Aphrahat returns to his agonistic metaphor again using many of the same words and tropes as previously. I quote the whole passage to show how Aphrahat ties so many aspects of the metaphor together with the Christian's present experience:

> And whoever is afraid of the conflict (*mnotō d-taktōša,* lit. portion of fighting), let him return, lest he cause his brothers to become as disheartened as he is. And whoever loves his property, let him turn away from the army (*ḥaylō*), lest when the war (*qrobō*) overwhelms him he calls his property to mind and turns back to it. There is only shame for the one who turns away from the struggle (*aīgūnō*). The one who turns away but has not yet vowed himself nor put on armour (*zaynō*) is not blamed. But if any of those who have vowed themselves and have put on armour (*zaynō*) turn away from the struggle (*aīgūnō*), they are ridiculed.[136]

This connects to his earlier discussions of shame, turning back, and distractions. The goal is the struggle, but not everyone is ready.

Section Twenty-One describes the next chronological phase in the testing at the waters. Aphrahat advises the leaders that, "When they have preached, and announced, and warned all those who have made a covenant with God, let them bring those who have been

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[134] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.20 (PS 1.1:345; Lehto, 212), ܡܢܗܘܢ .
[135] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.20 (PS 1.1:345; Lehto, 212), ܢܬܩܛܠ ... ܕܠܦܗܟ .
[136] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.20 (PS 1.1:345; Lehto, 212), ܚܢܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܘܗܘܗܟ ... ܢܠܟ ... ܡܐܟ ... ܟܝܚܘܟ ... ܐܢܟ ... ܐܢܟ
ܐܢܟ ... ܐܪܘܟܥ .

chosen for the struggle (*l-aīgūnō*) to the waters of baptism so that they might be tested."[137] Following selection as one of the prepared few comes baptism. Aphrahat continues his metaphor by adding the further dimensions of military rout and weapons:

> The strong ought to take courage, but the lazy and the weak will openly turn from the struggle (*nahpakūn men aīgūnō*), lest when fighting overtakes them they conceal (*negnabūn*) their weapons (*zaynhūn*) and take flight (*neʿrwūn*) and suffer defeat (*wanḥūbūn*).[138]

This is rich imagery and describes what must have been a reasonably common occurrence given the number of battles fought in this region. Aphrahat appears to consciously add new aspects of his metaphor in manageable pieces, extending his language as he connects warfare imagery with the various dimensions of the inner struggle. He then quotes Judges again, "All who lap the water like a dog ought to go to war (*laqrobō*)."[139] Aphrahat completes Section Twenty-One by a lengthy discussion of the good dog (*kalbbē*) who will "take up his fight courageously (*wtaktōšeh ʿobdīn lbībōīt*)" and "keep watch" (*naṭrīn maṭarteh*), being like those chosen by Gideon and an example for the penitent.[140] In a brief recap of the previous teaching and with another use of synthetic parallelism, Aphrahat writes in Section Twenty-Two of those who enter the "war" (*ba-qrobō*) and the "struggle" (*b-aīgūnō*) but "turn away from the fight (*taktūšō*)" and are thus disgraced.[141] This is then a transition to the following sections Twenty-Three to Twenty-Five which return to the theme of the wounds received in battle.

According to Aphrahat, Christians must learn not to "trust in yourself," since by this "the one who has been wounded (*lameḥṭō*) might become slack and not seek repentance."[142] This is the main point of Section Twenty-Three which mainly covers the struggle from the point of view of leaders' responsibilities. He suggests that just as the "watchers of heaven (*lʿīrā*)" rejoice when a sinner repents, so must leaders consider the wounded, and "lift up from his suffering each one who is sick among us, and suffer agony over each one who

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[137] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.21 (PS 1.1:348; Lehto, 212), ܠܐܓܘܢܐ .

[138] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.21 (PS 1.1:348; Lehto, 212), ܢܗܦܟܘܢ ܡܢ ܐܓܘܢܐ ... ܢܓܢܒܘܢ ... ܙܝܢܗܘܢ ... ܘܢܚܘܒܘܢ .

[139] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.21 (PS 1.1:348; Lehto, 213), ܠܐܩܪܒܐ .

[140] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.21 (PS 1.1:349; Lehto, 213), ܟܠܒܐ ... ܘܬܟܬܘܫܗ ܥܒܕܝܢ ܠܒܝܒܐܝܬ ... ܢܛܪܝܢ ܡܛܪܬܗ .

[141] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.22 (PS 1.1:349; Lehto, 213), ܒܩܪܒܐ ... ܒܐܓܘܢܐ ... ܬܟܬܘܫܐ .

[142] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.23 (PS 1.1:352; Lehto, 214), ܠܡܚܛܐ .

stumbles."[143] This mention of suffering agony is likely a reference to Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Aphrahat again is making Christ the example for the Christian leader, and His suffering (*agōna*) is paradigmatic. The medical healing aspect of the fight is the theme of Section Twenty-Four, which returns to the language of the abscess we saw earlier. Aphrahat uses the Pauline metaphor that the whole body suffers if one part is sick, to teach the importance of leaders healing the "wounded." So again pastoral care is included in the extended struggle and healing metaphor, and Aphrahat makes his connection between ascetic struggle and ecclesiology clear.

Sections Twenty-Five to Twenty-Seven are Aphrahat's summary and conclusion. He writes, "We struggle (*aīgūnō*) against our Adversary (*bᶜeldaran*), and he, our Adversary, fights against us (*metkataš*)."[144] He mentions the single ones and also those who have been "defeated and struck (*d-methaybīn w-bolᶜīn*)."[145] He also refers to the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins which he has discussed at length in Demonstration Six, linking this struggle yet again to eschatology. Aphrahat appeals to pastors reminding them to "heal the lame" and "guard" the Lord's flock. He links this struggle and eschatology by commanding, "O watchmen (*dawqē*), keep watch diligently (*dūqu šapīr*, lit. watch well) and warn all the people about the destruction [to come]."[146] Aphrahat warns in his final sentences that this judgement "draws near," and hence people should repent now. He concludes by using another Pauline image and aspect of the *agōna* metaphor by saying, "For many run the race (*drohṭīn bestadyo*), but only the man who wins obtains the crown, and every person receives their wage according to their labour (*ᶜamleh*)."[147] Hence Aphrahat finishes his Demonstration on-theme, drawing together his thoughts about the Christian life as a spiritual struggle, and using both the military and race aspects of the *agōna* motif.

I have shown from this analysis of Demonstration Seven that aside from a few parts which consist of Old Testament examples of repentance, every section is focussed on Christians being prepared and worthy of the spiritual struggle, and contains highly metaphorical struggle language. Aphrahat displays a wide range of related *agōna* concepts to

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[143] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.23 (PS 1.1:353; Lehto, 215), ܠܚܢܐ The Syriac of the final phrase seems to imply removing the suffering caused by the falling (in sin) from others.

[144] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.25 (PS 1.1:356; Lehto, 215), ܟܢܝܫܬܐ ... ܚܠܐܨ ... ܬܟܬܫܥ .

[145] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.25 (PS 1.1:356; Lehto, 215), ܕܬܚܫܒܬܢ ܘܒܠܥܢ .

[146] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.26 (PS 1.1:357; Lehto, 217), ܕܘܩܐ ... ܕܘܩܘ ܥܦܢܐ .

[147] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.25 (PS 1.1:356; Lehto, 215), ܕܪܗܛܝܢ ܒܐܣܛܕܝܘܢ ... ܥܡܠܗ .

teach his readers about being ready for this fight. He extends the primary battle metaphor by including the story of Gideon, and refers to many parts of the *agōna* including the war, being struck and killed, trumpets, plunder, armour, the army, weapons, adversaries, warriors, the line of battle, being wounded, gangrene, keeping watch, victors, concealing weapons, and fleeing, among other things. Aphrahat here conceives of the whole Christian life in relation to struggle, especially for those who are called to be the single ones.

Aphrahat provides many rules related to effective warfare both for ascetics as well as pastors, covering such themes as festering wounds, shame, lines of battle, and when to open the gates of a city. He is not the first however to have made these kind of connections for ascetics. Garland discusses the regulations for those who fight in the physical war against Antiochus Epiphanes as recorded in 1 Maccabees, and the related passages in Mishnah *Sotah* 8 and the Qumran *War Scrolls*. He notes that Aphrahat seems to take similar regulations and apply them to spiritual war but includes as the qualified all the baptised, not just the celibate. Garland also notes the connection to Deuteronomy 20:2-9 concerning the war in which, "all take part, 'even the bridegroom out of his chamber and the bride out of her chamber'," and this is especially relevant given Aphrahat's earlier use of this bridegroom imagery in Demonstration Six.[148] Aphrahat is thus using concepts of the qualifications of the warrior engaged in a literal battle and applying them to the inner spiritual battle.

Struggle Metaphors and Themes in Demonstration Six

While Demonstration Seven focusses on the present battle and its rules, Demonstration Six discusses struggle from a more inaugurated eschatological perspective. I shall thus briefly outline how Aphrahat portrays ascetic practice in the light of eschatology in each section of this Demonstration, and then explore his specific metaphors for the spiritual struggle in more detail. In Demonstration Six, Aphrahat begins by calling his readers to be watchful and to awaken from sleep. This theme of watchfulness, a military activity, is common in the Syriac ascetic tradition.[149] "Watchfulness" hearkens back to the Garden of Gethsemane—"keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation,"[150] and to Paul:

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[148] Garland, "Ascetics as Representative Warriors," 267.

[149] See Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian), xxv. Brock also discusses other common Syriac themes, most of which are relevant to Aphrahat. These themes are also clearly evident in Aphrahat's near-contemporary Ephrem, and in the anonymous the Syriac "Book of Steps." Cf. Arabic *murāqaba* used frequently by Sufis.

[150] Matt. 26:41.

(I)t is already the hour for you to *awaken from sleep*; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and *the day is at hand*. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the *armour of light*. … put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regards to *lusts*.[151]

This focus on the nearness of "The Day" is a major theme in the whole Demonstration, and is here the motivating factor for watchfulness and ascetic struggle against the lusts.[152] The opening paragraph then emphasises the eschatological marriage imagery by referring to the parable of the virgins and follows with a long list of "Let us…" statements, akin to Romans 13; for example, "Let us be strangers to the world, even as Christ was not of it," and, "Let us take as armour (*zaynō*) for the fight (*l-taktōša*), the preparation of the gospel."[153] This long part establishes the main themes of the Demonstration—eschatology, virginity, heavenly marriage, and spiritual battle.

In the first sections of the Demonstration, Aphrahat frequently encourages his readers to be Christ-like in the present so as to ensure a future reward, for example, "Let us be partakers of His suffering, so that we might live through his resurrection" and, "Let us leave the world, which is not ours, in order to arrive at the place to which we have been invited… Whoever loves the abode that is in heaven, let him not toil at the building of clay that will fall."[154] Yet Aphrahat's focus is not just the future, and he has numerous sentences that emphasise a more inaugurated eschatology, for example, "Let us lift up our wings as eagles that we may see the body there where it is," and, "Whoever is *training for the conflict (d-metrabē b-atlīṭōtō)* let him keep himself from the world. Whoever wishes to gain the *crown (kalīlō)*, let him run as a *winner in the race (b-aīgūnō ayk natsīḥō)*… Whoever adopts the *likeness of angels (damōtō d-mlakē)*, let him be a stranger to men."[155] These images highlight the Syrian idea of treating our bodies in the present as if they are already resurrected and glorified in heaven. Aphrahat also describes this behaviour as adopting the "likeness of angels," similar to Luke 20:34-36. Hence this is also a reference to another concept—that of virginity as a foretaste of the heavenly a-sexual reality.

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[151] Rom. 13:11-14 (emphasis mine).

[152] We will see a similar perspective later in the Qur'ān.

[153] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 6.1 (PS 1.1:240-45; Lehto, 169-73 (172-73)), ܐܢܟ ܠܐܚܬܘܬܐ , part of translation mine to match the Ephesians 6 passage it is referencing.

[154] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.1 (PS 1.1:241, 245, 248; Lehto, 171, 173) (Johnston, 364). The last sentence, and several following translations, are from Albert Johnston, NPNF, 2.13.

[155] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 6.1 (PS 1.1:248; Johnston, 363, 364) (emphasis mine), ܕܡܬܐܒܨ ܒܐܬܠܝܛܘܬܐ ... ܚܠܟ ... ܐܝܟ ܢܝ ܢܨܝܚ ... ... ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܟܣܢܝܐ .

This present lived experience of the resurrection may be compared to other writers, for example St. John Damascene who has a similar emphasis in his Paschal Troparias and Canon:

> You *raised with Yourself all Adam's race*, in Your rising from the Sepulchre, Buried yesterday with you, O Christ, and today, as you arise, *I am raised with you*, … The Day of Resurrection, let us be radiant, O peoples, Pascha, the Lord's Pascha, for from death unto life, and from earth unto heaven, Christ has brought us over, as we sing the *triumphal song*.[156]

An inaugurated eschatological viewpoint is so central to Aphrahat's ideas of struggle that I shall discuss it at length below in relation to his soteriology and anthropology.[157] This understanding is also evident in the later Syrian writers in my next two chapters.

In this first section of Demonstration Six Aphrahat uses the image of the wedding feast four times, once in the first sentences, and again twice half-way through, and then finally in his concluding sentences. This is clearly an important image for him. Significantly, in the last occurrence he links the wedding feast with the already mentioned related image of the "likeness of angels" (from Luke 20:34-36). Of deep significance is that the Luke passage describes the disciples as "Sons of the resurrection." This effectively equates *bnai qyama* with *bnai qyamtha*, since both groups are those preparing for the wedding feast especially with virginity, and both terms derive from the same root. In his summarising sentences, Aphrahat again treats the wedding feast image but this time also adds a link to virginity, which introduces the next several sections. He says, "The one who waits for the call should take oil in his vessel. Whoever guards the gate ought to keep watch for his master (*danoṭar*

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[156] Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 258, 261, 264 (emphasis mine), note the link with the triumph. It also evident in the main liturgy of the Orthodox Church, that of St John Chrysostom, which has a prayer, "You brought us out of nothing into being, and when we had fallen. You raised us up again, and left nothing undone until you had brought us up to heaven and granted us Your kingdom that is to come." *The Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom*, trans. George Nasr and Geoff Harvey (Illawong, NSW: Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia and New Zealand, 2001). Note also that the prosokmede prayer before the Liturgy has, "You poured forth immortality upon mankind" i.e. eternal life has already begun to be realised. By comparison the Liturgy of the Apostles of the Church of the East has, "you clothed yourself with our humanity, that you might make us alive by your Godhead. You have exalted our humble state, raised up our fallen condition, given new life to our mortality, forgiven our debts." http://web.archive.org/web/20061206003428/http://www.cired.org/liturgy/apostles.html, accessed July 3, 2018.

[157] Aphrahat's view of salvation history is very Pauline, and reflects Paul's statement, "But God … made us alive together with Christ … and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus." Eph. 2:4-6, cf. Col. 3:1-3 which says, "If you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

tarʿō nasakē l-moreh). The one who loves virginity should become like Elijah," making further connections between ascetic practice, eschatology, and virginity.[158]

Sections Two to Eight continue this major theme of virginity by emphasising the spiritual fight involved in remaining celibate, and how often women were the cause of man's downfall (Eve, Delilah with Samson etc.). Aphrahat notes that Elijah was holy and celibate, and again links this with resurrection and angel-likeness, asserting that, "because he took upon himself the *likeness of the angels of heaven* (*damōtō d-ʿyīray šmayō*, lit. image of the heavenly watchers), those very angels brought him bread and water when he was fleeing before Jezebel."[159] Aphrahat here indicates that likeness to angels is appropriate while here on Earth, and is not just a state for the future in heaven. The language here again resonates with Luke 20 and "the sons of the resurrection" who do not marry, being like angels in heaven.

In Section Six Aphrahat directly links the two themes of the wedding feast and resurrection and also states that the *watchers of heaven* (*d-ʿyīray šmayō* i.e. angels) shall minister to those who do not take wives now, thus equating such people with Elijah.[160] A little later Aphrahat again invokes the wedding feast and says that such pure virgins are "children of the Most High." Women virgins especially he says are now "betrothed" to Christ, presumably because the full marriage is still to come. This partial-fulfilment is again a reference to Aphrahat's inaugurated eschatology. Sections Nine and Ten address the presumed question of how hard is the struggle to stay celibate, and the example of Christ himself is seen as the motivation. The Saviour's humility is especially emphasised and this is a foretaste of the later Demonstration Nine *On Humility*. Thus Demonstration Nine can also be seen as connected to Aphrahat's theme of eschatologically-driven asceticism.

The next few sections deal with how this same Christ now dwells in people by His Spirit, and Section Fourteen leads back into a discussion of how the animal nature will be transformed at the final resurrection. Aphrahat writes, "And the Holy Spirit will be the earnest with Christ for the resurrection of that body which kept Him with purity" (again emphasising virginity), "and the Spirit will request to be again conjoined to it that that body

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[158] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.1 (PS 1.1:253, Lehto, 176), ܕܢܐ ܐܝ̈ܟ ܐܠܝܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܡܚܒ ܠܒܬܘܠܘܬܐ .

[159] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.5 (PS 1.1:263, Johnston, 366), ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܥܝ̈ܪܝ ܫܡܝܐ .

[160] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.6 (PS 1.1:269, Lehto, 182), ܕܥܝ̈ܪܝ ܫܡܝܐ .

may rise up in glory."[161] This draws yet a further link between present virginity and future resurrection, and thus the fight against the animal nature. Aphrahat reiterates his main points in concluding the Demonstration, namely virginity, the angelic life, and the life of the resurrection. He says, "In writing this I have reminded myself, and also you, my beloved; therefore love virginity, the heavenly portion, the fellowship of the Watchers of heaven."[162] He also directly links this to eschatology, quoting Matthew 24:32 and Luke 21:10, and says that these indications of the end, "are beginning to be fulfilled," a connection back to Demonstration Five *On Wars*.[163] Throughout the Demonstration Aphrahat repeatedly emphasises that spiritual struggle is the method for attaining this heavenly life of virginity. We have already seen above that in the opening sections of this Demonstration Aphrahat refers to "the armour of light" and uses the phrases "training for the conflict," and to "run as a winner in the race" so as to receive the "crown." These themes are continued throughout the Demonstration and repeatedly intertwined with Aphrahat's inaugurated eschatology.

Having summarised Aphrahat's general approach in Demonstration Six, and the place of ascetic battle within this, I now thematically analyse his specific struggle metaphors in more detail. In Section One, Aphrahat in his "Let us" part writes:

> Let us gird our lions with truth, that we may not be found impotent (*šapple*) in the contest (*b-aigūnō*). Let us arise and awaken Christ, that he may still the stormy blasts [away] from us. Let us take the shield (*sakrō*) against the Evil One … Let us receive power (*šōlṭonō*) from our Lord to tread upon snakes and scorpions.[164]

This imagery describes the soldier preparing and fighting, and Aphrahat's exhortation is in the middle of many others that cover various aspects of the Christian life such as loving others, laying aside malice, being diligent workers etc., so for Aphrahat the struggle is integral with the rest of life. Noticeably, Aphrahat is using the phraseology of Ephesians Six, which he returns to roughly twenty sentences later when he writes, "Let us take to ourselves, as armour (*zaynō*) for the battle (*l-taktōšō*), the preparation of the Gospel."[165] Continuing the fighting imagery he adds, "Let us guard (*neṭar*) His pledge in purity," a metaphor related to

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[161] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.14 (PS 1.1:293-95; Johnston, 372).

[162] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.19 (PS 1.1:309; Lehto, 198).

[163] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.19 (PS 1.1:312; Lehto, 198).

[164] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.1 (PS 1.1:244; Johnston, 363), ܥܩܠܗ ... ܒܐܓܘܢܐ ... ܣܟܪܐ ... ܫܘܠܛܢܐ.

[165] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.1, (PS 1.1:245; translation mine, cf. Johnston, 363), ܙܝܢܐ ܠܬܟܬܘܫܐ Cf. Eph. 6:11, 15.

the active defence by a soldier.[166]

In a more agricultural metaphor, Aphrahat writes, "Whoever receives the good seed, let him purge his land from thorns (*qrītō w-sīmtō dabgwoh*)."[167] Here the term "purge" also carries the idea of antagonism, and Aphrahat may also have the image of the land worked with difficulty by Adam in Genesis Three, given his understanding of salvation as a partial return to a Paradisiacal state.[168] Two sentences later, and still in Section One, Aphrahat uses several sentences that all reflect the struggle trope. He says:

> Let the one who wishes to receive a crown (*klīlō*) run as a champion (*natsīḥō*) in the competition (*b-aigōnō*). Let the one who wants to enter the stadium (*b-esṭaydō*) to fight (*d-netkataš*) learn about his opponent (*bʿel*). Let the one who wishes to enter into battle (*b-qrobō*) take armour (*zaynō*) for himself in order to fight (*d-netkataš*), and let him keep it clean at all times.[169]

This again displays the linked themes of racing and military fighting. Aphrahat's final phrase connects struggle with purity, a point repeated elsewhere specifically in relation to sexual purity. Interestingly, the immediately following sentence speaks of taking up the "likeness of angels." This implies that struggle is the way to attain such a likeness. Aphrahat then continues for another eight sentences which include various portrayals of inaugurated eschatology including the marriage feast image. This linkage is repeated towards the end of Section One when Aphrahat says:

> Whoever puts on the new man, let him keep (*neṭar*, lit. guard) himself from all filthiness. Whoever has put on armour (*zaynō*) from the water (of baptism), let him not put off his armour (*zayneh*) that he not be condemned. Whoever takes up the shield (*sakrō*) against the Evil one, let him keep himself from the darts (*geʾrē*) which he hurls (*d-šodē*) at him.[170]

This is almost a repeat of earlier and makes the same baptism-struggle connection we saw detailed in Demonstration Seven. Aphrahat is again drawing on Ephesians Six, and finishes

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[166] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.1 (PS 1.1:248; Johnston, 363), ܢܨܝ .

[167] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.1 (PS 1.1:248; Johnston, 364), ܐܪܥܗ ܡܢ ܟܘܒܐ̈ ܕܢܕܟܐ .

[168] Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 254-63.

[169] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.1 (PS 1.1:248; Lehto, 174), ܟܠܡܢ ... ܕܨܒܐ ... ܟܐܓܘܢܐ ... ܟܐܣܛܕܝܘܢ ... ܕܢܬܟܬܫ ... ܟܠ ... ܚܡܘܟܐ ... ܐܢܟ .. ܕܢܬܟܬܫ .

[170] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.1 (PS 1.1:252; Johnston, 364), ܢܛܪ .. ܐܢܟ ... ܐܢܗ ... ܣܟܪܐ ... ܓܐܪܐ̈ ܕܫܕܐ .

with, "Who shall draw back [retreat, pull back from] (*d-metqaṭ ʿō*), his Lord has no pleasure in him."[171]   Ascetics must keep up their fight daily, and the special attack that Aphrahat alludes to here and describes more later, is sexual sin, which would break the ascetic vow of celibacy. Aphrahat indeed after a few more sentences then finishes this Section mentioning virginity, and having established the theme of struggle for holiness, he proceeds to explain why it is a struggle in the next Section.

The centrality of struggle within Demonstration Six is evident in Section Two which begins with, "For, my beloved, our adversary (*bʿeldaran)* is skillful. He that contends (*metkataš*, lit. fights) against us is crafty. Against the brave (*ḥallītsē*) and renowned ones (*natsīḥē*, lit. victorious) does he prepare himself, that they may be weakened."[172] The terms "brave" and "renowned ones" are those used of especially famous fighters. Aphrahat in the followings sentences makes many other references to attacks from Satan, for example, "nor does he fight (*maqreb*) with the captivity [captive ones](*šbītō*) that are made captive to him" contrasting these with the renowned ones.[173] He again draws on Ephesians Six but with a new military analogy of fleeing the darts, writing, "He that has wings flees from him [ie the Adversary] and the darts (*geʾrē*) that he hurls (*d-šodē*) at him do not reach him."[174] Aphrahat explains the reason for such confidence in the spiritual war: "The children of the Good fear not the Evil, for He has given him to be trampled (*d-dāšō*) by their feet," a reference to Luke 10:17-19 and its theme of inaugurated eschatology.[175] Further, in an allusion to Genesis, the Evil One "creeps (*rošep*) upon them like a serpent (*ḥewyō*)," but the Christians "conquer (*zokīn*) him by fasting."[176] This possibly shows why Aphrahat includes a whole Demonstration on fasting, since it is a powerful weapon to win the battle. Aphrahat also again makes an eschatological connection when he continues, "And if he wishes to contend (*d-net-kataš*) with them by the lust of the eyes, they lift up their eyes to the height of heaven."[177] This may be an allusion to Paul's words in Colossians, "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God … then you will also be revealed with him in glory," with its associated idea of inaugurated

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[171] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.1 (PS 1.1:252; Johnston, 364), ܪܨܛ݂ܝ This is almost a direct quote from Heb. 10:38.

[172] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 6.2 (PS 1.1:253; Johnston, 365), ܚܠܝܨܐ̈ ... ܡܬܟܬܫ ... ܒܥܠܕܪܢ ܡ ... ܢܨܝ̈ܚܐ .

[173] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 6.2 (PS 1.1:253; Johnston, 365), ܫܒܝܬܐ ... ܡܩܪܒ .

[174] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.2 (PS 1.1:253; Johnston, 365), ܕܫܕܐ ܓܐܪ̈ܐ .

[175] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 6.2 (PS 1.1:256; Johnston, 365), ܕܕܐܫܐ using the same verb as in Luke.

[176] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 6.2 (PS 1.1:256; Johnston, 365), ܐܥܛ ... ܚܘܝܐ ... ܐܙܟܝ .

[177] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.2 (PS 1.1:256; Johnston, 365), ܕܢܬܟܬܫ .

eschatology.[178] This connection is also seen in Aphrahat two sentences later: "If he wishes openly to strive (*d-net-kataš*) with them, lo! They are clothed in armour (*zaynō*) and stand up (*qōmīn*, with same root as resurrection) against him."[179] Aphrahat is saying that Christians can in a sense reverse the fall which resulted in its "clothing" of skins, by living Christ's resurrection and by being clothed in spiritual warfare armour now. This theme of clothing and resurrection life is important in Syriac theology, and discussed at length by Brock and Murray.[180] According to the Syrians, Adam and Eve were originally clothed with light, but after their sin they were clothed with skins, however, in Christ the Christian is again clothed in Light.[181] Aphrahat is also referring to the armour of Light he has mentioned earlier, and this clothing allows for a victorious standing up (resurrection) against the Devil.

Immediately after this, Aphrahat adds the theme of wakefulness and vigilant watchfulness which he sees as integral to struggle and says, "If he wishes to come against them by sleep, they are watchful (*mettʿīrīn*) and vigilant (*šohrīn*) and sing psalms and pray."[182] Watchfulness and vigilance are the actions of a soldier on duty. This mention of prayer so soon after fasting, and along with fasting in connection with struggle, does seem to indicate that the usefulness of fasting and prayer is one reason for the inclusion of Demonstrations Three *On Fasting* and Four *On Prayer* in Aphrahat's work. Aphrahat concludes Section Two repeating the central point of the struggle for sexual purity, "If he inflames them with the desire of Eve, they dwell alone, and not with the daughters of Eve."[183] Aphrahat seems to understand the first sin as a sexual sin, and although at time he seems to blame Eve solely for this sin, at other points he blames Adam.

Section Three mainly describes how various previous Old Testament men fell into sin because of women but also provides examples of godly men such as Asa who "conquered (*zakoyahī*) the Accursed-of-Life who wished to come in against him."[184] After this Aphrahat focusses on sexual temptation and purity, several times using struggle imagery to discuss the

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[178] Col. 3:1-4.

[179] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.2 (PS 1.1:256; Johnston, 365), ܕܢܬܟܬܫ ... ܐܢܟ ... ܩܡܝܢ .

[180] Brock, *The Syriac Fathers*, xxii-xxv, Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 69-78. Murray asserts that, "The Church is implicitly presented as antitype of the garden." Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 85. See also Serge Ruzer, *Syriac Idiosyncracies* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 63; and Jarkins, *Aphrahat and Temple,* 42.

[181] Sebastian Brock, "The Robe of Glory: A Biblical Image in the Syriac Tradition," *The Way*, v. 39, no. 3 (July 1999): 247-59. This idea derived from Judaism, see Alexander Toepel, "When did Adam wear the Garments of Light?," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 61 (1, March 2010): 62-71.

[182] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.2 (PS 1.1:256; Johnston, 365), ܟܕܠܐܚܢܝ ... ܥܗܢܝ .

[183] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.2 (PS 1.1:256; Johnston, 365).

[184] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.3 (PS 1.1:260; Johnston, 366), ܐܚܝܡ .

fight against temptation. He writes that, "it was through woman that the adversary (*la-bʿeldbobo*) … fights (*maqreb*) against the champions (*atlīṭē*)," since "she is the weapon (*zayneh*) of Satan."[185] He hence later writes of the one who "guards (*d-neṭar*) the Spirit of Christ in purity,"[186] and how because Satan "watches" (*noṭar*) and "assails" (*ʿode*), therefore the ascetic must "watch (*d-nettʿīrūn*) and guard (*neṭrūn*) his house," meaning his body.[187]

Towards the end of Demonstration Six Aphrahat makes some significant theological statements about Christ and ascetics. He refers again to Christ's giving power to His disciples to tread upon "the power (*ḥayleh*) of the adversary (*bʿeldbobo*)," applying this to spiritual struggle. According to Aphrahat, spiritual battle is inherent in life because Job says concerning Satan that, "God made him to wage war (*qrobeh*)."[188] However, ascetics imitate Christ and can win and "not be overcome (*dlō nezdkē*)" by Satan.[189] This high anthropology of a potentially victorious imitation of a war-waging Christ is a theme I return to below. The mention of war also again indicates that the previous Demonstration Five on worldly wars may have been included to contrast with and highlight the more spiritual war of ascetics.

Throughout this Demonstration Aphrahat uses military and athletic metaphors repeatedly in relation to the spiritual *agōna*. He uses much the same wording that he uses in other Demonstrations, mainly fighting, conquering, watching, armour, and contending with adversaries. His persistent joining of struggle metaphors with his soteriology and anthropology is noticeable.

Struggle Concepts in *Demonstrations* Fourteen, Three, and Four

It is appropriate to briefly review some further uses of the term *agōna* and the related cluster of agonistic terms in other of Aphrahat's Demonstrations, to note the persistency of his usage and to show other related struggle metaphors. In Demonstration Fourteen *On Dissension*, Aphrahat addresses the issue of disunity and strife in the church, and in one long section (sixteen) uses an extensive list of brief metaphors to teach about the wise and good shepherds

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[185] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.6 (PS 1.1:265; Johnston, 367), ܐܢܬܬܐ ... ܒܐܬܠܝܛܐ̈ ... ܡܩܪܒ ... ܒܥܠܕܒܒܐ .

[186] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.14 (PS 1.1:293; Johnston, 372), ܢܛܪ .

[187] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.17 (PS 1.1:301; Johnston, 373), ܢܛܪ ... ܕܢܬܥܝܪܘܢ ... ܥܕܐ ... Aphrahat explicitly says the house is the body. Note the two uses here and one previously of words from the root n-t-r.

[188] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.17 (PS 1.1:305; Johnston, 373), ܩܪܒܗ ... ܒܥܠܕܒܒܐ ... ܚܝܠܗ Luke 10:19, cf. Rev. 13:7.

[189] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.17 (PS 1.1:301; Johnston, 373), ܕܠܐ ܢܙܕܟܐ .

who will protect the church. He uses sixteen images in consecutive sentences to make his point, and although not every metaphor is directly related to *agōna*, many are, and all have some element of effort involved and thus are related to ascetic struggle. For example he writes:

> Blessed is the wise doctor who has obtained remedies and who will labour (*neʿmala*) for the sick. The brave sentinel (*dōqō natsīḥō*) will warn the people about the sword (*ḥarbō*) which is unsheathed. The successful athlete (*atlīṭō kašīrō*) will be victorious in the struggle (*netnatsay baigūnō*).[190]

He says that the "famous athlete (*atlīṭō natsīḥō*) will compete in the stadium (*b-esṭadyō*)," and mentions the "wise architect" who "digs his foundation deep" and "hired labourers" who "work hard," and this connecting of soldiers, runners, and farmers is reminiscent of Paul.[191] Aphrahat also mentions that, "the doorkeeper is vigilant (*neṭar*) so as not to be conquered (*nezdkē*)," referring to the related imagery of the military guard on watch, and he refers to the "captain (*gōbernīṭō*) who stays awake (*d-šohar*)."[192] I shall return to this theme of military watchfulness among the Syrians in my chapter on Isaac as he uses this concept extensively. In the second half of this section Aphrahat switches from the wise shepherds to the church as a whole and uses further agonistic language. He writes that "the prisoners (*asīray*) of the congregation will remain in the fortress (*b-ḥesnō*) and wait in silence," where the term "prisoners" here is not meant to be seen as negative.[193] These church members are also those who "guard" (*nezdahrōn*) themselves, and "those wear the breastplate arm themselves bravely (*walbīšay šeryonō netḥaltsōn ḥlītsōyīt*)."[194]

The struggle motif appears in a significant way in Demonstration Three *On Fasting* and is briefly mentioned in Demonstration Four. Aphrahat starts with the two reasons why he sees value in fasting, that is, as a "treasure" and as a "weapon." He writes, "Pure fasting is highly acceptable before God, and it is kept as a treasure (*sīmtō*) in heaven. It is a weapon (*zayna*) against the Evil one, and a shield (*sakrō*) which receives the arrows (*geʾrē*) of the

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[190] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 14.16 (PS 1.1:609; Lehto, 320), ܢܚܫܠ ... ܐܘܡܢܐ ܢܝ ܢܥܡܠ ... ܢܐܬܐ ... ܕܥܐܠܢܐ ܚܙ݁ܥܐ ... ܠܐܢܝ, ܕܟܢܝܘܐܘܐ .

[191] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 14.16 (PS 1.1:609-12; Lehto, 320), ܟܠܐܢܐ ܢܝ ܢܥܡ ... ܕܟܘܡܠܐܢܟ . 1Tim.2:4-6, as discussed in my first chapter.

[192] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 14.16 (PS 1.1:609-12; Lehto, 320), ܢܛܪ ... ܢܕܚܟ ... ܠܟܐܕܢܣܐܟ ܕܘܡܘܐ . ܢܛܠ .

[193] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 14.16 (PS 1.1:612; Lehto, 321), ܚܫܡܟ, ... ,ܟܡܢܐ The word for prisoners is almost identical with the earlier "doctors" and is probably a play on words.

[194] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 14.16 (PS 1.1:613; Lehto, 321), ܣܠܢܝ ܟܢܐ ... ܐܠܬܥܦ ܥܢܝܢܟ ܢܐܢܠܝ ܦ ܥ . ܢܐܕܘܡܘܐ .

Adversary (*d-bꜥeldbobo*)."[195] This pairing of the concept of successful struggle and good standing with God as the main two advantages of fasting shows how important the *agōna* is for Aphrahat. Later in this same section Aphrahat expands his commentary on these two linked ideas by writing, "There is one who, in suffering, keeps himself from the things of this world, so that he will not be harmed by the Adversary (*bꜥeldbobo*), and there is the one who abstains so that he may remain in mourning, in order to please his Lord in his suffering."[196] Here Aphrahat intertwines the two ideas of fasting as both a struggle and as a treasure—fasting is a protection against Satan and also a way to please God. Further on various people who fasted are used as examples again using agonistic metaphors, including Mordecai and Esther whose fast was a "shield of salvation" (*sakrō d-pārōnō*) for the Jews.[197]

Fasting for Aphrahat is not just effective in the external fight against Satan, but also in the internal battle against the lusts. In Demonstration Three Aphrahat uses agonistic language to describe the fight with the passions and writes: "…there is one who abstains from anger, and crushes (*kobeš*, or subjugates) his desire [to get angry] so that he might not be conquered (*nezdkē*) [by it]."[198] He also mentions the importance for an ascetic that he, "guards (*neṭar*) one's tongue," and he exhorts, "let him keep watch (*nezdhar*) over his tongue."[199] Aphrahat concludes his Demonstration Three *On Fasting* by mentioning the prayer of Daniel, known for his fasting due to the destruction of Jerusalem, and then contrasts the destroying foreign army with, "The leader of our army (*mašrītān*) is greater than Gabriel."[200] Fasting is thus for Aphrahat a key element in winning the spiritual fight, and he mainly conceptualises it with agonistic metaphors.

Prayer as a power or strength is the theme of Demonstration Four, titled *On Prayer*. Aphrahat begins by emphasising prayer as a pure offering and as a force, "Hear concerning the strength (*ḥaylo*) of pure prayer, and see how our righteous fathers triumphed (*atnatsḥo*) for their prayer before God, and how prayer was for them a pure offering."[201] Aphrahat seems to pair powerful prayer with acceptance with God just as he did in relation to fasting. His elevation of the struggle alongside right standing before God may appear overstatement to

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[195] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 3.1 (PS 1.1:97; Lehto, 109), ܡܬܢܨܚܘ ... ܐܢܫ ... ܩܡܨܐ ... ܠܐܓܘܢܐ ... ܕܒܥܠܕܒܒܐ .

[196] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 3.1 (PS 1.1:100; Lehto, 111), ܒܥܠܕܒܒܐ .

[197] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 3.10 (PS 1.1:116; Lehto, 118), ܩܡܨܐ ܕܦܘܪܩܢܐ .

[198] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 3.1 (PS 1.1:100; Lehto, 110), ܟܒܫ ... ܢܙܕܟܐ .

[199] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 3.2 (PS 1.1:101; Lehto, 112), ܢܛܪ ... ܢܙܕܗܪ .

[200] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 3.15-16 (PS 1.1:133-36; Lehto, 124-5), ܡܫܪܝܬܢ .

[201] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 4.1 (PS 1.1:137; translation mine, cf. Lehto, 128), ܚܝܠܗ ... ܐܬܢܨܚܘ .

Protestant readers or be seen as a form of "salvation by works," but is a natural outworking of his anthropology and soteriology. Aphrahat continues by giving examples of the power of prayer and lists how strong prayer, "divided the sea, opened a breach in the Jordan, held back the sun and immobilized the moon, exterminated the impure," among many others. What is noticeable is that in these examples Aphrahat uses the military language of "breach (*terʿat*)" and "exterminated (*ḥerbat*)."[202] Aphrahat further urges, "Be diligent in watchfulness (*b-ʿīrūto*), and remove from yourselves drowsiness and sluggishness. Be vigilant (*šohar*) by day and by night," again invoking the soldier metaphor.[203]

He asserts concerning prayer that, "Its strength (*ḥayloh*) is considerable, as considerable as the strength of pure fasting."[204] That this is not an abstract strength but one conceived of in very concrete and military terms is shown by the examples he uses and the related agonistic language. For example Moses is discussed in Section Seven, where the "strength of pure prayer" is exemplified by how he, "conquered (*zakot*) Amalek and gave strength to Joshua … [who] knocked down (*saḥpat*) the walls of Jericho."[205] Aphrahat's use of these examples shows that he does not conceive of the battle of ascetics as abstract. We must recognise that for Aphrahat, the present fight with the demons is just as concrete and real as these Old Testament examples of strong prayer and physical walls—it involves specific acts of fasting and praying that result in concrete affects. More examples are later given including that, "the strong army was defeated (*wezdkī*) by the strength of the prayer of Asa."[206] Jonah also prayed, and with more rich metaphor Aphrahat says that, "his prayer penetrated (*bezʿat* lit. split or cleave) the abyss, conquered (*wazkot*) the waves, and was stronger (*ḥesnat*) than the tempestuous sea. It pierced [like an arrow] (*bezʿat*) the clouds."[207]

In summarising, Aphrahat asserts that these righteous fathers, "put on the armour (*zayno*) of prayer," yet another clear reference to Ephesians Six.[208] Although brief, Aphrahat's mentions of struggle in relation to prayer and fasting underscore how much these ascetic practices are an aspect of the spiritual fight. This spiritual war theme as I have

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[202] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 4.1 (PS 1.1:137; Lehto, 128), ܬܒܪܬ … ܚܪܒܬ .

[203] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 4.16 (Lehto, 142), ܐܬܬܥܝܪܘ … ܥܝܪ .

[204] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 4.1 (PS 1.1:137; Lehto, 128), ܚܝܠܗ .

[205] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 4.7 (PS 1.1:152; Lehto, 133), ܐܚܪܒ … ܣܚܦܬ .

[206] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 4.8 (PS 1.1:153; Lehto, 134), ܘܐܙܕܟܝ .

[207] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 4.8 (PS 1.1:153; Lehto, 135), ܒܙܥܬ … ܚܣܢܬ … ܘܐܙܟܬ … ܒܙܥܬ .

[208] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 4.9 (PS 1.1:157; Lehto, 136), ܙܝܢܐ .

mentioned earlier, is a salient aspect of the Syrian worldview.[209]

Struggle in Aphrahat's anthropology and soteriology

Aphrahat's anthropology and soteriology is intimately related to his understanding of struggle. Aphrahat has a "high" anthropology, a strong belief in the true freedom of the human will, whereby due to Christ's real transformation of human nature, a Christian can attain to living like the angels while yet on Earth. For Aphrahat, "ascetica and eschata go together; the latter motivates the former while the former prepares for the latter."[210] Aphrahat can insist on the efficacy of the free human will because of his anthropology. Like all the Syrians he holds a high view of human nature as being restored progressively.[211] He sees Christ's incarnation as central to this transformed and effective human nature. In Demonstration Three *On Fasting* Aphrahat concludes with three summarising sentences:

> He has suffered, and has been *tempted in the flesh* which he *received from us*, and can *therefore assist those who are tempted*. For he fasted on our behalf, and has conquered (*wazko*) our Enemy. He has commanded us to fast and to keep watch at all times, so that by the power of pure fasting, we might obtain rest.[212]

This conclusion references many Biblical passages. Firstly, there is the notion from Hebrews that Jesus was tempted in all ways like other humans, in the same flesh received from us, yet without sin, and therefore He can assist us fellow humans.[213] Secondly, Jesus has conquered Satan through fasting, a reference back to Christ's forty days in the wilderness.[214] These two points affirm the power of human action, since it was Christ as a true human who defeated Satan. Aphrahat says that, "He walked in our nature (*nqawe ḥnan bakyonan*)," and thus liberated it, which means the struggle of ascetics can be effective.[215] The Syrian tradition affirms the absolute laying aside of Jesus' divine power at this point (while still remaining divine in essence), and that His sin-conquering actions were solely due to a purified human

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[209] Lehto, introduction, 45-6; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 15-17; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, 1:13; 3:8,9. Aphrahat notes that Mary found favour with God by her "prayer and fasting." Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 3.14 (PS 1.1:132; Lehto, 123).

[210] Kevin Hester, *Eschatology and pain in St. Gregory the Great* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock2007), 33, quotes Robert McNally, "Gregory the Great and His Declining World," *Archivum historiae pontificiae* 16 (1978), 14.

[211] Lehto, introduction, 46; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 61, 69-77.

[212] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 3.16 (PS 1.1:136; Lehto, 125) (emphasis mine), ܐܬܟ .

[213] Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15.

[214] Luke 4:1-12.

[215] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.10 (PS 1.1:277; Lehto, 186), ܒܩܢܘܡܗ ܣܒ ܚܝܠܢ .

nature.[216] Thirdly, the final exhortation refers to the words of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane to his disciples, "Watch and pray," although here Aphrahat links this to fasting. Again, this event in Luke is described as an *agōna* in the Syriac.[217]

In Demonstration 23 Aphrahat makes his anthropology and soteriology even more explicit when he explains:

> For great is the gift of the Blessed One which is with us … Though we did not ask him, he sent us his gift … He sent Christ *as a human being*, so that he might ridicule the Evil One and his armies (*w-ḥaylahī*), and *chase away from us the conquered army* (*walmerdap men lwotan ḥaylō ḥayobo*) … He sent the Strong One (*lḥayltono*) in the form of our weakness, so that he might *make strong our weakness against the strength of the Evil one* (*danaḥyel mḥīlūtan ʿal ḥayleh d-bīšo*).[218]

As well as the explicit military language used here in relation to Christ's victory over Satan, this shows Aphrahat's belief that in Christ the Christian is now strong enough to fight the defeated Evil one. There is a juxtaposition between the terms "Evil One" and "Strong One," but Christ has won the battle, and this victory is transferred to the Christian. Aphrahat connects this to his inaugurated eschatology where he continues this theme in the very next section and quotes Paul that, "He has raised us up and seated us with him in heaven."[219] Further, "We will give thanks with our mouths as much as possible to the Strong One (*ḥaylo*) who has come to give life to the weak."[220] We see this linkage further in Demonstration 22 where Christ is called "the Slayer of Death (*qoṭūleh d-mawto*)."[221] Slightly later Aphrahat says that because Christ destroyed death, Christians should, "be mindful of Death and remember life."[222] It is the unwise who "do not keep in mind the end of the world," an association again of eschatology and holiness. We will see a similar idea of the remembrance of death as a motivation for struggle in al-Muḥāsibi.

This theme of Christ as victor is central to Aphrahat's soteriology and is joined to

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[216] Phil. 2:6-8; see also the Tome of Leo and its emphasis that Jesus operated in some cases purely with his human nature.

[217] Luke 22:39-46, cf. Matt. 26:41.

[218] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 23.49 (PS 1.2:96; Lehto, 513) (emphasis mine), ܡܛܠܗܘܢ ... ܘܠܡܪܕܦ ܡܢ ܠܘܬܢ ܚܝܠܐ ܚܝܒܐ. ܫܕܪ ... ܠܚܝܠܬܢܐ ... ܕܢܚܝܠ ܡܚܝܠܘܬܢ ܥܠ ܚܝܠܗ ܕܒܝܫܐ.

[219] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 23.50 (PS 1.2:97; Lehto, 514), quoting Eph. 2:6.

[220] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 23.52 (PS 1.2:100; Lehto, 515), ܚܝܠܐ.

[221] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 22.4 (PS 1.1:996: Lehto, 462), ܩܛܘܠܗ ܕܡܘܬܐ.

[222] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 22.6 (PS 1.1:1000; Lehto, 463), cf. 467.

spiritual war at several other points. As well as occurring in the more ascetic *Demonstrations*, there is even an important parallel made in the Demonstration *On Wars*. Aphrahat exhorts, "Take note that the children of the kingdom have been marked, and they have received their liberation from this world."[223] The reason that this has occurred is that, "a mighty champion (*gabro ganeboro*), whose name is Jesus, will come with power (*ḥaylo*), carrying all the power of the kingdom as his armour (*zayneh*)."[224] This adds to the other passages which show a cosmic victory already occurring, and presents the final victory which will take place at the Jesus' Second Coming. Here Aphrahat is affirming the "now but not yet" paradox of inaugurated eschatology.[225] The following words about those who "clothed with his armour will not be defeated in war (*hū wzayneh l'ĭšīn wlo' ḥoybīn ba-qrobo*)" and who "conquer the beast" (*zkalūh l-ḥayūtō*) can therefore be seen as a further foreshadowing of the main themes of *Demonstrations* Six and Seven, which equate the beast with the internal passions, and the literal conquering with the ascetic metaphorical battle.[226] For Aphrahat, salvation is understood not in a legal justification sense but as the victory of the Strong over the evil, and as strength imparted to the believer. This life is then lived out via a daily *agōna*, and hence both cosmic salvation and personal salvation consist of a battle for holiness. This struggle is not easy, and Aphrahat teaches that the Christian still struggles with sin because even though "it is nailed to the Cross, its sting (*ʿūqsoh*) [still] exists."[227] In further alluding to the sting of the Serpent in Genesis as ongoing sinful temptation, he adds that sin will "pierce many until the end comes when its sting (*ʿūqsoh*) is broken."[228]

Aphrahat is not unique in emphasising this theology, as several of the Greek-speaking Orthodox have a similar perspective. Chrysostom, living in the late fourth century, writes extensively on virginity and the angelic life, and displays a very similar anthropology and ascetical theology. For Chrysostom, Paul occupies the first place after Christ himself, and is the person whose Christ-centred asceticism is most worthy of emulation. Paul is the ideal model for the monk, and lived the "angelic life."[229] Chrysostom lived in Syrian Antioch for

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[223] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 5.23 (PS 1.1:232; Lehto, 166).

[224] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 5.24 (PS 1.1:233; Lehto, 166-7), ܐܢܐ ... ܙܝܢܗ ... ܚܝܠܬܢܐ .

[225] George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Eerdmans, 1959), 18, 23-5.

[226] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 5.24 (PS 1.1:233; Lehto, 167), ܗܘ ܕܐܝܬܘ ܠܚܝܘܬܐ ܐܝܟ ܡܨܝܢ ܕܟܠܗܘܢ ... ܐܟܠܩܪܨܐ ܠܚܝܘܬܐ .

[227] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.1 (PS 1.1:316; Lehto, 200), ܥܘܩܣܗ .

[228] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 7.1 (PS 1.1:316; Lehto, 200), ܥܘܩܣܗ .

[229] Margaret Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet* (Louisville, KT: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 309 lists several references to this idea of the "angelic life" and says that there are "literally hundreds" of other references. Mitchell also on 309 cites David G. Hunter in *A comparison between a king and a monk/Against the*

his formative years, and since many in Antioch were bilingual Greek and Syriac speakers, it is possible that he was exposed to Aphrahat. Chrysostom's approach to asceticism and virtue is not purely Greek philosophic, rather he often teaches Syriac and Cappadocian virginity-asceticism. As Lai states, "one must resist the temptation to conclude hastily that Chrysostom's ethics is largely Stoic or Platonic."[230] Chrysostom uses many images to describe the Christian *eudaimonia*, but "his favourite is most certainly the metaphor of the Christian as living the life of the angels," the restoration of the life of pre-fall Adam and Eve.[231] He challenges his hearers to love God and attain virtue, and thus they "shall be living the life of angels, and while we abide on Earth," emphasising the present possibility of angelic holiness.[232] However, on one point Lai is wrong, i.e.:

> [T]he *aretē*, or, the way of life of the angels that the Son of God brings down from heaven to earth is clearly understood in moral rather than ontological terms, since Christians can only imitate the angels and not change their phusis in this present age.[233]

Chrysostom and the Cappadocians do believe in a partial change of *phusis* here on Earth—a partial deification, and that this was achieved through ascetic practice. On this point they teach the same as the Syrians, although not to the same extent as we see in Aphrahat. Chrysostom writes that the Christian's "citizenship is in heaven…The Son of the Very God has brought every virtue, has brought down from heaven all the fruits that are from hence… He has brought us the virtuous life (*politeian*) of the angels."[234] In other words, there is an ontological change in the Christian now which enables them to live a different life. Further, Christians are "spiritual soldiers" who must "watch," because no-one knows when Christ will return.[235] Noticeably, the main themes of Chrysostom's *Ephesians Homily 23* resonate with Aphrahat's Demonstrations Six and Seven, that is, spiritual warfare, citizenship in heaven, the life of angels, and watchfulness. It is hard to see that this clustering is coincidental, and it

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opponents of the monastic life: Two Treatises by John Chrysostom (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 13) (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 147, note 51, who says that, "What stands out most in Chrysostom's descriptions of the monastic life, however, is the idea that the monk lived on Earth the life of heaven." Chrysostom has been falsely accused of being a semi-Pelagian, but this is a term only developed in the 16th century, according to Pak-Wah Lai, "John Chrysostom and the Hermeneutics of Exemplar Portraits," 5 see also notes 15, 16.

[230] Lai, *John Chrysostom,* 45.
[231] Lai, *John Chrysostom,* 57.
[232] John Chrysostom, *Homilies to the Romans*, NPNF, 1.11, 516.
[233] Lai, *John Chrysostom,* 66.
[234] John Chrysostom, *Homilies to the Ephesians 23*, NPNF, 1.13, 166.
[235] John Chrysostom, *Homilies to the Ephesians 23*, NPNF, 1.13, 163, 166.

is likely that both Aphrahat and Chrysostom were both informed by earlier works such as the *Liber Graduum* and Jewish eschatological asceticism.

Struggle and celibacy

One specific feature of Aphrahat's work has evoked much discussion, namely his emphasis on virginity, or at least for those already married—celibacy. For Aphrahat life is a struggle and one of the main temptations to fight is sexuality. This theme is central to Demonstration Six where he writes, "In writing this I have reminded myself, and also you, my beloved; therefore love virginity, the heavenly portion, the fellowship of the Watchers of heaven."[236] He specifically warns ascetic men about sharing housing with women because they will become the source of sexual temptation, since, "from the beginning women have been a way for the Adversary to gain access to people…for women are the weapon (*zayneh*) of Satan, and through them he fights (*maqreb*) against the [spiritual] athletes (*atlīṭē*)."[237] Fighting sexual sin is thus for Aphrahat primarily conceptualised as a battle.[238] Aphrahat notes that Elijah was holy and avoided sexual relations, and then again links this with resurrection and angel-likeness, "because he took upon himself the likeness of the angels of heaven, those very angels brought him bread and water when he was fleeing before Jezebel."[239] Aphrahat indicates that likeness to angels is appropriate while here on Earth, and is not just a state for

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[236] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.19 (PS 1.1:309; Lehto, 198).

[237] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.6 (PS 1.1:265; Lehto, 181), ܐܢܝܢ ... ܡܐܢܐ ... ܐܬܠܝܛܐ Further, Aphrahat provides a long list of sixteen men who succumbed to sin because of women, including the righteous Adam and David, and even the evil Ahab and Herod. He writes concerning Satan that, "it was through Eve that he came against Adam, and in his innocence Adam was enticed by him … Through a woman he [Satan] fought (*aqreb*) with Samson." Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.3 (PS 1.1:257; Lehto, 177), ܐܩܪܒ During Aphrahat's time the influence of Encratism led many to reject marriage and all sexual relations, but not always successfully. There was well over a century during which the church had to deal with renegotiating appropriate male-female relations. As part of this upheaval, some of Aphrahat's readers appear to have been practicing celibate co-habitation with women, and Aphrahat says that this will not work. Non-sexual co-habitation seems to have become a new trend in the church to such an extent that Aphrahat needs to warn against it, and he was not alone, as the Council of Ancyra (314), the Council of Nicea (325), and Basil of Ancyra (c.337) warn and legislate against this practice.[237] Canon Nineteen of the Council of Ancyra says, "And, moreover, we prohibit women who are virgins from living with men as sisters." NPNF, 2.14, 71. In this context, Aphrahat's rhetoric about "dangerous women" makes sense, and indeed he warns both men and women of the struggle of sexual temptation. His basic vision is positive– regardless of gender, people can now on Earth be celibate like the angels. Yet Aphrahat is concerned that his liberating vision of both women and men living transformed lives is in danger of being undermined by unwise male decisions about co-habiting with female ascetics. His statements on women as the source of evil then must be read in this context of probable male sin.

[238] In regards to women specifically, Aphrahat invokes the wedding feast image again and says that these virgins are "children of the Most High." Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.6 (PS 1.1:269; Lehto, 183). He writes that women virgins are now "betrothed" to Christ, presumably because the full heavenly "marriage" is still to come. Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.7 (PS 1.1:272; Lehto, 183).

[239] Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.5 (PS 1.1:264; Johnston, 366).

the future in heaven.[240] He sees sexual temptation as requiring a daily intense struggle, and this is an important aspect of his *Demonstrations.*

Conclusion

The theme of struggle is very important to Aphrahat, an author who is significant for writing before Athanasius pens his *Life of Anthony*. Aphrahat is an early exemplar of a distinctive and continuous Syrian tradition. His concept of ascetic fighting is closely linked to inaugurated eschatology, and also to a particular anthropology and soteriology. Because Christ is the victor over sin and Satan, the ascetic Christian is partly transformed now and thus can win the daily battle if they struggle wisely. A major issue for Aphrahat is the battle against sexual sin, yet he also writes of fighting through prayer and fasting. Aphrahat discusses spiritual combat using a wide range of terms and metaphors clustered together around the central metaphor of the *agonising* soldier, or occasionally, athlete. He teaches extensively on the macrotrope of "spiritual life is a struggle" using many images. Aphrahat's theology and ascetic emphasis is not unusual in the Syrian writings and I shall now analyse similar material in six other representative Syrian authors, culminating in Isaac. My analysis of Aphrahat's use of the inner spiritual struggle metaphor shows that he sees this battle as vital for Christians.

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[240] He addresses men specifically, when he states that the "Watchers of heaven" (angels) shall minister to those who do not take wives now, thus equating such men with Elijah. Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.6 (PS 1.1:268; Johnston, 367). But he also says to both genders, "The one who loves virginity should become like Elijah," Aphrahat, *Demonstrations,* 6.1 (PS 1.1:253; Lehto*,* 176). The Syrian church at this time was in significant turmoil due to some Christians teaching an extreme theology that led husbands and wives to leave their spouses in the name of holiness. Some ascetics even refused to accept that married priests could lead the church, and numbers of women started wearing men's clothing as a presumed sign of their renunciation of sexuality. The Council of Gangra in 340CE responded thus: "For, from their utter abhorrence of marriage, and from their adoption of the proposition that no one living in a state of marriage has any hope towards God, many misguided married women have forsaken their husbands, and husbands their wives: then, afterwards, not being able to contain, they have fallen into adultery; and so, through such a principle as this, have come to shame." Council of Gangra, *Synodical Letter of the Council of Gangra*, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.14, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 1994), 91. The rulings of this Council were seen as important enough to be ratified by Chalcedon. Aphrahat's repeated warnings about the possible loss of the fight against temptation is thus grounded in his observed reality.

3. Syrian Christian Authors on Struggle from the fourth to the sixth century

The idea of spiritual battle is central to Syrian ascetic writing. Aphrahat is not alone in discussing the *agōna,* as there are almost three centuries of Syrian ascetic writers after him and before Islam, who in their particular ways also emphasise struggle. I have analysed Aphrahat in detail, but in this chapter I briefly demonstrate that spiritual battle and contest is a persistent theme for five other Syrian ascetic writers. I argue that these authors similarly connect the inner warfare motif with anthropology, free will, Christology, and the passions, but in a creative diversity of ways. All the writers use a number of metaphors to explain the struggle, many in common with others, but in some cases they demonstrate unique emphases. Military metaphors and inaugurated eschatology are important in every case. Sebastian Brock provides a list of the main Syrian ascetic authors between Aphrahat and Isaac, and in this chapter I cover almost all of them. For the fourth century I analyse Pseudo-Macarius and the anonymous author of the *Book of Steps* (*Liber Graduum*).[1] I do not include the well-known fourth century Ephrem as he wrote very little on struggle. From the fifth century there are two agonistic texts, namely *On the Soul* by John "the Solitary" (of Apamea, fl. mid fifth century), and the *History of the Monks of Syria* by Theodoret of Cyrrhus (d. 466 CE). For the sixth century I discuss two temptation homilies by Jacob of Serugh (d. 521 CE). Due to limitations of space I do not include the two other major sixth century authors, namely Philoxenus (d. 523 CE), and Sergius of Resh'aina (d. 536 CE). I have chosen the main ascetic writers and texts up to Isaac, but excluded authors such as Dadisho' and Sahdona, who wrote after the coming of Islam. Three of these selected Syrian authors wrote in Syriac, namely the anonymous author of *Book of Steps*, John of Apamea, and Jacob of Serugh. The other two authors, Pseudo-Macarius and Theodoret, wrote in Greek, but their thinking is distinctly Syrian. Their works are very important in later Syrian ascetic theology, and Ps-Macarius is extensively quoted by Isaac. With regards to the *Homilies* of Ps-Macarius, its Syrian worldview and cultural framework is more important than the language of his text. Theodoret's History is also important because it is a different genre but still emphasises the *agōna.*

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[1] S. P. Brock, "Spirituality," http://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/resources/syriac/brock/spirituality, accessed October 10, 2018.

Struggle Metaphors in the *Book of Steps*

The *Book of Steps*, often known by its Latin name *Liber Graduum,* is important because it teaches "pre-monastic asceticism in the Syrian Orient."[2] This Syriac work, known to the West since 1926 as the *Ktābā d-massqātā*, is written anonymously and is usually considered to be dated from the mid-fourth to early fifth century.[3] The very individualist non-communal nature of the contents however suggests that it is from the mid-fourth century, and possibly even prior to Aphrahat. There is none of the communal flavour seen in the Egyptian "Pachomian Koinonia" or in Basil's *Ascetikon*.[4] Instead, there is a strong focus on individual struggle and an Old Testament exegetical approach reminiscent of the targum-like style of Aphrahat.[5] According to Kitchen, while Kmosko and Hausherr consider the text "Messalian," Vööbus challenges this idea, and in some ways the text is quite anti-Messalian.[6]

The Christian life is portrayed as a series of steps on the road to perfection in the *Book of Steps*, with a strong emphasis on celibacy.[7] The author indicates that some are further ahead on the path, and these he labels "Perfect" (*gmīrē,* or mature),[8] while others are just beginning—the "Upright" (*kēnē*).[9] Despite the many unique features of this work it has been little studied.[10] Diana Juhl's recent monograph on the *Liber Graduum* discusses the "heavenly-earthly" contrasts and related anthropology, and includes a chapter on the worldview of ascetic practice, but only briefly notes the themes of struggle and warfare.[11] Kitchen has written several articles on the text, but he and others such as Baker, Corbett, and Roux, mainly explore anthropology, economics, and mysticism etc. and no one has analysed

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[2] Robert Kitchen, introduction to *The Syriac Book of Steps,* trans. Robert Kitchen (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009), vii.

[3] Kitchen, "Book of Steps," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, eds. Sebastian Brock et al. (Piscataway N.J: Gorgias Press, 2011), 85.

[4] See Armand Veilleux trans. *Pachomian Koinonia* (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1980). The Koinonia has extensive stories of conflict and reconciliation between the brothers.

[5] For a discussion of the Jewish literary features of the early Syriac authors see Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, rev edn. (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 17-18.

[6] Kitchen, "Book of Steps", in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage,* 85. See also Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 33-35.

[7] Kitchen, introduction, viii.

[8] *The Syriac Book of Steps,* also known as *Liber Graduum* (hereafter *LG*), 2.2 (Kitchen, 42-43), ܓܡܝܪܐ . The Syriac text and facing-page English translation are from *The Syriac Book of Steps,* Facsicle 1, trans. Robert Kitchen (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009) and *Syriac Book of Steps*, Facsicle 2, trans. and introduction, Robert Kitchen and Martien Parmentier (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2011).

[9] *LG*, 2.2 (Kitchen, 42-43), ܟܐܢܐ .

[10] Kitchen, introduction, vii.

[11] Diana Juhl, *Die Askese im Liber graduum und bei Afrahat* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996). Juhl mentions asceticism as the *kampf* or *krieg* briefly on 142 "*asketischen kampf*", 118 "war against Satan's temptation" (*Kampf gegen die Versuchung des Satans*), and some ten other places, but these themes are not analysed in any depth.

its struggle metaphors.[12]

The Syriac *Book of Steps* consists of thirty teaching chapters or *memre* (plural of *memra,* lit. "words"), a common Syriac form of narrative theology.[13] Thematically the *Book of Steps* maintains the Syrian emphasis on asceticism and perfection as an ongoing struggle, an ideal based on the New Testament command to "be perfect."[14] One unique aspect of this work that becomes important in later Syrian ascetic and mystical works is the importance of tears e.g. Memra 18.[15] The author of the *Book of Steps* writes often about spiritual struggle on the path to perfection. He says of the perfect that "Contesting and wrestling like athletes (*d-ba-qrobo qoymīn atlīṭe w-b-agōnō*),"[16] they "strike and receive blows (*w-moḥen beh w-bolʿyn beh*),"[17] and after they have "won (*eṭ-zkūn*),"[18] and "received the wreath (*w-etsbūn klīIlo*),"[19] they are "found in victory (*d-et-stakḥūn*)."[20] This *agōna* of the perfect is against a number of enemies including thoughts, passions, and evil spirits. He writes that Christians are, "conquering their evil thoughts with which they fight continually within and without (*wa-zkā l-maḥššbothūn bīštō d-ma-qrbon ʿmhūn kulyūm men lgaw men lbar*)."[21] The holy one also "fights (*w-net-kataš*) and defeats (*w-ne-zke*) the evil spirits that struggle against him (*d-met-katšon*),"[22] must "do battle (*agōnō*) to the death (*w-qeṭl*),"[23] and also undertakes a "great struggle (*wat-katūšō*) with the very root of sin."[24] The Christian is called to "wrestle (*w-met-kataš*)[25] with Satan and overthrow (*w-soḥep*) him as our Lord has overthrown (*d-saḥpeh*)

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[12] Robert Kitchen, "Conflict on the stairway to heaven: The anonymity of perfection in the Syriac Liber Graduum," in *Symposium Syriacum VII 1996*, ed. R Lavenant (OCA 256, 1998), 211-20; Aelred Baker, "The 'Gospel of Thomas' and the Syriac 'Liber Graduum'," *New Testament Studies* 12 (1965-1966): 49-55; John H. Corbett, "They Do Not Take Wives or Build, or Work the Ground: Ascetic Life in the Early Syriac Christian Tradition," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 3 (2003): 3-20; René Roux, "La sotériologie du Liber Graduum," in *Für uns und für unser Heil: Soteriologie in Ost und West. Forscher aus dem Osten und Westen Europas an den Quellen des gemeinsamen Glaubens Studientagung, Esztergom, 3.–5. Oktober 2012*, eds. Theresia Hainthaler, Franz Mali, Gregor Emmenegger, and Mantė Lenkaitytė Ostermann, Pro Oriente 37, Wiener Patristische Tagungen 6 (Innsbruck Wien: Tyrolia, 2014): 81-90.

[13] S.P. Brock, "Yaʿqub of Serugh," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage,* 433-35.

[14] Gregory Kessel and Karl Pinggéra, introduction to *A Bibliography of Syriac Ascetic and Mystical Literature* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 1-11 (2); Matt. 5:48; ܓܡܝܪܐ cf. 2 Cor. 13:11 where the Peshitta has "Be made perfect" ܐܬܓܡܪܘ.

[15] *LG*, 18 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 124-34).

[16] *LG*, 3.3 (Kitchen, 44-45), ܘܚܕ̇ܟܐ ܡܥܒ ܐܬܟܢܬܝܐ ܘܕܐܝ̈ܝܘܐܠ .

[17] *LG*, 3.3 (Kitchen, 44-45), ܘܡܛܝܣ ܒܗ ܘܕܠܒܝ ܒܗ .

[18] *LG*, 3.3 (Kitchen, 44-45), ܝܪܨܗ̣ .

[19] *LG*, 3.3 (Kitchen, 44-45), ܘܐܝܨܗ̣ ܡܟ̈ܠܐ .

[20] *LG*, 3.3 (Kitchen, 44-45), ܘܐܬܟܨܗ̣ .

[21] *LG*, 3.4 (Kitchen, 46-47), ܘܟܕ ܠܚܣܩܬܟܠܗܝ ܟܣܩܐܠ ܘܕܡܩܪܒ ܟܡܕܗ̣ ܟܠܝܘܡ ܡܢ ܠܓ̈ܝܗ ܡܢ ܠܒܚ .

[22] *LG*, 20.4,5 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 196-97), ܘܢܬܐܟ̈ܐ ܘܪܦܐ ... ܘܟܠܐܟܬܗ̣ .

[23] *LG*, 20.4,5 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 196-97), ܠ ܘܝ̈ܘܢܐ ܘܩܬܠܐ .

[24] *LG*, 20.4,5 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 196-97), ܘܐܬܟܘܬܫܐ .

[25] *LG*, 6.2 (Kitchen, 118-19), ܘܘܟܠܐܟܠܝ .

him."[26] Thus after he has "conquered (*da-zakoyhy*) his enemy,"[27] he can "rest from this enemy's burning arrows (*ge'rawhy yaqqdē*)."[28] So the battle is against both Satan and evil spirits, and against the internal thoughts and sins, just as in the other Syrians. It is also an imitation of Christ, as I discuss further below.

The author uses both military and athletic imagery and terms interchangeably and sometimes intermingled, for example he writes that, "an athlete (*atlīṭō*), who sees [sin] standing menacingly before him … battles (*ma-qreb* from q-r-b) desperately, struggling (*agōnō*) with sin."[29] He continues saying that the reader has "not yet conquered even visible sins" and is engaged in a "battle (*w-agōnō*) by which sin and the powers of Satan engage you."[30] He bases this on Paul who he then quotes concerning, "a battle (*qrobō*) outside and fear within,"[31] clarifying that "externally the powers of Satan do battle (*maqrbīn*) and internally sin attacks (*bāgūnō*)."[32] The author says that the there is a definite outcome when the Christian does "battle (*d-agōnō*) against sin," that is, "either it kills or is killed (*qeṭlat āw etqaṭlat*)."[33] This Memra 20 is a good example of the breadth of terms that the author uses as we see here a wide range of words derived from several roots all related to the theme of struggle, namely q-r-b, k-t-š, q-t-l, s-ḥ-p, z-k-y, as well as *agōna,* and the Syriac cognate of athlete. The struggle is also connected to the author's central theme of becoming "perfect". He writes, quoting Christ, "You must be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect," and follows with a quote from Paul that, "this is my struggle and my toil (*'amly w-agūny*), to make all people perfect (*gmīr*) in Christ by the energy which works in me through the power of our Lord."[34] The author's understanding of the balance between human and divine activity is here evident.

The Christian's struggle is closely related to Jesus' Gethsemane experience in Luke. The anonymous author interprets this event as understood in Hebrews, and writes:

Even an athlete, who sees [sin] standing menacingly before him preventing him from

[26] *LG*, 6.2 (Kitchen, 118-19), ܘܡܫܬ ... ܘܡܣܩܗ .
[27] *LG*, 6.2 (Kitchen, 118-19), ܘܙܟܝܗܝ .
[28] *LG*, 6.2 (Kitchen, 118-19), ܓܐܪܘܗܝ ܝܩܕܐ .
[29] *LG*, 20.4 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 194-95), ܐܬܠܝܛܐ ... ܡܩܪܒ ... ܐܓܘܢܐ .
[30] *LG*, 20.4 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 194-95), ܘܐܓܘܢܐ .
[31] 2 Cor. 7:5; ܩܪܒܐ .
[32] *LG*, 20.4 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 194-95), ܡܩܪܒܝܢ ... ܘܐܓܘܢܐ .
[33] *LG*, 20.4 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 194-95). These verbs are derived from the q-t-l root. ܘܐܓܘܢܐ ... ܩܛܠܬ ܐܘ ܐܬܩܛܠܬ .
[34] *LG*, 3.9 (Kitchen, 54-55), ܚܡܝ ... ܘܐܓܘܢܝ ... ܓܡܝܪ .

crossing over to the place the Lord has promised him, *battles desperately*, *struggling with sin*. Concerning this step Paul said, 'You have not yet encountered murder nor stood up (*qomtuon*) in the *struggle* until blood [is shed] *against sin'*.[35]

There are a number of important points to make about this passage. Firstly, the author reinterprets the Hebrews verse (Heb. 12:3) equating the Biblical "resists" with "standing up," both terms with military meaning related to a soldier in direct contact with the enemy. Secondly, he evokes the image of the soldier trying to cross a stream but meeting resistance, drawing on the Jewish imagery of the battle to enter the "promised land." Thirdly, the quote from Hebrews and the use of the term "struggling" both refer to Christ at Gethsemane as described in Luke, but here is used in the context of going to the place that "the Lord has promised him," so this adds an eschatological and soteriological perspective to the suffering of Jesus. Christ Himself fought sin, not just in a moment at the Cross, but for a long period beforehand, and this is a model for Christians. Hence, according to this author, the final promised heavenly kingdom is only entered through persistently struggling with sin.[36]

The author also includes two other memre specifically and solely on this theme of the sufferings of Christ, memre Eighteen and Nineteen, which teach that struggle is intricately linked to his eschatology and anthropology, and to a discipleship emphasising the imitation of Christ.[37] In one extended discussion of the *agōna* in Memra Eighteen, the author uses a range of terms and metaphors to describe the battle with sin, and also explains his anthropology and imitative Christology clearly. He begins:

> When we *cut off* (*da-pasaqnan* from *pasaq*) all our visible sins we shall *rise up* (*n-qūm* from *qōm*) *in the struggle* (*b-āgūnō*) against the Sin that dwells in us internally, because they are the evil thoughts that Sin devises in the heart. With *power* (*wab-ḥaylo*) may we pursue the *struggle* (*l-agōnō*) that is *set before* (*dsēm*) us and let us do *battle* (*la-gūnō*) with prayer *just as* ('*ykan*) our Lord did before us.[38]

Intermingled with the agonistic terms are two words that come straight from the Peshitta and refer to Christ's death and resurrection—"pasaq" (from Heb. Peshach) and "qōm." The

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[35] *LG*, 20.4 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 194-95) (emphasis mine), ܡܩܕ̈ܡ .

[36] This is a quite different view of salvation to the common Western forensic concept of an instant salvation as developed by Anselm and Luther.

[37] This imitative aspect of the *Liber Graduum* is discussed in depth by Juhl, *Die Askese im Liber graduum und bei Afrahat*, 77-83.

[38] *LG*, 18.3 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 128-29) (emphasis mine), ܘܩܩܡܝ ...ܢܩܘܡ ܟܠܝܗܘܢ ... ܚܣܝܟܐ ... ܠܝܗܘܢܐ ܘܩܡ ... ܐܝܟ ... .

phrase "set before (*dsēm*) us" is also from Hebrews 12:1 where it is used of the *agōna* set before Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and also in relation to the reader. The term "power" is also from the Garden, where Christ Himself is strengthened with power by the angels,[39] and words derived from the same root (ḥ-y-l) are used in several other Peshitta verses about the struggle with sin.[40] As with the other Syrians, this author sees Jesus as the model agonist to be imitated. In this instance the use of the crucifixion, resurrection, and Gethsemane terms highlights the extent of identification required. This whole section is full of Christological terms that would have been familiar to Syriac Christians who used the Peshitta.

The author repeats his main points in the following two paragraphs of Memra 18 again mentioning "struggle" (*l-agōnō*) and Christ's example, and adding Paul's comment that "Epaphras does battle (*l-agōnō*) for you with his prayer."[41] Only through Christ-like shedding of "many tears" (*ašad sageyotō*) in prayer is the Christian "rescued (*metparqīn*) from the sin that dwells in the heart."[42] Of note is the statement that through this struggle Christ Himself was "made perfect" (*wetgmar* from root g-m-r), which is yet another quote from Hebrews and one which emphasises the real humanity of Christ in his dealings with temptation and sin.[43] That the author is not a Pelagian he makes clear in the immediately previous section where he concludes that we must "work diligently to become sinless" (*d-net-ḥapaṭ dnehweʾ dlo ḥḥṭoheʾ*),[44] but also to, "entreat our Lord to *rescue us from sin*" (*d-neprqan men ḥṭytō*) since no one can be delivered from sin except by the "grace of God" (*ṭybūteh da-alohō*), quoting Paul.[45]

Overall however, the author mostly emphasises human agency in the gaining of holiness and in becoming like the angels on Earth even now. He quotes an apocryphal saying of Christ: "Raise yourselves up from the earth and do not be anxious" (*detʿlā lkūn men arʿo w-lo tetspūn*).[46] Of the perfect Christian he writes: "While living in the flesh on earth, his mind daily dwells in Eden in the Spirit, that is, the heavenly Jerusalem (*būwršlem dalʿel*).

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[39] Luke 22:43.

[40] For example Eph. 6:10, Col. 1:11, 2 Tim. 2:1, Heb. 11:34.

[41] Col. 4:12; ܠܐܝܟܘܢ

[42] *LG*, 18.3 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 128-29); ܐܬܦܪܩܝܢ ... ܚܛܝܬܐ this term *metparqīn* is related to redemption and "saviour".

[43] *LG*, 18.3 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 128-29), Heb. 5:9, ܘܐܬܓܡܪ.

[44] *LG*, 18.2 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 128-29), ܕܢܬܚܦܛ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܕܠܐ ܚܛܗܐ.

[45] *LG*, 18.2 (Kitchen and Parmentier, 128-29), Rom. 7:24 (emphasis mine), ܕܢܦܪܩܢ ܡܢ ܚܛܝܬܐ ... ܛܝܒܘܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ.

[46] *LG*, 3.6 (Kitchen, 50-51), ܕܐܬܬܥܠܘ ܠܟܘܢ ܡܢ ܐܪܥܐ ܘܠܐ ܬܨܦܘܢ.

Thus he grows daily … until he arrives at the measure of the spiritual angels (*dʿīrre rūḥonē*)."[47] At the same time he does link human agency with divine grace, received from the Holy Spirit, to become angel-like. The author quotes an apocryphal saying of Christ: "When I send the Paraclete …I will perfect you because you have … pursued the Perfection of the heavenly angels from which Adam your father fell. I will make you and your father Adam ascend to the height from which you have fallen."[48] This theme of the heavenly is often contrasted with the earthly, and parallels Paradise in the Garden versus the "world."[49]

So with the exception of the emphasis on the being perfect, this author writes in a very similar way to Aphrahat about struggle, using a wide range of terms. He also ties this closely to a well-developed anthropology and soteriology that has a strong eschatological dimension, and in this he is an exemplar of the other Syrians.

Struggle Metaphors in the *Fifty Spiritual Homilies* of Ps-Macarius

The second representative Syrian writer to explore is Macarius, author of the *Fifty Spiritual Homilies* sometime in the late fourth century or early fifth century.[50] Not much has been written about these *Homilies* nor Macarius, and what has been written tends to focus on the text and its dating rather than the content.[51] Werner Jaeger wrote a brief introduction to Macarius in his now old work, and George Maloney provides a basic introduction in his modern translation where he notes the importance of spiritual combat and free will in Macarius.[52] Marcus Plested's recent monograph emphasises the source texts of Macarius and notes how much he does not follow Evagrius.[53] This is an excellent work with some general comments on struggle in Macarius's soteriology but no analysis of the metaphors. Alexander Golitzin has a few paragraphs that note Macarius' emphasis on *synergeia*, free will, Jewish

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[47] *LG*, 6.2 (Kitchen, 118-19), ܟܐܢ̈ܘܬܟܡ ܘܚ̈ܠܝ ... ܘܒ̈ܢܐ ܕܡ̈ܝܠ .

[48] *LG*, 9.12 (Kitchen, 186-87).

[49] See also Juhl, *Die Askese im Liber graduum und bei Afrahat,* 99-104.

[50] Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* Vol. 3. (Utrecht, 1966), 162-64. Baker argued that the *Homilies* were written before 534 CE based on manuscript evidence, Aelred Baker, Syriac and Scriptural Quotations of Pseudo-Macarius, *The Journal of Theological Studies* New Series, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Oxford University Press, April 1969): 133-49 (137).

[51] See for example G. Quispel, The Syrian Thomas and the Syrian Macarius, *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 18, No. 4 (Brill, Dec., 1964): 226-235, and Aelred Baker "Pseudo-Macarius and the Gospel of Thomas," *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 18, No. 4 (Dec., 1964): 215-25.

[52] Werner Jaeger, *Two rediscovered works of ancient Christian literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius* (Leiden: Brill, 1954), 208-30; Macarius, *Pseudo-Macarius: The fifty spiritual homilies and the Great Letter,* trans. George Maloney (New York: Paulist, 1992).

[53] Marcus Plested, *The Macarian Legacy: The Place of Macarius-Symeon in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Oxford Theological Monographs 2004). See especially 36-42.

mystical elements, and spiritual combat, and these are indeed quite central to Macarius.[54]

The identity of Macarius is unknown because from early times he was confused with Macarius the Great of Egypt or with Macarius of Alexandria, although his background is clearly quite Syrian, as shown by his use of characteristic Syrian metaphors and terms such as "clothing", and his detailed understanding of Syrian geography and other local elements.[55] Maloney speculates that he may have been one Symeon of Mesopotamia given the very Syrian style of writing, but Symeon was a Messalian, and Macarius is quite anti-Messalian. Golitzin notes the similarity of Macarius with "Syrian Christian currents represented by Aphrahat and Ephrem," which were quite strict but not Messalian.[56] The Messalians were a lay anti-sacramental movement that emphasised individual rather than corporate prayer and were condemned in various Church Councils.[57] Whoever he was, there is no particular reason to say that he was not named Macarius so I use that denotation rather than the clumsy "Pseudo-Macarius."[58] It is unclear also whether these passages were originally spoken homilies recorded by a listener or written texts penned by the ascetic himself. What is known is that the author writes to Christians in general, although he addresses monks in particular at points.[59] He also seems to be answering the words of false teachers when he says, "and not as some say: 'To put off one garment and put on another'."[60] Apparently the Pauline reference to "putting on Christ"[61] was being used by some to teach an instant perfection on Earth, but Macarius speaks extensively and repeatedly in various homilies about the (only) gradual overcoming of sin.[62] He also writes that, "There are those who claim that there is no sin in

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[54] Alexander Golitzin, "The Macarian Homilies and Orthodox Spirituality", in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality,* ed. S. T. Kimbrough (Crestwood NY:2002), 133-41 (133-34, 137-41). See also Ramsey who has a few pages on struggle imagery in Macarius, Susan Ramsey, *Exploring the Harbour of Rest* (Unpublished PhD thesis, 2012), 156-158.

[55] Maloney demonstrates that Macarius has extensive local knowledge of Syria etc. in Maloney, introduction, *Pseudo-Macarius*, 6-8. See also Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* Vol. 3. (Utrecht, 1966), 162-64.

[56] Golitzin, "The Macarian Homilies and Orthodox Spirituality," 131.

[57] Plested, *The Macarian Legacy: The Place of Macarius-Symeon in the Eastern Christian Tradition,* 16-27

[58] If his name was Macarius this may explain why he was confused with the Egyptian Macarius even though his writing style is quite different.

[59] For example "Christians (*Christianoi*), therefore, should strive in all things," George Maloney, *Pseudo-Macarius: The fifty spiritual homilies and the Great Letter* (New York: Paulist, 1992) (hereafter "Macarius, *Homilies*"), 15.8 (PG 34: 580-81; Maloney, 111), yet "But you, O *monk*" (*monázōn*) Macarius, *Homilies,* 48.6 (PG 34: 812; Maloney, 241). The Greek text is from PG 34, *SS. Macarii Ambo, Aegyptius et Alexandrinus,* J.P. Migne, ed. and trans. (Paris: J.P. Migne, 1860). The English translation is from Maloney, *Pseudo-Macarius.*

[60] Macarius, *Homilies,* 15.41 (PG 34: 604; Maloney, 124).

[61] Gal. 3:27; See Kitchen, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 69, 157; and Sebastian Brock, The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual life (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987), xxiv who discusses the significance of this imagery.

[62] Macarius, *Homilies,* 8, 9 (PG 34: 527-39; Maloney, 81-88).

man."[63] This statement about sinless people sounds very Messalian, and Macarius sides with the Orthodox belief in condemning this idea which is contrary to his understanding of daily spiritual struggle.

Macarius teaches extensively about the value of spiritual struggle, often using the word "*agōna*," and uses much the same motifs as Aphrahat and the earlier Greeks. His predominant struggle metaphor is the military one, and he says that the Christian must "do battle against his thoughts (*èn toĩs logismoĩs poieĩn agōna kaì pólemon),"* although a better translation is to "do struggle and war."[64] The Christian faces "daily battles and struggles" (*mésō agōnas kaì athlēseis*)[65] because "in his heart there is interiorly a war, and a struggle … a conflict" (*ésō en tē kardia ho pólemos gínetai, kaì ho agōn, kaì ho státhmion*).[66] Following the Greek notion that courageous fighting is central to masculinity,[67] Macarius says that the disciple must "manfully fight against" (*polemeĩ gennaíos*) the passions.[68] Other terms he uses include *kruptoĩs* (battle),[69] *apomachómenos* (war against/struggle)[70] and verb variations of *agōn* such as *agōnísētai* (struggle)[71] and *agōnísasthai*.[72] Elsewhere Macarius mentions "battle and affliction" (*pólemon kaì pãsan*)[73] and "contend" (*athleĩn*).[74] Macarius writes that "The contest and battle (*Hē ... pálē kaì ho agōn*) is one of equal forces,"[75] and as discussed in the first chapter, *agōn* and *pale* are roughly synonyms. At times the ascetic in this fight will receive "wounds" (*traúmata*).[76]

As with the other Syrians, Macarius extends the war metaphor to include weapons that prevent these wounds or that hurt the enemy. He describes fasting, faith, and struggle as the "heavenly armour (*hópla*) of the Spirit" with which the Christian is "armed

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[63] Macarius, *Homilies,* 16.10 (PG 34: 619; Maloney, 133).

[64] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.3 (PG 34: 469; Maloney, 48), ἐν τοῖς λογισμοῖς ποιεῖν ἀγῶνα καὶ πόλεμον. See also *Homilies* 3.4 (PG 34: 469; Maloney, 49).

[65] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.6 (PG 34: 500; Maloney, 66), μέσῳ ἀγῶνας καὶ ἀθλήσεις.

[66] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.6 (PG 34: 501; Maloney, 67), ἔσο ἐν τῇ καρδιᾳ ὁ πόλεμος γίνεται, καὶ ὁ ἀγῶν, καὶ ὁ στάθμιον.

[67] Jacob Burkhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization,* trans. Sheila Stern (New York: St Martin's Griffin, 1998), 160-85.

[68] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.6 (PG 34: 505; Maloney, 68), πολεμεῖ γενναίως.

[69] Macarius, *Homilies,* 21.1 (PG 34: 655; Maloney, 153), κρυπτοῖς.

[70] Macarius, *Homilies,* 21.1 (PG 34: 655; Maloney, 153), ἀομαχόμενος.

[71] Macarius, *Homilies,* 21.3 (PG 34: 655; Maloney, 154), ἀγωνίσηται.

[72] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.5 (PG 34: 472; Maloney, 49), ἀγωνίσασθαι.

[73] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.6 (PG 34: 505; Maloney, 69), πόλεμον καὶ πᾶσαν.

[74] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.5 (PG 34: 472; Maloney, 49), ἀθλεῖν.

[75] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.6 (PG 34: 472; Maloney, 50), Ἡ ...πάλη καὶ ὁ ἀγὼν.

[76] Macarius, *Homilies,* 21.4 (PG 34: 657; Maloney, 154), τραύματα.

(*hoplisámenos*)."[77] He adds: "(H)aving armed himself by all prayer and perseverance and supplication and fasting and by faith, he will be able to battle the war against the principalities, powers, and world rulers, and be able to have victory over the opposition through the cooperation of the Spirit."[78] Macarius explains the spiritual battle using several examples including the image of the soldier responding to an "invading enemy" (*allophúlōn érchesthai*).[79] He says that the Christian defender thus, "through divine power … *cuts through* (*dia-kóptei*) the world and through the powers of evil which lay snares for the human soul."[80]

In these passages Macarius' dominant metaphor has been military, but he also uses some athletic imagery. In a vivid boxing metaphor Macarius says that:

[S]in pounces (*rhíptei*) on the soul and wages ten or twenty conflicts (*agōnas*). It overcomes (*nikã*) the soul and pins it down (*rhíptei*). But then the soul, after a while of momentous struggle (*mían agōgēn*), overcomes (*nikã*) sin. If the soul perseveres without letting down its guard in any area, it begins to emerge victorious (*pleonázein*) as it sees through the deceits of sin and so it wins the crown of victory (*apoféresthai tà nikētēria*) over sin."[81]

One metaphor that is not strictly military nor athletic but does involve violence, is that of the robber invading one's home. Passions are likened to this robber who must be fought: "you begin to fight back (*anti-túptein*) against him. You exchange blows (*déreis kaì dérē*). So also the soul ought to strike back (*anti-túptein*), to resist (*anti-máchesthai*), to strike blow for blow (*anti-kroúein*)."[82] The central "against another" aspect of the struggle metaphor is clearly seen here in the second sentence in the Greek compound word formation—all words start with "anti".

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[77] Macarius, *Homilies,* 21.5 (PG 34: 657; Maloney, 155), ὅπλα ἐξ οὐρανοῦ τοῦ Πνεύματικος ... ὁπλισάμενος.

[78] Macarius, *Homilies,* 21.5, (PG 34: 657; my translation, cf. Maloney, 156), Ἄπερ ὅπλα διὰ πάσης προσευχῆς, καὶ προσκαρτερήσεως, καὶ ιεήσεως, καὶ νηστείας, τὸ δὲ πᾶν διὰ τῆς πίστεως πορισάμενος, τὸν πρὸς τὰς ἀρχὰς, καὶ ἐξουσίας, καὶ κοσμοκράτορας πόλεμον καταγωνίσασθαι δυνήσεται, καὶ οὕτως νικήσας τὰς ἐναντίας δυνάμεις διὰ τῆς συςεργείας τοῦ Πνεύματος. Maloney's work here is a weak paraphrase that leaves out the important points concerning victory and the synergy of the Spirit. Several of these phrases are Pauline, compare Eph. 6:12.

[79] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.6 (PG 34: 508; Maloney, 69), ἀλλοφύλων ἔρχεσθαι.

[80] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.6 (PG 34: 505; Maloney, 69), διακόπτει.

[81] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.5 (PG 34: 472; Maloney, 49), ῥίπτει ... ἀγῶνας ... νικᾶι ... ῥίπτει ... μίαν ἀγωγὴν ... νικᾶι... πλεονάζειν ... ἀποφέρεσθαι τὰ νικητήρια.

[82] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.4 (PG 34: 469; Maloney, 49), ἀντιτύπτειν ... δέρεις καὶ δέρῃ ... ἀντιτύπτειν … ἀντιμάχεσθαι ... ἀντικρούειν.

For Macarius, this struggle is against several enemies, including one's own will, as "the will fights back (*proaíresis anti-machoménē*)."[83] He explains that the struggle is also against "earthly preoccupations" (*peristasmōn gēĩnōn*), "sinful passions" (*pathōn tēs hamartías*), "evil spirits" (*pneúmata*—the "evil" is clear from his following quote of Eph. 6:12), and the "pleasures of the flesh" (*hegoun tōn sarkikōn hēdonōn*).[84] Macarius quotes Paul as evidence, using the same passage from Ephesians Six that many other Syrian writers quote.[85] Christians must make themselves "an enemy against the adversary" (*tō enantíō mérei tēs kakías*) and "wage battle on a double front" (*pròs dúo agōnas echei tēn pálēn*).[86] The struggle is thus against the internal passions as well as the external Satan and the demons. To win in the struggles and to "avoid the attacks (*ponērōn*) of the evil spirits," Macarius also prescribes "vigilance and attentive faith" (*nēpsei kaì gorgótēti písteōs*).[87] Vigilance is the practice of a soldier on guard-duty, which becomes one of the key monastic virtues, as will be discussed in Isaac. Here Macarius uses the Greek equivalent monastic term *nepsis*.

Macarius at points uses synthetic parallelism to discuss the spiritual war. He writes using some of his most frequently used terms, of the Christian finding "in his heart another struggle (*pálē*), another hidden opposition (*enantíōsis kruptē*), and another war (*pólemos*) of the temptations of evil spirits, and another battle (*agōn*) opens up."[88] This shows how closely linked these words are within the same metaphorical concept. Macarius often uses a number of related or synonymous terms to describe the spiritual struggle, presumably for variety. For example in Homily Twenty-One, which consists of only five paragraphs of approximately 840 words, he uses military struggle terms forty-three times, applying over fifteen different root words. The struggle metaphor is his central theme here and it is dominant in many other Homilies as well.

Sometimes Macarius links struggle with the virtues in the same way as the other Syrians. He says "let all strive and labour with all the virtues" (*ofeílei oũn ékastos*

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[83] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.5 (PG 34: 472; Maloney, 49), ἡ προαίρεσις ἀντιμαχομένη.

[84] Macarius, *Homilies,* 21.1,2 (PG 34: 656; Maloney, 153), περιστασμῶν γηΐνων, παθῶν τῆς ἁμαρτίας, πνεύματα, ἔγουν τῶν σαρκικῶν ἡδονῶν. When he describes the fight as occurring in the thoughts or against the will it is unclear whether these are an aspect of the "passions" or the "preoccupations".

[85] Eph. 6:12.

[86] Macarius, *Homilies,* 21.1 (PG 34: 656; Maloney, 153), τῷ ἐναντίῳ μέρει τῆς κακίας ... πρὸς δύο ἀγῶνας ἔχει τὴν πάλην.

[87] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.6 (PG 34: 512; Maloney, 72), πονηρῶν ... νήψει καὶ γοργότητι πίστεως.

[88] Macarius, *Homilies,* 21.3 (PG 34: 656-57; Maloney, 154), πάλη ... ἐναντίωσις κρυπτὴ ... πόλεμος ... ἀγων.

agōnísasthai, kai stoudásai dià pasōn aretōn).[89] Like Paul, Macarius makes the connection of struggle to labouring in physical work at points, for example he writes of "struggles, labours, and setbacks (*agōnas kaì pónous kaì thlípseis*)."[90] For Macarius, virtue and salvation is difficult and is only found through "temptations and many trials and afflictions and struggles (*peirasmoì, kaì dokimasíai pollaì, kai thlípseis, kaì agōnes*)."[91] This indicates just how central the *agōn* is in Macarian soteriology, and his use of these closely-related ideas is common to Aphrahat and Isaac etc. He says that it is the "just man" (*díkaios*) who "pleased God" (*euēréstēse tō theō*) and "struggled and fought battles" (*pósa ēndragáthēsan kaì ēgōnísanto*), for indeed, no-one can "possess the kingdom" without "labor and struggles" (*pónous kaì agōnas*).[92] That "labors and struggles" is meant to be representative of the whole range of trials is shown a few sentences later when Macarius writes in relation to the godly ones:

> We desire ardently to receive their outstanding gifts, but we fail to notice their labors, struggles, afflictions, and crucifixions (*toùs pónous, kaì agōnas, kaì tàs thlípseis, kaì tà pathēmata*). We eagerly want their honors and dignities … but we are not ready to accept their labors and struggles (*pónous kaì agōnas*).[93]

Other agonistic imagery that Macarius uses include the need to "examine the heart" (*enkúptontes eis tēn kardían*) as part of the "war against sin," (*agōna katà tēs hamartías*)[94] and the need for the ascetic to have "crucified himself" (*eautòn staurōsas*).[95]

The world-view of Macarius is quite similar to the other Syrians, especially regarding free will and an inaugurated eschatology. Macarius writes extensively on the themes of free will and grace, and at times he seems to be answering questions of presumed interlocutors in the way he frames his comments. He seems especially to be answering Messalian rhetoric for example when he writes:

> [S]till, to uproot sin and evil that is so embedded in our sinning can *only* be done *by*

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[89] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.7 (PG 34: 512; Maloney, 72), ὀφείλει οὖν ἕκαστος ἀγωνίσασθαι, καὶ στουδάσαι διὰ πασῶν ἀρετῶν.

[90] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.6 (PG 34: 512; Maloney, 69), ἀγῶνας καὶ πόνους καὶ τηλίψεις. Cf. 2 Tim. 2:4-6.

[91] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.6 (PG 34: 512; Maloney, 71), πειρασμοὶ, καὶ δοκιμασίαι πολλαὶ, καὶ θλίψεις, καὶ ἀγῶνες.

[92] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.6 (PG 34: 509, 512; Maloney, 71), δίκαιος ... εὐηρέστησε τῷ Θεῷ ... πόσα ἠνδραγάθησαν καὶ ἠγωνίσαντο ... πόνους, καὶ ἀγῶνας.

[93] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.6 (PG 34: 512; Maloney, 71), τοὺς πόνους, καὶ ἀγῶνας, καὶ τὰς τηλίψεις, καὶ τὰ παθήματα ... πόνους καὶ ἀγωνας.

[94] Macarius, *Homilies,* 15.48 (PG 34: 608-09; Maloney, 126), ἐγκύπτοντες εις τὴν καρδίαν ... ἀγῶνα κατὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας.

[95] Macarius, *Homilies,* 49.1 (PG 34: 812; Maloney, 241), ἑαυτὸν σταυρώσας.

divine power (*tē theía dunámei mónon*),[96] for it is impossible and outside man's competence to uproot sin. To struggle (*antipalaĩsai*),[97] yes, to continue to fight (*antimachesthēnai*), to inflict blows (*deĩrai*), and to receive setbacks is in your power. To uproot, however, belongs to God alone.[98]

For Macarius, the struggle is the human choice and responsibility, but only God's grace will bring holiness. It is almost possible to see an anti-Augustinian view in Macarius when he asserts: "(I)f you say that the enemy has too great a power and that *evil completely dominates man* (*kaì basileúein tò hólon tēn kakían katà toũ anthrōpou*), you make God unjust."[99] However, Macarius is likely prior to Augustine so this must be understood as a response to (possibly Manichaean) rhetoric. Further, in comparison to the power of Satan, "we again insist that the mind is a *good match* (*antípalon*) and is equipped with *equal powers of combat* (*isórrhopon*)."[100] Further, "(T)he contest and battle is of equal forces (*isodunamía*)."[101] He argues that "man was enchained by two binding forces … the flesh and the passions … from which the Word of God bids him to be freed by his *own free choice* (*idía proairései*)."[102] Thus for Macarius, the daily struggle is possible and efficacious because humans have a real and effective free will. The Christian can fight Satan on equal terms if they so choose.[103] At the same time Macarius recognises that grace is essential, but it is not automatic. Indeed, God works in *synergeia* with human effort, "depending on one's *cooperation* (*sumphéron*) as far as this is given."[104]

Macarius writes from an understanding that the body has a positive value when appropriately integrated with the soul.[105] In this view the body is not unnecessarily an

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[96] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.4 (PG 34: 469; Maloney, 48), (emphasis mine), τῇ θείᾳ δυνάμει μόνον.

[97] ἀντιπαλαῖσαι. This is the same verb "to wrestle against" used earlier in Euripides, *Heracles,* Euripidis Fabulae, vol. 2. ed. Gilbert Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 1206, and in many other Greek classics, See: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/searchresults?all_words=a)nti/palos&la=greek&page=1&all_words_expand=yes, accessed October 15, 2018.

[98] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.4 (PG 34: 469; Maloney, 48), ἀντιμαχεσθῆναι ... δεῖραι.

[99] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.6 (PG 34: 472; Maloney, 49), (emphasis mine), καὶ βασιλεύειν τὸ ὅλον τὴν κακίαν κατὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

[100] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.6 (PG 34: 472; Maloney, 49), ἀντίπαλον ... ἰσόρροπον. "of combat" is implied by the earlier *palon.*

[101] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.6 (PG 34: 472; Maloney, 50), ἰσοδυναμία.

[102] Macarius, *Homilies,* 21.2 (PG 34: 656; Maloney, 153), ἰδίᾳ προαιρέσει.

[103] Macarius does say that Satan holds humanity "captive" (aichmalōtízōn; αἰχμαλωτίζων) and that the human race is infected by "the sin of Adam" (*tò hamartolòn génos toũ Adam*; τὸ ἁμαρτολὸν γένος τοῦ Ἀδὰμ). Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.2 (PG 34: 496; Maloney, 63). But this is not a total control as in Macarius the free will is still able to fight.

[104] Macarius, *Homilies,* 8.2 (PG 34: 529; Maloney, 81), emphasis mine, συμφέρον.

[105] Daniel Payne, "The Revival of Political Hesychasm in Greek Orthodox Thought" (PhD. Thesis, Baylor

antagonist to the soul but is an aspect of the whole united being which is an integrated soul and body, and where right use of the body can even assist in holiness. In contrast to Evagrius who concentrates on the *nous* (mind), Macarius emphasises purification of the heart, which for him is deeply connected to the body, an approach that becomes dominant in Syriac Christianity.[106] An inaugurated eschatology is clear in Macarius just as it was in Aphrahat. For Macarius, a primary reason for belief in the possibility of current victory in the battle against sin, is because Christians already while on Earth participate in the life of the angels and already share in the divine glory. In an extended discussion of sharing in God's glory now on Earth, Macarius elaborates his thesis. He starts by linking struggle with glory when he says:

> How, therefore, ought each of us to believe and strive (*agōnísasthai*) and to be dedicated to a full virtuous life (*pásē enaréto politeía*)? With much hope and endurance we should now desire the privilege of *receiving that heavenly power and the glory of the Holy Spirit interiorly in the soul* (*tēn ex ouranoũ dúnamin labeĩn kaì dóxan toũ agíou Pneúmatos entòs en tē psuchē*)."[107]

He says that the face of Moses shone and that this demonstrates the, "glory which *even now* (*apò toũ nũn*) the souls of the saintly and faithful people are deemed worthy to possess within."[108] Further, "the saints *even now* (*apò toũ nũn*) possess this glory in their souls", and Macarius emphasises his point by using the same phrase "even now" (*apò toũ nũn*) three more times in the next section.[109] This has a very practical application for ascetics, as Macarius teaches that monks can live communally in peace just "as the angels in heaven (*oí en ouranoĩs ángela*)."[110]

In summary, Macarius has a joyful vision of the daily spiritual struggle and teaches an empowered free will that can be victorious in the spiritual battle. Thus the Christian if they choose can experience some partial glory like the angels even now in the present. Macarius' frequent use of what appear to be stock phrases for the *agōn* shows that he is writing within a framework of a well-worn tradition that goes back to Paul and Homer. He uses a wide range

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University, 2006), 140.

[106] Payne, *The Revival of Political Hesychasm,* 141.

[107] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.10 (PG 34: 516; Maloney, 73), (emphasis mine), ἀγωνίσασθαι … πάσῃ ἐναρέτῳ πολιτείᾳ … τὴν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ δύναμιν λαβεῖν καὶ δόξαν τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἐντὸς ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ.

[108] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.10 (PG 34: 516; Maloney, 74), (emphasis mine), ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν.

[109] Macarius, *Homilies,* 5.11 (PG 34: 516; Maloney, 74), (emphasis mine), ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν.

[110] Macarius, *Homilies,* 3.1 (PG 34: 496; Maloney, 47), οἱ ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἄγγελα.

of fighting metaphors and the struggle is central to his teaching.

Struggle Metaphors in the *Discourses* of John "the Solitary"

John "the Solitary", now usually regarded as being John of Apamea (fl. 400s CE), is another important Syriac writer whose main ascetic teaching is on fighting the passions.[111] John's *Discourses* were written in Syriac for an ascetic audience wrestling with questions of practice, his answers becoming definitive—Brock says John's writings, "exerted a profound influence on virtually all later Syriac authors who wrote on the spiritual life."[112] Hansbury's assertion of a date of authorship "probably mid-5th century, and before Chalcedon" does seem a logical conclusion from the evidence of the text.[113] One important aspect of John's work is that it adopts a three-fold scheme of body, soul, and spirit, but is written before the main impact of Evagrius on the Syrian church.[114] Bitton-Ashkelony says that John knew Greek, but he uses almost no Greek terms and no NeoPlatonic ideas, and his worldview follows Aphrahat in many ways.[115]

John's discourses seem to be written for monks, as he addresses their particular concerns. The main theme of John's writing is the issue of how to be holy while having a body full of passions, as can be seen from his closing sentence: "Let us seek the bonds which bind our senses to the love of God so that when we are *released from a body full of passions* (*pagra mla ḥašša nštra*), we may be found in the place of rejoicing in God."[116] This is preceded by over twenty more "Let us" statements which are very reminiscent of Aphrahat's words in Demonstration Six about ascetic struggle.[117] John's general aim is also clear from the first pages of the First Discourse where he discusses the negative impact on the soul of

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[111] His title *iḥidāya* is the same Syriac term seen earlier. Kitchen asserts the now dominant view in "Yoḥannan Iḥidaya," *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage,* 442. See also Mary Hansbury, introduction to *John the Solitary on the Soul*, trans. Mary T. Hansbury (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2013), viii, who provides a brief summary of the arguments over identity; Acosta provides an extensive review, see Dempsey Rosales Acosta, "The Historical John of Apamea: A Framework of the Problem of his Identity", *Journal of Early Christian History* (Vol. 5, No. 1, 2015): 4-25.

[112] Sebastian Brock, introduction to *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part'* (Leuven, Peeters, 1995), xviii.

[113] Hansbury, introduction, ix. Brock agrees, see Brock, introduction, in *Isaac of Nineveh,* xviii.

[114] Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "'More Interior than the Lips and the Tongue': John of Apamea and Silent Prayer in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (Vol. 20, No. 2, Summer 2012): 303-31 (303).

[115] Bitton-Ashkelony, 321.

[116] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 196-97), (emphasis mine), ܐܪܛܣܢ ܐܫܚ ܐܠܡ ܐܪܓܦ . The Syriac text and facing-page English translation are from John, *John the Solitary on the Soul*, trans. Mary T. Hansbury (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2013).

[117] See Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 6.1, (PS 1.1:240-48; Lehto, 169-74).

the body with its passions, the need for struggle (*agōna*) against the passions so as to gain limpidity (*šapyuta*), and the love of God.[118] He says that the passions and thoughts that afflict the body and soul can only be overcome by a "great struggle (*b-agōna sagīla*)."[119] Thus struggle is an intrinsic and important element in his teaching. There is also a strong eschatological approach in John, possibly influenced by Theodore of Mopsuestia.[120] This is reflected in his frequent emphasis on the future world and a life lived now given that hope, and this again is reminiscent of Aphrahat.

John often discusses struggle and uses the same set of terms as the other Syrian authors—*agōna, qraba, tkṭoša, zkota*, and so on, but he also adds a few of his own words. He asserts that the Christian "strives against evil thoughts" (*tkṭoša loqbl byšota d-ḥošbohy*)[121] and that the Christian must "conquer (*tzkʾ*) your thoughts" until with God's help the "evil thought will be *overcome* (*d-mṭrpʾ*)."[122] In an interesting development beyond the previous Syrians, John adds that in relation to the evil thoughts the person must "force himself with violence (*w-ʿṣa npšha b-qṭyra*) so as not to do their will."[123]

The struggle for John is against the evil thoughts and the passions in the soul and body. The Christian must "do battle (*agōna*) against" the passions and "pray for their *destruction* (*boṭlhon*)", although they are "not easily *defeated* (*b-zkoth*)."[124] John's approach to the passions is very practical and he is concerned for how each passion interrupts the godly life now. He says that the "evil passions" (*hašša b-byša*) are an "obstacle" (*sygʾ*) to holiness and thus humans are "enemies of God" (*bʿldbba l-allaha*).[125] For John the fight is also against Satan who does "battle" (*m-qrab*) with "spiritual persons" (*gbrʾ d-wḥnʾ*).[126] A demon-possessed person may even have an "army" (*mašryta*) of evil spirits.[127] He mentions several times the envy of Satan and his "jealousy" (*ḥsm*) of both the fasting Christian and of Christ

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[118] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 14-17), ܐܝ̈ܘܒܐ: ܡܩܘܐ. See also the summary in Hansbury, introduction, xi.

[119] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 32-33), ܚܠܝܘܢܐ ܗܝ̈ܠܐ .

[120] Hansbury, introduction, xviii-xxiv.

[121] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 32-33), ܐܬܩܘܫܐ ܠܩܘܒܠ ܒܝ̈ܫܬܐ ܘܣܘܚܘܒܗܝ .

[122] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 162-63), ܕܡܛܪܦܐ ... ܐܬܐ Compare Peshitta 2Cor. 4:8.

[123] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 32-33), ܘܐܪܐ ܒܩܘܐ ܚܡܗܢܐ .

[124] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 156-57), ܐܝ̈ܘܢܐ : ܚܘܠܘ̈ܗܢ : ܕܪܨܘܐܗ .

[125] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 128-29, cf. 152-53), ܫܥܐ ܚܡܐ : ܗܝ̈ܫܐ : ܬܚܕ̈ܚܕܐ ܠܠܗܐ .

[126] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 28-29), ܡܩܢܒ ... ܓ̈ܚܐ ܘܡܣܐ .

[127] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 158-59), ܡܩܢܐܠ .

Himself.[128]

At several points John uses medical terminology and metaphors to extend his argument about passions and thoughts, so much so that Roger Pearse suggests that he may have had medical training.[129] He writes, for example, about medicinal plants,[130] lists a wide range of diseases,[131] and says that demons are harmful to the body (*pagra*).[132] Similarly to Aphrahat, John describes the passions as like an "ulcerous gangrene (*ḥldyṭa d-šoḥna*)."[133] John writes quite poetically about struggle. In a passage that because of its synthetic parallelism sounds very much like Proverbs, John writes:

> Virtuous strife (*takṭoša*, literally "fighting") is the war (*qraba*) against the passions.
>
> Real valour (*atlyṭota*) is the victory (*zakota*) over bad thoughts.
>
> The victory (*zakota*) of the soul is true majesty.
>
> The garment of wisdom is the mind's armor (*zayna*).[134]

The abiding influence of Hellenist notions of the heroic athlete is evidenced in this section by John's use of the word *atlyota*, and is also referred to when he writes that "Heroism (*ganbrota* lit. Manliness, as per Greek usage)… is that a person conquer (*n-zka*) his evil will."[135] For John, the passions must also be "rebuked (*kayt*)," a concept not that common in the Syrians but seen later in al-Muḥāsibī and other Sufis.[136] In a different non-military metaphor but also one we will see with the Sufis, John urges: "Empty (*d-nstrq*, from s-r-q) oneself of the passion of love of praise."[137] Part of this process involves "constraining (*ʿša*) inner thoughts," an idea with agonistic connotations since constraining is akin to binding of an enemy.[138]

In these discourses, one of the main goals of fighting the passions is to achieve love of God in a state of limpidity, an idea roughly equivalent to the Greek notion of tranquility and

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[128] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 28-31), ܣܡܗ .

[129] Roger Pearse, *John the Solitary*, http://www.roger-pearse.com/wiki/index.php?title=John_the_Solitary, accessed September 29, 2017.

[130] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 114-15).

[131] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 168-71).

[132] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 170-71), ܓܝܐ .

[133] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 152-53), ܣܘܚܢܐ ܚܠܕܝܬܐ .

[134] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 190-91), ܙܝܢܐ ... ܙܟܘܬܐ ... ܐܬܠܝܛܘܬܐ ... ܩܪܒܐ ... ܬܟܬܘܫܐ .

[135] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 190-91), ܢܙܟܐ ... ܓܢܒܪܘܬܐ .

[136] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 156-57), ܟܐܬ .

[137] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 14-15), ܕܢܣܬܪܩ .

[138] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 14-15), ܐܠܨ .

seen extensively in Isaac. John teaches that only when the passions are overcome can one attain "limpidity of soul (*špyota d-npša*)."[139] This limpidity is an aspect of John's inaugurated eschatology—a present experience of future glory. He writes however that the life in heaven is "higher than (*lʿlytohy*) limpidity" thus limiting current attainment to a foretaste of eternity.[140] This limpidity is also only a stage in the battle of the soul on its way to becoming a fully new person. John writes: "When he has done battle (*mqrabn*) and overcome (*agōna*) all evil passions and has stood firm (*qom*) in purity of mind … he begins to advance (*d-nʿōl*) from limpidity of soul to the way of life of the new Person."[141] In this sentence John uses a wide range of military terms, adding to his usual "do battle" the words related to the soldier advancing or standing firm. The word used here for "stood firm" is also the term used for resurrection, and this is probably an allusion to the imitation of Christ, as also seen in the author of the *Book of Steps*.[142] The term used for "advance" is the same used in the Peshitta for the one who "enters" the house of the strong man to bind him, with its clear spiritual warfare implications.[143] In other passages John links "wakeful striving" (*net-qrb*) for good thoughts and purity of soul, with "serenity and … mental awareness (*bʿyrōta d-m-rnyta d-špyrta*)."[144]

John has a quite nuanced perspective on the possibility of perfection, and on free will and grace. In relation to fighting and breaking free from sins, John says: "[I] do not believe that human nature is capable of this without *God's aid* (*ʿodrna d-alaha*)."[145] Even limpidity is ultimately a gift, and John sees it in the same category of divine graces as baptism. He writes: "consider baptism, resurrection and limpidity because their mystery is identical."[146] Limpidity is an "intermediary (*mtsʿyta*) devised for our inner person (*brnša ksya*)," an initial experience of "life after the resurrection."[147] Yet human effort is essential in the spiritual fight and the will is efficacious, since for John, there is nothing more "excellent" than that a person, "understand his evil passions and *subject them to the rule of his will* (*nšʿbd anōn l-mrōta d-ṣbynh*)."[148] The victorious Christian is also one who "drives out (*dṭord*) an evil

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[139] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 16-19, 114-15), ܢܦܫܐ ܫܦܝܘܬܐ .

[140] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 116-17), ܡܢ ܠܥܠ .

[141] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 16-17), ܫܘܠ ... ܘܩܡ ... ܥܡ ... ܒܢܝܐ ... ܡܩܪܒܢ .

[142] *LG*, 18.3, (Kitchen, 128).

[143] Matthew 12:29. Such intertextual referencing is very common in the Syriac writers.

[144] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 14-15), ܫܦܝܪܬܐ ܕܪܥܝܢܐ ܘܡܪܢܝܬܐ ... ܒܥܝܪܬ .

[145] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 128-29), (emphasis mine), cf. 158, ܕܐܠܗܐ ܥܘܕܪܢܐ .

[146] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 124-25).

[147] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 124-25), ܡܨܥܬܐ ܕܢܬ ... ܕܡܝܕܐ .

[148] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 156-57), (emphasis mine), ܘܢܫܥܒܕ ܠܡܪܘܬܐ ܐܢܘܢ ܢܣܬܟܠ .

passion from himself," with the Syriac having a clear military usage.[149] This is possible because of the practical reality of habits, for as John explains, "if one does not do the will of the passions they *completely lose strength* (*mlyayt mtmḥlyn*)."[150]

John's view of the *synergeia* is underpinned by his anthropology. "The nature of the soul is higher than evil deeds and foul thoughts. It is on account of the body it is affected by association with them."[151] Yet the body is intrinsic to being human because it is the container of the soul, and the soul is unique in creation as it is given by God. John argues further that a body without a soul or a soul without a body would not even be a true human.[152] Thus, the body though afflicted by the taint of sin, is still the place of salvation and the locus of spiritual battle and progress.

John also shares the Syrian approach to eschatology whereby the Christian can even now on Earth by God's grace have a present experience of heaven. Hansbury has noted how important eschatology is to John: His vision is of the "new world," but this is tarnished by the reality that the Christian is "not yet really being there."[153] As noted above, for John, limpidity, a foretaste of heaven, is only gained as a result of daily struggle. He says:

> But the one who is diligent … God does begin from this time to give him as much as he is able to receive of the future gifts in this life (*mka m-šra*). Therefore, after the self-emptying of the passion of the love of money … he … is brought to limpidity of soul.[154]

In some senses John's whole work is an extended discussion of the hope of heavenly life which can be partially realised now by continued intense struggle. Spiritual life for him is a series of "transformations" (*šuḥlpē*), for "as there are many transformations in the growth of the body so there are many transformations in the mind's growth."[155] This partly explains John's extensive and comprehensive discussion of all the different passions and how to conquer them. The Christian who fights each passion discovers that, "little by little he is

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[149] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 158-59), ܝܗ݈ܒ, Cf. Deut. 1:44.
[150] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 160-61), (emphasis mine), ܡܬܡܚܠܝܢ ܡܠܝܐܝܬ .
[151] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 14-15).
[152] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 8-9).
[153] Hansbury, introduction, xviii.
[154] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 18-19), ܡܟܐ ܡܫܪܐ .
[155] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 50-51), ܫܘܚܠܦܐ .

raised up (*metʿl*) so that he is *brought to perfection* (*d-netgmr*) in the spiritual order."[156] The future heavenly state is also a motivation to struggle, as it is for Aphrahat and Macarius. John writes "Take care to understand the hope to come and you will be *masters of your passions* (*mrrya d-ḥšykōn*)."[157]

John thus shares with the other Syrians an integrated worldview where spiritual battle forms a key part of his vision for the successful Christian. His emphasis on the passions, stillness, and tranquility is a development from Aphrahat, and makes him a stepping stone to Isaac, whose work will greatly evidence these themes. Two other authors whose work is not particularly ascetic in general, but who both pen specific texts which emphasise struggle language are Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Jacob of Serugh, and their ascetic works require further research as the *agōn* theme in these has been barely touched. Whereas the three previous authors, as well as Aphrahat and Isaac, all write in prose, these two authors pen a *historia* and poetry respectively. I therefore briefly mention some examples of their use of struggle metaphors, but there is not space to discuss their language and worldview in as much detail as the earlier writers.

Theodoret's *A History of the Monks of Syria*

Theodoret (c. 393 – c. 466 CE) was a Christian bishop (423-457 CE), of Cyrrhus (sometimes Cyrus) in Syria, known for his extensive exegetical and theological writings and major theological influence on the "Nestorian" church, today known as the Assyrian Church of the East. Despite his controversial role in relation to the Chalcedonian controversy, he continued to be a reference point for both sides, his thinking being reflected in many later writers.[158] Theodoret wrote an important biographical document on the Syrian ascetics, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, known in its original Greek literally as "History of the Ascetic People."[159] Although he was a native Syriac speaker, because Theodoret lived in a mixed Greek-Syriac environment within the Greek-speaking empire he wrote this history in Greek.[160] Urbainczyk discusses the context of Theodore's work and possible reasons for his choice of a classical

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[156] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 18-19), (emphasis mine), ܡܬ݁ܬ݁ܥܠ : ܢܬܓܡܪ .

[157] John, *Discourses* (Hansbury, 152-53), (emphasis mine), ܡܪܝܐ ܕܚܫܝܟܘܢ .

[158] For a good introduction to Theodoret see R.A. Kitchen, "Theodoret of Cyrrhus," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, eds. Sebastian Brock et al (Piscataway N.J: Gorgias Press, 2011), 402-03; also István Pásztori-Kupán, Theodoret of Cyrus (London: Routledge, 2006).

[159] ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ Η ΑΣΚΗΤΙΚΗ ΠΟΛΕΙΑ. Also available in Latin as "*Historia Religiosa*."

[160] R .M. Price, introduction to R. M. Price, trans. *A History of the Monks of Syria* (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1985), xii; István Pásztori-Kupán, *Theodoret of Cyrus* (London: Routledge, 2006), 4.

Greek style and language.[161] His writings received wide attention in the Syrian area especially since his mindset was more aligned to the later Oriental church than to the Greek speculative tradition. He was recognized as one of the main theologians of the non-Chalcedonian Syrian church and his theological writings were widely used. Thus his description of Syrian monks is representative of the Syrian ascetic worldview and approach to spiritual struggle.

Theodoret's *A History of the Monks of Syria* is a collection of the histories of 33 monks living in the Syrian region from the late third century CE till his own time. Roughly a third were still alive at the time of Theodoret's writing in 440 or 444 CE, and Theodoret had personally conversed with several of the monks. He appears to know and consciously follow the style of the earlier *History of the Martyrs in Palestine* of Eusebius. The key to understanding Theodoret's book on monastic struggle is found in his six page prologue to the roughly 200 page work. Theodoret here engages in quite explicit rhetoric to inspire his readers to keep alive "the memory of these contests (*agōnōn*) worthy of admiration."[162] In his opening sentence he introduces the conceptual metaphor of athletic struggle (*agōnas*) which is performed by the monks, the "athletes of virtue" (*aretēs athlētōn kalon*).[163] This athletic image becomes the main recurring motif throughout his individual histories, and he several times even uses the exact same phraseology. Theodoret also writes that his aim is to "impel the beholder to attain" the same virtues which have resulted from the "memory of these contests (*agōnōn*) worthy of admiration."[164] He notes that if it is proper to honour the Olympic "athletes and pancratiasts" (*agōnizoménōn athlētōn te kaì pankratiastōn*, lit. agonizing athletes and wrestlers) with images, then surely these monks should be praised, remembered, and emulated.[165]

Significantly, Theodoret like the other Syrians discusses Paul's Eph. 6:12-17 metaphor of armour and warfare, applying it to the monks. He highlights the element of wrestling with the demons and says that monks are surrounded by spiritual "adversaries"

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[161] Theresa Urbainczyk, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: The Bishop and the Holy Man* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 40-51. This book is also a good introduction to Theodoret.

[162] Theodoret, *History,* Prologue.2 (PG 82:1285; Price, 4), ἀγώνων. The Greek text is in PG 82, J.P. Migne, ed. and trans. (Paris: J.P. Migne, 1864), and the English translation is in Price, *A History of the Monks of Syria.* See also Urbainczyk, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus,* 52-65.

[163] Theodoret, *History,* Prologue.1 (PG 82:1284; Price, 3), ἀγῶνας ... ἀρετῆς ἀθλητῶν καλὸν, compare Price, *A History of the Monks of Syria,* 67, 133, 190.

[164] Theodoret, *History,* Prologue.2 (PG 82:1284-85; Price, 3,4), ἀγώνων.

[165] Theodoret, *History,* Prologue.3 (PG 82:1285; Price, 4), ἀγωνιζομένων ἀθλητῶν τε καὶ πανκρατιαστῶν.

(*anti-pálous*) and "enemies" (*polemíōn*), yet they have "won so radiant a *crown of victory* (*níkēn*)" because they have been able to "rout their adversaries" (*anti-pálous drapeteũsai*).[166] Building on Paul's Ephesians Six metaphor he says the monks were "steadfast in shaking off the showers of the devil's darts" (*apekroúsanto dè karterōs tōn toũ diabólou belōn tàs niphádas*) and resisted the "demons making war from the outside" (*exōthen polemoũsi daímosi*).[167] Further they even "laughed at the antagonists assailing from without" (*toùs exōthen epióntas antipálous egélōn*).[168] Theodoret is consciously applying Pauline imagery to the monks and describing their way of life primarily in terms of spiritual warfare. Elsewhere he does use other metaphors for monks, but in his prologue the persistent and overwhelmingly dominant motif is of the *agōn*. Theodoret's few other images of the charioteer or helmsman etc. are only briefly used, and it is to struggle metaphors that he consistently returns both here and in his later descriptions.

Theodoret describes Syrian monks throughout his work using a consistent cluster of terms related to athletes, warfare, victory, adversaries, combat, and struggling. He also uses other metaphors to affirm the great spiritual achievements of the monks, but his favourites seem to be these martial and athletic terms. Theodoret calls the battle with demons a "war" and quotes monk Eusebius of Teleda as saying, "To prevent him (the demon) from making war (*pólemē*) on me in things of importance… I try to transfer the war (*pólemon*) to these unimportant things."[169] In his praise of James of Cyrrestica, Theodoret links athletes and war in an extended metaphor:

> Now that we have proceeded through the *contests* (*agōnas*) of the *athletes of virtue* (*aretēs athlētōn*) described above, narrating in summary their laborious exercises (*melétē pónous*), their exertions in the *contests* (*agōsin*) and their most glorious and splendid *victories* (*níkas*), let us now record … the way of life of those … who contend magnificently (*agōnizoménōn*) and strive to surpass their predecessors in exertion … [James] unceasingly under the eyes of spectators … *strives in combat and repels* (*agōnízesthai kaì tàs anánkas*) the necessities of nature.[170]

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[166] Theodoret, *History,* Prologue.4 (PG 82:1285; Price, 5), (emphasis mine), ἀντιπάλους, πολεμίων, νίκην, ἀντιπάλους δραπετεῦσαι.

[167] Theodoret, *History,* Prologue.5,6 (PG 82:1285-88; Price, 5,6), ἀπεκρούσαντο δὲ καρτερῶς τῶν τοῦ διαβόλου βελῶν τὰς νιφάδας … τοὺς ἔξωθεν πολεμοῦσι δαίμοσι.

[168] Theodoret, *History,* Prologue.6 (PG 82:1288; Price, 6), ἔξωθεν ἐπιόντας ἀντιπάλους ἐγέλων.

[169] Theodoret, *History,* 4.7 (PG 82:1345; Price, 52), πόλεμῇ … πόλεμον.

[170] Theodoret, *History,* 21.1,5 (PG 82:1432-33; Price, 133, 135), (emphasis mine), ἀγῶνας ... ἀρετῆς ἀθλητῶν ...

Despite the monk's life not being public, Theodoret includes the imagery of the spectators watching the athletic feats. He adds the military term of "repel," used here for the internal battle, and Theodoret metaphorically applies this idea of physically pushing back an enemy to the notion of spiritually resisting the demonic attacks. Part of this resistance is due to the fact that Theodoret, in common with the other Syrians, understands monks to be living an angel-like life. He says of James that he was "practising in a body the life without the body" (*tēn asōmaton zōēn en sōmati meletōn*).[171] In praise of Symeon the Elder, Theodoret says,

> He built two philosophic retreats … He assembled athletes of virtue (*athlētàs aretēs*) in each, and was the gymnastic trainer (*gumnastēs*) of both groups—teaching the assaults of the adversary (*antipálou*) and enemy (*polemíou*), promising the favour of the Umpire (*agōnothéou*).[172]

This is a passage rich in imagery and allusion, invoking a clear sense of heroic struggle. Picturing God as an Umpire is unusual but appropriate to this metaphor. Theodoret even concludes one biography with the prayer:

> May the Umpire (*agōnothétēs*) of the *athletes of piety* (*eusebeías athlētōn*) grant this man an end worthy of his labors (*agōnōn*), and make the rest of his course (*drómou*) consonant with the earlier part, so that he may reach the finishing-post as victor (*nikēphóros*); and may He through the prayers of this man support our weakness, so that strengthened we may retrieve our many defeats (*anapalaísōmen*) and depart from this life with victory (*níkēs*).[173]

These examples indicate the close connection between the images of athletic contest and warfare in Theodoret's mind. Theodoret's quoting of Paul shows his explicit awareness of the Biblical basis for this theology of spiritual battle.[174] There may even be a foreshadowing of the Islamic idea of greater and lesser *jihād* in Theodoret's reference to the "greater contests" and "lesser labours."[175]

μελέτη πόνους ...ἀγῶσιν ... νίκας ... ἀγωνιζομένων ... ἀγωνίζεσθαι καὶ τὰς ἀνάγκας.

[171] Theodoret, *History,* 21.3 (PG 82:1432; Price, 134), (emphasis mine), τὴν ἀσώματον ζωὴν ἐν σώματι μελετῶν.

[172] Theodoret, *History,* 6.13 (PG 82:1364; Price, 67), ἀθλητὰς ἀρετῆς ... γυμναστὴς ... ἀντιπάλου ... πολεμίου ... ἀγωνοθέου.

[173] Theodoret, *History,* 21.35 (PG 82:1452; Price, 147), (emphasis mine), ἀγωνοθέτης … εὐσεβείας ἀθλητῶν … ἀγώνων … δρόμου … νικηφόρος … ἀναπαλαίσωμεν … νίκης.

[174] Theodoret, *History,* 21.3 (PG 82:1432; Price, 134).

[175] Theodoret, *History,* 21.4 (PG 82:1432-33; Price, 134), μειζόνων ἄθλων … μείοσιν πόνοις.

In his epilogue Theodoret ties the struggle metaphor to what is almost a new topic for him, but is clearly important given that his epilogue is devoted to it—love. He writes again about "athletes of virtue" (*aretēs athlētaì*) and their "struggle (*pálēn*) against sleep", and how this leads to an "intoxication he had received from divine love" (*toiaúton apò tēs Theías agápēs edéxato mèthēn*).[176] He uses a metaphor in relation to this deep desire for God of being "kindled by the firebrand on high" (*tō hánōthen tursō turpoloúmenoi*).[177] We will see this same language of intoxicating and burning love again in Isaac, who also connects it to struggle. Theodoret concludes the epilogue with the Biblical basis for such conection of these two themes when he says of the monks he has described that "they have been wounded by the sweet darts of love" (*toĩs glukési tēs agápēs etrōthēsan bélesi*) and quotes the Old Testament, "We are wounded with love (*tetrōménoi agápēs emeĩs*)."[178]

Theodoret writes with less Old Testament exegesis and more Greek philosophical rhetoric than his earlier Syrian forefathers, yet his use of the *agōn* metaphor is very similar in relation to ascetic victories. He uses a wide range of terms and many variations of metaphor to discuss the central topic of struggle, and makes a connection to divine love that goes beyond the earliest Syrians.

Jacob of Serugh

The final Syrian writer I analyse in this chapter is Jacob of Serugh (sometimes Sarug), a bishop not known specifically for ascetic writing, but whose theological poetry exhibits the same struggle worldview and metaphors as the other Syrians. Jacob (*c*. 451–521 CE) wrote over 700 theological poems or *memrē*, a form of narrative theology.[179] He was known as the "Flute of the Spirit" because of the beauty and depth of his poetry, thus associating him with Ephrem who was called the "Harp of the Spirit."[180] Jacob is important in this thesis because he is a significant Syrian theological author and because like John of Apamea and Macarius, he is one of the main sources of influence on Isaac, and thus his framework becomes deeply embedded in Syrian ascetic tradition.

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[176] Theodoret, *History*, Epilogue.1,3,5 (PG 82:1497-1501 ; Price, 190, 192, 193), ἀρητῆς ἀθληταὶ ... πάλην ... τοιαύτην ἀπὸ τῆς θείας ἀγάπης ἐδέξατο μèθην.

[177] Theodoret, *History*, Epilogue.4 (PG 82:1501; Price, 192), τῷ ἄνωθεν τυρσῷ τυρπολούμενοι.

[178] Theodoret, *History*, Epilogue.20 (Price, 204), τοῖς γλυκέσι τῆς ἀγάπης ἐτρώθησαν βέλεσι ... Τετρωμένοι ἀγάπης ἡμεῖς. He is quoting Song of Songs 5:8.

[179] S.P. Brock, "Yaʿqub of Serugh," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage,* 433-35.

[180] For a thorough introduction to Jacob see George Kiraz, ed., *Jacob of Serugh and His Times: Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity* (Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies) (Piscataway N.J: Gorgias Press, 2010).

Among Jacob's works are two "Homilies on our Lord's combats (*dareh*) with Satan," Homily 82 and Homily 126. In his recent translation of these homilies, Adam McCollum extensively lists the wide range of war-like terms that Jacob uses, providing lists of line numbers for each occurrence. These words include athlete, fighter, victorious, contest, battle, army, arrow, weapon, win, lose, fight, conquer etc.[181] McCollum notes the similarity of this aggressive language with that of Ephrem but he does not discuss the struggle metaphor in any depth. Because McCollum's listing is extensive I add just four quotes which suffice to show the breadth of Jacob's metaphorical fight language and how these terms are intertwined with, and reflect, his soteriology and anthropology.

In Homily 82 he writes:

> Because Adam fell in the contest (*b-darō*) when he was tempted,
>
> The contest (*darō*) was renewed that the slanderer might be defeated (*d-n-ḥūb*).
>
> Because Adam was defeated (*d-ḥōb*) and taught defeat (*ḥayobūtō*) to his descendants,
>
> The Son of God has taught them how to be victorious (*nezkūn*)…
>
> And for this reason, he did combat (*agōnō*) in a human body (*b-pagrō*).
>
> For he was embodied out of the human race:
>
> He became a human and as a human Son he did battle (*qrobō*).
>
> His contest (*dareh*) with Satan was a human one (*anošoyō*):
>
> Let no one say that he was *fighting divinely* (*da-alohoīt etkataš*).[182]

In this passage we see struggle terms derived from five different roots all clustered together as virtually synonyms. Jacob also makes clear one of the main themes of his homily—that Jesus' struggle was in a human body and not due to any divine power. He teaches that any human can also thus in imitation of Christ win in the battle with Satan, a similar view to John of Apamea. Jacob also sees Adam's sin as a battle defeat and somehow transmitted to all his descendants, thus emphasising the significance of struggle in Jacob's whole understanding of salvation history.

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[181] Adam McCollum, introduction, in Jacob of Serugh, *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on Jesus' Temptation,* ed. and trans. Adam McCollum (Piscataway N.J: Gorgias Press, 2014), 15-20.

[182] Jacob, *Homily* 82:53-56, 60-64 (McCollum, 34-35), (emphasis mine), ... ܬܘܩܦ ... ܐܬܟܬܫ ... ܚܒ ... ܬܣܬܚܪ ... ܐܘܢ ... ܕܪܐ ... ܐܓܘܢܐ ... ܘܒܝܚܐ ... ܟܬܐ ... ܙܟܘ ... ܐܢܫܐ ... ܘܟܬܘܫܝܐ ܐܢܫܝܐ . The Syriac text and facing-page English translation are from Jacob of Serugh, *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on Jesus' Temptation,* ed. and trans. Adam McCollum (Piscataway N.J: Gorgias Press, 2014).

When Jacob emphasises that Jesus was not fighting divinely, but that his fight was a "human one," this is in the context of ongoing debate over the Council of Chalcedon. He teaches that the human nature of Jesus was fighting, using no divine power, with the implication that therefore any human who so desires can likewise fight. For both sides of the Chalcedonian debate the issue of soteriology was central—the way the natures of Christ interacted had direct consequences for the possibility and value of human spiritual struggle. Such emphasis on the importance of *synergeia* and the *agōn* for salvation is why sometimes the West has labelled both Greek Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox as "Semi-Pelagian."[183] Jacob continues a little later:

> The race that had been conquered (*d-ḥōb*), the Son of God wished to make a victor (*dan-zakē*),
>
> And for this reason he *fought bodily* (*pagronoīt metkatoš*).
>
> He undertook a fast at the beginning of the struggle (*dareh*) of that contest (*agōnō*).
>
> Since he had seen that Adam was conquered (*d-ḥōb*) with food…
>
> He began with a fast (*b-ṣōmō*), in order to rebuke gluttony, intemperance,
>
> And the desire of people's bellies with his fast,
>
> And to show us with which weapon (*zaynō*) people may conquer (*zokē*).[184]

In this section Jacob teaches on the imitation of Christ, again like the earlier Syrians, and on the distinct possibility of victory now on Earth. Fasting is a key element in the struggle, and again occurs within a long view of salvation reaching back to Adam. Jacob emphasises that Christ fought "bodily," a strongly anti-gnostic position and in keeping with the Syrian approach of seeing body and soul as closely joined.[185] Jacob follows the other Syrians also in describing the fight as specifically against Satan, who Jacob pictures as audaciously waging war against Jesus:

> The opponent (*bʿl-darō*) saw the Athlete (*l-atlīṭ*) of Truth *standing in the struggle* (*d-qom ba-agōnō*),
>
> And he readied himself to *fight strongly* (*lmet-katošū ḥasīnoīt*)…

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[183] Michael *Horton, "Are Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism compatible? No.,"* in ed. James Stamoolis, *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 139–40.

[184] Jacob, *Homily* 82: 78-82, 89-91 (McCollum, 36-37), ܘܫܚ ... ܘܡܛܐ ... ܦܝܢܬܐܠܗ ܡܕܘܟܟܗ ... ܘܦܘܗ ... ܐܠܝܗܢܐ ... ܘܫܚ ... ܕܘܗܘܐ ... ܐܡܢܐ ... ܐܬܐ .

[185] Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 69-77.

He drew near to fight (*net-kataš*), held back the dread of divinity.

Arrows (*gērrē*) wounded (*b-līʿīn*) the evil one before the fight (*taktūšō*),

But he audaciously dared to wage a contest (*darō*)…

He was strengthened to have a contest (*darō*) in confidence.

Perhaps, my brothers, he had ceased from all [other] contests (*darīn*),

That he might fight (*net-kataš*) in that contest (*darō*) for victory (*zokūtō*).[186]

Jacob names Satan (*bʿl-darō*) using a word that is derived from that for contest or struggle (*darō*), emphasising that Jacob sees Satan's primary relationship with humans as characterised by antagonistic struggle. In contrast, Christ is the "Athlete of Truth", combining the struggler term with the primary Greek virtue Truth. The term used for "standing" in the fight is doubly appropriate because it is the stance of the resisting soldier and also the word used for the resurrection. Again there is mention of the weapon which wounds Satan even before the fight, which we know from the text is fasting, accessible to all Christians. Jacob continues concerning Satan:

He gathered his tribes at his bivouac and set up his camp (*paseh*);

He summoned his legions (*legyūnawhy*), appointed his battle lines (*sedrawhy*), and arranged his troops (*gūdawhy*) all around.

He readied his armies (*gaysawhy*), convoking his ranks (*tegmawhy*), prepared his companies (*kenšawhy*);

He assembled his troop (*sīʿoteh*), and his throng (*šḥrawhy*) arrived from every side.[187]

This passage shows a great variety of words to describe Satan's attacking demons, terms that are later used by Isaac and other Syrian writers. Jacob shows a deep appreciation for the nuances of military structure terminology, and two words of his words are even derived from the Greek terms *legion* and *tagma*. This indicates that he has thought about the struggle metaphor at length as he uses a large number of appropriate combinations of nouns and verbs to picture the attacking forces.[188] Jacob of Serugh's homilies have been little studied and may well reveal even more insights into his agonist worldview. His struggle metaphor in these two homilies is central and defining of salvation, and many of his ideas appear later in Isaac.

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[186] Jacob, *Homily* 126:65, 66, 70-72, 78-80 (McCollum, 92-95), ܚܕܪܢܐ ... ܠܠܐܟܣܝ ... ܘܟܡ ܟܠܝܘܢܐ ... ܚܩܕܟܐܟܘܗ ܥܨܢܐܠܟ. ܘܐܢ ܠܐܟܘܟܗ ... ܟܐܘܐ ... ܚܟܢܝ ... ܐܘܗܘܐܗܐ ... ܘܘܐ. ܘܘܐ ... ܘܘܢܝ. ܘܘܐ ... ܠܘܐܟܗ ... ܘܘܐ ... ܐܘܘܐ ... ܐܘܘܐ.

[187] Jacob, *Homily* 126:81-84 (McCollum, 94-95), ܩܘܗ ... ܠܝܝܟܬܘܘܗ ... ܫܒܘܘܗ ... ܟܘܘܘܗ ... ܟܘܘܗ ... ܐܠܝܟܘܗ ... ܟܢܘܗ ... ܗܬܢܟܗ ... ܗܘܬܘܘܗ.

[188] I have here focussed mostly on the nouns, but an analysis of more of the verbs would also be useful research.

Conclusion

The struggle motif presented by Aphrahat is consistently developed by these five other major Syrian Christian authors. These writers share a persistent worldview and language which they express in a variety of metaphorical and linguistic forms. The seven Syrian Christian authors I explore across this whole thesis are adequate exemplars of a tradition which has barely begun to be analysed. In this chapter I have shown that struggle is a defining element for all these authors and is closely tied to their persistent worldview of a present lived experience of partial-angelic likeness and partial perfection. The *agōn* is central to their anthropology and soteriology, and they communicate an enduring set of metaphors around combat, contesting, and racing. They write often of fighting, passions, stillness, wounds, and guarding, and we see these themes developed even further in Isaac.

4. The Struggle Metaphor in the *Ascetic Homilies* of Isaac

Isaac of Nineveh (c. 613 -c. 700 CE), is a key witness to Syrian Christian ascetic belief and practice because he draws upon a long line of Syriac ascetic writers and is considered to be the summit of Syrian monasticism.[1] Other Syrian Christian writers do not become as popular as Isaac, nor as defining of Orthodox spirituality, and it is Isaac's work more than any other Syriac text that is carried to the West from the thirteenth century onwards via Latin translations.[2] Known in the West more commonly as "Isaac the Syrian," his writings were early translated into several other languages and form a significant part of the *Philokalia*, the standard Orthodox monastic and ascetic manual. Isaac is important because he writes within a century of the formation of the Muslim community and is a near contemporary with the very earliest known Sufis such as Rabiʿa and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. His writing on struggle (in Syriac *agōna*), given that the Syriac word *agōna* and the Arabic *jihād* were commonly seen as equivalent, is thus highly significant.[3] Isaac was born early in the seventh century in Beth Qatraye on the South coast of the Persian Gulf (near Bahrain). He lived as a monk for many years and wrote numerous homilies on the ascetic life. Although in 676 CE he was briefly made a bishop of the Church of the East (often incorrectly called the Nestorian Church), he is also greatly revered as a saint in the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches because of his holiness and writings. Isaac is recognised by both the Syrian and the Greek Orthodox churches as a primary source for ascetic thought and practice, and he is known variously as Isaac the Syrian or Isaac of Nineveh depending on the church. Very little else is known about Isaac's life, but his ascetic works are some of

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[1] Becker describes Isaac as "The culmination of monastic ideology," Adam Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: the School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 184. Brock calls him the "outstanding representative," Sebastian Brock, "St Isaac of Nineveh and Syriac Spirituality," *Sobornost* 7.2 (Winter 1975): 79-89 (80). Later Syrian authors appear to have contributed little new to the ascetic corpus with the possible exception of the anonymous author of the Book of the Dove.

[2] Dana Miller, introduction to *The Ascetical Homilies, of Saint Isaac the Syrian,* trans. Dana Miller (Boston: The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2011), 64-73. Miller notes Isaac's use by John Peckham in his *Tractatis Pauperis* in 1270 CE, and probable influence on Ignatius Loyola via the Latin translation of Isaac by Abbot Cisneros of Montserrat.

[3] Hassan Bar Bahlul, *Syriac Lexicon, Vol.1*, ed. Rubens Duval (Paris, 1901), Col. 24-25.

the most read in Orthodoxy and are definitive of ascetic practice.[4] The similarities between the metaphors and phrases used by Isaac and early Sufis such as al-Muḥāsibī informs debates over the nature of early Islam and the concept of inner spiritual *jihād*, raising questions about the extent of possible mutual interaction.

In this chapter I explain Isaac's context, and review the current research on Isaac which has barely touched on his ideas of ascetic struggle. I evaluate the role of struggle within the purpose and structure of Isaac's *Ascetic Homilies,* and discuss his use of various sources. Isaac writes about the macrotrope of spiritual life as a struggle using a cluster of related metaphors, and these are examined by a close reading of his work. The connected imagery of the arena, wrestling, contest, watchful soldier, and others are explored and evaluated from a critical metaphor analysis perspective. I analyse some important aspects of Isaac's vision of struggle, including the Stoic notion of stillness, the assumption of free will for effective struggle. Also summarised is Isaac's understanding of inaugurated eschatology and struggle, and how this impacts his anthropology and the body-soul connection. This chapter uses a close reading approach to discern Isaac's conception of the heroic spiritual warrior as a development of the Greek tradition, especially in relation to the concepts of passionlessness (*apatheia*) and stillness (*ataraxia*).

When Isaac writes in the late seventh century of "holy athletes and strugglers who splendidly ran the course of their life," he is using imagery that already had over a thousand years of history in the Greek games, but such games had not been held in Syria for several centuries.[5] The *agōn* of Greek popular life features prominently in Isaac's homilies, with several homilies even using this image as the defining metaphorical framework for the whole passage. Isaac also very frequently uses a cluster of related terms such as gymnasium, wrestler, and contestant, and this athletic trope is one of his two favourites,

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[4] Mary Hansbury, introduction to *St. Isaac of Nineveh: On Ascetical Life,* trans. Mary Hansbury (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 7-12. Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syria* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000) has an excellent introduction to the life and teaching of Isaac.

[5] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.21 (Bedjan, 151-52; Miller, 233). In this thesis I use three sources for Isaac's translated homilies, namely Isaac, *St. Isaac of Nineveh: On Ascetical Life*, trans. Mary Hansbury (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), hereafter (Hansbury); Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian,* trans. Dana Miller (Boston: The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2011), hereafter (Miller); and Isaac, *Isaac of Nineveh: 'The Second Part,'* CSCO 555, trans. Sebastian Brock (Louvain: Peeters, 1995), hereafter (Brock). The Syriac sources for the two "Parts" are Isaac, *Mar Isaacus Ninivita: De Perfectione Religiosa*, ed. Paulus Bedjan (Paris: Otto Harrowitz, 1909), and Isaac, *Isaac of Nineveh: 'The Second Part'* (CSCO 554, ed. Sebastian Brock (Louvain: Peeters, 1995).

along with the metaphor related to soldiers and warfare. This demonstrates the persistence over time of a worldview of spiritual attainment as a heroic athletic struggle or a spiritual battle, a conception rooted in Paul's letters and seen throughout early church ascetic discourse.[6] Isaac is quite aware of this heritage and quotes both the New Testament and other Syrian authors on the struggle, and even explicitly links this back to Jesus and his Gethsemane struggle in prayer.[7]

Isaac has often been compared to Evagrius who he quotes extensively, but while Evagrius was later condemned, Isaac was lauded. One key difference is that Isaac is far more Stoic than Evagrius, and his asceticism is less speculative and abstract. Isaac's ascetic homilies were originally written for an audience of monks in the 690s CE.[8] He wrote in Syriac, but his work was early translated into Greek and Arabic, thus becoming a central text for monks across the churches of the Orthodox, Oriental, and Assyrian Church of the East communions, making his works uniquely ecumenical in the region. His writing evidences many Syriac thought-forms intermingled with Greek philosophy, especially Stoicism. Other authors have focussed on his Neoplatonic thought, but as Marcia Colish has noted, the Western academic bias against Stoicism has meant that almost nothing has been written about Isaac's Stoicism.[9] Alfeyev's much-cited work for example only treats Isaac's Neoplatonism and does not even mention any Stoic mindset.

Isaac's *Ascetic Homilies* consists of three parts: the first being the longest and best known, the second apparently a continuation of the first, with the third part only recently re-discovered and still debated with regards its attribution. Only the First Part was translated from the original Syriac into other languages—first into Greek within a hundred years, then into Arabic by 1000 CE, and then into Latin by the 13th century.[10] The Homilies contains many images and teachings on ascetic struggle that have hardly been researched. Hagman is correct in asserting that "Isaac's writings have barely been considered in the

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[6] See for example Basil in his Homily on the "forty martyrs," where he discusses the soldiers as "athletes," and speaks of the "stadium" and "ascetic exercises." Basil, 'A Homily on the Forty Holy Martyrs of Sebaste,' in "*Let Us Die That We May Live,*" eds. Johan Leemans, Wendy Mayer, Pauline Allen and Boudewijn Dehandschutter, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 68-77. See also S.P. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20 (1973.4): 1-19.

[7] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.75 (Bedjan, 556; Miller, 521).

[8] Miller, introduction, 60.

[9] Marcia Colish, *Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, Volume 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 2.

[10] Miller, introduction, 64-67. Isaac's Part Two was never anciently translated, so it was not known to Western Christians until the late 20th century.

discussion on asceticism among scholars."[11]

Context

The world that Isaac writes within is one of dramatic change and conflict, and yet this was typical of the region. Inter-religious and intra-religious conflict was the accepted reality of Isaac's readers. Three important aspects of this were the recent conquest by the Arab Islamic empire after centuries of Persian-Roman conflict, the ongoing debates between the three main branches of Syrian Christianity, and tensions between ascetics and the established church hierarchy. I shall now situate Isaac's work within these three contexts. Prior to the coming of Islam, Christianity was a large group within society in Isaac's territory, the region now known as Iraq. Morony suggests that it may have been the largest religious group, although there were still significant numbers of Jews and other religious groups present.[12] By the time of Isaac, the Syrian region had undergone several centuries of warfare. In the 300s CE there were several wars between the Roman and Persian empires. In Isaac's century there had been further Roman-Persian wars and then the Arab/Muslim conquests.[13] Warfare was a fact of life and a frequent occurrence, and this is evident in the metaphorical world of Isaac's writings. In the period from roughly 290 CE - 630 CE the Roman imperial policy had become one of containment and defensive strategy on the Eastern borders, resulting in the creation of and dependence on a series of border forts and towns. The focus for the military in these forts was on guarding and watching, themes that are evident in Isaac, and he uses the image of the fortress several times to illustrate the "guarding" focus of "spiritual soldiers."[14]

Isaac writes roughly seven decades after the Islamic conquest of Iraq. The Arab/Islamic conquests however did not change that much at the grassroots level in the first Islamic century. Civil administration was still conducted in Syriac in Isaac's time, and although the collectors of taxes were changed, taxes were still paid, merchants still traded, and churches

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[11] Patrik Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.

[12] Michael Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2005), 332; on the Jews see 306-09.

[13] Christianity in the late Sasanian period was no longer as persecuted as it was during the fourth and fifth centuries, although there was a brief time of persecution during the Persian-Byzantine war in the 620s under Parviz. Michael Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 333-34.

[14] For example Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.73 (Bedjan, 537-38; Miller, 508). On the defensive mindset and practices on Rome's Eastern borders see Nigel Pollard, *Imperatores castra dedicaverunt*: Security, Army Bases, and Military Dispositions in Later Roman Egypt (Late Third-Fourth Century), *Journal of Late Antiquity* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Volume 6, Number 1, Spring 2013): 3-36, DOI: 10.1353/jla.2013.0001 accessed October 14, 2018.

still functioned.[15] Jews and various kinds of Christians continued in government roles into the early Islamic period, and so there was extensive Islamic contact with these groups.[16] Christians under Islamic law even had some protections, although these were not always applied.[17] The churches therefore did not immediately fall into a retreat mode—there was ongoing inter-religious contact with Muslims, such that, "At the end of the eighth century, the law code of the Catholicos Timothy (780-823 CE) accepted the witness of 'a Muslim or another God-fearing man' in the ecclesiastical court."[18] Timothy engaged in robust argument with the Caliph in a well-documented and studied debate which evidences extensive knowledge of each other's beliefs.[19] Within a few generations of Isaac, the Islamic empire became a centre of learning and translation with an important function for Christian scholars, but some elements of this process were also beginning during Isaac's time.[20] Bertaina says that, "(S)ometimes these individuals and communities identified more closely with their Arab colleagues than their western Christian counterparts."[21] Thus Isaac's work must be seen within the context not of some Arab-induced "dark age," but within a time of change and growth. Islam and Christianity were not yet radically opposed, and it must be remembered that, "Every first-generation Muslim was a former pagan, Magian, Jew or Christian."[22]

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[15] There were even new churches built during this time, Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, 3, 9.

[16] Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 508-11. It is also notable that around Isaac's time John of Damascus' father was an administrator in the court of the Caliph. Sidney H. Griffith, "The Manṣūr Family and St. John of Damascus," in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State: Lamine 1- Late Antique and Medieval Islamic Near East,* eds. Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016), 29-51. Griffith elsewhere notes that Arabic-speaking Christians made "major contributions to Islamic culture", Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1.

[17] Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 343. In a poignant statement regarding the reasonable status of Christians relevant also to Syria, Morony writes that the Catholicos Isho'yahbh,"is said to have made an agreement with Muhammad through the mediation of the secular leader and the bishop of the Christians at Najran. According to this agreement, Christians were to be protected from attack, Arabs were not to require them to do military service or to change their faith or their laws, and Arabs were to help Christians repair ruined churches. Priests and monks were to be exempt from tribute (Syr. gezitd), the poor were to pay only four silver coins (Syr. zuze), and merchants and the rich were to pay ten zuze. A Christian woman in an Arab household was not to be forced to change her religion or beguiled out of the fasting, worship (Syr. selota), or doctrine of her own faith."

[18] Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 371.

[19] Erica C. D. Hunter, "*Interfaith dialogues: The Church of the East and the Abbassids,*" in *Der Christliche Orient und seine Umwelt,* ed. Sophia G.Vashaolmidze and Lutz Greisiger (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 289–302.

[20] Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque,* 45-7, 156-9.

[21] David Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East* (Piscataway, NJ:Gorgias, 2011), 4. Griffith argues for "a significant measure of intellectual cross-pollination", Sidney Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 2, 7-17.

[22] Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 431.

The history of the theological schism that separated the three branches of Christianity in Syria—the "Chalcedonian," "Miaphysite," and "Nestorian" churches, has been well documented.[23] What has often not been noted however, is the impact of these divisions on specific people and places. In the case of Isaac, he had been a bishop in the Church of the East, which was as Bertaina notes was, "in terms of geography … the largest Church in the world by the seventh century."[24] The Church of the East by this time had congregations as far away as China, and had jurisdiction over an area larger than that covered by the Latin and Greek churches combined.[25] This challenges the usual Western perceptions of an exotic fringe Oriental Church far from Rome, and explains why Isaac is in no way defensive nor reacting to Byzantine Church concerns. He speaks authoritatively as a former bishop of a large cosmopolitan church from inside a monastery in the centre of his known and extensive world.

Ongoing debates between the churches in the sixth and seventh centuries caused a growing clarifying of boundaries, a greater centralisation in church leadership, and an extension of canon law to cover all aspects of life for the laity.[26] Despite the differences between the three branches of the Church, there was still considerable dialogue, a feature which continued under Muslim rule and affected Christian-Muslim dialogue as well. Bertaina argues that the usual concept of a clear "parting of the ways" between Christianity and Islam is fundamentally flawed, an issue I develop in my final chapter.[27] For now it is sufficient to recognise that Isaac was well-placed within this context of inter-confessional conflict to write in such a way as to overcome the differences. He rarely writes on the controversial and divisive topic of the natures in Christ, but when he does he writes very carefully. Isaac explicitly urges his readers not to read books, "which accentuate the differences between the

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[23] Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition,* Vol. 2, Part 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1986); Dana Miller, "A Brief Historical and Theological Introduction to the Church of Persia to the End of the Seventh Century," in *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, ed. Dana Miller (Boston: The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), 481-541.

[24] Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues,* 35.

[25] Following Alfeyev and others I will use the term "Church of the East" rather than "Nestorian" since it is unclear whether Isaac's Church ever held to the teachings of Nestorius. Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Kalamazoo,MI: Cisterian Publications, 2000), 15-24. Isaac's Christology certainly appears Orthodox enough according to Alfeyev.

[26] Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 366. Morony notes that, "By the 580s, with the growing Monophysite challenge, Nestorian canon law was beginning to enclose the entire community by extending its principles to cover the laity."

[27] Bertaina *Christian and Muslim Dialogues,* 4.

confessions with the aim of causing schisms."[28] There was also conflict between the "Miaphysite" Syrian Church and the Church of the East in regards to forms of prayer and the place of Evagrius. Isaac reflects a positive appreciation of Evagrius, but this was in tension with the more "scholastic" approach of the School of Nisibis within the "Miaphysite" West Syrian Church.[29] Becker notes that Isaac makes frequent comments that privileges monastic *theoria* (contemplative experience of God) over the institutional "knowledge" about God.[30] Becker also argues that these different views were driven by the "Egyptianization" of the native Syriac form of asceticism, resulting in a reactive and more mystical "reform monasticsm" of which Isaac was a leader.[31] This difference in response to "Egyptianization" and "reform monasticism" was a tension between churches, but also related to an internal conflict within the Church of the East.

During Isaac's time there were considerable tensions between ascetics and the established church hierarchy that had been ongoing since the early fourth century. The struggle between monastic and episcopal influence on the church was manifested in issues such as rules of prayer, the role of celibacy, and the power and accountability of wandering ascetics etc.[32] As discussed earlier, at the time of Aphrahat there had already been continued arguments in the Church between the bishop-centric hierarchy and the wandering ascetics who repudiated various rules of the Church. The number of Church Council rulings spanning several centuries exhibit the enduring problem caused by various forms of Messalianism and Encratism. In Isaac's context these issues were still alive and so he writes against dead formalism, but also against various kinds of antinomianism and Messalianism. It appears that there were various lay groups who rejected communal and sacramental forms of worship and withdrew from the church into solitary prayer, and these are called by Isaac "Messalians." He rejects the teaching of, "those people with Messalian opinions," who say that "outward forms

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[28] Isaac of Nineveh, *Mystic Treatises*, trans. A.J. Wensinck (Amsterdam, 1923), 34. Brock notes that "Spiritual writers of the Christian East … often got into trouble with the ecclesiastical authorities of the day, and they had a delightfully disconcerting way of crossing the normal ecclasiastical boundaries. In this respect they became truly ecumenical figures - and perhaps none more so than St Isaac of Nineveh. Sebastian Brock, "St Isaac of Nineveh and Syriac Spirituality," *Sobornost* 7.2 (Winter 1975): 79-89 (79).

[29] Adam Becker, *Fear of God and the beginning of Wisdom: the School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 15, 169-96.

[30] Becker quotes several of Isaac's passages and discusses Isaac's role, Becker, *Fear of God and the beginning of Wisdom,* 184-188.

[31] Becker, *Fear of God and the beginning of Wisdom,* 172-78.

[32] Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 347. The conflict between different models of monasticism can be also seen as an aspect of this ascetic versus bishop conflict. Morony writes, "The movement to spread coenobitic discipline and to found new monasteries lasted from the mid-sixth century until the mid-eighth century." Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 363.

of worship are unnecessary."[33] Isaac refers a number of times to the importance of ignoring the rules of prayer, as he believes that they are no longer needed for the one who has achieved a delight in God. He writes, "When someone reaches insights into creation on the path of his ascetic life, then he is raised above having prayer set for him within a boundary; for it is superfluous from then onwards for him to put a boundary to prayer by means of (fixed) times of prayer or the Hours."[34] He also says of those who deeply love God that, "They are not concerned whether this (portion) belongs to the community's (monastic) rule … for they are not enslaved by custom or by the fine points of the series of the community's rules which were laid down for the undisciplined."[35] Isaac does however limit this freedom to those who have attained "pure prayer" and cites as his authority Mark who, "knew that not everyone attains to pure prayer."[36]

At the same time he cautions against merely breaking the bodily disciplines due to any tendencies which downplay the physical. He also argues against an antinomian spirit at times, writing, "Many people have despised these (outward postures) in their thoughts and supposed that prayer of the heart suffices by itself for God … Imagining in themselves that they are wise, they have acted with disrespect."[37] In Homily 2.21 Isaac seems to draw his two thoughts together when he discusses the benefits of both the Office of Prayer and the freer inner prayers attending it.[38] In this context Isaac's term for the ascetic life (*bawrḥa d-dobrh*) which literally means "road/way of guidance/training," but implying rule and ordered cultivation, seems ironic given his emphasis on freedom.[39] Yet the thrust of his writing as a

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[33] Isaac, *Homilies*, *Part 2,* 14.22 (CSCO 554:62-63, trans. Sebastian Brock (CSCO 555 (Louvain: Peeters, 1995), 73, hereafter referenced as "Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.X.Y (CSCO 554:pp; Brock, pp)." For details of Messalians see Marcus Plested, *The Macarian Legacy: The Place of Macarius-Symeon in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Oxford Theological Monographs, 2004), 16-27.

[34] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.35.1 (CSCO 554: 139; Brock, 151).

[35] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.31.6 (CSCO 554: 127-28; Brock, 139-40). He also writes, "During prolonged periods of grace when you enjoy this great prayer of delight … there is no great necessity for you to stand by the canonical (Hour) or to worry yourself over the matter of the number of (prayers) that remain (to be recited), for such prayer has … made the canons (governing such behaviour) subordinate to you." Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.4.4 (CSCO 554: 2; Brock, 2).

[36] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.4.5 (CSCO 554: 2; Brock, 2).

[37] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.14 (CSCO 554: 59-60; Brock, 70-71).

[38] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.21 (CSCO 554: 102-05; Brock, 114-17). He also writes of the need for wise use of freedom. He says of those who have attained delight in God that, "Even though they conduct their way of life with such liberty with themselves, being above any law because of the truth they have acquired within themselves - namely, divine love - when they come to other people and to the (monastic) community, then they conduct themselves exactly as others do, following in everything the practices which the (community) uses." Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.31.8 (CSCO 554: 128-29; Brock, 140). See also Homilies 2.14.7 (CSCO 554: 58; Brock, 68), where he condemns those who "neglect the duty of the hours of prayer" except when this is due to a "long drawn out … sweet delight in prayer."

[39] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.35.1 (CSCO 554: 139; Brock, 151), ܒܐܘܪܚܐ ܕܕܘܒܪܗ

whole does posit a host of guidelines and flexible rules to attain to ascetic heights, and his individual statements about ignoring rules must be seen in this light. The *agōna* is a serious struggle and guidelines of some sort cannot be ignored, even if it is Isaac's own rules about when to ignore the rules. One aspect of Isaac's life that is unclear is to what extent he fulfilled the "holy man" role discussed by Peter Brown.[40] Unlike many earlier monks who criticised rulers and healed the poor from atop their pillars or mountains, Isaac appears to limit his impact to the written word.[41] Yet in his resistance to a rule-centred Christianity there are resonances with a "holy man" status, and this could be an area of interesting research.

Literature review

Considering that Isaac's writings are some of the most important in Eastern Orthodox spirituality, surprisingly little has been written about him and his work. In English there are only two significant texts, namely *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* by Hilarion Alfeyev, and *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh* by Patrik Hagman.[42] There is a recent Italian monograph by Sabino Chialà that is a good introduction with many insights into some themes in Isaac, and a German text by Nestor Kavvadas that situates Isaac within various historical currents.[43] Alfeyev's work is the most thorough exploration of Isaac's thought world to date and admirably introduces the theological and ecclesial context of Isaac as well as analysing many key themes in Isaac's work. Alfeyev discusses prayer, asceticism, humility, wonder, and the possibility of universal salvation in Isaac. He focusses on the idea of the love of God and union with the divine and other more NeoPlatonic themes, but has very little on the very central theme of ascetic struggle, which he notes more as a means to attain to "inebriation" in God. In this he is following the viewpoint of Lossky in his *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* which similarly understands the NeoPlatonic elements in Isaac but overlooks the more Stoic themes of struggle and stillness.[44]

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[40] Brown also argues for interpreting Muhammad as a kind of Late Antique holy man in Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 103-04, 148-52.

[41] For example, none of the histories mention any criticism by Isaac of rulers, nor any miracles of his miracles, and only speak of his going blind from much reading.

[42] Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Kalazmazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000); Patrik Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[43] Sabino Chialà, *Dall'ascesi eremitica alla misericordia infinita: ricerche su Isacco di Ninive e la sua fortuna* (Florence: Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki, 2002), Nestor Kavvadas, *Isaak von Ninive und seine Kephalaia Gnostika: Die Pneumatologie und ihr Kontext* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[44] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002).

Patrik Hagman has some important insights into Isaac's use of his various sources and what aspects he draws from each.[45] Hagman rightly notes the extensive use of ascetic metaphor in Isaac and that asceticism is "a concept that has layer after layer of metaphors heaped upon it."[46] He discusses the theological viewpoints of Isaac but only mentions the theme of spiritual battle in the context of analysing Isaac's use of John of Apamea. Hagman correctly identifies the ascetic background to Isaac and notes the important metaphors of athletic training and school discipline.[47] He does not however investigate the specific Syriac words used nor the related aspects of these metaphors such as the image of wrestling in the arena. His main emphasis is on the politics of the body in Isaac. Hagman makes a positive contribution to rehabilitating the body as an aid in asceticism and holiness, an idea well propounded by Isaac. Chiala's work covers ground closest to this thesis in that he discusses struggle in relation to specific practices and virtues, for example, prayer, fasting, poverty, humility, weeping, hope, perseverance, silence etc. His main framework for approaching Isaac, however, is the virtues, understood from a more Latin perspective, and this means that the more Stoic and vigorous struggle aspects of Isaac are overlooked. Chiala barely mentions stillness, and does not interpret this in the light of Isaac's Stoic precursors. His main interpretive tool is the Evagrian eight "deadly sins," which while present in Isaac, are not as prevalent as the persistent struggle metaphors. Chiala also discusses Isaac's anthropology and his approach to the mind and senses, and correctly notes Isaac's "Two Natures Christology" and his understanding of the passions. His focus is on enduring human frailty in the slow process of healing, but he does not discuss Isaac's vision of the importance of free will and grace acting in synergy in ascetic struggle. Chiala also ably analyses Isaac's writing in relation to union with God and love of God, but does not discuss the metaphors nor thoughtworld of Isaac regarding attaining such love through wrestling with the soul's passions and fighting in the arena of life. All these three texts rightly note the enduring significance of Isaac's thought in Eastern Christianity but also highlight his significant influence on Western thought as well. Chiala especially traces possible influences on the work of Ignatius of Loyola and this is an area requiring further research.

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[45] Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh*, 27.

[46] Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh,* 3.

[47] Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh,* 44.

There are brief useful introductions to Isaac to be found in Mary Hansbury's *Isaac of Nineveh, On Ascetical Life*,[48] Margaret Smith's 1931 classic *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*,[49] and Dana Miller's *Introduction* to her translation of Isaac's Homilies Part 1.[50] While these provide basic outlines of his life and writings, they do not explore Isaac's themes in any detail. Despite the paucity of English material, there are however a number of works in Latin, German, Dutch, and French which provide a basic introduction to Isaac's life and thought, although some of the contents is at points outdated, for example, the most famous of these by Bedjan.[51] Blum's recent work, like several other books and articles, surveys a wide range of Syrian mystics including Isaac, but his emphasis is on Isaac's notion of grace operating in the heart and mind, and on the experience of the Light of God rather than spiritual battle.[52] Blum discusses the three Evagrian aspects in the way to God, but in relation to the corporeal he does not explore bodily struggle. Possibly the most prolific writer on Syriac authors is Sebastian Brock, who has written more than 20 articles on Isaac plus many more of general relevance.[53] Brock however has not focussed on struggle and his articles cover the more NeoPlatonic themes that Alfeyev emphasises. There are at least another 100 articles that have brief mentions of Isaac but their material barely goes beyond what is contained in the able summary of the Gorgias Encyclopedia or in Khalifé-Hachem's French article.[54] Few of these articles mention struggle *per se* and none analyse this very central theme in Isaac's work.[55]

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[48] Isaac of Nineveh, *On Ascetical Life*, trans. Mary Hansbury (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989)

[49] Smith, Margaret, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (Sheldon Press, 1931).

[50] Dana Miller, introduction to *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian,* trans. Dana Miller (Boston: The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2011).

[51] Isaac, *De perfectione religiosa: Homiliæ S. Isaaci, Syri Antiocheni*, trans. Paul Bedjan (np: Otto Harrassowitz, 1903); There is a useful index and footnotes in A. J. Wensinck, *Mystic treatises* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie Van Wtenschappen, 1923); See also general information in Isaac of Nineveh, *Œuvres spirituelles : les 86 discours ascétiques: les lettres,* préface d'Olivier Clément, introduction du Père Basile, avant-propos, traduction et notes de Jacques Touraille (Desclée De Brouwer; 1981); For a very old work often quoted until recently, see J.B. Chabot, *De S. Isaac Ninivitae* (Lovani: Excuderbunt Lefever F.& S., 1892).

[52] Georg Günter Blum, *Die Geschichte der Begegnung christlich-orientalischer Mystik mit der Mystik des Islams*, Orientalia Biblica et Christiana 17 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009).

[53] See for example Sebastian P. Brock, "St. Isaac of Nineveh and Syriac Spirituality," *Sobornost* 7.2 (1975): 79-89. Sebastian P. Brock, "Discerning the Evagrian in the Writings of Isaac of Nineveh: A Preliminary Investigation," *Adamantius* 15 (2009): 60-72.

[54] Sebastian P. Brock et al, *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2011), 213-14; Élie Khalifé-Hachem, "Isaac de Ninive," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: doctrine et histoire* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1971), 2041-54. See also Muriel Debié, "Livres et monastères en Syrie-Mésopotamie d'après les sources syriaques," in *Le Monachisme syriaque*, ed. F. Jullien (Études syriaques 7) (Paris: Geuthner, 2010): 123-168.

[55] For example Paoli Bettiolo, *Isacco di Ninive. Discorsi spirituali: capitoli sulla conoscenza, preghiere, contemplazione sull'argomento della gehenna, altri opuscoli*. Padri orientali (Magnano: Monastero di Bose, Edizioni Qiqajon, 1985) covers knowledge, prayers, and contemplation on the subject of gehenna, and his "Misericordia versus giustizia nella meditazione di un solitario siro-orientale del VII secolo, Isacco di Ninive",

Isaac's Sources

John the Solitary (John of Apamea) and Evagrius are major sources for Isaac, as Sebastian Brock has noted: "Isaac's phraseology and terminology owes a great debt" to them.[56] John writes in Syriac probably around the fifth century and his agonistic themes have been discussed in the previous chapter.[57] Some of the main emphases in Isaac that reflect John are seen in John's *Epistle on Stillness*.[58] In this letter the central themes in Isaac of struggle, stillness, passions, knowledge of God, and love of Christ are clearly seen. After a brief introduction, John writes:

> Therefore, my brethren, let stillness be reckoned by you as greater than any other way of life. For by continually abiding in *stillness* the wandering thoughts are mortified along with empty recollections and deadly passions, since continual abiding within itself makes the intellect stronger than anything else. Thus it mightily *defeats* the thoughts, it *destroys* the memory of wrath, and it *slays the passions* through patience.[59]

Isaac follows John, teaching that the passions are an enemy which disturb the mind, and must be fought against to obtain the goal of stillness. Isaac shares John's anthropology of believing that human nature is basically good and has the capacity to find stillness and wisdom, and emphasises that knowing oneself is to draw near to God.[60] Isaac shares John's very positive view of human attainment, and the bulk of Isaac's quotes are from John and Evagrius.

Evagrius is the other main source for Isaac, and is referred to several times by name. For example Isaac says that during certain times a person should "remember the word of

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in *"Cose nuove e cose antiche." Scritti per Monsignor Antonio Niero e Don Bruno Bertoli*, Eds Francesca Cavazzana Romanelli, Maria Leonardi, and Stefania Rossi Minutelli, Collana di studi 7 (Venezia: Biblioteca nazionale marciana, 2006), 55-70 is on Isaac's mercy and justice, and his "'Avec la charité comme but': Dieu et création dans la méditation d'Isaac de Ninive," *Irénikon* 63:3 (1990): 323-45 is on Isaac's theology of Creation.

[56] Sebastian Brock, introduction to *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part'* (Leuven, Peeters, 1995), 38.

[57] See also Mary Hansbury, introduction to John the Solitary, *John the Solitary on the Soul,* trans. Mary Hansbury (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), ix.

[58] John the Solitary, "Epistle on Stillness," in *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian,* trans. Dana Miller (Brooklyn, MA: The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1985), 461-66. Several passages in particular find nearly identical form in Isaac.

[59] John the Solitary, "Epistle on Stillness," (emphasis mine), 462.

[60] John writes in relation to seeking knowledge of God, "We do not desire something that is not in our own nature, but something that we are, which is implanted in and given by the Bestower of all. Wisdom is one of the man of God's great members, as it were. Indeed, it is not acquired or revealed to a man without the experience of struggles, and that, only when he has embraced stillness … By means of stillness a man is brought near to himself." John the Solitary, "Epistle on Stillness," 463.

Evagrius."[61] Brock correctly notes, "For Isaac, as for almost all other Syriac monastic writers, Evagrius ranks among the most highly revered authorities on the spiritual life."[62] Alfeyev also discusses how Isaac embraces the Evagrian approach in many respects, for example in relation to contemplative prayer.[63] One key example is where Isaac explicitly uses the three stages of ascetic growth developed in Evagrius to structure his whole homily.[64] Isaac frequently draws on Evagrius but also other earlier Syrian church fathers such as Ps Macarius, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Diodore of Tarsus, Aphrahat, Ephrem, and Dionysius, although these others are only occasionally quoted.[65] There are also times where Isaac refers to philosophers, and he seems well-acquainted with certain aspects of NeoPlatonism especially that part influenced by Stoicism.[66] In relation to the theme of struggle he writes in a very Stoic-like tone, "One of the great philosophers said: 'If a man satiate his body with delicacies, he delivers his soul up to warfare.'"[67] Overall it is apparent that Isaac is well-read. Later histories contain few facts about his life, but one detail that is common is that he went blind from all his reading.

Genre

Christian ascetic writing was a common enough genre by the time of Isaac, having been developed by Greco-Roman philosophers such as Epictetus, Porphyry, Philo, Musonius, and the Cynics, and refined in Syriac by Isaac's sources, for example Evagrius, Ps-

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[61] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.18.21 (CSCO 554: 91; Brock, 101); Hagman discusses the various writers that Isaac quotes and notes "Theodore of Mopsuestia, whom Isaac quotes more that fifty times. Evagrios of Pontos is quoted explicitly more than thirty times." Hagman, *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh*, 27, and see also 27-33; Isaac quotes or uses as his authority St Martinian in *Homilies*, 1.9.

[62] Brock, introduction to Isaac, *Homilies "The Second Part,"* xxiv. Brock's index and footnotes show how many phrases Isaac draws from Evagrius.

[63] Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Kalazmazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000), 21-24. See also the Index which notes many other themes drawn from Evagrius.

[64] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.12 (Bedjan, 121-22; Miller, 198).

[65] Brock discusses the importance of each of these in Isaac's thinking and quotes in his Introduction to Isaac, *Homilies "The Second Part,"* xx-xxxx.

[66] The NeoPlatonism that Isaac inherited was a mix of Plato, Plotinus, and Stoicism. See Gregory Smith, "Physics and Metaphysics," *Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 513-43 (516).

[67] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.40 (Bedjan, 285; Miller, 331). Isaac also is knowledgeable about some aspects of Aristotle and uses Aristotelean categories and terms at various points. For example in Homily 1.26 he distinguishes between motions, essences, natures and affects. Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.26 (Bedjan, 182-88; Miller, 252-56), and compare Homily 1.27 (Bedjan, 189; Miller, 257) where Isaac discusses the differences between substances and effects.

Macarius, and John the Solitary (John of Apamea).[68] This genre is characterised by persuasive teaching about the value of struggling with the body and overcoming the passions. The content of ascetic discourse according to Wimbush is a "complex of ideas clustering round central themes of renunciation, temptation, denial, spiritual progress or ascent in the spiritual life."[69] Many of these relate to the macrotrope of spiritual life as struggle, and when Isaac's writing is analysed such advocacy of the path of denial and self-renunciation is evident. Isaac uses the cluster of terms mentioned by Wimbush although he adds and emphasises that struggle is important in asceticism, along with stillness and *apatheia*.[70]

Isaac writes very rhetorically about asceticism, and in Syriac his work has a beauty not easily conveyed in English. His prose is often poetic and alliterative, and his choice of imagery designed to inspire the reader or listener to ascetic endurance. One curious aspect of his Ascetic Discourses is that there is a division between the first six chapters and the rest of his work in both the First and Second Parts. The opening six chapters follow the "Centuries" style used earlier by Evagrius and others, consisting of short pithy sayings not organised in any particular order.[71] The rest of Isaac however is more strictly speaking discourse, with each chapter flowing and developing around usually a single topic or series of related issues. Homily 1.8 is a typical example and deals with the importance of the monk knowing "his own weakness" and thus being "in need of divine help" and motivated to many prayers. There are also a few places where Isaac uses a Question-Answer approach with an explicit Interlocutor where he responds to questions such as, "What bond restrains a man's mind from running after evil things?"[72] An implicit interlocutor is also present in Homily 1.52 where

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[68] See for example Epictetus, The *Enchiridion of Epictetus*, trans. David Tuffley (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2012), Porphyry's *De Abstinentia,* or the examples from Philo, Musonius and the Cynics in *Ascetic Behaviour in Greco-Roman Antiquity,* 117-55. Pseudo-Macarius, *Pseudo-Macarius: The Fifty Spiritual Homilies, and the Great Letter,* trans. George Maloney (New York: Paulist, 1992).

[69] Wimbush and Valantasis, *Asceticism,* 150-51. Wimbush defines Ascetic Discourse as, [T]he typical way of expressing ascetic ideas, including the vocabulary used … an ascetic discourse is one which explicitly advocates asceticism … for example Iamblichus's On the Pythagorean Life …the Life of Anthony has long been rightly regarded as a work of seminal importance, both for the pattern it lays down, including its typology of demonic temptation, and its agenda of physical deprivation.

[70] Struggle is a theme that Wimbush barely touches on in his definition even though *agōna* is central to much Greek ascetic discourse. He also barely mentions the ideas of stillness and *apatheia* but this may be because these are more later-Stoic rather than common in earlier Greek writing.

[71] See Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer,* trans. John Eudes Bamberger (Cistercian Publications, 1972).

[72] For example Isaac, *Homilies* 1.3, 1.23, 1.28, 1.37, 1.62 and 1.71 (Bedjan, 21-33, 168-73, 195-197, 224-66; Miller, 128-38, 243-45, 262-63, 289-317, 438-50, 491-96). The example is from 1.37 (Bedjan, 224; Miller, 289).

Isaac writes, "If anyone says…" and then replies with his solution.[73] Discourses of this type would also be read in whole or in part as homilies, both in churches and in monasteries, and commentators thus use the terms "discourse" and "homily" interchangeably with respect to Isaac's work. This homiletic aspect accounts for Isaac's very typically Syriac use of alliteration and other devices that would be pleasing to the ear. Syriac also is naturally somewhat rhyming simply due to the nature of its case and verb formation, but skilled authors like Isaac amplify this.[74]

Purpose and Structure

There are several places where Isaac explains his purpose in writing, but as this is usually in regards to specific Homilies it can only be surmised that these sentiments are true for the work as a whole. He says, "I now compose this homily for the kindling and enlightenment of our souls, and of those who come across it, with the hope that, perchance, some might rouse themselves by reason of their desire for what I speak of, and endeavour to *practice* it."[75] In Homily 1.35 he writes, "Now that we have written above about spiritual aspiration and yearning, the time has come to *explain* it."[76] This in fact is a good characterisation of his work—an explanation, often from many different angles, of the practice of ascetic life in God. Using a metaphor unrelated to struggle, he also says:

> These things I have written down as a reminder and *source of profit* for myself, and for *every man* who comes upon this book, according to what I have understood from both the divine vision of the Scriptures and from true mouths, and a little from experience itself, in order that they might be a help to me through the prayers of those who are *profitted* by them.[77]

Isaac expects people will be benefitted by his words and thus grow spiritually. Although he seems to have monks in mind as his main audience, he hopes any reader will benefit. Isaac noticeably does not appear to respond in his work to the current theological debates happening around him. His lack of direct response in itself is a response, as he hints at the errors of theological debate and the disunity it causes.[78] In Isaac's time the relation of the

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[73] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.52 (Bedjan, 368; Miller, 392).
[74] I will mention some examples below.
[75] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.23 (Bedjan, 164; Miller, 238). The Syriac literally says to "labour at war."
[76] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.35 (Bedjan, 221; Miller, 284), (emphasis mine).
[77] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.14 (Bedjan, 126; Miller, 202), (emphasis mine).
[78] Isaac of Nineveh, *Mystic Treatises*, trans. A.J. Wensinck (Amsterdam, 1923), 34.

natures and wills in Christ was still a lively point of debate, being the main source of contention between the three branches of Christianity in Syria—the "Chalcedonian," "Miaphysite," and "Nestorian" churches. Given that he was a member of the Church of the East, his few statements on the nature of Christ using words that appear to be non-controversial is significant.[79]

The one debate that Isaac noticeably enters into is the ongoing argument about the extent of human free will, but on this topic he does not discuss the controversial topic of how the human and divine wills operate in Christ. He says, "For in proportion to a man's volition to strive towards God, and in proportion to his purpose to attain his goal for God's sake, God works with him, helps him, and manifests His providence in him."[80] In this statement Isaac is following the teaching of earlier Syrian writers like Aphrahat, as well as the Cappadocian fathers. He also concurs with the more extensive teachings of John of Damascus who writes some 40-50 years later. The topic of free will appears to have been an ongoing philosophical concern in both the Greek and Syriac-speaking churches, but became especially apposite in relation to the monothelite controversy of the seventh and eighth centuries, as evidenced by Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus.[81] This debate over free will is paralleled by the equally large divisions in early Islam over the same topic.[82] Isaac appears to enter this argument only to the extent that the use of free will is fundamental to ascetic struggle, a theme to which I shall return.

As previously discussed there is a basic structure of Isaac's works where the first six chapters of "Centuries" introduce the remaining 71 Discourses in the "First Part," plus another 41 Discourses in the "Second Part." Writers have noted that there is no particular structure to these chapters as they wander between various topics related to the love of God, prayer, and ascetic warfare. However, there does appear to be some development in Isaac's chapters with more specific and difficult questions being answered later, such as the state of people in hell and whether it is temporary or permanent.[83] There is often more structure seen

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[79] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.11.21 (CSCO 554: 49; Brock, 59).
[80] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.39, (Bedjan, 271; Miller, 321).
[81] Maximus (580-662 CE) wrote extensively against monothelitism, for example in his *Disputation with Pyrrhus*, trans. Joseph P. Farrell (St. Tikhon's Monastery Press, 2014). John of Damascus (*c*. 675-749 CE) treats free will in his *Exposition on the Christian Faith*, Book 2: xxii-xxx, 484-92 and Book 3: xiv-xviii, 515-29.
[82] Maria De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, al-Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabi* (Routledge, 2013).
[83] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.40 and 2.41 (CSCO 554: 163-71; Brock, 174-82).

at the level of each chapter, for example, several chapters use the three-fold progress in the spiritual life developed by Evagrius.[84] In 2.20 he also outlines his chapter structure, writing, "We will begin by distinguishing the stirrings of human knowledge, both the level below the nature of the soul, and the upsurges which are supernatural."[85] Isaac does indeed proceed in this manner although his work appears to digress at points, and Isaac even writes at one point, "But let us leave these spiritual matters behind and come back again to our topic."[86] Isaac is also aware that his chapters somehow build upon each other, for example at the beginning of 1.70 he refers to the previous chapter, "The concise sense of [the previous] chapter is the following."[87]

Struggle Themes in Isaac's *Ascetical Homilies*

Isaac explains his themes at several points in his work. In his opening words he follows a traditional philosophical approach by defining virtue as "the fear of God (*bḥlt alaha*)."[88] A few paragraphs later he says, "This is virtue: emptying one's mind of the world (*mytrota hdʾ hy: d-anš b-rʿynh mn ʿlma nhwa spyq*),"[89] and he also mentions "passions (*ḥašša*),"[90] "the time of conflict (*bnyša d-tktoša*),"[91] and "the struggle within (*qraba d-mn l-go*),"[92] these being some of his central themes. Isaac also writes of love of God, saying, "Thirst for Jesus, that he may intoxicate you with his love."[93] This theme of love of God is evidenced many times in his writings but I do not deal with it in this chapter as it seems rarely to be connected with struggle and it has already been extensively analysed in Alfeyev and others. In some ways Isaac's first chapter covers all his main themes in that he discusses virtue, passions, the fight against the passions, spiritual union with God, and "when the soul is freed."[94] In the last paragraphs at the end of his first six chapters, that is, at the conclusion of his "Centuries-like" chapters, Isaac writes, "Better for us is death in the *battle* (*qraba*) for the love of God than a life of shame and debility."[95] This is a rousing finale to his

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[84] For example Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.12 (Bedjan, 121-22; Miller, 198).

[85] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.20.1 (CSCO 554: 95; Brock, 106).

[86] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.20.9 (CSCO 554: 98; Brock, 109).

[87] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.70 (Bedjan, 502; Miller, 487). Some Homilies build on the previous ones, for example 1.35-36, and 2.40-41.

[88] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.1.1 (Bedjan, 1; Hansbury, 25), ܕܚܠܬܐ ܐܠܗܐ.

[89] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.1.5 (Bedjan, 2; Hansbury, 26), ܡܝܬܪܘܬܐ ܗܕܐ ܗܝ܆ ܕܐܢܫ ܢܣܬܪܩ ܒܪܥܝܢܗ ܡ̣ܢ ܥܠܡܐ ܘܗܘܐ ܣܦܝܩ.

[90] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.2.23 (Bedjan, 16; Hansbury, 38), ܚܫܐ.

[91] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.1.15 (Bedjan, 4; Hansbury, 27), ܒܢܝܫܐ ܕܬܟܬܘܫܐ.

[92] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.1.19 (Bedjan, 5; Hansbury, 28), ܩܪܒܐ ܕܡܢ ܠܓܘ.

[93] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.3.38 (Bedjan, 38; Hansbury, 55).

[94] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.1.20 (Bedjan, 5; Hansbury, 29).

[95] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.6.26 (Bedjan, 97; Hansbury, 114-15), ܩܪܒܐ.

ascetic aphorisms and encapsulates his two main themes—love of God and spiritual struggle. Significantly, when Isaac concludes his First Part he writes about imitating Christ and attaining virtue, and of the ascetic who has "overcome and subjugated all the strongholds of the enemy (*w-zka w-mkn lklhon ḥsna mryda*)," showing again that the struggle metaphor is one of his main points.[96]

At the conclusion of his "Second Part," Isaac explicitly outlines his main two themes in his concluding prayer by saying, "For to God our Saviour (belongs) glory, in Christ Jesus our hope, along with all adoration and honour, in the two worlds which He created *for our training and for our delight*, for eternal ages, amen."[97] Here his use of "delight" (*w-l-bosmn*) refers to his frequent earlier mentions of delighting in God and being inebriated with God.[98] The use of "training" (*doršn*, also meaning exercise) is a reference back to the ascetic practice required of the monk.[99] This mention of training also follows the previous paragraph where Isaac writes of the future hope of salvation and of the current "*contest with the passions (agōnē hašša)*," a notion common in Greek philosophy.[100] For Isaac, philosophy is not an abstract phenomenon but a lived practice of holiness. This is best discussed by Hadot in his *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.[101] The true philosopher for Isaac is the one who concretely lives the virtues rather than one who has noble speculation and knowledge. Isaac does however use many common philosophical tropes and especially appropriates and develops the Stoic notions of stillness and *apatheia*, and I discuss his particular transformations of these concepts below.

The struggle metaphor is very important to Isaac and he repeatedly emphasises the ideas of struggle, fight, contest, and battle, often using the Syriac words *agōna* (cf. Greek *agōn*), *qraba*, and *taktoša*. He often pairs these terms in a synthetic parallelism, for example he says, "When a man has cast off from himself every hindrance and has entered into the struggle (*agōna*), what is the beginning of his war (*taktoša*) against sin and where does he

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[96] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.77 (Bedjan, 580; Miller, 538), ܘܐܬܐ ܘܡܟ ܠܟܠܗܘܢ ܚܣܢܐ ܡܪܝܕܐ .
[97] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.40.18 (CSCO 554: 168; Brock, 179), (emphasis mine). Chapter 41 appears to be a later addition.
[98] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.14.7 (CSCO 554: 58; Brock, 68); 2.10.29 (CSCO 554: 39; Brock, 48), 2.10.35 (CSCO 554: 40; Brock, 49).
[99] This word is also used in 1 Tim 4:8 in relation to "training in righteousness."
[100] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.40.17 (CSCO 554: 168; Brock, 179).
[101] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* Arnold Davidson ed. (Wiley Blackwell, 1995).

start his fight (*qraba*)?"[102] However, there are times when Isaac describes the struggle using metaphors that do not contain these words, so my analysis focusses on imagery as well as specific words. In his discussions of struggle Isaac uses many related metaphorical terms such as "attacks," "battle," "defence," "wounding," "warfare," "wrestling," "weapons," "stadium," "courses," "crowns," and "enemies" etc. and these are explained in the sections that follow.[103] Isaac see struggle as occurring in three stages, corresponding to the three stages enunciated by Evagrius. Isaac outlines these stages: "The initial stage involves labouring with a great deal of recitation, and just the treading out of the body by means of laborious fasting."[104] The imagery here is of treading out (*ḥullāpā d-dubbārē*) the grapes in a winepress, a laborious process requiring constant and repetitive actions. Isaac mentions both recitation of prayers and fasting as the two activities of this first stage; both of which he discusses several times in his work as forms of struggle. The second stage, he writes, involves more, "persistence in other things, labouring (*'amla*) on (spiritual) reading and especially on kneeling."[105] Isaac means kneeling in prayer, and his use of "labouring" continues the metaphor of hard spiritual work. According to Isaac, at the final stage in struggle, the person engages in, "labouring (instead) on meditation and on prayer of the heart."[106] He elsewhere says that at the third stage the ascetic comes to stillness, a theme he returns to repeatedly.[107] There is a kind of symmetry in Isaac's teaching that struggle leads to stillness, and that hard spiritual work leads to love of God. After much "toil and struggle" the goal is to be "raised up to the love of God."[108] At this third stage, "Luminous meditation on God is the goal of prayer."[109] Isaac also asserts that, "All these are different stages in the course run (*šoḥlpa d-rhṭa*), in divine fashion, by the intellect in the stadium (*asṭadyon*) of this world, each person having his gaze fixed upon the crown," using a further metaphor of the athletic race completed over the course in the stadium.[110]

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[102] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 238; Miller, 298); all three words appear in the Peshitta. *Taktoša* is from the root ܟܬܫ k-t-š to strike, strive, endeavor, fight. Cf. 1 Tim. 6:12 See also Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.18.3 (CSCO 554: 85-86 where *taktoša* and *agōna* are also used as parallels. The other common equivalent terms are wrestles, struggles, and fights e.g. Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.9 (CSCO 554: 32; Brock, 40), *ida'ta d-agonē*, contest, conflict.

[103] Isaac writes of "Battles that assail him." Isaac, Homilies, 1.37 (Bedjan, 244; Miller, 301).

[104] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.22.1 (CSCO 554: 106; Brock, 118).

[105] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.22.2 (CSCO 554: 106; Brock, 118), ܥܡܠ.

[106] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.22.3 (CSCO 554: 106; Brock, 118).

[107] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.37 (CSCO 554: 41; Brock, 50).

[108] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.35 (CSCO 554: 40; Brock, 49).

[109] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.38 (CSCO 554: 41; Brock, 51).

[110] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.40 (CSCO 554: 41-42; Brock, 51), ܫܘܚܠܦܐ ... ܐܣܛܕܝܘܢ.

Struggle is inherent in living in this present world according to Isaac. The *agōna* is natural to human existence prior to heaven yet does not have to be lost. He writes of the saints of Christ who, "conquered this world of struggle (*w-zako beh l'lma hza d-agōna*)."[111] Isaac uses the struggle metaphor to explain almost every aspect of the ascetic life, for example, the thought life, prayer, and fasting. He asserts that, "Fasting is the champion (*mˁšnānā*) of every virtue, the beginning of the struggle (*b-agōna*), the crown of the abstinent."[112] These short three phrases link several struggle motifs together. For Isaac, the central ascetic practice of fasting is the "champion," that is, the single strong fighter who fights as representative of the army, an image with strong resonances with the battle of David against Goliath. Fasting is also described as the starting point or essential basic practice of the struggle, and is the victor's "crown." These closely-related terms all evoke the military/athletic imagery that is central to Isaac's understanding of ascetic *agōna*.

The Importance of Struggle

The concept of struggle is perhaps the most central aspect of Isaac's teaching, a feature not previously mentioned by other scholars. Struggle and the related metaphors of athlete and soldier etc. account for the bulk of the content in most of his chapters, and are mentioned in almost every homily. Isaac makes struggle his primary and persistent focus in a large number of Homilies. For example in Homily 1.32, Isaac starts with:

> A man is not freed from the pleasure of the working of sin until he truly abhors the cause of sin with his whole heart. This is the *fiercest struggle* (*ḥsynot agōna*), the struggle that *resists* (*d-l-qoblh*) a man *unto blood* (*ˁdma l-dma*), wherein his free will is tested as to singleness of his love for the virtues.[113]

Isaac's reference to "resisting unto blood" is a direct allusion to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, using the same Syriac words as in the Peshitta version of Hebrews 12:4 where Christ is described as having "resisted to the point of shedding blood" in "striving against sin." Isaac also mentions free will in relation to the struggle, an important theme in Isaac. Isaac then continues with a few sentences wherein he discusses the *agōna* further using terms such as the "*power* (*ḥyleh*) of sin," "the *enemy* (*m-doda*, lit. disturber)," "*struggle* unto blood (*agōna d-dma*)," "this *warfare* (*qraba*)," a "*struggle* (*taktoša*)," and a "fierce

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[111] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.5.22 (CSCO 554: 12; Brock, 16), ܘܙܟܐ ܒܗ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܐܓܘܢܐ.
[112] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 238; Miller, 298), ܨܘܡܐ ... ܐܓܘܢܐ.
[113] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.32 (Bedjan, 208; Miller, 275),(emphasis mine), ܡܣܬܠܐ ܐܓܘܢܐ ... ܕܠܩܘܒܠܗ ... ܥܕܡܐ ܠܕܡܐ.

conflict (*b-agōna*)."[114] He says that this struggle is a time of "unseen martyrdom (*d-shdota d-la mtḥzya*)," making the metaphorical connection with the literal Christian combatants in the arenas who also underwent an *agōna*.[115] Isaac extends the imagery by writing that the "upright" (*tagma*, the word for cohort) "mind" must "*guard* itself (*mtḥzya*)," and then provides a sample prayer to do this.[116] He writes:

> O Lord, the Source of all aid, in these times …of martyrdom …grant them power to *pull down* (*kabaš*, lit. overcome) with boldness the *fortified walls* (*ḥasna*) and every high thing that exalts itself against the truth, lest they *miss their mark* (*ntdodn men nyša*) by reason of the irresistible and unsupportable violence of that moment when one must *struggle unto blood* (*agōna d-dma*).[117]

Once again Isaac uses extensive military metaphors related to guarding, pulling down walls, and the arrow which misses its mark. He alludes to Jesus at Gethsemane with the mention of "struggle unto blood." Isaac also describes this present time as a "critical conflict (*taktoša*)," and warns of the "adversary (*bʿldynh*)," and "opening our door (*b-šbyqothūn*) to the demons," who seek to "enslave (*d-šbyohy*)," and take "captives (*šbyqota*)."[118] He further warns readers to "[B]e on your guard (*azdhro*)" and not be like the weak men who have "surrendered themselves to defeat (*d-rkynot*)" and to "death (*mota*)."[119] This is all the language of war, and Isaac returns to these closely-related metaphors frequently.[120] In contrast, Isaac uses a predominantly athletic metaphor when he writes:

> If each day recurringly we should receive a thousand *wounds* (*mḥota*), we should not become faint-hearted and abandon our *course in the arena* (*rhaṭa d-b-asṭdyon*). For it is possible through one small opportunity to *seize the victory* (*ḥṭpynn leh lzkota*) and to *win our crown* (*nqbl klyln*). The world is the *course of the contest* (*rhaṭa hu d-*

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[114] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.32 (Bedjan, 209; Miller, 275), … ܬܟܬܘܫܐ … ܡܢ … ܐܓܘܢܐ ܕܕܡܐ … ܡܕܡ … ܒܐܓܘܢܐ. ܣܠܡ
ܐܓܘܢܐ .

[115] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.32 (Bedjan, 209; Miller, 275), ܕܣܗܕܘܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܐ .

[116] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.32 (Bedjan, 209; Miller, 275), ܕ̈ ܠܥܠ … ܡܬܚܙܝܐ .

[117] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.32 (Bedjan, 209; Miller, 275), (emphasis mine), … ܡܣܟ̈ܐ … ܢܬܕܘܢ ܡܢ ܢܝܫܐ … ܚܕ
ܐܓܘܢܐ ܕܕܡܐ .

[118] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.32 (Bedjan, 209; Miller, 276). ܬܟܬܘܫܐ … ܒܥܠܕܝܢܗ … ܬܫܒܩܘܢ … ܕܢܫܒܘܗܝ, … ܫܒܝܬܐ .
The last three terms are all derived from the same root š-b-y.

[119] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.32 (Bedjan, 209; Miller, 275-76), ܐܙܕܗܪܘ … ܕܪܟܝܢܘܬ … ܡܘܬܐ .

[120] In this one and a half pages Isaac uses over twenty-five different warfare-related terms, and this passage shows that Isaac's thought on *agōna* is richer in metaphorical terms than any other topic.

agōna) and the *arena of the courses* (*asṭdyon d-rhaṭa*).[121]

In this passage Isaac is evoking a whole series of traditional Greek sporting images. Athletes ran and fought on courses in arenas, and if they won then they received crowns. Isaac writes these words in the concluding stage of Homily 1.70, but notes at the beginning that he is building upon the previous Homily 1.69, which also focuses on the struggle and uses metaphors of spiritual battle. This parallelism of the athletic and military metaphors demonstrates the link between these two aspects of the "life is struggle" macrotrope.

The struggle metaphor is central to Isaac as seen in his discussions on sin. His longest homily on sins, Homily 1.9, discusses voluntary and involuntary sin, a common distinction made in the fathers and seen in the Orthodox liturgy.[122] After a few paragraphs discussing laziness, falling short of virtue, and free will, Isaac spends the bulk of the Homily speaking of struggling against sin. He writes, "whenever a man falls, he should not forget the love of his father … he should rise up again[123] to *struggle* (*b-taktoša*) against his adversaries … May he never cease from *making war* (*b-l-m-qrabo*) until his death, and as long as there is breath in his nostrils may he not *surrender his soul to defeat* (*yhb npšh l-m-zdkynota*)."[124] In response, God, "beholding his struggle (*ḥpyṭoth*, lit. diligence)" then "sends down His mercy and gives him powerful motivations to enable him to undergo and *resist the flaming darts of the enemy* (*l-madʿ gara ymda d-byša*)."[125] For Isaac, the whole Christian story of forgiveness and growth is encapsulated in agonistic metaphor. Here Isaac also emphasizes that when the monk struggles, God assists him to continue to defeat Satan. Human free will is assisted by divine grace once it is exercised, a theme to which I return when I discuss Isaac's anthropology. The Homily continues with Isaac urging "[N]ever cease, therefore, from wrestling with your adversaries (*taktoša d-lo-qbl bʿldbba*)."[126] He mentions the "fierceness of the battle (*taktoša*)," "your struggle (*d-qraba*)," "many struggles (*sagyawt taktoša*)," and a "great war (*d-qraba … rab*)."[127] He expands the metaphor, mentioning

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[121] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.70 (Bedjan, 506; Miller, 489), (emphasis mine), … ܐܝܟܢܐ … ܐܓܘܢܐ ܕܐܣܛܕܝܘܢ … ܐܝܟ ܐܘܣܛܕܝܘܢ . ܢܩܦܝܗ … ܕܒܠܠ ܠܡܒܕ … ܐܝܟ ܕܐܬ ܗܘ ܐܝܟܐ ܕܪܗܛܐ .

[122] George Nasr and Geoff Harvey trans., *The Divine Liturgy* (Illawong, NSW: The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of Australia and New Zealand, 2001), 12, 21, 32.

[123] *l-m-qom*, ܠܡܩܡ This Syriac word also refers to resurrection and Isaac may be drawing a parallel here with Christ.

[124] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.9 (Bedjan, 112; Miller, 190), ܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ … ܒܩܪܒܐ … ܗܘ ܗܘܐ ܠܡܙܕܟܝܘܬܐ .

[125] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.9 (Bedjan, 112-13; Miller, 190-91); this is a quote from Eph. 6:16. ܣܘܦ . ܠܡܐܕܥ … ܓܐܪܐ ܝܡܕܐ ܕܒܝܫܐ .

[126] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.9 (Bedjan, 113; Miller, 191), ܬܟܬܘܫܐ ܕܠܩܘܒܠ ܒܥܠܕܒܒܐ .

[127] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.9 (Bedjan, 113; Miller, 191), ܪܒ … ܩܪܒܐ … ܬܟܬܘܫܐ ܣܓܝܐܘܬ … ܩܪܒܐ … ܬܟܬܘܫܐ .

"blood of your wounds (*b-dma d-mḥotdon*)," "enemies (*d-b ʿldbba*)," and "wrestling with adversaries (*taktoša d-loqbl b ʿldbba*)."[128] For Isaac, his whole theology of salvation from sin, and the acquisition of virtue, is conceived of and described in agonistic language.

Struggle is inherent in living in this present world according to Isaac. The *agōna* is natural to human existence prior to heaven yet does not have to be a lost battle. He writes that, "This world is the *course of the contest* (*rahaṭa hu d-agonō*),"[129] yet it is also the place where the saints of Christ "conquered this world of struggle (*w-zkw bh l ʿlma d-agōna*)."[130] Isaac uses the struggle metaphor to explain almost every aspect of the ascetic life, for example, the thought life, prayer, and fasting. He asserts that "[F]asting is the champion (*m ʿšnna*) of every virtue, the beginning of the struggle (*b-agōna*), the crown (*klyla*) of the abstinent."[131] These short three phrases link several struggle motifs together. For Isaac, the central ascetic practice of fasting is the "champion," that is, the single strong fighter who fights as representative of the army, an image with strong resonances with the battle of David against Goliath. Fasting is also described as the starting point or essential basic practice of the struggle, and is the victor's "crown," a reference to the athletic games.[132] These closely-related terms all evoke the military/athletic imagery that is central to Isaac's understanding of ascetic *agōna*.

The words for struggle: Clustered concepts

As discussed in the first chapter, spiritual life as a struggle is a macrotrope that encompasses a number of images and a cluster of words and metaphors. Many of these ideas are grouped together in Isaac. He connects ideas of the struggle (*agōna*) with metaphors of athletes and soldiers who engage in struggle and warfare, and who practice watchfulness, guarding of the soul, and victory over the demons. The ascetics run the race in the stadium to gain their victory, but they are sometimes wounded by the fight against the passions, and Isaac clusters these metaphors together on many occasions. Isaac also goes further and adds several more Stoic-derived themes, namely dispassion, the fight for *apatheia*, and the goal of stillness. I discuss all these themes in this chapter. That Isaac understands these as related is evident in

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[128] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.9 (Bedjan, 114; Miller, 191), ܟܕܡ ܕܪܚܫܝܢܘ ... ܕܒܠܕܒܒܐ ... ܗܕܘܬܐ ܕܡܚܘܬܢ ܒܕܡܐ ܕܡܚܘܬܢ.

[129] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.70 (Bedjan, 506; Miller, 489), ܪܗܛܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܓܘܢ.

[130] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.5.22 (CSCO 554: 12; Brock, 16), ܘܙܟܘ ܒܗ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܐܓܘܢ.

[131] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 238; Miller, 298), ܨܘܡܐ ... ܟܠ ... ܕܐܓܘܢ ... ܟܠܝܠܐ.

[132] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 238 ; Miller, 298).

the many times he links some or all of them together in various combinations. Homily 1.73 is one of Isaac's shorter discourses and demonstrates his overall thought as well as how he links these agonistic metaphors. It is worth quoting in its entirety to show the way his discourse flows, and how he integrates multiple related ideas:

> Mighty indeed, trying and difficult, is the *struggle* (*agōna*)[133] that arises from the proximity of things. However much a man becomes eminent and *strong* (*ḥyltn*),[134] yet when the causes that bring on the onslaughts of *wars and struggles* (qraba w-taktoša)[135] come near him, fear grips him; he swiftly inclines towards a fall, even more than through encounter with the devil's *open warfare* (*b-qraba glyʾyt*).[136] Therefore, as long as a man does not remove himself far from what his heart dreads, his *enemy* (*lbʿldra*)[137] always has a *coign of vantage* (*ʾtra ʿlohy*)[138] against him. And if he drowses a little, his enemy readily *destroys* (*mobd*)[139] him.

> There[140] the body is fearful of injury, but by every means it keeps itself distant from sin. But here[141] it is the soul that receives the *invisible wound* (*mḥota d-la mtḥzya*)[142] and cannot *beat down her enemy who strives against her* (*mlʾyʾ leh lbʿldra d-n-taktoš ʿmh*).[143] For (worldly) things of themselves are able to arouse the turbulence of *warfare* (*qraba*)[144] against her, and voluntarily she is *led away into captivity* (*mt-dbra dšbythyn*)[145] by them, though no *warfare has assaulted* (*d-sdr ʿmh qraba*)[146] her from without. Howbeit, the soul has to *struggle* (*agōna*)[147] in the provocations that are arrayed before the body's senses, as has been said elsewhere: 'Whenever the harmful encounters of the world prevail upon the soul, these same become *sharp stakes*

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[133] ܐܓܘܢܐ This and the following terms are all in Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.73 (Bedjan 536-38; Miller, 507-08), (emphasis mine). I reference them on separate lines for easier identification.

[134] ܚܝܠܬܢ .

[135] ܩܪܒܐ ܘܬܟܬܘܫܐ .

[136] ܒܩܪܒܐ ܓܠܝܐܝܬ .

[137] ܠܒܥܠܕܪܐ .

[138] ܐܬܪܐ ܥܠܘܗܝ .

[139] ܡܘܒܕ .

[140] i.e. in the desert.

[141] i.e. in the world.

[142] ܡܚܘܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܐ .

[143] ܕܠܐ ܡܨܝܐ ܠܗ ܠܒܥܠܕܪܗ ܕܢܬܟܬܫ ܥܡܗ .

[144] ܩܪܒܐ .

[145] ܡܬܕܒܪܐ ܕܫܒܝܬܗܝܢ .

[146] ܕܣܕܪ ܥܡܗ ܩܪܒܐ .

[147] ܐܓܘܢܐ .

(*špya*)[148] for her, and she is worsted as it were naturally whenever she comes in contact with them.

Because our ancient fathers, who walked these paths, knew full well that our mind is not at all times in vigorous health, and that it is incapable of *standing steadily* (*mṣṭlyn ʾyt*)[149] in one state and *keeping guard* (*mṭrta*)[150] on itself, and that there come times of darkness when it cannot even perceive what causes it *injury* (*d-m-sgpn*),[151] they considered the matter with wisdom, and clad themselves with non-possessiveness as a *weapon* (*zayna*).[152] This frees a man from *many struggles* (*agōna sgya*),[153] as it is written, for by means of his indigence he can *extricate himself* (*d-mt-plṭ*)[154] from many transgressions. And they went out into the desert, where there is nothing that can be an occasion for the passions, in order that when a moment of weakness should come, they would be unable to find occasions for falls. I mean that they would have no occasion for anger, lust, the remembrance of wrongs, and glory, and that both these and their like would be at a minimum by reason of the desert. For they walled themselves up in the desert as in an *impregnable tower* (*d-bmgdla d-la mtkbš*).[155] Thus each of them was able to finish his *struggles* (*agoneh*)[156] in stillness (*b-šlya*),[157] where the senses find no help for assisting our *adversary* (*lb ʿly taktoša*)[158] through the encounter with harmful things. It is better for us to *die in the struggle* (*mota d-b-agonyn*),[159] than to live in our fall.[160]

In this Homily we see from the first sentence that the theme is the struggle (*agōna*) caused by having or desiring possessions. Isaac in the following sentence mentions both struggle (*agōna*) and war (*qraba*), and that Satan conducts open warfare against the ascetic. He then develops this theme in several sentences that all use various military terms—enemy, strives,

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[148] ܫܘܦܐ. This is the same word used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7 to describe the thorn from Satan that harassed him.

[149] ܡܨܛܠܝܢ ܐܝܬ.

[150] ܡܛܪܬܐ.

[151] ܕܡܣܓܦܢ.

[152] ܙܝܢܐ.

[153] ܐܓܘܢܐ ܣܓܝܐܐ.

[154] ܕܡܬܦܠܛ.

[155] ܕܒܡܓܕܠܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܟܒܫ.

[156] ܐܓܘܢܗ.

[157] ܒܫܠܝܐ.

[158] ܠܒܥܠܕܒܒܐ.

[159] ܡܘܬܐ ܕܒܐܓܘܢ.

[160] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.73 (Bedjan, 536-38; Miller, 507-08).

wound, fight, captivity, warfare, assaulted, struggle, prevail, and sharp stakes (as used in warfare). Isaac evinces his wide repertoire of struggle-related ideas in a well-constructed paragraph. These terms frequently used in his work in close conjunction and exhibit Isaac's capacity to use a kind of *exergasia.* In the concluding paragraph Isaac develops his argument further and again adds to his exhibition of terms related to a military struggle. He mentions keeping guard, injury, weapon, adversary, and struggles (three times). He also introduces passions and stillness, and describes the successful ascetic as one who "walled themselves up in the desert as in an impregnable tower," a clearly military idea. This whole Homily, like several others, moves quickly from phrase to phrase, and uses many military or athletic terms or images.

I shall now proceed to analyse Isaac's use of these terms, starting with the more obvious military and athletic ideas of fighting, wrestling, guarding, and watchfulness, including the main objects of the fight—Satan and the passions. This leads to further discussion on struggle in relation to Isaac's anthropology and inaugurated eschatology. I conclude with his approach to spiritual battle as it intersects with the Stoic themes of dispassion and stillness.

Locations of Struggle

Isaac's definitive understanding of spiritual life is that it is an ascetic struggle (*agōna*), one that takes place in several locations, the most common being the arena or stadium of life. This term *asṭadyon* derives from the Greco-Roman word for stadium—the place used for both sport and for the slaughter of martyrs.[161] Since for Isaac the struggler is both soldier and athlete, the arena is a logical location in his metaphorical thought-world, as both the athlete and soldier-martyrs fought there. Also, given that asceticism was often seen as a new kind of martyrdom, and martyrdom was often associated with the arena, this is a natural connection for Isaac to make. Isaac says, "Now is the time of the unseen martyrdom (*d-shdota d-la mtḥzya*), in which it is said that the monastic order always excel."[162] He explains that, "Not only those who, for the sake of faith in Christ suffer death, are martyrs; but also those who die because of their observance of the commandments."[163] Isaac writes that anyone who is having difficulties in the fight "should not be troubled on this account,

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[161] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.40 (CSCO 554: 41-42; Brock, 51), ܐܣܛܕܝܘܢ.
[162] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.32 (Bedjan, 209; Miller, 275), ܕܣܗܕܘܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܐ.
[163] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.3.19 (Bedjan, 31; Hansbury, 53).

nor quit the *arena* (*b-d-gon*)."[164] At several points Isaac refers to *pankrateia*, the "all-in" style of Greek wrestling which featured in the Olympic games and was a popular military training exercise. He writes that God is "gladdened by your wrestling."[165] For Isaac, the location of this spiritual wrestling is the stadium, and it is an "all-in" wrestling with Satan and the passions.[166] Isaac also uses the term stadium when he says, "there are four different kinds of reflection on salvation, with which the intellect works to irrigate its knowledge, for the increase of life in the stadium of uprightness (*asṭadyon d-kinuta*)."[167] He continues by listing these four kinds of reflection, which he says includes "knowledge of the hidden struggles (*taktoša*)," indicating yet again the connection between struggle and its metaphorical location of the arena.[168]

Isaac discusses the stages of spiritual life and prayer in Homily 2.10.[169] He then summarises, "All these are different stages in the course [are] run (*šoḥlpa d-rhṭa*), in divine fashion, by the intellect in the stadium (*asṭadyon*) of this world, each person having his gaze fixed upon the crown."[170] Here Isaac adds to the metaphor of the stadium the images of course to be run in the stadium, and the vision of the reward of the crown. Isaac is alluding to the Pauline expression in 1 Cor. 9:24-27.[171] One aspect of this metaphor of running the race is persistence. The Greek *marathōn* was long and exhausting and Isaac sees this as a correct understanding of ascetic struggle. This use of arena or stadium is not frequent in Isaac, yet the naturalness of Isaac's usage shows that he expects that his readers will understand these terms and their related metaphorical worlds. Given that when Isaac was writing, the Greco-Roman stadiums had long been closed for such arena sports this evidences the remarkable longevity of these ideas and the extent that Hellenist culture had

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[164] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.8 (Bedjan, 110; Miller, 188), ܒܐܓܘܢ The Syriac construction means roughly "in the place of the *agōn*."

[165] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.16 (Miller, 211). The Syriac text is not in Bedjan.

[166] Note the significance in Semitic thought of Jacob who in Genesis 32:22-32 wrestles with the angel of God. His name is changed to Israel meaning "He who wrestles with God." Compare Hos. 12:3,4a "In the womb he took his brother by the heel, And in his maturity he contended with (lit. craftily put to flight) God. Yes, he wrestled (*ath-rorb*) with the angel and prevailed."

[167] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2:10.1 (CSCO 554: 31; Brock, 38), ܐܣܛܕܝܘܢ ܕܟܐܢܘܬܐ.

[168] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2:10.1 (CSCO 554: 31; Brock, 38), ܬܟܬܘܫܐ.

[169] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10 (CSCO 554: 31-42; Brock, 38-52).

[170] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.40 (CSCO 554: 41-42; Brock, 51), ܫܘܚܠܦܐ ܕܪܗܛܐ ... ܐܣܛܕܝܘܢ.

[171] "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

penetrated the worldview of Syrians.[172] It also demonstrates again the high level of similarity between Syrian and Greek Christian ascetic frameworks. For Isaac the location of the spiritual warfare is here on Earth, which he also calls the "field of fighting (*atra galya d-taktoše*)," using a term for the rural outdoor scene of battle.[173] This somewhat contrasts with Isaac's more frequent reference to the arena as the location of struggle, but the wide open space was generally chosen by generals because it was most suitable for opposing armies to fight and is thus an appropriate metaphor. Isaac also refers to a mound or place gained by a soldier to provide a positional or height advantage over his opponent. He uses this as a metaphor for "the devil's open warfare" because if the ascetic is not careful "his enemy always has a *coign of vantage* (*atra ʿlohy*) against him."[174]

Another related metaphor is that of the fortress as a place of watching and as a target for offensive fighting. When Isaac writes that ascetics succeeded in their "struggle" (*agōna*) because "they walled themselves up in the desert as in an *impregnable tower* (*d-bmgdla d-la mtkbš*)," he is using the fort as a metaphor for the body and soul of the ascetic who dwells safely in the desert.[175] This analogy is doubly appropriate as the desert region was where most of the defensive Syrian forts were built, and because by the time of Isaac many of these desert forts had been abandoned and were inhabited by ascetics.[176] These references to various locations for the *agōna* demonstrate that Isaac has a well thought-out appreciation for the similarities between the ascetic, the soldier, and the athlete in terms of where they fight or agonise.

Soldiers, Armour, Weapons, Athletes, and Crowns

The spiritual combat is never-ending according to Isaac, and requires quite brutal soldier-

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[172] Theodosius I banned the games in 394 CE, Tony Perrottet, *The Naked Olympics: The True Story of the Ancient Games* (New York: Random, 2004), 190.

[173] Brock's translation "open space of struggles," while literal, does not do justice to the metaphor. Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.37 (CSCO 554: 41; Brock, 50), ܐܬܪܐ ܓܠܝܐ ܕܬܟܬܘܫܐ.

[174] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.73 (Bedjan, 537; Miller, 507), ܐܬܪܐ ܥܠܘܗܝ.

[175] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.73 (Bedjan, 538; Miller, 508), ܕܒܡܓܕܠܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܟܒܫ.

[176] Procopius writes, "For a land which is altogether bare and unproductive separates the Roman and the Persian territory for a great distance, and this contains nothing worth fighting for. Both of them, however, have built forts carelessly of unbaked brick in the desert which chances to lie nearest to the land which they inhabit; these forts never suffered attack from their neighbours, for both peoples lived there without enmity, since they possessed nothing which their adversaries might desire. The Emperor Diocletian had built three forts, such as I have described, in this desert, one of which, Mambri by name, had fallen into decay in the long course of time and was restored by the Emperor Justinian." http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Procopius/Buildings/home.html, accessed October 15, 2018.

like self-discipline for the spiritual warrior. He urges his readers to copy the beliefs and practice of the ascetic "frontline warriors (*ršy drra dbnyh*)."[177] He writes that:

> This world is the course of the contest (*rhaṭa hu d-agōna*) and the arena of the courses (*asṭadyon d-rahṭa*).[178] This is the time of combat (*d-taktōša*); and there is no law laid down in the field of combat (*atra d-taktōša*) and in the time of contest (*zbna d-agōna*).[179] That is to say, the King lays no limits on His warriors (*palḥawohy*) until the contest (*agōna*) is finished.[180]

Isaac uses the intertwined metaphors of the soldier fighting in the field of combat until the battle is won, and the runner racing in the stadium until the race completed, to make the point that the ascetic must not stop his fasting and prayer or he will lose. He also warns that "oftentimes" an ascetic is "useless … because of his lack of training (*la-mdršoteh*)," and is "constantly pierced and thrown down (*dgyš w-rma*)."[181] This links lack of military preparedness with the outcome of being speared or possibly thrust through with a sword. For Isaac, training is essential to win the spiritual fight. Yet Isaac sees the possibility of victory even amidst near-defeat. He says that such an untrained ascetic can rise up and win if he "suddenly seizes the banner from the hands of mighty warriors (*ḥṭp leh lnyša d-mšryta min ayda dbny gnbra*)."[182] Here Isaac refers to the general's banner which if captured signalled a major victory for the attacker. To do this requires one to be greater than the "mighty warriors," and thus Isaac is attributing to unyielding ascetics great stature indeed.

Isaac often expands the metaphor of the ascetic as a spiritual soldier fighting in combat, by discussing how he is equipped with weapons. In Homily 1.39 he speaks to ascetics saying:

> But you … who have set out in pursuit of God, always remember in your life of *struggle* (*d-agōna*) … the ardent thoughts with which you left your home … and enrolled yourself in the *fighting ranks* (*d-qraba*). In this manner examine yourself each day, that there be no cooling of your soul's ardor with respect to any of the

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[177] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.14 (Bedjan, 127; Miller, 202), ܪܫܝ ܕܪܐ ܕܒܢܝܗ .

[178] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.70 (Bedjan, 506; Miller, 489), ܪܗܛܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܓܘܢܐ … ܐܣܛܕܝܘܢ ܕܪܗܛܐ.

[179] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.70 (Bedjan, 506 ; Miller, 489), ܐܬܪܐ ܕܬܟܬܘܫܐ … ܙܒܢܐ ܕܐܓܘܢܐ .

[180] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.70 (Bedjan, 506 ; Miller, 489), ܦܠܚܘܗܝ, … ܐܓܘܢܐ .

[181] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.70 (Bedjan, 506 ; Miller, 490), ܠܐ ܡܕܪܫܘܬܗ … ܕܓܝܫ ܘܪܡܐ.

[182] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.70 (Bedjan, 506 ; Miller, 490), ܚܛܦ ܠܗ ܠܢܝܫܐ ܕܡܫܪܝܬܐ ܡܢ ܐܝܕܐ ܕܒܢܝ ܓܢܒܪܐ Lit. "Encampment banner."

weapons that you carry, nor in the zeal which blazed up within you at the commencement of your *struggle* (*agōna*), lest you lose any of those *weapons* (*zayna*) with which you were arrayed at the start of the *contest* (*agōna*).[183]

The imagery of the soldier being arrayed with weapons and having the right zealous attitude is an appropriate image for the zeal required of an ascetic in maintaining his fasting and prayer.[184] Isaac continues by mentioning another weapon in the soldier's armoury. A soldier's voice could be used as a psychological weapon and also as a warning. "Constantly raise your voice in the camp (*w-arym qlk amynayt bgo mšryata*), encouraging and urging to valor the sons of the right (that is, your own thoughts) and show the others (that is, the enemy's forces) that you are keeping watch (*d'yr*)."[185] In this section we see the image of the army camp, with the soldier on guard duty, strengthening his comrades' commitment and also raising his voice at the first sign of attack. The spiritual soldier is not meant to be passive but active, and use his ascetic weapons in the combat. He writes, "He who has armed himself with the weapon of fasting is afire with zeal at all times (*ayna dlhna amyn lbyš: dṭnna ayk dbnora šgyr bklzbn*)."[186]

Along with weapons, Isaac several times mentions the use of spiritual armour. He speaks of the "armour of humility (*zayna mkykota*)" when fighting the "enemy (*db'ldbba*)."[187] Elsewhere he urges:

Arm your soul (*zayn npšk*) against the spirit of blasphemy; for without armour (*zayna*) you will not stand firm in this place without being killed suddenly in secret by the seducers. Your armour (*zayna*) is fasting and those tears which you shed in continual bowing down" (i.e. prayer).[188]

Later he adds the importance of having, "Our senses without and our thoughts within clothed with the whole armor of God (*zyna d-Alaha*)."[189] While Isaac explicitly mentions

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[183] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.39 (Bedjan, 274; Miller, 323), (emphasis mine), ... ܐܓܘܢܐ ... ܐܢܘܢ ... ܩܕܡܬܐ ... ܐܙܝܢܐ ... ܐܓܘܢܐ.

[184] In another reference that connects to the image of the arena without explicitly mentioning it, Isaac writes of the ascetic who fails to maintain righteousness and is thus "like a gladiator surrounded by enemy ranks and stripped of his *weapons.*"ܙܝܢܗ Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 226; Miller, 290).

[185] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.39 (Bedjan, 274; Miller, 323), ܘܐܪܝܡ ܩܠܟ ܐܡܝܢܐܝܬ ܒܓܘ ܡܫܪܝܬܐ ... ܕܥܝܪ.

[186] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 241; Miller, 300). ܐܝܢܐ ܕܠܗܢܐ ܐܡܝܢ ܠܒܝܫ ܕܛܢܢܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܒܢܘܪܐ ܫܓܝܪ ܒܟܠܙܒܢ ܚܠܐܬ It is interesting that Isaac at various points describes fasting as both an armour and as a weapon.

[187] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.5.26 (CSCO 554: 13; Brock, 18), ܐܢܘ ܡܟܝܟܘܬܐ ... ܕܒܥܠܕܒܒܐ.

[188] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.4.55 (Bedjan, 48; Hansbury, 70), ܙܝܢ ܢܦܫܟ ... ܙܝܢܐ ... ܙܝܢܐ.

[189] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 242; Miller, 300). ܙܝܢ ܕܐܠܗܐ.

the soldier and his defensive armour many times, the hundreds of other times that he uses "struggle," "combat," "contest," and equivalent terms all imply the soldier or athlete as the actor. Significantly, other than a very few times when Isaac likens the ascetic to someone on a journey, Isaac's persistent and overwhelming metaphor for the ascetic is that of the soldier or athlete in an *agōna*.[190] For him, almost the only way to conceptualise the committed spiritual life is as a spiritual battle or race.

I have previously noted several places where Isaac writes about wrestling in the arena and running the race to receive the crown. The Syriac word that Isaac uses at these times is usually *m-athlyta* (*mṭlyta*), which is derived from the Greek *atlysa* (i.e. athlete).[191] Isaac directly links the two metaphors of athlete and soldier together at several points. One of the clearest is in Homily 1.70 where Isaac writes: "This world is the *course of the contest* (*rhṭa hu agōna*) and the *arena* (*asṭadyon*) of courses. This time is the time of *combat* (*taktoša*)."[192] Isaac is using typical Syriac synthetic parallelism where two closely-related terms and ideas are brought together to make a point, often poetically.[193] Isaac also makes this connection when after mentioning fighting with the "enemies" (*l-bʿldbbyn*) of the soul and taking up the "whole armor of God" (*klh zyna d-alaha*), he adds "let us strenuously take this crown (*klyla*)."[194] It was normal in Greek athletics that after an athlete won a race they would receive a crown, thus Isaac is here linking the military conquest with the athletic achievement.[195] Elsewhere Isaac further uses the image of the athlete and the crown. He says, "For if you suffer bodily in the Lord's contest (*agōna*), the Lord himself will *crown* (*m-kll*) you."[196] This imagery is familiar in Christian ascetic literature, for

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[190] For examples of the journey metaphor see Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.30.7 (CSCO 554: 123; Brock, 136); 2.30.13,14 (CSCO 554: 124-25; Brock, 237); 2.31.1 (CSCO 554: 126; Brock, 238); 2.32.3 (CSCO 554: 131; Brock, 143); 2.33.1 (CSCO 554: 132; Brock, 144).

[191] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.39 (Bedjan, 276; Miller, 325), ܡܛܠܝܬܐ. *Mṭlyta,* (n. fight, struggle, especially for a prize). A related word that Isaac uses is *doršn* (ܕܘܪܫܐ) meaning training or ascetic practice, and which is the equivalent of the Greek *gymnasia* or the Latin *exercitus*, for example Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.40.18 (CSCO 554: 168; Brock, 179).

[192] Homily 1.70 (Bedjan, 506; Miller, 489), (emphasis mine), ܪܗܛܐ ܗܘ ܐܓܘܢܐ ... ܐܣܛܕܝܘܢ ... ܬܟܬܘܫܐ.

[193] This was a common Middle-Eastern form and is very evident in Psalms and Proverbs.

[194] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 242; Miller, 300), ܠܬܚܫܚܬܐ ... ܟܠܗ ܙܝܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ... ܟܠܝܠܐ Compare Theodoret of Cyrus who in his praise of James of Cyrrestica, links athletes and war in an extended metaphor. "Now that we have proceeded through the *contests* of the *athletes* of virtue described above, narrating in summary their *laborious exercises*, their *exertions* in the *contests* and their most glorious and splendid *victories*, let us now record … the way of life of those … who *contend* magnificently and *strive* to surpass their predecessors in *exertion*." James, "unceasingly under the eyes of spectators … *strives in combat* and *repels* the necessities of nature" (emphasis mine). Theodoret of Cyrrhus, R.M. Price, trans. *A History of the Monks of Syria* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 133, 135.

[195] See Burkhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, 160-217.

[196] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.39 (Bedjan, 270; Miller, 321), ܡܟܠܠ

example Rufinus writes that Athanasius died "after many struggles and many crowns of suffering" (*post multos agones multasquo patientiae coronas*).[197] A common enough trick in the arena was for an athlete to blind his wrestling opponent with dirt thrown in his eye. While considered dishonourable it was practiced enough to be an image for the tricky enemy. Isaac states that various objects can blind the senses of the ascetic, particularly the "phantasies of a woman's beauty," and thus "the athlete's understanding is blinded by the sight and nearness of objects of sense."[198] So the metaphor of the athlete is, along with soldier, a very appropriate image for the ascetic, and given the interconnectedness of the two roles, in many ways Isaac's most common metaphor could be defined as that of the soldier/athlete.

Self-mortification

Isaac in several places uses the image of self-mortification and specifically self-crucifixion as a form of *agōna*. In Homily 2.30 Isaac teaches at length about spiritual self-crucifixion in relation to prayer. He writes that one who prays at length without keeping track of the time, "has truly *crucified* (*d-zqph*) the world within himself" and "has *been crucified* (*w-azdqp*) over *against the world* (*loqbal 'lma*), having *suspended himself on the cross through the abandonment of everything* (*wṭla npš b-zqypa bšbyqota dkl mdm*)."[199] In this section he discusses various ways a monk may spend the day in prayer or psalmody, which enables him to fight the passions, "this being the sum of all *contests* (*agōna*)."[200] Isaac specifies further that it is both the "body (*d-pagra*) and intellect (*hona*)" that are "crucified," an aspect of Isaac's integrated anthropology where what impacts the body also affects the soul.[201] Isaac elsewhere develops this notion of fighting the mind where he writes of our "foolish mentality, which continually needs the *lash* (*torṣa* lit. correction) in order to be kept on the right path … Accordingly, *blame* (*at'dl*) your mind for being stupid."[202]

In Homily 1.64, Isaac discusses his popular themes of stillness, silence, guarding the heart, prayer and the passions, and early in the homily adds a set of pithy aphorisms. One of

[197] Rufinus, *Church History*, Book 11.3, The Church history of Rufinus of Aquileia Books 10 and 11, trans. Philip Amidon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 64; PL 21:510.
[198] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.39 (Bedjan 276-77; Miller, 325).
[199] Homily 2.30.5 (CSCO 554: 123; Brock, 135), (emphasis mine), ܘܡܘܦ ... ܘܐܝܕܘܡ ... ܘܦܡܘܦ ... ܟܠܗ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܠܟܐ ... ܘܐܠ ܗܘ ܢܦܫ ܒܙܩܝܦܐ ܒܫܒܝܩܘܬܐ ܕܟܠ ܡܕܡ.
[200] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.30.7 (CSCO 554: 123; Brock, 136), ܐܓܘܢ.
[201] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.30.6 (CSCO 554: 123; Brock, 135), ܕܦܓܪܐ ... ܗܘܢܐ.
[202] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.26.2 (CSCO 554: 113; Brock, 125), ܬܘܪܨܐ ... ܐܬܥܕܠ.

the first of these is that, "True *theōria* is mortification of the heart (*teorya d-šrra: mytota hy d-lba*)."[203] Theōria is the Greek idea best translated as "contemplation of God" and is a common theme in Syrian ascetic and mystical writings.[204] Isaac is thus directly linking the ultimate ascetic experience of God with heart mortification. He continues by adding that, "*A heart that is truly dead to the world* (*lba d-bqošta myt l'lma*) is wholly astir to God … True mortification is the movement of life," thus emphasising the paradox that death can bring life, and that the *agōna* is life-giving.[205] For Isaac this image of self-death is recurring. He states "Be dead in life and you will not live in death. Let your soul die strenuously and not live in weakness (*hwy myta bḥya: w-la tḥa b-mytota. hb npšk dtmot bkšyrota: w-la lmḥa bḥyba*)."[206] Isaac emphasises the level of self-denial required to be an ascetic, and he seems to be alluding to Jesus' words that "whoever wishes to save his soul will lose it, but whoever loses his soul for my sake will find it."[207] Isaac writes also that "stillness *mortifies* (*mmyt*) the outward senses" as these were understood to cause the passions and thus needed to be deadened.[208] This metaphorical death of the ascetic is quite an intense image and reflects the Biblical imagery of the *agōna* unto death.[209] For Isaac, the Christian life is a fight with the self to the death, but this death leads to life.

This linking of *agōna* with crucifixion would for a Syriac reader immediately bring to mind the direct connection between the *agōna* of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and his related crucifixion. The Eastern and Oriental traditions, and even to some extent the Latin, place far more emphasis on the events leading up to the Crucifixion than does Protestantism with its almost exclusive focus on the death of Christ. This somewhat occludes to Western perception the extent to which the Syrians view the whole agonising process as salvific. The struggle of Jesus is not a defeat, but a victory of a hero over sin and death. And since for Jesus as a divine hero there was suffering and struggle, then naturally for the ascetic there is also most appropriately a daily struggle and various kinds of self-

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[203] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.64 (Bedjan, 444; Miller, 448), ܗܝ ܕܠܒܐ ܡܝܬܘܬܐ ܕܫܪܝܪܐ ܬܐܘܪܝܐ.

[204] Mary Hansbury, introduction to *On the Ascetical Life: St Isaac of Nineveh,* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 17. Hansbury notes that *theōria* along with many other key Syrian terms were originally developed by Evagrius. Brock notes that for Isaac, *theōria* is the "profundity of the soul's vision." Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.7 footnote 5.

[205] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.64 (Bedjan, 444; Miller, 448), (emphasis mine), ܠܟܠ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܚܝܐ ܠܥܠܡܐ This is yet another synthetic parallelism showing that self-mortification is being dead to the world. This concept is common in the Sufis too.

[206] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.3.19 (Bedjan, 31; Hansbury, 53), ܗܘܝ ܡܝܬܐ ܚܝܐ ܘܠܐ ܬܚܐ ܒܡܝܬܘܬܐ ܗܒ ܢܦܫܟ ܕܬܡܘܬ ܒܟܫܝܪܘܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܠܡܚܐ ܒܚܝܒܐ.

[207] Matt. 16:25.

[208] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 246; Miller, 303), ܡܡܝܬ.

[209] Heb. 12:4.

crucifixion. Spirituality for the Syrians focusses on the ascetic imitating the actions of Christ.[210] In a lesser form of self-mortification Isaac also discusses the importance of self-examination in the struggle. He says, "throughout your life of struggle (*agōna*) … examine yourself each day (*wabqy napšek bklywm*)," a phraseology we see in the chapter on al-Muḥāsibī.[211]

The Enemies: The passions, Satan, and demons

Isaac frequently uses the language of the "enemy" which is natural given that the struggle is a fight against an antagonist. He states that the demons are the "enemy (*bʿldbba,* lit. accuser)" and uses a roughly equivalent term when he writes of "countless blows from the adversary (*d-lqobla*)."[212] In Homily 1.16 Isaac writes about the attacking "demon of fornication" and that the ascetic must, "be on your guard against the spiteful abuse of the *enemy.*"[213] In all this, God is present to assist the ascetic in the struggle. He writes that God will help the monk so that "you will no longer be defeated (*ḥob*) by your enemy (*bʿldbbza*)."[214] The enemy is not just external and demonic however, for the battle is partly internal against the lusts. Isaac describes the result of being attacked by the enemy of the passions as being, "Vanquished (*nezdka*) by the lusts," where the notion of being defeated is one of deep shame in Syrian culture.[215] This repeated use of the enemy trope would have resonated deeply in a culture where repeated invasions by Persians, Romans, and Arabs was a regular feature of everyday life.

The most frequent antagonist in the struggle is the passions. Isaac writes often of "contests with the passions" (*agonē ḥaššē*) and "contests … in opposing the passions (*agōna … bhyn bhlyn,* where "these" refers back to the *ḥaššē*)."[216] He frequently links contests and passions, for example, he warns that leaving God, the "Fountainhead of life and Ocean of knowledge," one is "thrown night and day into *struggles, contests and fights*

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[210] Isaac also teaches his readers to pray "By your passion, cure my passions." Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.16, (Miller, 212). The Syriac is not in Bedjan.

[211] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.39 (Bedjan, 274; Miller, 323), ܘܗܡܪ ܒܥܝܢ ܚܠܝܡܪ .

[212] ܕܠܡܘܥܠܟ … ܚܠܘܕܚܟ Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.5.26 (CSCO 554: 13; Brock, 18); Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.40 (Miller, 329). He also writes of "hard battles with the demons (*b-qraba ʿsqa d-šada*)." ܚܢܘܟ ܚܡܘܪ ܚܣܘܡ ܕܥܪܐܟܪ Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.5.26 (CSCO 554: 13; Brock, 17).

[213] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.16 (Miller, 210), (emphasis mine). Syriac unavailable.

[214] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.39 (Bedjan, 275; Miller, 324); ܚܠܘܕܚܟ … ܣܕ Isaac also often uses metaphorically-related terms like "victory (*zkota*)," Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 241; Miller, 300).

[215] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 243; Miller, 301), ܢܕܟܪ .

[216] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.15 (CSCO 554: 34; Brock, 41); Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.9 (CSCO 554: 32; Brock, 40), ܚܠܝܡ ܚܣܘ ܐܟ ܓܠܝܟ … ܚܫܪܪ ܟ ܓܠܝܟ ܐ .

with the thoughts, the passions (mṣwota w-agōna w-taktoša. ʿm-ḥošbba w-ḥḥaša)."[217] Isaac lists the passions towards the end of Homily 1.2 as being "love of riches; amassing of possessions; the fattening of the body, from which proceeds carnal desire; love of honours, which is the source of envy; … pride and pomp of power; elegance; popularity, which is the cause of ill-will; fear for the body."[218] He elsewhere lists anxiety, anger, greed,[219] fear,[220] depression,[221] and lust.[222] In relation to these, Isaac writes that "virtue consist(s)" in control of the passions, and that "once the intellect is engaged in meditating on God, it is *raised above contest (mnh d-agōna atʿly)*," and "reigns over (*mmlko mmlk*)" the passions and "they *vanish away (mtṭlqo mtṭlqyn).*"[223]

The passions are relentless in attacking the ascetic, and Isaac asserts that, "you will find no peace from the *importunity of the passions (lzta d-ḥašša).*"[224] Isaac argues that just as the warmth from the sun lingers for awhile, much more so do passions. He warns that, "The passions are like dogs accustomed to lick blood in butcher's shops. When these are barred from what their habit feeds on, they stand before the doors and howl until the force of their previous custom is spent."[225] Isaac describes the attacks in very vivid and concrete imagery. He also demonstrates a very nuanced view of the passions and how they attack when he states that, "Not all the passions wage war by means of assault (*lo klhon ḥašša bgorga mqrabyn*)" but some "simply lay a weight upon the soul (*ala yoqra symyn blḥod ʿl-npša*)."[226] Because the passions are so powerful they are hard to fight, therefore, Isaac says that, "[T]o avert passions by memories of virtues is easier and also more beautiful than to conquer them in battle (*lm-gnb anon l-ḥašša bʿwohdna dmytrta pšyqa ap špyra: min d-lm-zka anon b-agōna*)."[227] The war against the passions is difficult according to Isaac, and everyone falls at some point. People will be "grieved over the portion of their righteousness which is snatched away from them from time to time during the *contest (agōna)* with the

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[217] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.26 (CSCO 554: 38; Brock, 47), ܗܘܐ ܡܢ ܐܘ ܐܓܘܢܐ ܘܚܘܫܒܐ ܡܢ ܣܘܥܪܢܐ ܘܚܫܐ.
[218] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.2.30 (Bedjan, 18-19; Hansbury, 40).
[219] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.3.1, 1.6.2 (Bedjan, 20, 82; Hansbury, 43, 102).
[220] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.1.20, 1.1.37 (Bedjan, 5-6, 10; Hansbury, 29, 32).
[221] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.2.6 (Bedjan, 11; Hansbury, 33).
[222] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.5.84 (Bedjan, 78; Hansbury, 97).
[223] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.12 (CSCO 554: 33; Brock, 40-41), … ܡܠܟܐ ܡܡܠܟܐ … ܐܬܥܠܝ ܐܓܘܢܐ ܘܟܕ ܡܢ ܗܘ ܡܛܠܩܐ ܡܛܠܩܝܢ.
[224] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.67 (Bedjan, 481; Miller, 474), ܐܠܬܐ ܕܚܫܐ.
[225] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.67 (Bedjan, 481; Miller, 474).
[226] ܠܐ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܚܫܐ ܒܓܘܪܓܐ ܡܩܪܒܝܢ … ܐܠܐ ܐܝܩܪܐ ܣܝܡܝܢ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܥܠ ܢܦܫܐ Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.68 (Bedjan, 485; Miller, 477). Isaac lists here as those which "do not attack": "listlessness, despondency and grief."
[227] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.6.17 (Bedjan, 90; Hansbury, 109), ܠܡܓܢܒ ܐܢܘܢ ܠܚܫܐ ܒܥܘܗܕܢܐ ܕܡܝܬܪܬܐ ܦܫܝܩܐ ܐܦ ܫܦܝܪܐ ܡܢ ܕܠܡܙܟܐ ܐܢܘܢ ܒܐܓܘܢܐ.

passions and with sin."[228] Yet God's forgiveness is great and, "His mercifulness is far more extensive than we can conceive."[229]

While discussing the war against the passions Isaac writes of the importance of being "diligent and alert (*kšyrīnn w-ʿyrīnn*)."[230] Diligence is the quality expected of the soldier on watch, and so is alertness. A word from the same Syriac root (*ʿyr*) is used in the NT where Paul writes, "Be on the alert."[231] This vigilance is especially against attacks on the mind, and Isaac speaks of the "*hidden attacks (bksyot pgʿa)* of the imprints of thoughts."[232] He adds that for the ascetic, "His mind is defiled (*mṣʿra*) by shameful passions" and thus needs to be "purified (*zhy*)," making a connection here with the whole sacrificial system and the cleansing brought by Christ's salvation.[233] The mind for Isaac is the battle field for thoughts and passions, but these can be defeated. He asserts that "[F]rom labor (*ʿmla*) and vigilance (*zhyrota*) flows purity of thoughts."[234] Isaac at times locates these passions within the "irascible (*ḥmat*)" part of the soul, in contrast to the mind, and whereas the mind is purified by *theōria*, Isaac says that the passions in the soul are purified by ascetic "practice" (*sʿorota*, rhymes with Syriac *teorya*).[235] According to Isaac, the passions do not cease nor evil thoughts come to an end without the desert and solitude.[236] The significance of the desert is that it is the place where the monk in solitude is most engaged in the warfare with the demons. The desert in monastic tradition is the place of undistracted prayer, but also the site of the greatest *agōna*. Sometimes these spiritual battles with evil forces are open and sometimes in secret.[237] Isaac therefore frequently emphasises the importance of being vigilant and watching and guarding against the demons' attacks.[238] He writes of the "watchfulness" (*shahara*) required by the monk for "completing their struggles

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[228] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.40.17 (CSCO 554: 167-68; Brock, 179), (emphasis mine), ܐܠܗܐ .

[229] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.40.17 (CSCO 554: 167-68; Brock, 179).

[230] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.10.26 (CSCO 554: 38; Brock, 47), ܟܫܝܪܝܢ ܘܥܝܪܝܢ . This rhymes.

[231] ettʿyro. Greek is *gregoreite* 1 Cor 16:13, Compare "be fully alert" 1 Peter 1:13.

[232] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.2.34 (Bedjan, 20; Hansbury, 41), ܚܘܫܒܐ ܟܠܝ .

[233] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.2.23 (Bedjan, 16; Hansbury, 38), ܟܬܪܝܢ ... ܗܘ .

[234] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.2.24 (Bedjan, 17; Hansbury, 38), ܥܡܠܐ ... ܙܗܝܪܘܬܐ The Syriac word *ʿmla* connotes working against the soil, e.g. Exod 20:9 cf. Gen 3:17-19.

[235] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.2.21 (Bedjan, 15; Hansbury, 37). ܣܥܘܪܘܬܐ ... ܣܘܥܪܢܐ This understanding of the composition of the human and how both parts are purified can be compared to Evagrius.

[236] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.1.6 (Bedjan, 2-3; Hansbury, 26); Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.73 (Bedjan, 537-38; Miller, 508).

[237] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.5.26 (CSCO 554: 13; Brock, 17). Isaac writes of "Hidden struggles" 2.10.1; Brock, 38; "Battles (taktoša) that assail him from without." Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 244; Miller, 301).

[238] Compare Athanasius who was "vigilant," and thus the "tricks and deceits" of the heretics were "vigilantly exposed" by him. Rufinus writes "*doli as fallaciae vigilanter detergebantu.*" Rufinus, *Church History*, Book 10.8, The Church history of Rufinus of Aquileia Books 10 and 11, Philip Amidon trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 26; PL 21:486.

(*agonyhon*)."[239] He also emphasises "guarding of the heart (*nṭorta d-lebba*)," "guarding the tongue (*d-nṭorta d-lšna*)," and "guarding the mouth (*d-nṭr poma*)."[240]

Isaac sees the demons as partners with the passions in attacking the ascetic. The demons and their leader Satan must be wrestled with and conquered. Isaac writes of "hard battles (*b-qrabe ʿsqa*) with the demons."[241] This warfare is consistently described in agonistic language. For example, Isaac writes in a beautiful piece of synthetic parallelism, "God commands us to confront the devil with fearlessness and ardor, saying: 'Start now to destroy (*l-mībikētēh*) him, rush to war against him (*atgakā ʿamēh l-qrabā*), grapple with him manfully'."[242] The language he uses is replete with various images and words tied to the central trope of warfare, for example Isaac speaks of being attacked by a "phalanx of demons (*palga d-saṭana*)."[243] For Isaac, this *agōna* with the demons is real and constant but can be successfully waged.[244] He says, "the Fathers of old overcame the mighty and fearsome attacks of the rebellious one."[245] Sometimes this spiritual battle is with Satan himself because according to Isaac, evil thoughts come to the mind and lack of stillness assails the ascetic because of "the devil's violent combats (*b-qrabohy taqyāpa*)."[246] This "adversary" Satan is very cunning in how he attacks—"Our adversary, the devil, has the long-standing habit of artfully choosing modes of warfare against those who enter this contest after an examination of their weapons, and he *changes the mode of his struggle (dnā kagōneh mšaḥlēp)* against them according to the aim of each."[247] Isaac therefore frequently emphasises the importance of being vigilant and watching and guarding against the demons' attacks.[248]

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[239] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.75 (Bedjan 551, 556; Miller, 518, 521), ܐܓܘܢܐ ; ܫܘܪܐ .

[240] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.29.7 (CSCO 554: 119; Brock, 131); ܢܛܘܪܬܐ ܕܠܒܐ Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.54 (Bedjan , 389; Miller, 411), ܢܛܪ ܦܘܡܐ : ܕܢܛܘܪܬܐ ܕܠܫܢܐ .

[241] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.5.26 (CSCO 554: 13; Brock, 17), ܩܪܒܐ ܥܣܩܐ .

[242] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.39 (Bedjan, 270; Miller, 320), ܠܡܒܟܬܗ ... ܐܬܓܟ ܥܠ ܠܩܪܒܐ .

[243] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.37 (Bedjan, 241; Miller, 300), ܦܠܓܐ ܕܣܛܢܐ .

[244] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.39 (Bedjan, 274; Miller, 323), He warns the ascetic that, "The tempter violently assaults you."

[245] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.5.12 (CSCO 554: 8-9; Brock, 11). This theme of battle with demons is ancient in Christian teaching, being a primary motif in the Life of Anthony but derived originally from the struggles of Jesus with both the demons and Satan in the New Testament. Jesus casts out of demons many times in the gospels and is described as at war with them and Satan several times, as discussed in Chapter 1. Rufinus says that Anthony "triumphed frequently over the demons" (*et de daemonibus crebos agens triumphos*), Rufinus, *Church History*, Book 10.8, The Church history of Rufinus of Aquileia Books 10 and 11, trans. Philip Amidon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18; PL 21:478.

[246] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.25 (Bedjan, 179; Miller, 249), ܩܪܒܘܗܝ ܬܩܝܦܐ .

[247] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.39 (Bedjan, 269; Miller, 320), ܕܢܐ ܟ ܓܘܢܗ ܡܫܚܠܦ Isaac in Homily 39 writes at great length of the various kinds of warfare that Satan uses against ascetics who are progressing well. He notes that Satan is tricky and does "not confront them immediately," nor does he "draw himself up to do battle with" them at first. This is because Satan "knows that a man's beginning in every war is more fervent, and that zealous warriors are not lightly vanquished, and he sees how his antagonist has great zeal." Isaac continues that Satan

Watching and Guarding

Watchfulness is one of Isaac's most frequent metaphors for the spiritual struggle. He writes of the "watchfulness" (*shahar*) required for the monk for "completing their struggles."[249] He says that, "The soul which is purified by the thought of God in watchful vigil (*b-šhrāh ʿyrā*) night and day is good earth which makes its Lord rejoice by yielding a hundredfold."[250] Here Isaac is invoking the imagery that Jesus uses in Mark 4:1-20 to describe the fruitful disciple; the *watchful* disciple is the fruitful one. This is paralleled by the image in Matt. 25:1-13, where it is the five watchful/alert virgins who enter the bridegroom's chamber which is a metaphor for Christ's eternal kingdom, a common ascetic image.[251] Watchfulness is an appropriate metaphor in relation to struggle as it invokes several related images that would be known to Isaac's readers. Firstly there are the words of Jesus while He was undergoing his own struggle (*agōna*) in the Garden of Gethsemane as discussed earlier. Jesus asks his sleepy disciples to "*watch* with me," and when they fail, He rebukes them with "Could you not *watch* with me for one hour."[252] He then instructs them to "Watch and pray that that you may not enter into temptation."[253] Secondly, "watchfulness" was the word used of a soldier on

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waits until the monk has become "self-confident" and "lax," when they have "cast off the weapons they had fashioned." But then, "the devil refrains from warring against them" because God Himself "repels from them the violence of the devil's wickedness." Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.39 (Bedjan, 272-73; Miller, 322). This paragraph is replete with military metaphor including even the behavioural components of zeal and fervour.

[248] Compare Athanasius who was "vigilant", and thus the "tricks and deceits" of the heretics were "vigilantly exposed" by him. Rufinus writes "*doli as fallaciae vigilanter detergebantu."* Rufinus, *Church History*, Book 10.8, The Church history of Rufinus of Aquileia Books 10 and 11, trans. Philip Amidon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 26; PL 21:486.

[249] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.75 (Bedjan, 551; Miller, 518), ܫܗܪ cf. Arabic *shahāruwa.*

[250] Isaac, *Homilies*, 6.3 (Bedjan, 82-83; Hansbury, 102), ܒܫܗܪܐ ܥܝܪܐ .

[251] For Watchfulness as an ideal, see P. Rousseau, "The Desert Fathers, Antony and Pachomius," in *Study of Spirituality*, ed. C. Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 119 – 130 (122). See also L. Bouyer, *History of Christian Spirituality: The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers,* vol. 1 (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), and T. Ryan, "The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers", in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the 12th Century,* eds. B. McGinn, and J. Meyendorff (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1986).

[252] Matt. 26:38, 40, 41. (cf. Greek noun γρηγορειτε, verb γρηγορευο, Strong's notes: to keep awake, i.e. watch (literally or figuratively), probably from egeiro, to waken (transitively or intransitively), i.e. to rouse (literally, from sleep, from sitting or lying, from disease, from death; or figuratively, from obscurity, inactivity, ruins, nonexistence; probably akin to the base of agora (through the idea of collecting one's faculties), also used in 1Cor. 15:13, 1Pet. 5:8, 1Thess. 5:6, Col. 4:2; Acts 20:31; Luke 12:37; Rev. 3:2,3, in relation to eschatology. The Syrian Orthodox liturgy has, "Blessed are those good servants, whom their Lord shall find watching and working when He comes to His vineyard."

[253] Two closely related terms are used in these verses– one from the root *šhr* and the other from *ʿyr*. Matt. 26:38 has *wšhrw* (ܘܫܗܪܘ) the 2MP Imp PEAL of the root ܫܗܪ. This word is also used elsewhere in the Peshitta NT, for example where Paul suffers "by labour, by watching, by fasting," 2 Cor. 6:5, ܒܨܘܡܐ ܒܫܗܪܐ ܒܥܡܠܐ ܗܢ Note the proximity of fasting and watching. Also cf. 2 Cor 11:27, and usage by Philoxenus and others, although *ʿyr*-derived words are used more often. Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon,* 1516. Also compare the Arabic New Testament which has *isharuwa* إِسْهَرُوا This idea of watching is repeated in Matt. 25:13, 1 Cor. 16:13, and in 1 Peter 5:8, in all cases using ܥܝܪܘܬܐ which also has the meaning of alert/watchful. In these cases the words are derived from the root ܥܝܪ and is the same word used in Matt 28:41, *ʾttʿyrw* 2mPl imper ettaphal, "awake, wake up, watch,

guard duty and thus is an appropriate action for the ascetic spiritual soldier who is watching over their actions, mind and soul.[254] It was used this way by the earlier Stoic philosophers as well, for example, Epictetus writes of "being watchful in cultivating our reason."[255] So when Isaac speaks of keeping "watch over his soul," "guarding of the heart," and "guarding the mouth," he is making this direct connection for his readers, a link that they would have been quite familiar with.[256]

Isaac ranks watchfulness and guarding as one of the primary ascetic practices. He writes "the *guarding of the heart* (*nṭūrta d-lebbā*) is the most important thing of all."[257] The centrality of watchfulness is made explicit by Isaac when he quotes Jesus' "Watch and pray" words in Homily 2.75, using these words to reinforce his assertion that "all the fathers persevered in this labor of the vigil throughout the entire course of their lives."[258] Isaac continues, "But they did so especially because they heard our Saviour in many places earnestly admonish us by his living word: 'Watch ye therefore and pray at all times'…He also gave us an example in His own Person." Isaac is thus making Jesus' own teaching and practice paradigmatic. For Isaac, watchfulness is clearly an aspect of struggle, especially with the passions. In Homily 1.18 Isaac writes of the "work" of "violence" (meaning prayer, fasting, prostrations etc. as he explains later in the same Homily) and links it to watchfulness (and also limpidity). He writes, "This work, and watchfulness (*w-d-hyrotē*), refine the mind by their fervor."[259] In this same Homily Isaac also warns of the danger of being un-watchful.

arouse." Verse 41 is a parallel of verse 38. "Be on the alert" or be wakeful/watchful. ᵓttᶜyrw ܐܬܬܥܝܪܘ Verb, Ettaphal 2MP Imperative from ܥܝܪ Root meaning awake, wake up, watch, arouse, cf. Arabic *Isharuwa* إِسْهَرُوا

[254] Syriac: *shahar* or the closely related "guarding" *ntortha,* See Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009), 1516, ES3 488:10 where an armed guard watches.

[255] Epictetus writes, "Why are we still indolent and negligent and sluggish, and why do we seek pretences for not labouring and not being watchful in cultivating our reason?" Epictetus, *Discourses of Epictetus,* 1, Chapter 7. trans. George Long (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904), 23, compare Rufinus who writes of the emperor that, "in no respect did he slacken his vigilance of mind" (*tamen in nullo relaxant animi vigorem*), Rufinus, *Church History*, Book 10.12, *The Church history of Rufinus of Aquileia Books 10 and 11*, trans. Philip Amidon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 24; PL 21:483.

[256] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.8 (Bedjan, 109; Miller, 188); Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.29.7 CSCO 554: 119; Brock, 131); Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.54 (Bedjan, 389; Miller, 411).

[257] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.29.7 (CSCO 554: 119; Brock, 131), ܢܛܘܪܬܐ ܕܠܒܐ

[258] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.75 (Bedjan, 556; Miller, 521). It is worth noting that the two most common words used by Isaac, which depending on context are translated as watchful, guarding, wakeful or vigilant are based on the roots of *šhr* and *nṭr* and their various verbal and adjectival forms. These words are synonyms but with *shahar* having more the sense of wakefulness and *nṭr/nṭorta* having more the sense of observing/guarding. The Syriac Peshitta has several instances where various verbs from the root n-ṭ-r are used, for example Luke 2:8 has shepherds "keeping watch over their flock"; Mark 3:2 the Jews were "watching Him (Jesus) to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath"; and Luke 11:28 "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe (*nṭr*) it"; but also Matt. 27:36, the soldiers "keep watch" over Jesus before His trial; and "He will give His angels charge concerning you to keep you." Luke 4:11. The verbs can also mean remaining sleepless.

[259] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.18 (Bedjan, 128; Miller, 217), ܡܣܗܪܢܘܬܐ cf. Matt. 11:12.

He says that if a person should, "cease as well from his outer watchfulness (from which come both inner watchfulness and proficient work), then he is certain to be swept away into the passions."[260] He explicitly links watchfulness to victory over the passions.[261]

Watchfulness is a sort of defensive struggle and appears to be less active than the combative *agōna*. Yet Isaac sees watchfulness as a violence against the body and its desires for food and sleep. Watchfulness is at times linked to a specific kind of guarding and struggle, that of the night vigil, and because the night is when demons are understood to most attack this is a natural connection.[262] Isaac writes, "Watch over your belly, but still more over your sight" since these two are the source of many sins.[263] In Homily 67 Isaac discusses several other bodily behaviours that he says are, "signs for those who are *vigilant* and on their *guard*, who abide in *stillness*, and have their hearts set on attaining *perfection*" linking these frequently-clustered concepts.[264] For Isaac, watchfulness covers every aspect of physical life. He writes, "For this is the love of wisdom: that a man is ever watchful even in the small and insignificant things he does," a sentence with distinct Stoic overtones.[265] Watchfulness is also connected to Syrian ascetic eschatology as seen in Aphrahat, where to be ascetic is to be like the angels, because in Syriac the angels are known as the "Watchers."[266] Many Sufis also

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[260] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.18 (Bedjan, 128; Miller, 217), cf. Miller, 380.

[261] Watching for Isaac is an attentive defense against specific enemies. Just as in his other discussions of struggle, Isaac believes in Satan as a real protagonist. He discusses "Guarding against the passions" which attack the soul, for "Satan is ever wont to mount upon it (ie the soul) as a charioteer, and bearing with him the thong of the passions, he invades the wretched soul and plunges her into the pit of confusion." In a passage about the "war with the demons" Isaac notes the importance of "guarding the tongue" and adds that "guarding the mouth wakes up the conscience to God." He teaches that the victorious ascetic is one who is diligent to "Keep guard on their minds through prayer." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.54 (Bedjan, 380-89; Miller, 404, 407, 410-11, 409).

[262] Syriac *lalyā*, literally "night" but by extension the night prayers. Hilarion Alfeyev has an excellent summary of the night prayer vigil in Isaac: "The aim of the night vigil is spiritual illumination: nothing makes the mind so radiant and joyous, as do continual vigils. I/75 (370). Isaac calls night vigil 'the light of the thinking (*tarʿitha*)', by which 'the understanding (*madʿa*) is exalted, the mind (*reʿyana*) is collected, and the intellect (*hauna*) takes flight and gazes at spiritual things and by prayer is rejuvenated and shines brightly'.I/75 (372-373). This is a unique passage in Isaac where all four Syriac terms for the mental faculties of man are employed together. By this Isaac probably wants to emphasize that night prayer can embrace an entire man and can totally transfigure the whole of man's intellectual sphere. Nocturnal prayer has, in Isaac, an all-embracing character and is regarded as a universal means for attaining to the illumination of mind."
http://orthodoxeurope.org/page/12/2.aspx, accessed October 15, 2018.

[263] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.51 (Bedjan, 345; Miller, 380). Elsewhere he adds that "wise mastery of the belly" in turn leads to "watchfulness of the understanding." Homilies 1.40 (Bedjan, 281; Miller, 329).

[264] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.67 (Bedjan, 479-83; Miller, 473-75), (emphasis mine). These behaviours are eyes filled with tears, longing to depart this body and be in heaven, and silence during prayer even when "the verse is cut short from the tongue."

[265] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.40 (Bedjan, 290; Miller, 335).

[266] (Syr. *ʿyra* = Watcher/Angel compare Daniel: *ʿyrin* and *qaddishin*, "Watchers and Holy Ones"; *ʿyrutha* = wakefulness.) Brock notes "Ephrem, *Hymns on Nativity* 21:4 'The Wakeful One (Christ) came to make us wakeful here on earth.'" http://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/resources/syriac/brock/spirituality, accessed

write of watching the soul, but a full comparison of Syrian Christian and Islamic ideas of watchfulness is yet to be completed. Isaac's metaphor of the watchful soldier in the desert fort is vivid and visceral and it is no wonder it has become a staple of Orthodox asceticism.

Greek Philosophical elements: *Apatheia* and *Ataraxia*

Central to Isaac is the whole notion of virtue and the fight against the passions to achieve *apatheia* (lit. without passions) and *ataraxia* (stillness, Syriac, *šelya*).[267] This is a very Evagrian framework and builds on Greek philosophical ideas, especially that of the Stoics. Passions in Stoic thought are externally caused and impact the soul negatively. They ebb and flow, overwhelm and control. According to Seneca, "the passions, the tides and the orbits are phenomena of the same kind."[268] One of the main aims and virtues of the Stoics was therefore *apatheia*, being without the base emotional responses of fear, anger, etc.[269] Stoics considered uncontrolled emotion (*pathos*) to be a "perturbation … a commotion of mind contrary to reason."[270] Isaac often uses very Stoic arguments against emotions by asserting the need to flee passions and fight against them to attain *apatheia*. He speaks of "contests with the passions,"[271] and sees the goal of the monk as acquiring "dispassion" which "cannot be acquired outside of stillness."[272] For Isaac, "Dispassion (*apatheia*) does not mean that a man feels no passions, but that he does not accept any of them. Owing to the many and various virtues…acquired by the saints, the passions have grown feeble in them."[273] Significantly, Isaac also transforms the idea of *apatheia*. In his first Homily Isaac says that healing of the senses does not happen until the "soul is intoxicated with God."[274] He challenges his readers

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October 15, 2018. See also Christopher Buck, Paradise and Paradigm: Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha'i Faith (New York: State University of New York, 1999), 59. Isaac says "A Monk who perseveres in the vigil (*shahar*) with a discerning mind will not seem clad with flesh, for this is truly the work of the angelic estate … (in their) wakefulness of heart … a soul that labors in the practice of vigil and excels therein will have the eyes of Cherubim." Homilies 1.20 (Miller, 222).

[267] Syriac ܫܠܝܐ cf. Greek *ataraxia*, meaning "not disturbed".

[268] C. J. Herrington, "Senecan Tragedy", In *Essays on Classical Literature*, ed. Niall Rudd (Cambridge: Heffer, 1972), 169-220 (181-2).

[269] F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), 59-63.

[270] Zeno quoted by Cicero, *Tusculanae Quaestiones*, iv. 6, Andrew P. Peabody, *Cicero's Tusculan Disputations* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1886), 202. Stoics taught then that a person of "moral and intellectual perfection would not suffer such emotions," "Stoicism", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/stoicism/, accessed October 15, 2018.

[271] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.10.15 (CSCO 554: 34; Brock, 41).

[272] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1, Appendix (Miller, 554). The Syriac is not in Bedjan.

[273] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.71 (Bedjan, 513; Miller, 495). This can be contrasted with Gregory the Great who argued that "the goal of the contemplative was not apatheia." Hester, *Eschatology and pain in St. Gregory the Great*, 105.

[274] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.1.6 (Bedjan 2-3; Hansbury, 26).

to "Thirst for Jesus, that He may intoxicate you with his love."[275] Isaac's idea at this point is quite a contrast to the distant and unfeeling Stoic.[276]

For Stoics, the attainment of *apatheia* and *ataraxia* primarily comes about through right thinking in the mind/will (*nous*), by realising that it is reasonable to live in accordance with nature and the universal reason (that is, the *logos*).[277] Isaac writes of Stoic-like constant ascetic practice, and assumes that people can attain to virtue due to the presence of the Logos, but his focus is neither on right thinking nor quiet reflection. Isaac instead emphasises the daily struggle and sees it as serious athleticism and soldier-like battle. His asceticism is more active and "violent" to the self, involving "self-mortification" rather than just quiet reflection. Isaac writes, "Persecute yourself and your adversary will be driven away from you."[278]

The idea of stillness (*ataraxia,* or limpidity) is deeply rooted in the Syriac tradition.[279] For Isaac, as noted before, *apatheia* is attained via stillness, but stillness is also an end in itself.[280] The word most commonly used in Syriac is *shelya* which can be translated as

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[275] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.3.38 (Bedjan, 38; Hansbury, 55).

[276] Also in contrast to the Stoics, Isaac says that no-one can know truth until they have experienced suffering and developed strong compassion, Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.1.8 (Bedjan, 3; Hansbury, 26). He also writes that, "Spiritual union is a watchful memory which … swells the heart with burning compassion." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.1.33 (Bedjan, 9; Hansbury, 31). He urges his readers to, "Be a companion to those who are sad at heart with passionate prayer and heartfelt sighs," Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.2.17 (Bedjan, 14; Hansbury, 36). Isaac sees intoxication and compassion as good emotions, in contrast to the "bad" emotions of greed, anger and lust etc. This idea of good emotions or *eupatheiai* was a concept partially developed by some later Stoics in reaction to criticism of their apparently emotionless ideal. Marcia Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 42; Sandbach, *The Stoics,* 67; See also Gitte Buch-Hansen, "The Emotional Jesus: Anti-Stoicism in the Fourth Gospel?", *Stoicism in Early Christianity,* ed. Tuomas Rasimus (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 106-09. Yet their notion of the good passion of joy was never developed to the extent of being a "burning intoxication."

[277] Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, Vol. 1, 43; Sandbach, *The Stoics,* 40, 53; Runar M. Thorsteinsson, "Stoicism as a Key to Pauline Ethics in Romans," in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, ed. Tuomas Rasimus (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 28. Stoics believe that destructive emotions are caused by errors in judgement, and hence if thinking is changed, virtue can be obtained. Thorsteinsson, "Stoicism as a Key to Pauline Ethics in Romans," 83. Marcus Aurelius writes: "Say to yourself in the early morning: I shall meet today ungrateful, violent, treacherous, envious, uncharitable men. All of these things have come upon them through ignorance of real good and ill... I can neither be harmed by any of them, for no man will involve me in wrong, nor can I be angry with my kinsman or hate him; for we have come into the world to work together." Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Book II, part 1, trans. Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10. Virtue for Stoics is thus achieved through reason and rational decision. Sandbach, *The Stoics,* 36, 37.

[278] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.2.8 (Bedjan, 12; Hansbury, 34). When Isaac does write of contemplation, it is as *theoria*, ܬܐܘܪܝܐ ܕܐܠܗܘܬܐ, contemplation of God not self. See Isaac, Homilies, 2.7.1 (CSCO 554: 19; Brock, 23), and note 5 for other references and for Isaac's definition.

[279] Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, 77-80; The Syrian Orthodox Liturgy Service book mentions stillness/tranquility. The priest blesses the people with, "Tranquility and Peace be unto you all" (*Shayno wash-lomo lkol-ḥoon*), and a prayer is made to "the Lord of peace and tranquility." www.syriacmusic.com/pdf/Service_Book_of_the_Holy_Divine_Liturgy.doc, accessed October 15, 2018.

[280] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1, Appendix (Miller, 554).

stillness, limpidity, or tranquility. For Isaac, tranquility is both a means to victory in the struggle as well as a result of successful spiritual battle. He writes, "The soul receives limpidity after experiences (consisting) in struggles."[281] There is an apparent irony in the contrast of stillness being gained through struggle, yet the battle is against the passions which are the cause of the lack of stillness. At the same time, tranquility assists in overcoming the passions and is the opposite of the passions. Stillness is often linked to watchfulness and being on guard since to be truly watchful requires being undisturbed, being still. Isaac writes "There are times when a person sits in stillness that is guarded and wakeful."[282] Isaac speaks several times of the rest and stillness that comes after long periods of prayer. [283] He says that, "sometimes … tears fall like fountains of water, involuntarily soaking the whole face. All this time such a person is serene, still, and filled with a wonder-filled vision."[284]

Isaac has a slightly different idea of *ataraxia*.[285] Isaac opens his fourth Homily with the saying, "The soul that loves God is at rest in God alone."[286] Here Isaac links the good passions with the apparently contrasting image of stillness. Note that for the Stoics, *ataraxia* was an attribute of the gods, so Isaac is here possibly referring to the theology of divinisation. Stoics emphasise stillness while in the world, whereas Isaac teaches a flight from the world into a heavenly state of undisturbed contemplation of God. He urges his readers to, "Cherish the leisure of stillness more than satisfying the hungry of the world, or converting a multitude

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[281] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.18.1 (CSCO 554: 84; Brock, 95). He also says that, "A person who has stillness and the converse of knowledge will easily and quickly arrive at the love of God." Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.10.3 (CSCO 554: 31; Brock, 49). Isaac teaches how to attain, "tranquility from passions." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.37 (Bedjan, 243; Miller, 301).

[282] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.35.2 (CSCO 554: 140; Brock, 146). Watchful struggle is less apparently active and seems the opposite of violence, yet Isaac sees watchfulness as a violence against the body and its desires for sleep.

[283] One of the frequent metaphors in Isaac is that of the pearl diver, which is understandable given his life near the Sea in Beth Qatraye (modern Qatar). He writes "let those who dive into the sea of stillness" (*yammā d-šelyā*) and adds "let us consider as oysters the prayers upon which the intellect alights." Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.34.5 (CSCO 554: 137; Brock, 148). After further discussing prayer as diving into the sea of stillness, Isaac describes the results as, "a joy and sense of unexpected lightness." Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.34.9 (CSCO 554: 137; Brock, 149). This link of stillness to lightness is significant because lightness is another important Syriac theme.

[284] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.35.1 (CSCO 554: 139; Brock, 151). This imagery of serenity is very close to the Stoic understanding of stillness. *Ataraxia* (stillness or being undisturbed) is a central Stoic concept and almost for them an equivalent to *apatheia*. In his *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius says, "Do not disturb yourself" (σεαυτὸν μὴ τάρασσε), and that [the goal is to live a] "tranquil and god-fearing life."(εὔρουν καὶ θεουδῆ βιῶσαι βίον). Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 4.26; 2.5. The Greek word here derives from *eurous,* meaning gently flowing.

[285] *Ataraxia* is equivalent to *hesychia* according to Gisela Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 184.

[286] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.4.1 (Bedjan, 40; Hansbury, 63). He later writes that the aim of the monk is to make the soul a "limpid receptacle of the blessed light." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.3.5 (Bedjan, 22; Hansbury, 44). Also he says "…be assured that God is near to his friends… (those who) follow Him with a limpid heart." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.5.39 (Bedjan, 67; Hansbury, 86). Further, One is "lifted to God" by "stillness of soul from the world." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.3.1 (Bedjan, 20; Hansbury, 43).

of peoples from error to the worship of God."[287] For Isaac, becoming free of the passions and attaining stillness requires a serious struggle with the flesh and the demons. Isaac reminds his audience to "never cease … from wrestling with your adversaries."[288]

For Isaac as for the Stoics, the path to victory over the passions is through ascetic practice to attain to apatheia and stillness, but Isaac transforms these notions and connects them to the *agōn* in a unique way.[289] Isaac adds suffering to the *agōn*, and for him, to struggle is also to nobly suffer. He argues that no-one can know truth without gaining experience of suffering.[290] While for the Stoics, self-examination is an important part of the *agōn,* Isaac extends it to include self-mortification.[291] Isaac can thus be seen as utilising but adapting some key ideas from Stoicism.

Christ as Model

Like other early Syrian Christian writers Isaac is very Christ-centered.[292] For Isaac, struggling against Satan is both an emulation of Christ and effective as a result of Christ's own struggle. In an earlier chapter I discussed the New Testament references to *agōna* which demonstrate the portrayal of Christ as a Divine Warrior and Hero. For the Syrians, a Christian is meant to follow their hero through their struggles because this is the way to true life. Isaac writes that ascetics should choose to cut themselves off from others when they pray the vigil prayers because "our Saviour too, during the night times, chose deserted places."[293] Isaac also writes

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[287] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.4.40 (Bedjan, 45; Hansbury, 68). Yet he also writes, "Deem that one a man of God who with his great compassion always stands on the side of poverty." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.5.51 (Bedjan, 68; Hansbury, 87).

[288] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.9 (Bedjan, 114; Miller, 191). This is also somewhat evident in Stoic thinking. Marcus Aurelius writes that it is good to be like "a wrestler in the greatest contest of all, never to be overthrown by any passion." Aurelius, *Meditations*, 3.4. The Greek is ἀθλητὴν ἄθλου τοῦ μεγίστου, τοῦ ὑπὸ μηδενὸς πάθους καταβληθῆναι.

[289] For the Stoics, the idea of *agōn* is less important than for Isaac, and it is merely an aspect of the general *askesis* which is required to attain *apatheia*. Seneca for example writes of frequent struggle, but the imagery of the athlete is far less common in Stoicism than in Isaac. Isaac however sounds like Seneca who writes, "You are a great man; but how am I to know it, if fortune gives you no opportunity of showing your virtue? You have entered the arena of the Olympic games, but no one else has done so: you have the crown, but not the victory…There can be no easy proof of virtue. Fortune lashes and mangles us: well, let us endure it: it is not cruelty, it is a struggle (*certamen*), in which the oftener we engage the braver we shall become. Seneca, *Prov.* 4 http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Of_Providence#IV, accessed October 15, 2018.

[290] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.1.8 (Bedjan, 8; Miller, 185-7).

[291] Isaac writes, "I have carried out an examination of myself for many long years." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.40 (Bedjan, 281; Miller, 329). He also says, "You may take the measure of your way of life by observing your mental impulses." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.2.34 (Bedjan, 19; Hansbury, 40).

[292] Mary Hansbury, "Evidence of Jewish influence in the writings of Isaac of Nineveh: translation and commentary" (PhD. Thesis, Temple University, 1987), 11, 12.

[293] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.12.1 (CSCO 554: 53-54; Brock, 63).

of the "children of light (*bnai nuhrā*) who would travel afterwards in His footsteps following this new mode of life."[294] For Isaac, when the Christian struggles they are following the example of Christ, and he makes this connection explicit at several points. For example, Isaac writes that the ascetic, "has truly crucified the world within himself," and "has been crucified over against the world, having suspended himself on the cross through the abandonment of everything."[295] Since Christ underwent an *agōna* specifically of prayer, the ascetic likewise struggles in prayer. This is because as a baptised person the ascetic now has the broken image restored in Christ—The image lost by Adam is renewed by Christ Who is the "Second Adam." As Brock notes, "Second Adam typology plays a very prominent role in early Syriac Christianity."[296]

Isaac also understands that an ascetic can like Christ have real victory in the spiritual battle, especially as a result of Christ's own victorious struggle. He prays, "O Christ, because of our nature's sin You went out into the wilderness and vanquished … the ruler of darkness, taking from him the victory."[297] He extends this by referring to the crucifixion, saying (emphasis mine showing struggle language), "May the Cross of shame which You mounted for my sake become a bridge to that peaceful abode [ie heaven], may the crown of thorns with which your head was crowned, become for me a *helmet of salvation* (*snorta d-porqna*) on the *heated day of battle* (*b-yoma ḥmyma d-qraba*) ... may the mysteries of the faith … replace there the inadequacy of my ascetic conduct."[298] For Isaac, the battle is undertaken because it is a "winnable war," and the language of ascetic *agōna* is natural because this emulates Christ.[299]

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[294] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.12.1 (CSCO 554: 53-54; Brock, 63). ܒܢܝ ܢܘܗܪܐ I discuss this theme of light below in Isaac's Anthropology. See also Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Studies, 1992), 71-7.

[295] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.30.4-7 (CSCO 554: 123; Brock, 134-6).

[296] Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, xxii.

[297] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.5.24 (CSCO 554: 12; Brock, 16).

[298] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.5.25 (CSCO 554: 12; Brock, 16-17). ܣܢܘܪܬܐ ܕܦܘܪܩܢܐ … ܒܝܘܡܐ ܚܡܝܡܐ ܕܩܪܒܐ His mention of the helmet of salvation is from Eph. 6 discussed earlier.

[299] Isaac's view of possible and indeed significant spiritual victory while on Earth contrasts with the Latin view which is less optimistic. Some Latin writers in the first millennium accused the Eastern Church of being "semi-Pelagian" because of this, but this was more due to a misunderstanding of Syrian and Greek Orthodox anthropology. See for example the debate over the differences between John Cassian and Augustine in Daniel Taylor, Sovereignty of God and Human Responsibility: Augustine Versus Cassian (Research Paper, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), https://www.academia.edu/27086302/Sovereignty_of_God_and_Human_Responsibility_Augustine_Versus_Cassian, accessed October 3, 2018.

Isaac's Anthropology

Isaac's Anthropology is important to understand because it underlies his whole approach to spiritual struggle. He generally follows the earlier Syrian ideas but adds one novel feature regarding the passions in response to NeoPlatonic/Stoic philosophy. As Brock asserts, the Syrian theological system is more Jewish and Biblically-based than the Greek which has a strong Platonic influence.[300] One aspect of this Syriac worldview is the body-soul integration. Brock writes about Syriac asceticism that:

> Far from being the outcome of a dualistic worldview and a negative attitude to the body, these ascetic ideals in fact imply a very biblical—and positive—attitude towards the human person as body-cum-soul, with great value attached to the sanctity of the body, and emphasis laid on the interpenetration of the physical and spiritual worlds.[301]

I have already discussed how Aphrahat saw the ascetic's experience during this present time as far more than an "anticipated resurrection."[302] Isaac shares this view and writes:

> Insofar as a person draws near to knowledge of truth, he becomes less (under the influence) of the activity of the senses … The mode of conduct of this (present) life provides (an opening) for the functioning of the senses, while the mode (of the life) to come leads to spiritual activation… May God grant you to know the power of the world to come, and you will cease henceforth from all engagement with this present life.[303]

One example of this more Jewish and integrated worldview is the idea that the struggling ascetic may develop a shining face filled with light.[304] This concept can be compared to Moses' face which shone after He experienced God on Mt Sinai, and which Paul also applies to his readers when he writes that Christians in his day are:

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[300] Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life,* xii.

[301] Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life,* xxiv-v. See also the discussion on the Syrian worldview in Murray, *Church and Kingdom,* 69-77.

[302] Hansbury, introduction, 21; Lehto, introduction, 46.

[303] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.13.1-2 (CSCO 554: 55; Brock, 65), cf. Murray, *Church and Kingdom,* 74-77.

[304] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.6.1-4 (CSCO 554: 16-17; Brock, 20-1). Isaac writes: "When, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, that illumination of mind of which the Fathers speak has begun to shine out in you, there are two signs which will give you confirmation concerning this… Now one of the signs is this: once this hidden light starts shining in your soul you will have the sign, that whenever you leave off the reading Scripture or prayer, the mind will be caught up with certain verses or with the content of these, and it will mediate on, examine and probe of its own accord into their spiritual significance."

> [N]ot as Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away (ie. the light), … But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.[305]

For Paul, Christians even in this present life begin to experience God's glory, which is manifested as light, and this theme is emphasised in Syrian asceticism. Alfeyev notes that "the term *nahhiruta*, 'illumination', also refers to the influence of divine grace over a person: it derives from *nuhra*, 'light', and points to such an action of God within a person which is accompanied by the presence of light."[306] So Isaac writes of the person who chooses their actions so that "the love of the Lord may best shine out in them," he is using a common Syrian ascetic trope.[307] The trope of the shining philosopher's face was well-known in NeoPlatonic teaching, but was also a feature of both Syrian and Greek Orthodox theology.[308] For Late Antique readers schooled in NeoPlatonic thinking, this close connnection between the mind, soul, and body was obvious. Isaac sees ascetics as the true philosophers who treat their body in such a way as to benefit their souls.[309]

Isaac does not however see the body as necessarily a hindrance to purifying the soul. On the contrary, the body can be a great aid in soul-growth, but even this way of discussing Isaac's thought is dualist. It is better to recognise that he understands the ascetic struggle of

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[305] 2 Cor. 3:18.

[306] Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, 236-240. See also Brock, *The Luminous Eye,* 71-7.

[307] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.31.6 (CSCO 554: 127; Brock, 139). In Syrian asceticism these stories of shining monks are very celebrated. For example, the story is remembered of Monk Martyr Stephen the New (born 715 CE). Two brothers who visited him in prison "beheld the face of the monk shining with a divine light." http://oca.org/saints/lives/2014/11/28/103412-monkmartyr-and-confessor-stephen-the-new-of-mt-st-auxentius, accessed October 15, 2018. Compare the story of Monk Sisoi the Great (d. 429 CE) who was a hermit-monk, and lived in the Egyptian wilderness in a cave previously occupied by the Monk Anthony the Great. "When the Monk Sisoi lay upon his death-bed, his students saw his face shining, so they asked him what he saw. Sisoi answered, that he saw the prophets and apostles. His students then asked, with whom was he talking? He said that Angels had come for his soul, and he had entreated them to give him a short bit of time yet for repentance. 'You, father, have no need for repentance,' replied the students. But the Monk Sisoi, with his great humility, answered: 'I do not know for sure whether I have even begun to make my repentance.' After these words his face shone so brightly, that the students could not look at him." "Monk Sisoi the Great." http://www.missionstclare.com/english/people/jul6o.html, accessed October 15, 2018.

[308] Gregory Smith, "Physics and Metaphysics", *Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012), 513-543, especially 515-6. This idea draws on NeoPlatonic notions and earlier Greek philosophy that goes as far back as the 5th century BCE, whereby light-filled and light-weight souls ascend to the heavens after death, whereas heavy souls, that is, those filled with food and lusts, cannot ascend so readily, see especially 513, 515, 532-3.

[309] This is in some contrast to the immaterial soul view of Augustine and Descartes which has pervaded the West and which makes it hard to appreciate the integrated psychology of Isaac. Smith, *Physics and Metaphysics*, 540. Smith notes of this Western dualism, "No matter how kind or keen, a Cartesian mind cannot shine through a philosopher's face," 518.

purifying the soul-body-mind as one single harmonious process. Isaac specifically states, "You should realize, my brethren, that in all our service God very much wants outward postures, specific kinds of honour, and visible forms of prayer—nor for His own sake, but for our benefit."[310] He adds that a monk sometimes can be overcome by "altered states" of "rapture," and "delight" "resembling honey from a honeycomb," while he "lies prostrate on his face."[311] For Isaac, another of the main reasons for the outward bodily actions is that these break one's pride. He says that this "labour of the body" was done by the "blessed fathers" Evagrius, Macarius and others because of their "fear of pride."[312] Presumably, remaining in a physically humble stance prevents the soul from becoming proud.[313]

As previously mentioned, Isaac's comments about using the body in prayer are in the context of his anti-Messalian chapter where he specifically argues against, "those who despise the reverent outward forms."[314] That proper bodily struggle is essential is borne out by Isaac's warning that the Messalians have failed to follow "instructions about stratagems against the demons."[315] For Isaac, being successful in the spiritual battle requires a bodily spirituality involving, "prostrations, continual falling to the ground, a suffering heart, and the submissive postures appropriate to prayer, modest standing, hands clasped in submissive fashion, or stretched out to heaven."[316] It is evident that Isaac's anthropology directly shapes his understanding of struggle.

With regard to the passions, Isaac has a somewhat different anthropology from the Stoics and from the Stoic-informed NeoPlatonism current in Syria in his time. Stoics teach that humans are by nature filled with unhealthy passions whereas Isaac's anthropology emphasises an earthly lived experience of the heavenly—an inaugurated eschatology. Isaac teaches a present re-creation of the original Edenic passionless humanity. He accepts the normal Syriac anthropology which teaches that putting on Christ's resurrection restores

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[310] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.13 (CSCO 554: 59; Brock, 69). He notes that standing helps the ascetic stay focussed and undistracted.

[311] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.27 (CSCO 554: 64-65; Brock, 75).

[312] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.21-2 (CSCO 554: 62-63; Brock, 73).

[313] Isaac also writes that, "Someone who shows a reverential posture during prayer, by stretching out his hands to heaven as he stands in modesty, or by falling to his face on the ground, will be accounted worthy of much grace from on high." Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.12 (CSCO 554: 59; Brock, 69).

[314] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.3 (CSCO 554: 56; Brock, 66); He mentions the Messalians by name in 2.14.22, (CSCO 554: 62-63; Brock, 73). Isaac also warns about "those who say that outward forms are unnecessary." Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.22 (CSCO 554: 62-63; Brock, 73).

[315] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.42 (CSCO 554: 70; Brock, 80).

[316] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.42 (CSCO 554: 70; Brock, 80).

humanity to the innocent state of the Garden, at least in potential. This is a common Syrian idea—that just as Adam and Eve were clothed in garments of skin to cover their sin and shame, God has given Christians garments of light to make us like Him, since Christ Himself put on the garment of humanity and restored it to the divine state.[317] Isaac writes, "the passions are no (longer there), for that person has actually been raised from the world, leaving behind below."[318]

Isaac is very conscious that his reasoning at this point is in contrast to the NeoPlatonic philosophers. He states that the soul, "does not naturally have passions. But the philosophers who are outside (the church) do not believe this… We believe that God has not made his image subject to passion."[319] Later he asserts, "Let no one blaspheme against God saying that He has placed passions and sin in our nature," rather that, "the soul without sin has a "natural limpidity and innocence."[320] For Isaac, the natural state of humanity is *apatheia* and stillness, being like God. The passions are purely a result of the fall and thus can be healed here on Earth through ascetic practice. At the same time, paradoxically, and also in contrast to the Stoics, Isaac says that the negative passions can be useful. Although humanity has fallen in sin, and God did not create the passions in people, he allows and uses them for humanity's restoration. For example he writes that, "Fear is useful to human nature to preserve the boundary of transgressing a commandment."[321]

Isaac in comparison to other ascetics even at times sounds libertine. In one paragraph he begins with the typical monastic warnings but then proceeds to qualify them—He writes, "Occasions for sin are wine and woman, riches and a healthy body. It is not that these things in and of themselves are to be designated as sin, but on account of human weakness and the unlawful use of these."[322] This explicit affirmation of the goodness of the body and sexuality was quite counter to the lingering Encratism that existed on the fringes of the Syrian Church. Isaac's anthropology is rich and liberating for an ascetic. He sees the human as partially

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[317] Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 69-71.

[318] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.10.12 (CSCO 554: 33; Brock, 41). Isaac also quotes an "Elder" who warned against losing the focus on stillness and the memory of God, and thus "awakens in you the mortified passions; … resurrects your corpse which was dead to the world; causes you to fall from the angelic husbandry." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.21 (Miller, 230).

[319] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.3.4-5 (Bedjan, 21-22; Hansbury, 44).

[320] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.3.8 (Bedjan, 25-26; Hansbury, 47); Homilies 1.3.12 (Bedjan, 30; Hansbury, 51).

[321] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.3.13 (Bedjan, 30; Hansbury, 51). Further, he writes "The bodily passions are placed in the body by God for its support and growth; the passions of the soul, that is, the soul's powers [are placed there] for the growth and support of the soul." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.3.8 (Bedjan, 25; Hansbury, 47).

[322] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.5.6 (Bedjan, 61; Hansbury, 81). Compare Aphrahat's comments earlier.

transformed and able to ascend above the flesh, and his very hopeful anthropology is closely linked to his eschatology.[323]

Inaugurated Eschatology

Isaac teaches inaugurated eschatology because he understands that baptism has wrought a fundamental change in human nature. Isaac believes that Christ's resurrection has already taken the Christian somewhat into a new heavenly life—"The passions, memories and all that they induce, are no (longer there), for that person has actually been raised from the world."[324] In the Syrian worldview, baptism is both a sign and an active participation in the new Paradise.[325] This earthly time however is not yet fully heavenly. The current "time of contests (*zbna d-agōna*)" is also contrasted with the "time of immortality (*zbna dla mywtota*)."[326]

Like Aphrahat, Isaac sees the ascetic life as being the angelic life. He writes of the ascetic who "acquires an inner stillness (*šelyūtā gawāytā*) in God, a semblance of the future state."[327] He believes that "as though in heaven, may we bear on our hidden limbs (i.e. spiritual bodies) the sanctification of your divinity."[328] For Isaac, this life of the angels is an important element in winning the spiritual battle. He links the two ideas when he says, "the Fathers of old overcame the mighty and fearsome attacks of the rebellious one … manifesting on earth a likeness of the things to come."[329] He sees this angelic life as without equal and highly attractive. Isaac asks rhetorically, "What is comparable to this, that someone should resemble the angels (while still) standing in this world, as his reflection is continually upon God and things divine."[330] At the same time he recognises that the complete fulfilment of this angelic state is still in the future. He warns those who avoid the outward rituals of prayer that "they do not realize that they have not yet reached the state of spiritual beings, or that the (final) resurrection has not yet taken place and they have not yet achieved a state of

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[323] When Isaac writes "And what manner of life did these holy men lead in these places? Did they live in the body, or did their life, perhaps, transcend flesh and blood?" he is alluding to the Syrian inaugurated eschatology discussed below, and in my chapter on Aphrahat.

[324] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.10.12 (CSCO 554: 33; Brock, 41).

[325] Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life,* xxiii.

[326] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.39.11 (CSCO 554: 158; Brock, 168), ܪܗܘܬܘܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܐܬܐ ... ܐܓܘܢܐ ܕܗ ܐܬܐ .

[327] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.18.3 (CSCO 554: 88; Brock, 96), ܪܘܬܐ ܓܘܝܬܐ .

[328] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.10.41 (CSCO 554: 42; Brock, 52).

[329] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.5.12 (CSCO 554: 8; Brock, 11).

[330] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.29.12 (CSCO 554: 121; Brock, 133). He also says that stillness is the "angelic labor." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.21 (Bedjan, 152; Miller, 233).

immutabilty."[331] He urges his readers to "hold fast to stillness, become like the Cherubim," for they have not yet reached this goal.[332]

A related concept for Isaac is his belief that the current *agōna* results in "mingling with God," an idea full of NeoPlatonic resonances.[333] Isaac writes, "To come from the toil and struggle with the thoughts to the luminous love for humanity, and from this, to be raised up to the love of God - for someone to complete such a course in this life … is impossible, however much he struggles … without inebriation in God."[334] Isaac explains just how difficult this task is but that it is yet possible with "inebriation in God," a theme full of eschatological significance and one also evident in Sufis such as Rumi. These ideas of being "raised up to the love of God" and mingling with God are significant themes in Isaac, and he sees this attainment as being a result of the ascetic "toil and struggle."[335] Isaac's deeply positive anthropology stems from his inaugurated eschatology and creates an image of struggle as a heavenly battle completed while on earth.

Struggle and an efficacious Free Will

The value of ascetic struggle is predicated on the assumption that such human effort, freely-chosen, accomplishes the intended goal of purification. Human action is efficacious in the Greek and Oriental church, for example Gregory of Nyssa says, "For He who holds sovereignty over the universe permitted something to be subject to our own control, over which each of us alone is master. Now this is the will: a thing that cannot be enslaved, being the power of self-determination."[336] This may seem strange to Western ears that are more used to the approach of Augustine, who so emphasised grace that human choice was highly contingent and somewhat insignificant. Yet in the East, grace and effort went hand-in-hand in a theology known as *synergeia*.[337] This explains why Pelagius, Augustine's opponent, was at

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[331] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.14 (CSCO 554: 60; Brock, 70).

[332] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.21 (Bedjan, 153; Miller, 234).

[333] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.7.3 (CSCO 554: 20; Brock, 25). See Brock's footnote 6. Being like the angels is a form of divinization, or attaining union with God. Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, 59.

[334] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.10.35 (CSCO 554: 40; Brock, 49).

[335] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.10.35 (CSCO 554: 40; Brock, 49).

[336] Gregory of Nyssa, The Great Catechism, MPG 47, 77A, in George Gabriel, *Mary: The Untrodden Portal of God* (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr Books, 2000), 27.

[337] Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009). Ps.Dionysius writes about human nature and free will that the "divine blessedness … grants the beneficent rays of its own light," yet, people can "fall away" … "from the light," "because of their free will." Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 205.

first received in the East.[338] The approach of Augustine never gained much support in the East, and most of his later statements about human effort, grace, free will, and predestination are in contradiction to the Syrian and Greek teaching.[339] Augustine's place is still hotly debated in Orthodox circles because of his teaching against an efficacious and real free will.[340] For whatever reason, there was evidently still some ongoing debates in the Isaac's Syrian milieu around the issue of predestination. We saw earlier that Aphrahat and Macarius argued against predestination, and this controversy seems to continue and is still being responded to just a few years after Isaac by priest-monk John of Damascus.[341] It is important to note that this debate over determinism was of immense importance in early Muslim theological and ethical debates as well, as I discuss in a later chapter.[342] For both Christians and Muslims, the possibility of a salvific efficacious freely-chosen struggle was vital. However when Isaac writes about free will, human effort, grace, and predestination his comments appear as incidental clarifications rather than organised excurses. Isaac does not set out to explain theology nor reply to current debates *per se* and he is writing purely in relation to the theme of struggle and how free will is an aspect of this.

Isaac sees free will as essential to the attainment of spiritual progress and struggle. His Homily 37 deals extensively with this theme of struggle, free will and grace, as well as with stillness, the passions, fasting, prayer, and the spiritual battle with both the world and the devil. The Homily consists of a series of questions and answers and is eighteen pages long in

He also writes that, "people may freely act as individuals or groups," and discusses how that people choose to sin- they are not fated or predestined to sin." Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works,* 95.

[338] It was only when Augustine noted the extremist aspects of Pelagius that he was finally condemned at a Church Councils in 418 CE and 431 CE.

[339] George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Augustine and the Orthodox: 'The West' in the East," in *Orthodox readings of Augustine,* eds. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary press, 2008), 31-33.

[340] His early teaching was more acceptable. See John D'Alton, Aphrahat and Augustine: Resurrection Asceticism and Eastern Hope, *Orientale Lumen: Australasia and Oceania* IV, eds. Lawrence Cross and Birute Arendarcikas (Melbourne: Freedom, 2015).

[341] Sidney H. Griffith, "The Manṣūr Family and St. John of Damascus," in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State: Lamine 1- Late Antique and Medieval Islamic Near East,* eds. Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016), 29-51. While John of Damascus writes in Greek, he is a leading administrator to the Muslim Caliph in Damascus, and is familiar with Syrian traditions and teaching as well as Arabic terminology and thoughtforms. He argues at length about free will, predestation and salvation for over seven chapters in his *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, NPNF 2.9, 489-95. John asserts in his section titled "Of the things which are in our Power, and not in our Power" that humans have an efficacious free will, by nature. He says that this is because humans are not like animals but are created in the image of God, and since God has freedom, so do humans. He says that Christ as a true human had will and desire. NPNF 2.9, 489. The "will" in humans includes a deliberative or *gnomic* will, but John argues however that there was no deliberation in Christ's will because God already knows the right action and does not have to consider and choose.

[342] These issues of free will and predestination in relation to human effort are evident in various early Muslim writers.

the English edition. Isaac writes in the third Question and Answer, "What is the first path and beginning that conducts us to wisdom? It consists in a man's going in search of God with all his strength, in striving with his whole soul until the end of his pursuit (*w-nestarhab bab'tēh malyayt*), and in not being negligent when it is necessary for the love of God to strip off and hurl away even his very life."[343] Isaac affirms the importance of human effort and striving. He continues a little later by saying that "a man strives" to "come out of the darkness of this world" when he has "his soul stirred within a man."[344] He also emphasising the weakness of human nature, and the need for God's grace, asserting that, "nature is feeble and cannot suddenly renounce its former habits and embrace a life of afflictions!"[345] The solution is that, "in proportion to a man's volition to strive toward God, and in proportion to his purpose to attain his goal for God's sake, God works with him, helps him, and manifests His providence in him."[346] Isaac is here teaching the standard Orthodox theology of synergy, where humans co-operate and work together with God for their salvation. According to this view the will is still able to choose to struggle in Christ, yet is flawed and in need of assistance.[347] He also argues that demons are only allowed to attack to the extent that God's will allows it. If God allowed free will unlimited liberty then total chaos would result, so instead, God provides constraints on free will. In this Isaac is affirming both the actions of a genuinely free will as well as divine providence.[348]

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[343] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.37 (Bedjan, 225; Miller, 289), ܘܢܣܬܪܗܒ ܒܒܥܬܗ ܡܠܝܐܝܬ .

[344] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.37 (Bedjan, 227-28; Miller, 291). He then asks, "From whence does he possess this ability to be moved in such a manner?" Isaac answers "At the first it is the nature which imparts to him this discerning impulse, when it silently indicates to him the unstable constitution of the world." Humans can perceive the true state of things from observing nature, and thus are moved.

[345] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.37 (Bedjan, 231; Miller, 293). He also writes "For a man cannot gain instruction concerning himself solely from his nature and the discerning impulses that arise in him, but we can learn only from the Scriptures, or from revelations of the Spirit." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1. 37 (Bedjan, 230; Miller, 293).

[346] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.39 (Bedjan, 271; Miller, 321).

[347] This is explicitly contradicted by the later Augustine although not in his earlier works. Elsewhere, Isaac explicitly discusses free will and how human free will and divine will inter-relate. In Homily 1.54, Isaac speaks of the demons who battle against the ascetic through "prolonged warfare," and discusses ascetic struggle, "guarding the tongue" and "war with demons." He concludes by repeating the synergistic wording of one victorious saint who had prayed through a whole day without noticing it, "And then, when the sun beat down on me more strongly and scorched my face, my mind returned to me, and lo! I saw that it was another day, and I thanked God, seeing that His grace is so abundantly poured out on man, and that He should deem those who pursue Him worthy of such majesty." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.54 (Bedjan, 381, 389; Miller, 405, 410, 411). Isaac again affirms that God's grace is essential along with human action when he explicitly says, "Nature is feeble and cannot suddenly renounce its former habits and embrace a life of afflictions." Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.37 (Bedjan, 231; Miller, 293).

[348] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.54 (Bedjan, 385-86; Miller, 409). He says: [B]e like a man who believes that there is a Guardian with him and is perfectly assured through his wisdom that he together with all creation, is under a single Master Who with a single nod moves, and shakes, and stills, and orders all. There is not one slave who can harm another of his fellow slaves without a warrant from Him Who provides for them all, and controls all; and all things are under His providence. Rise up straightway and take courage! For although liberty is granted to some, it is not granted for every act. For neither demons, nor ravaging beats, nor men bent on evil can carry out their will to ruin and destroy their fellows unless the bidding of Him Who governs permits it and assigns it a

In another extended discussion on fighting the passions, free will, and human nature, Isaac writes that God "accepts the paltry and insignificant things done with a good will for His sake along with the mighty and perfect actions. And even if they are blameworthy, they are borne with mercy, and forgiven their authors, without any blame."[349] Here Isaac shows a high assessment of human struggle. He is confident that God accepts even meagre ascetic efforts because, "the omniscient God to whom all things are revealed before they happen, and who was aware of the constraints of our (human) nature before He created us… is good and compassionate."[350] This is an important theological context for understanding Isaac's view of ascetic struggle. Human effort is indeed valued and compassionately accepted by God. He does not accept that humans are fated or predestined, and he teaches an efficacious freely chosen struggle.[351]

Conclusion

Isaac is a creative developer of the traditional Syrian concepts of inner struggle, drawing together many previous ideas of John of Apamea, Evagrius, and Macarius. Isaac is more Hellenised than Aphrahat and most of the earlier Syrians, and connects imagery of the arena, wrestling, and the watchful soldier, to Stoic notions of stillness and *apatheia*. His *Ascetic Homilies* display a rich array of fighting images and terms to express the macrotrope of spiritual life as a battlle. Isaac's approach to daily spiritual combat is embedded in a hopeful

definite compass. For that divine nod from on high does not command or permit liberty to come into full sway; if it did, no flesh would survive." This is a complex passage but Isaac uses the image of the Caliph and his slaves to clarify several points. Humans have free will, but this freedom is limited in operation by the divine will. God will not allow every attack to happen- human will is limited and not all actions are granted to people. Humans can choose, but only God grants the liberty to fulfil the intention. Thus the ascetic should not fear the attacks on his struggle because God is ultimately controlling all. Isaac's advice to "be like a man who believes that there is a Guardian with him" sounds distinctly Stoic. Seneca writes "God is near you, he is with you, he is within you. This is what I mean, Lucilius: a holy spirit indwells within us, one who marks our good and bad deeds, and is our guardian. As we treat this spirit, so are we treated by it. Indeed, no man can be good without the help of God. Can one rise superior to fortune unless God helps him to rise?" Seneca, *Epistle 41,* (compare Epictetus). We can see from Seneca's balance of divine help and free will similarities between Isaac and Stoicism.

[349] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.15 (CSCO 554: 60-61; Brock, 71).

[350] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.15 (CSCO 554: 60-61; Brock, 71).

[351] To struggle and attain to tranquility requires human choice and effort according to Isaac. For Isaac, God's grace is essential to struggle but is not a precursor to action. Isaac's teaching here draws on the long established tradition of the Eastern churches, as is reflected in the ascetic teachings of monastics in general and in the Greek fathers when they discuss theology. In this he follows John Chrysostom who writes, "All is in God's power, but so that our free-will is not lost . . . It depends therefore on us and on Him. We must first choose the good, and then He adds what belongs to Him. He does not precede our willing, that our free-will may not suffer. But when we have chosen, then He affords us much help . . . It is ours to choose beforehand and to will, but God's to perfect and bring to the end." Chrysostom, *Homily 12 on Hebrews*, 425.

inaugurated eschatology and related anthropology, which enables Christians to conquer the enemies of the demons and passions. In this approach he is similar to the previous Syrians although somewhat more Stoic. Unlike the previous Syrian authors who wrote prior to Islam, Isaac's continued use of warfare metaphors and *agōna* language in the context of a possibly competing view of inner warfare is significant. Isaac conceptualises the ascetic life as an active and watchful fight in ways that is very similar to the early Sufis.

5. *Jihād* in the early Islamic Context

Similarly to the Syrian Christians, Sufis teach that the most important struggle is the internal battle of the heart. Al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī use many images and stories to convey the broad conceptual metaphor of spiritual growth as a kind of struggle, sometimes but not exclusively using the term *jihād*. Even when they write about soldiers, armour, and weapons without mentioning this term, the imagery of the external *jihād* is evident in their texts. While they write in somewhat similar ways to the Syrian Christians, their specific sources and contexts determines a different approach. It is thus necessary before engaging with the Muslim authors to provide some context for their writing, and especially to define the central struggle term *jihād*. In this chapter therefore I survey the highly contested idea of *jihād* and situate it within current debates over the nature of Islam. My review includes a summary of Qur'ānic usage and a review of the breadth of meaning of the term throughout history. I summarise the historical evidence that the word *jihād* encompassed both the internal and the external battle, as demonstrated for example in the writing of al-Muḥāsibī. I also introduce the major historical and theological issues of the early Islamic context of the Muslim authors and note how these shape their works. Because the place of Sufi authors is also becoming contentious, I evaluate the relation of Sufism to Islam as a whole. The possibility of Christian influence on Sufism is also controversial so I address this specifically in relation to the struggle metaphor, which will allow the issues raised during the next two chapters to be assessed in this context.

Definitions of *Jihād*

Defining *jihād* as a concept without recognizing the broader cluster of related terms is unsatisfactory. The semantic range of meaning of *jihād* allows many authors to pick the particular definition that suits their polemical intent. In reality, however, "*jihād*" is a complex idea intertwined with *shahīd* (martyr) and other notions of spiritual struggle. Most authors recognize that the concept of *jihād* contains both an internal and an external aspect, drawing on the frequently-cited *ḥadīth* reference.[1] Ashraf says that *jihād* means "fighting in the Way

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[1] Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History* (Princeton, Princeton University Press. 2006), 13. The *ḥadīth* is: "A number of fighters came to the messenger of Allah, and he said: "You have done well in coming from the 'lesser *jihād*' to the 'greater *jihād*'." They said: "What is the 'greater *jihād*'?" He said: "For the servant [of God] to fight his passions."" David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 35,

of God" and that, "Islam is a religion of peace but it prescribes war as the last resort to ward off the enemy, secure peace, and establish security."[2] He adds that it is also a constant internal battle to maintain inner purity and justice, to "distinguish between right and wrong."[3] He argues that because the internal battle against the *nafs* (soul) is harder, therefore it is the "greater *jihād.*"[4]

Jihād is defined by many as "the Just Striving,"[5] "moral striving,"[6] "righteous cause (i.e., action for the sake of a moral order),"[7] or "Striving in the Way of God,"[8] and even includes striving in "learning and research."[9] Such *jihād* involves striving for justice, bearing up against injustice patiently, and maintaining an orientation towards God and the Muslim community. This includes love for others, selfless living and "communal solidarity."[10] It is not a simple-minded bloody battle. Abul-Fadl sees *jihād* as the responsible means to protect the Muslim community against injustice. *Jihād* is understood by Muslim scholars as primarily a defensive war within certain Qur'ānic parameters. These prescriptions are often quoted, for example, not killing women and children.[11] In contrast, some non-Muslim authors completely ignore the non-violent aspects of *jihād*. According to Desai many Muslim leaders teach that *jihād* is not the word for "Holy War", but the word for "the quotidian struggle to lead the good life in accordance with the teachings of the holy book."[12] Desai notes the divergence between most Muslim scholars and the terrorists who wear "Muslim garments."[13] While some Muslim leaders emphasise the non-violent meaning of *jihād*, self-identified Muslim terrorists themselves reinforce the Western media notion of *jihād* as violent conflict. This legitimation by terrorists of violent *jihād* based on their interpretation of the Qur'ān

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citing al-Bayhaqī, *Zuhd* (Beirut, n.d.), 165. See also Imam Al-Nawawi, *Riyadh-as-Saliheen* , volume 1, hadith 194, 195, (Houston, TX: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 1999), and Al-Bukhārī, *Sahih al-Bukhari,* Volume 4, Book 52, Number 44, (Alexandria, VA: Al-Saadawi Publications, 1996).

[2] Syed Ali Ashraf, "The Inner meaning of Islamic Rites: Prayer, Pilgrimage, Fasting, Jihad," in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. Syed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad,1987), 111-30, (125). Ashraf also says it entails resisting evil and is a pure act of maintaining justice, 126.

[3] Ashraf, "The Inner meaning of Islamic Rites," 126.

[4] Ashraf, "The Inner meaning of Islamic Rites," 128. Ashraf says that, "Spirit overcomes the soul with its sins through remembrance of God and union with Him."

[5] Mona Abul-Fadl, *Introducing Islam from Within* (Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, 1991), 57.

[6] Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam: Misgivings and History* (New Delhi 2008), 227.

[7] Paul Heck, "*Jihād* Revisited," *Journal of Religious Ethics* (32.1, 2004): 95-128, (95).

[8] Abul-Fadl, *Introducing Islam from Within,* 71; Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*, 2.

[9] M. Faruk Zein, *Christianity, Islam and Orientalism* (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 29.

[10] Abul-Fadl, *Introducing Islam from Within,* 71.

[11] Abul-Fadl, *Introducing Islam from Within,* 63-65. See *ḥadīth* such as in Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Saheeh Muslim,* Book 19, Hadith Number 4319 (n.p.: Dar-Us-Salam, 2007), and Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari* Volume 4, Book 52, Hadith Number 256, (Alexandria, VA: Al-Saadawi Publications, 1996).

[12] Meghnad Desai, *Rethinking Islamism: The Ideology of the New Terror* (London. I.B. Taurus 2007), 19.

[13] Desai, *Rethinking Islamism,* 19.

perpetuates the media representation. This issue however is not new.

Even in the earliest days of Islam, *jihād* did not mean just violent war, but had a broader range of meanings, according to Asma Afsaruddin, renowned professor of Near-Eastern languages and cultures.[14] Within three centuries, however, two opposing schools of thought emerged. Afsaruddin notes the "changing semantic landscape" of early Islam and analyses the critical verses Qur'ān 22:78, 25:52, 29:69, to show "non-combative dimensions attributed to the term *jihād* in the middle Meccan to early Medinan period."[15] She adds that, "Broad, non-combative meanings for *jihād* in this period are frequently documented, particularly by the earliest commentators" and proceeds with extensive evidence.[16] In a highly revealing evaluation Afsaruddin concludes:

> Thus in regard to Qur'ān 22:78 and 29:69, early exegetes like Muqātil, Ibn 'Abbās, and al-Qummī understand the term *jihād* in these verses as referring to the general struggle of believers to obey God in their actions and to please Him. Al-Ṭabarī's commentary, however, marks a signal transformation in the meanings assigned to the derivates of *jihād* in these verses. In clear contradistinction to earlier authorities whose views he conscientiously preserves, he tellingly expresses a personal preference for assigning combative meanings to the Meccan locutions *jāhidūfī 'llāh/jāhadūfī na* because, he says, they had become the predominant understanding by his time. Al-Ṭabarī's commentary is therefore exceptionally valuable to us in indicating that the progressive privileging of the combative aspects of *jihād* had become almost inexorable by the late third/ninth century in certain scholarly circles. Post-Ṭabarī exegetes, however, continue to record both combative and non-combative meanings of *jihād* in relation to these verses, as we note in the commentaries of al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, and al-Qurṭubī.[17]

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[14] Asma Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God: Jihād and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2013).1-3.

[15] Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God,* 1, 269.

[16] Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God,* 269-70.

[17] Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God,* 270. She also argues that the early *Ḥadīth* work *al-Muṣannaf* of 'Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827), which was compiled earlier than the authoritative *Ḥadīth* collection of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), "contains a number of reports that relate multiple combative and non-combative definitions of martyrdom that are not always reproduced in later compilations," 4. See also other early Muslim Qur'an commentators, such as Muqatil ibn Sulayman al-Balkhi (died 767), and Muhammad al-Kalbi, Abu al-Mundhir Hisham bin Muhammed bin al-Sa'ib bin Bishr al-Kalbi, at http://www.altafsir.com, accessed September 6, 2018, and an early book on asceticism, ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitab Al-Zuhd wal Raqa'iq,* eds. Aḥmad Farīd Al-Ṭab'ah (Riyadh: Dār Al-Mi'rāj Al-Dawlīyah, 1995).

This is an extremely significant argument which partly explains why early Sufi writings on inner *jihād* become somewhat contested later on. This divergent perspective in early Islam continues to have repercussions today. Along with *ḥadīth* interpretations of *jihād*, Afsaruddin also discusses various interpretations of Qur'ānic references to *jihād*, going as far back as the first/seventh century, including the meaning of striving against unbelievers "with the Qurān," e.g. the *Tafsīr* of Mujāhid b. Jabr.[18] She says,

> The Qur'ān preserves in particular a semantic spectrum for the term *jihād* and its derivatives that progressively came to be either downplayed or elided in much of the later literature. In the Qur'ān, derivatives from the root *jhd* (usually occurring as verbal forms) have the basic signification of "struggling," "striving," and "exertion."[19]

The narrowing of meaning of *jihād* in some parts of Islam by the third/ninth century, to a more specifically warfare-oriented understanding, was due to political circumstances.[20] Afsaruddin writes in regards to the *ḥadīth* literature that, "[the] progressive formulation of fairly monolithic classical juridical views of *jihād* and martyrdom owes considerable impetus to the rise and consolidation of the imperial Umayyad and Abbasid states and the establishment of a strong military during these periods."[21]

Heck argues further that it was the Abbasids who, seeking to legitimise their imperial expansion, sought to, "wrest the prestige of *jihād* from the ascetic warriors, undertook to limit the scope of *jihād*. In contrast, non-state actors' emphasis on *jihād* as a means to win redemption through martyrdom led to the escalation of violence and its identification with Muslim piety."[22] Thus long before the events of "9/11" various Muslim scholars were using particular interpretations of *jihād* to emphasis an aggressive *jihād* against non-Muslims, while

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[18] Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God,* 11-35. Mujāhid is mentioned by al-Muḥāsibī.

[19] Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God,* 2.

[20] Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God,* 117-148.

[21] Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God,* 4. She adds, "The progressive juridical—as well as exegetical—conflation of *jihād* with *qitāl* that occurred in the pre-modern period (and continued into the modern period) is reflected in the way martyrdom also came to be progressively understood in similar contexts as essentially dying on the battlefield." Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God,* 2. She also asserts that "in a number of these reports, it is the pious warrior who is being compared to the non-combative pious believer in order to assess the former's religious merit," and that, "Other reports posit the moral equivalence of fighting in the path of God to essential religious obligations performed for the sake of God, such as prayer and fasting. But already we begin to detect an overall shift in emphasis in this treatise, with more reports now extolling the greater moral excellence of the military *jihād* over more routine devotional acts, such as prayer and fasting," Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God,* 151. Further, the *Kitāb al-Jihād* of 'Abd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), etc. also show this changing emphasis, see 149.

[22] Heck, "*Jihād* Revisited," 110.

others maintained the non-violent inner spiritual understandings.[23]

Other authors take the opposite position to Afsaruddin and Heck, arguing that *jihād* is almost always violent. Tore Kjeilen in *The Jihād Fixation*, an encyclopedic collation of Muslim references to *jihād* defines it as:

> Islamic term, Arabic for 'battle; struggle; holy war for the religion'. *Jihād* has two possible definitions: the greater, which is the spiritual struggle of each man, against vice, passion and ignorance. This understanding of *jihād* has been presented by apologetics of modern times, but is an understanding of the term rarely used by Muslims themselves.[24]

Noticeably, of Kjeilen's seven paragraphs defining Islam, only the first (above) mentions the internal spiritual struggle, and then with the implication that this is a recent apologetic formulation "rarely used" by actual Muslims.[25] This misrepresentation of the history and meaning of Islam is frequently used to condemn Islam as inherently violent and all Muslims as latent terrorists.[26] Significantly the next chapter of *The Jihād Fixation* titled "Objectives" consists of eight pages purely discussing Islam as violent warfare, quoting the most commonly used *jihād* texts from Muslim scholars and the Qur'ān with no discussion of their context nor limitations to application. The opening paragraph states, "Allah, the Most High and the Most Majestic, has stated the objectives behind *jihād* in the cause of Allah the Most high. He the Most Perfect says: Fight them until there is no more *fitnah* (shirk)."[27] There follow six pages that review the evidence for the idea of *jihād* as spiritual struggle in the *ḥadīth*, concluding that the evidence is weak and that therefore the whole idea is false.[28] I have described *The Jihād Fixation* book in some depth because it is representative of a number of other works on *jihād*, in which there is almost no mention of the extensive early written description by early Sufis of *jihād* as spiritual struggle. Kjeilen, for example, has only a short one page summary of M. Amir Ali's extended discussion of *jihād,* which includes two paragraphs outlining the wider range of meanings, including loving God most, striving to

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[23] Heck, "*Jihād* Revisited," 205-19, 236-68.

[24] Tore Kjeilen, "Jihad," in *The Jihad Fixation,* ed. Tore Kjeilen (Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2001), 11-12 (11).

[25] Kjeilen, "Jihad," 11-12. One wonders what kind of Muslims Kjeilen reads or meets since many Muslims do in fact write of the spiritual battle, and al-Muḥāsibī's early work is readily available.

[26] Stuart Robinson, *Mosques and Miracles* (Brisbane: Cityharvest, 2003), 207-17.

[27] Sa'eed Al-Qahtani, "Objectives," in *The Jihad Fixation* (Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2001), 13.

[28] Sa'eed Al-Qahtani, "Objectives," 25.

be holy etc.[29] The extremely lengthy discussions of inner struggle by al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī etc. are ignored. A section titled "Obligation: *Jihād* according to the Qur'ān and Sunnah" includes a number of references. However, no context is provided for the Qur'ān references which start with, "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but transgress not the limits… Kill them wherever you find them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out." Quoting these verses without the qualifiers of context and limits, the reader is left with the distinct impression that Islam is a monolithic force about to engulf the West, especially when more than a third of the book's 424 pages are in two sections titled "Agents" and "Tentacles."[30]

In stark contrast is the view of Zein, who argues that *jihād* does not translate as "holy war" because the Qur'ān's references to *jihād* as warfare only ever applied to Arabia. According to Zein, outside of this specific historic context all *jihād* is meant to be striving to defend the Islamic beliefs, and should be done as a peaceful intellectual exercise. He also argues that the modern use of "*jihād*" in the name of Islam is ultimately derived from the Christian crusaders and their holy wars.[31] Other authors also so emphasise the personal spiritual struggle that they downplay *jihād* as war. Engineer for example states that, "we see wars in the history of Islam, not in the teachings of Islam," and attributes the killings to an "Arab mindset" rather than Islam *per se*.[32] This too is overstating the case and contradicts historical evidence.

Ali argues that *jihād* is merely defensive or the struggle for justice[33]. The Qur'ān (2:190) is often quoted in support of this view, "And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not the aggressors." Arnold

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[29] Kjeilen, "Jihad," 31-73. These 43 pages consist almost entirely of an explanation of the philosophy of violent *jihād*, with less than one page (70) examining *jihād* as an inner war and "a struggle against the base instincts of the body but also resistance to the temptation of polytheism." Al-Ghazālī, one of the greatest Sufi scholars is also cited in support of this view, but then is undermined by a quote indicating the opposite view. Amir Ali's work is summarised on 29, citing Amir Ali http://www.themodernreligion.com/jihad/jihad-explained.html.

[30] Kjeilen, *The Jihad Fixation.*

[31] Zein, *Christianity, Islam and Orientalism,* 24, 29, 30. In relation to the "sword verses" in the Qur'ān, (9:5,36 etc.) Zein writes, "Clearly, the Prophet was referring solely to the people of Arabia. Qur'ān 9:1-28 strongly supports this argument. The intention that only the population in Arabia should be Muslim in totality is very clear," 24. Heck argues that al-Fārābī (d. 950) was, "Heavily influenced by Greek thought in Arabic translation, refers to military activity not as *jihād* but as war (*harb*), speaking of it in terms of justice and injustice (al- Fārābī 1961, 146)," Heck, "*Jihād* Revisited," 103.

[32] Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam: Misgivings and History* (New Delhi, 2008), 6. See also 5-7, 11-13. Engineer argues that Islam significantly lessened the common violence of pre-Islamic tribes, 21, 25.

[33] Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*, 1; Engineer, *Islam: Misgivings and History,* 6, 8, 17.

argues that Islam spread as a result of Arab conquests rather than as Muslim *jihād*.[34] He also sees significance in the fact that some Orthodox Church leaders saw Arab conquests as peaceful in contrast to the Roman rule, or as a judgement on Christian sins.[35] Hence Islam in his view is always peaceful, and thus the West has nothing to fear. Noorani notes the description of Muslims in the media as "a fifth column in our midst", "isolationist" in approach, and unwilling to integrate into Western society.[36] He argues that due to the increased Muslim rage against the West, especially since the creation of Israel, what Islam needs is more "greater *jihād*" (inner struggle), that is, Muslims need to engage in more East-West dialogue and engage in rational dialogue to solve problems of injustice.[37]

Muraweic in contrast makes a negative assessment of Islam and *jihād*. The frontispiece of his book says that, "This book examines contemporary *jihād* as a cult of violence and power" and asserts that, "All *jihādi* groups, whether Shiite or Sunni, Arab or not, are characterized by a similar bloodlust."[38] The use of these polemical terms makes it difficult to imagine *jihād* in any way other than as evil. The first chapter is titled "We love death," and Muraweic situates *jihād* solely within a history of various atrocities going right back to the Greek Peloponnesian war.[39] He appropriates Huntington's "clash of civilizations" language by identifying the "irregular war waged by the *jihādi* world against the West" as determinate of even the West's "fate."[40] His use of "*jihādi* terror groups" virtually equates *jihād* with extremist violence.[41] Muraweic discusses *jihād* as inherent to Islam since its birth, but makes no mention of the Sufi understanding of *jihād*.[42] Rather, he implies that the "secret society" nature of Sufi groups may actually be a harbour for terrorists.[43] The modern outbreak of *jihād* he blames on the German foreign policy manoeuvres in the First World War, even describing Max von Oppenheim as the "German Abu *Jihad*."[44] When such texts are published by the reputable Cambridge University Press it is difficult to see how the public can resist the

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[34] Thomas Arnold, *The Spread of Islam in the World: A history of peaceful preaching* (New Delhi: Goodword, 2001), 46.

[35] Arnold, *The Spread of Islam in the World,* 54.

[36] A.G. Noorani, *Islam and Jihad* (London: Zed Books, 2005), 121, 123, 124.

[37] Noorani, *Islam and Jihad,* 126, 127. Some of these authors mentioned above are popular rather than academic, however they reflect the broader community perceptions and are often sourced instead of more-nuanced scholars.

[38] Laurent Muraweic, *The Mind of Jihad* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2008), frontis.

[39] Muraweic, *The Mind of Jihad*, 5.

[40] Muraweic, *The Mind of Jihad*, 1.

[41] Muraweic, *The Mind of Jihad*, 166.

[42] Muraweic, *The Mind of Jihad* , 169f.

[43] Muraweic, *The Mind of Jihad,* 166.

[44] Muraweic, *The Mind of Jihad,* 187f.

conclusion that Islam is inherently a religion of terrorists, and that all *jihād* is violent warfare.

It is not just non-Muslim Western scholars who disagree over the meaning of *jihād*. Muslims are divided too, between those who follow the Arab nationalist and Islamic resurgence viewpoints of Sayed Qutb, and those who prefer al-Ghazālī, Rumi, and other Sufis. The views of al-Qaeda and other groups that follow Qutb are well-documented, and they legitimate violent *jihād* against others based on the Qur'ān. In contrast, Sufis generally regard the inner *jihād* as the struggle to subdue the self, specifically the *nafs* (lower soul where the passions and sins reside), because the *nafs* is either weak or easily misled by Satan.[45] Their focus is very similar to that of Aphrahat, Isaac, and the Syrian ascetics. This concept of the struggle with the *nafs* is extensively described by al-Ghazālī, often considered the greatest Sufi theorist. Al-Ghazālī wrote extensively on spiritual attainment, inner battle, and the soul in his *Revival of the Religious Sciences*.[46] Except for a few notable exceptions, Al-Ghazālī's view represents the whole Sufi tradition. He excludes *jihād* as warfare except for extreme cases of self-defence. These two viewpoints regarding *jihād* have been in conflict for over a thousand years so it is hard to see how the divergence can be resolved given that both sides draw on a long history of Qur'ānic and Hadith exegesis. There may never be complete agreement even within Islam over *jihād* as Islam is in reality a fragmented and diverse collection of ethnic and religious viewpoints.[47]

The two opposing views of the meaning of *jihād* both suffer from a certain reductionism that ignores the full extent of historical data.[48] The resulting ambivalence leads to public confusion which has significant implications for the maintenance of social harmony. This thesis therefore will provide essential data to inform a more nuanced assessment of the meaning and history of inner *jihād* in Islam. While some Muslims may reject the evidence, it is possible that Western societies will use the knowledge to construct more harmonious engagement with Islam. Islam is far from monolithic, and the presence of some terrorist factions does not necessarily demonstrate that Islam is inherently violent. As Lawrence has

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[45] Mark Sedgwick, *Sufism: The Essentials.* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2003), 10.
[46] Sedgewick, *Sufism,* 18.
[47] Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 64-77.
[48] Kepel is another author who notes the political implications of the term *jihad* especially after "September 11," but fails to even mention the history of greater or lesser *jihad*. Gilles Kepel, *The Trail of Political Islam,* trans. Anthony Roberts (London: Taurus, 2002), 1.

noted, the West is also fractured, and in some places and times quite violent.[49] Ironically, the reductionist and singularizing view of a violent Islam perpetuated by many recent books stands in contrast to the earlier 19th century stereotype of Islam as impotent and dying.

Jihād: semantic range

Jihād literally means "strive" or "struggle" or even "exertion", and is used with this meaning in Muslim texts, but also in Christian Arabic literature after the spread of Islam, as I shall demonstrate in my final chapter. The Qur'ānic references above show that *jihād* carries a wide range of meanings but with the common underlying image of energetic struggle. This range is almost identical with that covered by the Greek *agōn* and the Syriac *agōna*. It is important to note that there are other specific words in Arabic for war, i.e. *ḥarb* and *qitāl*.[50] Both these words are used in the Qur'ān exclusively to denote external battles and ongoing warfare.[51] In recent polemic concerning Islam, the Muslim concept of the *dar-al- ḥarb* (abode of war) has attained also talismanic status, however *ḥarb* appears to be never used for inner struggle, and thus *jihād* occupies a broader semantic space given its use for both internal and external battles.[52]

Another key term that must be differentiated from *jihād* is *qitāl* (Syriac *qiṭāl*, war, massacre) since many Muslims and non-Muslims alike often incorrectly interpret *jihād* to always mean *qitāl*. However, *qitāl* has a specific meaning that is narrower than *jihād*. Both Syriac and Arabic use *qitāl* which is formed from the same triliteral root in both languages (q-t-l), with the particular meaning of murder or massacre.[53] The difference between *jihād* and *qitāl* appears to be the emphasis in the former on the inner struggle with its attendant spiritual growth and virtuous dimensions. This is important because *qitāl* does not seem to be used of the internal fight, and has a range of very negative uses such as massacre, which do not overlap either *agōna* or *jihād*. The use of *jihād* when *qitāl* would appear to suffice demonstrates that more than the physical battle is in the author's mind, borne out by the

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[49] Bruce Lawrence, *Shattering the Myth: Islam Beyond Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 4, 5.
[50] Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History,* 2. Engineer, *Islam: Misgivings and History,* 227.
[51] Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History,* 8.
[52] See for example Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam.*
[53] William Jennings, *Lexicon to the Syriac New Testament* (London, Oxford University Press, 1926), 192. Elias A. Elias and Edward E. Elias, *English-Arabic, Arabic-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Publications India, 1996), 320; In the New Testament see for example Luke 13:3, 15:27, Matt 2:4, 16, 15:19, Acts 7:61, 9:1, 12:2. Also see *Syriac Dictionary*, ed. J. Payne Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 501. See Qur'ān 8:39.

broader discourse in which these words are used. Anti-Islamic polemicists seem to have missed this important distinction and interpret *jihād* usage as if it implies *qitāl*. The concept of *jihād* is still often confused with "just war", and many scholars completely miss the internal aspect, focussing exclusively on the external warfare.[54] In possibly the clearest summary of the breadth of meaning of *jihād*, Heck writes:

> What is clear is that the qur'ānic declaration of *jihād* cannot be reduced to armed struggle. Virtually all instances of the root j-h-d speak primarily to the question of true intention and devotion (including, incidentally, those forms referring to oath-taking, for example Q 5:53, *jahda aymānihim*). The term in its various forms signifies a divine test (Q 47:31) to distinguish the lukewarm believers (Q 4:95; 9:81, 86) from those who desire God's satisfaction (Q 60:1) and strive body and soul in His way (Q 9:41, 88). *Jihād,* regardless of sphere of action, is a means of separating true belief from infidelity (Q 25:52) and of ranking the intention and merit of those who believe (Q 8:72-85.) … In short, *jihād* in the Qur'ān implies a total devotion to God through a consecration, dedication and even oblation of oneself in His way.[55]

This is extraordinarily similar to how the Syrian Christian ascetics write about the internal spiritual war. I will thus define *jihād* broadly as "struggle," either internal or external or even both, and let the textual analysis elucidate what specific authors mean by the term.

Jihād in the Qur'ān

Heck's summary requires further elaboration on the Qur'ān's actual usage of the *jihād* concept. The Qur'ān has over 40 occurrences of the word *jihād* or other words derived from the same trilateral root, in verses that either clearly refer to violent war or to peaceful internal battle or to both understandings. This means that both meanings of *jihād* must be recognized as existing together, and the specific meaning can only be determined by context.[56] Historically, some Islamic jurists have written extensively on *jihād* as external warfare, while others like al-Ghazālī have emphasized the peaceful internal form of *jihād*.[57] Bonney presents

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[54] For example see *Just Wars, Holy Wars, and Jihāds: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Encounters and Exchanges,* ed. Sohail H. Hashmi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Neither in the introduction nor in any of the 19 chapters is the idea that there is a peaceful internal *jihād* even mentioned.

[55] Heck, "*Jihād* Revisited," 96-7.

[56] For an excellent summary of the uses of *jihād* in the Qur'ān see Zeki Saritoprak, *Islamic Spirituality: Theology and Practice for the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017),

[57] Bonney, *Jihad: From Qur'an to bin Laden,* 26, 29.

the view of Shams al-Dīn al-Sarakhsi (*c.* 1010-1090 CE) as one traditional understanding of the gradual development of the concept of *jihād* in 4 stages.[58] Al-Sarakhsi indicates that initially, while Muslims were a tiny minority, Islam was spread completely non-violently, but in the second stage, Muhammad was commanded to argue but in a peaceful way. God then in the third stage granted permission to fight defensively those who were seeking to destroy the Muslims, and in the fourth stage Muslims were to spread Islam by the sword until there were no unbelievers. Bonney shows that in contrast to this, other Muslims read the Qur'ān more synchronically, seeking to apply the differing verses in different contexts. For example, Amir Ali sees twelve different meanings of *jihād* in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, including "defending Islam and the community" and "freeing people from tyranny."[59] While the ongoing epistemological debate within Islam complicates any certain definition of unclear verses, it is evident from the transparent passages that both of the main understandings of *jihād* have Qur'ānic and *ḥadīth* support.[60]

I have mentioned briefly the possible reasons for the growing emphasis on external *jihād* among the Islamic jurists during the Abbasid era. A similar shift was occurring, however, in the opposite direction among Sufis. Heck argues that the idea of *jihād* was:

> developed early on by the ascetically and mystically minded who saw *jihād*—against the backdrop of an increasingly affluent and comfortable Islamic order—as a struggle not to preserve the Islamic message against non-Muslim hostility but to direct one's own soul away from worldly attachments. *Jihād* was thus conceived as a spiritual exercise, including the ascetical discipline of the body.[61]

By the time of al-Muḥāsibī this reaction to a comfortable Islamic elite was quite noticeable, and his writings include several pointed comments.[62]

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[58] Bonney, *Jihad: From Qur'an to bin Laden,* 25-27.

[59] Summarized in Bonney, *Jihad: From Qur'an to bin Laden,* 26-27, as " recognizing the Creator and loving him most (Q.9:23,24); resisting pressure of parents, peers and society (Q.25:52); staying on the straight path steadfastly (Q.22:78); striving for righteous deeds (Q.29:69); having courage and steadfastness to convey the message of Islam (Q.41:33); defending Islam and the community (Q.22:39-40); helping allied people who may not be Muslim; removing treacherous people from power (Q.8:58); defence through pre-emptive strikes (Q.2:216); gaining freedom to inform, educate and convey the message of Islam in an open and free environment (Q.2:217); freeing people from tyranny (Q.4:75); and, after victory, removing tyranny, treachery, bigotry, and ignorance and replacing them with justice and equity (Q.4:58; Q.5:8; Q.7:181; Q.16:90)."

[60] Qur'an 91:9 "He who *purifies* it has succeeded." *zakkaha*. زَكَّاهَا The "it" is introduced in v7- the soul *nafs*. نَفْسٍ Qur'an 29:69 "Those who *strive* for Our sake, We shall surely guide in Our paths."*Jahadu.*

[61] Heck, "*Jihād* Revisited," 98.

[62] The tension is already evident as early as Rabia' and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.

Underpinning the validity of the internal view of *jihād* is the fact that this broader range of meaning and metaphorical use of the word *jihād* appears in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. 'Abbās b. al-Mirdās al-Sulamī[63] in one of his poems writes, "Upon my life, I am beginning today to combat *(jāhadā)* Dhamād [a god] by joining the Lord of the Universe."[64] This pre-Islamic poetry has hardly been studied, especially in regards to this controversial field of *jihād* studies. A final piece of evidence of an early broad range of views pertaining to the meaning of *jihād* is the oldest-known book written/compiled about the topic, the *Kitāb al-Jihād* of Ibn al-Mubārak, dated to around 170 AH. This collection reveals a breadth of approaches to *jihād* including both the internal spiritual war and the external battle views, and includes numerous stories supporting the developing Sufi idea but also others that promote the jurist line. Ibn al-Mubarak was a Muslim warrior who spent much of his life fighting the East Romans. He writes:

> Abu Salih al-Madani narrated: "A group of the Companions said: "If only we knew which actions were the best and most beloved to Allah." So, the verse was revealed: {*"O You who believe! Shall I guide you to a commerce that will save you from a painful torment? That you believe in Allah and His Messenger, and that you strive hard and fight in the Path of Allah with your wealth and your lives. That will be better for you, if only you knew!"*} [*as-Saff*; 10-11].[65]

There are similar references to external *jihād* in the writings of the significant early Sufi author al-Muḥāsibī (781-857 CE), but he privileges the internal battle over the external. At least in the first centuries of Islam, the polarity between the inner and outer *jihād* was not as extreme as later. We can compare al-Sulamī (d. 1106 CE) who writes, "Give precedence to

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[63] A (Persian) poet who became a Muslim, d. 639 CE, Al-Nadim, *The Fihrist of Al-Nadim: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture,* trans. B. Dodge (Columbia University 1970), 933.

[64] Najmah Sayuti, "The Concept of Allah as the Highest God in Pre-Islamic Arabia" (MA. Thesis, McGill University, 1999), 35, جاهدا .

[65] ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitab Al-Zuhd wal Raqa'iq,* No. 2, http://iskandrani.wordpress.com/2008/02/09/selections-from-kitab-al-*jihād*/, accessed August 27, 2014. He also says about the priority of state of the soul and the hereafter: 'Abdullah bin 'Amr bin al-'As said: "A good action that I perform today is more beloved to me than a good action I performed in the past, because, we were with the Messenger of Allah and our only concern was the Hereafter, and we did not care about the worldly life, while, today, the worldly life has overtaken us," ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitab Al-Zuhd wal Raqa'iq,* No.216, http://iskandrani.wordpress.com/2008/02/09/selections-from-kitab-al-*jihād*/, accessed August 27, 2014. The external violent conception is reflected in many other passages, for example: 'Uthman bin 'Affan said to his people: "It has become clear – by Allah – that I have kept you busy from *Jihād*, and it is an obligation upon me and you. So, whoever would love to make it to Sham, then let him do so, and whoever would love to make it to Iraq, then let him do so, and whoever would love to make it to Egypt, then let him do so, for verily, a single day for a *Mujahid* in the Path of Allah is like a thousand days for the one who fasts continuously and the one praying continuously," ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitab Al-Zuhd wal Raqa'iq,* No.71, http://iskandrani.wordpress.com/2008/02/09/selections-from-kitab-al-*jihād*/, accessed August 27, 2014.

jihād of yourselves over *jihād* against your enemies."[66] Significantly, al-Sulamī also compares the external fight of non-Muslims with Islamic *jihād* when he mentions that some non-Muslims were "tireless in fighting the *jihād* against the Muslims."[67] This indicates that the idea of *jihād* was complex even in early Islam, with a range of connotations depending often on context.[68] Having focussed on the term *jihād*, it is now appropriate to discuss the broader context of ascetic theory and practice in Islam, and especially the Sufi tradition and its focus on inner struggle.

Historical context

The texts of al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī, the two authors who I will analyse, were written in specific contexts which were different in some ways. However, the early centuries of Islam were common to both and shaped many of the issues that persisted from al-Muḥāsibī's time till al-Ghazālī. The main features of early Islam have been well documented and so I will only briefly mention a few main points that especially relate to ascetical struggle.[69] Robert Hoyland in his excellent chapter on early Islam interprets it as a "Late Antique Religion" and thus emphasises the role of power and the holy person, which is closely linked to the theme of spiritual struggle.[70] The first three Islamic centuries saw a considerable expansion of an empire, and the development of various states and political machinery, which meant that groups such as Sufis were sometimes seen as a threat to the State because they undermined social unity. According to Heck, "*Jihād* therefore became subservient to … the maintenance and expansion of Umayyad control and authority," and "the socio-political framework in which the legal theory of *jihād* was formulated was a decidedly imperial one."[71] Mourad adds that various authors "had a vested interest in promoting (external) *jihād*," given the ongoing

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[66] Al-Sulami, trans. Niall Christie, "A Translation of Extracts from the Kitab al-*Jihād* of 'Ali ibn Tahir Al-Sulami (d. 1106)," in *Muslims and Crusaders: Christianity's Wars in the Middle East, 1095-1382* (Routledge, 2014), 133. The Arabic text, with a French translation, may be found in Emmanuel Sivan, "Un traité Damasquin du début du XIIe siècle", *Journal Asiatique* 254 (1966): 206-22.

[67] Al-Sulami, *Muslims and Crusaders,* 133.

[68] Paul Heck, "*Jihād* Revisited," 95.

[69] Possibly the best introduction that covers the main themes is Gerald Hawting, "The Rise of Islam," in Youssef M. Choueiri, ed. *A Companion to the History of the Middle East* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 9-27, and see the other chapters in this book. Very good overall histories of early Islam are provided in Jonathan E. Brockopp, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Muḥammad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010); Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) situates early Islam well within the context of late antiquity especially its ideas of kingship, and briefly mentions possible Christian influence, but does not discuss ascetic practice.

[70] Robert Hoyland, "Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity,* ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1053-77.

[71] Paul Heck, "*Jihād* Revisited," 107-8.

wars with the Romans.[72] Understandably then, the teaching of Sufis on *jihād,* both the internal and external kind, had political implications, and the authors are aware of this.

Islam is not an homogenous entity. Along with geographical expansion during the 700s and 800s CE, there was also a rise of various Muslim theological movements such as the Muʿtazilites (Qadariyya), Jahmiyya, and others, the gradual ascendancy of Kalām and the Ashʿarites, as well as the splitting off of the Shia. Al-Muḥāsibī responds to a number of these movements and ideas in his work.[73] Islamic mysticism developed alongside and intertwined with Sufism, but must be distinguished from it as I discuss below.[74] One of the main developments that reached a peak by the time of al-Ghazālī in the twelfth century CE was the influence of Greek philosophy, which is quite evident in his doctrinal material and somewhat visible in his teaching on struggle.[75] There were also other influences on Islamic cultures that impacted Sufi ideas of struggle, including possible Syrian Christian concepts of the heroic warrior in battle. Although Islam started as a predominantly Arab movement it quickly grew to include many Persians, Egyptians, Syrians and others, who brought their own cultural ideas into their expression of Islam. It is noticeable that a significant number of the main Sufi and ascetic writers came from Basra or Persia, and it is possible that influential cultural factors were involved in their teaching. Al-Muḥāsibī was from Basra, like al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and thrived in Baghdad, and al-Ghazālī was from Persia and also flourished in Baghdad. These geographical and cultural factors have not been much studied but surely influenced their approach to Islamic spiritual struggle. Crone and Cook's *Hagarism*, while dated, is an excellent introduction to the historical, religious, and cultural background of early Islam. They note the many influences on Islam, such as Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism and ideas of a coming messiah.[76] To understand early Islam it is critical to appreciate the

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[72] Suleiman Mourad, *Early Islam between Myth and History* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 68.

[73] Good chapters on each of these are included in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); See especially Rachael Omari, "The Muʿtazilite Movement (I): The Origins of the Muʿtazila," 130-41; Steven C. Judd, "The Early Qadariyya," 44-54; Alexander Treiger, "Origins of Kalām," 27-43; Harith Bin Ramli, "The Predecessors of Ashʿarism: Ibn Kullāb, alMuḥāsibī and alQalānisī," 215-24; Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi "Early Shīʿī Theology," 81-92. There are also similar chapters in The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[74] Tor Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles: Studies in Early Islamic Mysticism*, trans. Birgitta Sharpe (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987); Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism* (Paulist Press, 1996), Sells discusses the stages of development in mysticism.

[75] Peter Adamson, "Rise of Philosophical Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology,* 297-312. M. Umaruddin,*The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazzali* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1996).

[76] Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 4-5, 9-12. They also state that Sufis were influenced by Syriac Christianity, 95. See also M. Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazzali,* 10, 14.

interconnections of the Arabs with Rome and the Persians, and this is excellently and thoroughly dealt with in Irfan Shahid's series on Byzantium and the Arabs mentioned previously. These must be balanced with works dealing with Persian influence as well.

Struggle and Sufism

The main movement that relates to inner struggle in Islam is Sufism, and both writers I analyse are usually described as Sufis, although that attribution is complicated as I shall discuss below. Sufism is properly understood as a movement within Islam which emphasises "Strenuous efforts at self-purification" (*jihād*) and it was present from the earliest times, since it was somewhat the practice of Muḥammad. This specific Sufi kind of ascetic effort is usually described as the "*jihād* of the heart" or "fight against the *nafs*" (inner soul that is tempted to do evil).[77] A definition that focusses on goal and quality is that, "Sufism can be described broadly as the intensification of Islamic faith and practice, or the tendency among Muslims to strive for a personal engagement with the Divine Reality."[78] The kinds of practices engaged in to achieve such purification include extensive prayer, fasting, giving alms to the poor, silence, meditation, rigorous self-criticism, developing a heightened awareness of judgement, and rejecting ostentation. Both authors al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī discuss these as aspects of inner *jihād*. These efforts are usually taught as requiring ongoing struggle—a battle against the world, self and demons. Ahmet Karamustafa says Sufism emerged clearly in the "last decades of the second/eight century" but also mentions al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and others who lived earlier and practised various ascetic/Sufi lifestyles, but were not yet part of a "single homogeneous movement."[79] This however does not preclude earlier Sufi-like Muslims teaching the concept of "inner *jihād*," and some of these early "proto-Sufis" are quoted by al-Muḥāsibī in relation to struggle.

The English term "Sufi" is a translation of the Arabic word *taṣawwuf, a* word denoting the practice of the Sufis, and is derived either from the practice of wearing wool (*ṣūf*) or a reference to those who sat at the bench and prayed a lot (*Suffa*).[80] The original sense of *Ṣūfī*

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[77] Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 6.

[78] John O. Voll and Kazuo Ohtsuka, "Sufism," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World,* ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[79] Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 1; See also Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism.*

[80] Alan Godlas, *Sufism's Many Paths* (University of Georgia, 2000), http://www.uga.edu/islam/Sufism.html, accessed September 29, 2018; Margaret Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam* (Luzac and Co., 1972), 2; Voll and Ohtsuka, *Sufism.*

seems to have been "one who wears wool (*ṣūf*)." Both of these possibilities show a possible link to the earlier Christian monks, as both wool-wearing and extensive prayer were defining aspects of their practice, however the derivation of the term Sufi is still highly contested. Some authors have endeavoured to show that Sufism came from outside Islam due to their belief that Islam was a defective religion, but many of their claims are very over-stated and based on minimal evidence.[81] However, one does not need to accept the Euro-centric assumptions of Juynboll to accept that there are elements of Sufi practice that have some roots in earlier Christian practice. Given the number of Christian converts to Islam, and the general interaction of the religions, this is not hard to understand. It is also true that the Qur'ān itself speaks well of monks and indicates that Islam is not contrary to but in fact a fulfilment of the previous religions. The older view of Sufism as inherently foreign to Islam is well expressed by Nicholson. He asserts that Sufism was derived from non-Islamic philosophical and spiritual influences, such as Christianity and NeoPlatonism. He states that, "Sufism, the religious philosophy of Islam, is described in the oldest extant definition as `the apprehension of divine realities'," and calls it "Islamic mysticism."[82] Hodgson and others have emphasised the role of the large numbers of Christian ascetics especially in Syria and Egypt, who came under the rule of Muslims and maintained their spiritual practices after the conquests, and suggest that Sufis were shaped by their methods.[83] By the mid-twentieth century however there was a growing recognition that Sufism was an integral and native part of Islam. Arberry in 1950 states that Sufism is "the name given to the mysticism of Islam" and "the mystical movement of an uncompromising Monotheism." He was possibly the first to argue that although Sufism was influenced by Neoplatonic and other sources, that it was fundamentally derived from the Qur'ān and Islamic tradition.[84]

The consistent theme of Sufism is that beyond the valued prescriptions of the formal religion, there is a higher level of direct experience of God. This relation with the Divine is nurtured by ascetic, and sometimes mystical, practices that lead ultimately to a union of love

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[81] G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Sedgwick, *Sufism: The Essentials,* 7; Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (New York: Doubleday, 1964). Idries Shah is quite dated although some material is useful.

[82] R.A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (1914), 1. Sarraj argues that Sufism was not only present from the beginning of Islam, but was even present before Islam, Nicholson, 8. He even provides a source for this "History of Mecca" and cites his authority as Muḥammad b. Ishaq, see Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 35.

[83] Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Vol 1: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 394; See also Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (Paris: Vrin, 1954), 104.

[84] A.J. Arberry, *Sufism* (1950), 12; See also Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 166-77, 357-59.

with God. This highest stage in Sufism is known as *ihsan*, but such direct experience of God only coming through a difficult purification of the soul, sometimes culminating in self-non-existence with its related realization of God as ultimate reality.[85] Such self-annihilation, called *fanā'*, is central to both Rumi and Hallaj, and is the basis of Hallaj's statement that "I am Truth," although not all Sufis interpret it this way.[86] For Sufis, the conquering of the self is often described in warfare and struggle terms. Smith notes that this Sufi emphasis has its roots in the Qur'ān and the central practices of Islam.[87] Fasting, renunciation, regular daily prayers, the forbidding of alcohol, and the frequent challenge to avoid wealth and greed, all reflect an ascetic tendency in Islam that is identified in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. The Sufi tendency occurred partly as a reaction against the rigid argument structure and philosophical nature of *kalām* theology, but it also emerged at a very early stage in Islam before *kalām* was even prevalent.[88] Some other element must be proposed to explain this growt of Sufism, and my research indicates possible influence from Muslim convert former Syrian Christians.

While many scholars have linked Sufism with Islamic mysticism, this identification can obscure the nature of Sufism as spiritual struggle. Voll and Ohtsuka assert that the term *Ṣūfī*, "has been used in a wide variety of meanings over the centuries, by both proponents and opponents of Sufism … Western observers have sometimes obscured the issue by referring to Sufism as 'Islamic mysticism' or 'Islamic esotericism.'"[89] In some Sufi authors such as al-Muḥāsibī there is very little that can be called "mysticism" at all. Knysh notes that there was from the start a variety of approaches to Islamic mysticism, and summarises various early conceptions of Sufism, ranging from the mystical to the more ascetic style of al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī.[90] Because in some cases there is a connection of Sufis with mystical practices such as ecstatic meditations, since the late 1800s various fundamentalist Islamic groups have campaigned against Sufism and attempted to deny its validity and history.[91] This criticism is not new, however, as early Islamic jurists condemned many Sufis such as Hallaj, often for their mystical beliefs. There certainly is some element of

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[85] Margaret Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam* (London, Luzac and Company, 1950), 1, 2.

[86] Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam,* vol. 3, The Teaching of al-Hallāj, trans. Herbert Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 42-7; Sells, *Islamic Mysticism,* 222-24, 257-65;

[87] Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam,* 2.

[88] See J. Van Ess, "Early Development of Kalam," In *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society,* ed. G. Juynboll (Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 109-123 (109-11).

[89] John O. Voll and Kazuo Ohtsuka, "Sufism," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World,* ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[90] Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 5-6.

[91] Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*, 1-2.

what is often called in the West "mysticism" in the sense that Sufism is often defined as *iḥsān* but this "mystical" belief however does not necessarily denote any kind of mystical practice. As Voll and Ohtsuka rightly explain:

> As a Qur'ānic name for the phenomenon that often came to be called Sufism, some authors have chosen the term *iḥsān*, "doing what is beautiful," a divine and human quality about which the Qur'ān says a good deal, particularly that God loves those who possess it. In the famous *ḥadīth* of Gabriel, the Prophet describes *iḥsān* as the innermost dimension of Islam, after *islām* ("submission" or correct activity) and *īmān* ("faith" or correct understanding). *Iḥsān* is a deepened understanding and perception that, in the words of this *ḥadīth*, allows you "to worship God as if you see him." This means that Ṣūfīs strive to be aware of God's presence in both the world and themselves and to act appropriately. Historically, *islām* became manifest through the *sharīʿah* and jurisprudence, whereas *īmān* became institutionalized through *kalām* and other forms of doctrinal teachings. In the same way, *iḥsān* revealed its presence mainly through Ṣūfī teachings and practices.[92]

Most commonly, attaining to *iḥsān* involves the typical Sufi practices as mentioned above, as well as concepts of inner struggle, which only in some cases are mixed with ecstatic trances or other "mystical" actions. Thus Sufism must be seen as a spectrum of views and practices, all involving struggle, and accepted to varying degrees within Islam. For the two authors I analyse, very few Muslims historically would reject them as mainstream Muslims despite their Sufi practices. The greatest writers in Sufism include Ibn Arabī (d. 1240 CE), Rumi (d. 1273 CE), al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE), Sarrāj (d. 988 CE), and Hallaj (d. 922 CE), but it is difficult to trace exactly where these later Sufis gained their ideas from since some of the earliest Sufis left little written, and their teachings are only recorded by later compilers such as ʿAṭṭar (d. *c.* 1220 CE).[93] This is one reason why al-Muḥāsibī is so important—his text is the earliest surviving extensive Sufi work, and he records many of the earliest Sufis.

Sufism and the Sunni tradition of Islam

One question that directly impacts this thesis is the extent to which Sufism reflects a

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[92] Voll and Ohtsuka, "Sufism."
[93] Kenneth Avery and Ali Alizadeh, *Fifty Poems of ʿAṭṭar* (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2007).

mainstream Islamic conception of struggle and the idea of the "inner *jihād*." In contrast to the oft-assumed belief in two opposing mutually-exclusive groups, that is, Sufis and "mainstream Muslims," there was in fact a much more nuanced relationship—Sufism is rather a subset of Islam. Chiabotti and Orfali argue that "in its formative period Sufism developed in close contact with the network of the 'ḥadīth folk,'" that is the traditionalist scholars.[94] Ahmet Karamustafa asserts that in a number of ways Sufis were allied to the traditional scholars, especially those who had "formed around the example of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal," (d. 855 CE), and this would include al-Muḥāsibī.[95] Ali Hassan Abdel-Kader notes that al-Junayd (d. 910 CE) was advised to be "a traditionalist who is a ṣūfī, and not a ṣūfī who is a traditionalist," again showing that the two classes were not mutually exclusive.[96] Al-Junayd and the later al-Ghazālī certainly took this to heart and bridged the gap between the two polarities in Islam. Voll and Ohtsuka note regarding Sufism that, "It is often seen as opposed to the state-supported jurists, yet jurists have always been counted among its devotees, and Sufism has frequently been supported by the state along with jurisprudence."[97]

Another way of framing this issue regarding the validity of Sufi concepts of struggle is to evaluate the flawed perception of some popular authors who assert that Sufism is either not true Islam or is a disguised version.[98] Various popular Christian writers write that real Islam is predominantly violent and that Sufis with their focus on the interior world are not true Muslims. They argue that the more one is committed to real Islam the more one is likely to be engaged in external *jihād* or even be a terrorist.[99] Most modern "Salafi" Muslims also make this argument that Sufi practices are a deviation from the original pure and that they are not true Muslims.[100] Such thinking then requires deeper analysis of exactly how early mainstream

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[94] Francesco Chiabotti and Bilal Orfali, An Encounter of al-ʿAbbās b. Ḥamza (d. 288/901) with Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. ca. 245/859-60): Edition and Study of MS. Vollers 875d, *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 90-121 (91).

[95] Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (University of Califormia Press: Los Angeles, 2007), 22-23. He adds, "The scholars and lawyers maintained a variety of attitudes towards Sufis that ranged from the curious, and at times sympathetic, observation to scepticism and even contempt." Karamustafa, *Sufism,* 22.

[96] Ali Hassan Abdel-Kader, *Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd* (London: Luzac and Company, 1962), 3.

[97] John O. Voll and Kazuo Ohtsuka, "Sufism."

[98] Robert Spencer, "Sufi Islam," https://sites.google.com/site/islamicthreatsimplified/home/sufi-islam, accessed 25 September 2018.

[99] Mark Durie, *The Third Choice: Islam, Dhimmitude and Freedom* (Deror Books, 2010), 155-157; Stuart Robinson, *Mosques and Miracles* (Brisbane: Cityharvest, 2003), 207-17. Robinson asserts that "Islam remains a religion whose followers believe that Allah requires them to send their sons to die." Robinson, *Mosques and Miracles*, 206. See also http://www.amnation.com/vfr/archives/006008.html accessed 25 September 2018.

[100] Roxanne Leslie Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, introduction to *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden,* eds. Roxanne Leslie Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 20-3. See also H. Hellyer, "The Dangerous Myths about

Islam responded to Sufism, but this is beyond the scope of this thesis, so I shall only briefly mention the views of two main early Muslim responders, Ḥanbal and Ibn Taymīyah, since they are often used to criticise Sufism.

Ḥanbal (d. 241 AH/ 855 CE, and thus a contemporary of al-Muḥāsibī) was the founder of one of the four schools of Islamic teaching and hence must be considered central to the majority path of Islam.[101] In his works, Ḥanbal rejects "metaphysical Sufism," but approves of "pietistic Sufism." Melchert importantly states that, "Both the Ḥanbali movement and classical Sufism took shape in Baghdad in the ninth and tenth centuries C.E. Both became essential components of the high-medieval Sunni synthesis."[102] Melchert provides a good overview of the ambivalency of Ḥanbal who was somewhat mystical himself yet critical of many aspects of Sufism. Noticeably, even today, Ḥanbalism is not generally hostile to Sufism but rather to any anti-traditionalist activities.[103] Ironically, despite his support of the non-ecstatic forms of Sufism, Ḥanbal is seen as foundational to the arguments of modern anti-Sufi Muslims such as Muḥammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb.[104]

It is significant that Ibn Taymīyah (d. 1328 CE), a strict jurist affiliated with the Ḥanbalī school of Islamic law and one of the most distinguished critics of Sufism in the premodern era, also actively approves of some elements of Sufism and does not condemn all the activities of the Ṣūfī orders. Ibn Taymīyah emphasises in his teaching the normative traditional forms of *taṣawwuf*, and bases his argument on numerous early Sufi masters. He describes the Sufis in his *Al-Risala al-safadiyya* as those who faithfully follow the path of the *Sunna* (the traditional Islamic teachings based on the Qur'ān and Muhammad's practice).[105] Further, although "nowadays he is supposed to be the ancestor of what we call Salafi Islam," Ibn Taymīyah was "a member of the Qādirī Sufi order."[106] This is important as Ibn

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Sufi Muslims," https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/11/airbrushing-sufi-muslims-out-of-modern-islam/546794/ accessed 25 September 2018.

[101] Gibril F. Haddad, *The Four Imams and Their Schools* (London: Muslim Academic Trust, 2007), 301.

[102] Christopher Melchert, *"The Ḥanābila and the Early Sufis," Arabica* T. 48, Fasc. 3 (2001):352-67 (352).

[103] Thomas Würtz, "Reactions of Ibn Taymiyya and Taftāzānī upon the Mystic Conception of Ibn ʿArabī," in *Mysticism in East and West: The Concept of Unity of Being,* ed. Heike Stamer (Lahore: Multimedia Affairs, 2013), 41-52 (41).

[104] Ahmad adds, "His authority has been used by some twentieth-century Islamist groups to declare *jihād* against ruling governments." "Ibn Taymiyyah, Taqi al-Din Ahmad," *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam,* http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e959, accessed September 4, 2018.

[105] Würtz, "Reactions of Ibn Taymiyya," 43. On the meaning of Sunna see *Asma Afsaruddin,* "Sunnah," *Encyclopedia Britannica,* https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sunnah, accessed September 4, 2018; Sayyid Rami Al Rifai, *The Islamic Journal* No. 03*: From Islamic Civilisation To The Heart Of Islam* , 46.

[106] Würtz, *Reactions of Ibn Taymiyya,* 41, 42; See also Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed *Ibn Taymiyya and*

Taymīyah's rhetoric on *jihād* is often used by Islamist terrorists today to justify their actions. Notably, Ibn Taymīyah defends Sufism as not being any sort of heretical deviation, although he is highly critical of the monism and antinomianism of some Sufis.[107] Further exploration of the ideas of inner *jihād* in the writings of these two authors is needed, especially in comparison to al-Ghazālī. It is evident however that there is no justification for relegating Sufi ideas of the battle of the soul to the fringe of Islam. Inner struggle is central to Sufism and important in Islam.[108]

The question of how many Sufis there were, and how representative Sufi writings are, is unresolved. The existence however of ongoing disputes between the "Traditionist" *ulama* and some Sufis, shows that Sufism was an influential movement.[109] This fact does not itself indicate any sizable number of Sufis, but does point to the perception that they were impacting many people. More significant is the rulers' fear of uprisings by Sufi followers, which indicates that this number cannot have been insignificant. For example, when Hallaj is about to be executed, the ruler keeps it a secret lest the people rise in revolt.[110] There is also considerable variation in how early Sufi writers describe Sufism, with some emphasising the struggle, while others emphasise mystical states of unity with God. Sarraj, like some other writers, emphasises *tawhīd* as union with God, but gives minimal treatment to discipline of the soul and body. He discusses practical aspects such as fasting, how to eat food, and how

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His Times. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 334. Heck writes: "Such rhetoric is easily used by radical Islam today to justify *jihād* against Muslims and non-Muslims alike (Sivan 1983), but one must be careful to make a distinction between (1) their appropriation of Ibn Taymiyya's conception of *jihād* for their politico-eschatological program of inaugurating the reign of God by warring against the worldly powers of the day and (2) Ibn Taymiyya's own intention of using it to define Islamic identity in ritual and communal rather than political and territorial terms. It is in that sense that radical Islam today and the work of Ibn Taymiyya represent two forms of religious consciousness. Theirs is eschatological, an abrogation of the restraints placed on war by the classical doctrine of *jihād* and affirmed by Ibn Taymiyya himself in favour of a self-sacrificial violence that dramatizes the anticipated victory of godly over worldly rule. His is a development in the legal theory of *jihād* to account for the post-Mongol social order." Heck, "*Jihād* Revisited," 117.

[107] Aaron Spevack, *The Archetypal Sunni Scholar: Law, Theology, and Mysticism in the Synthesis of Al-Bajuri* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2014), 92. Also "Ibn Taymiyya's Sufi inclinations and his reverence for Sufis like 'Abd al-Qadir Gilani can also be seen in his hundred-page commentary on *Futuh al-ghayb*, covering only five of the seventy-eight sermons of the book, but showing that he considered tasawwuf essential within the life of the Islamic community." Ibn Taymiyya, "Futooh Al-Ghayb and Sufism," http://www.livingislam.org/n/itaysf_e.html, accessed September 4, 2018. See also M. Hisham Kabbani, *The Repudiation of "Salafi" Innovations* (n.p.: Kazi, 1996), 354-366.

[108] One outstanding point worthy of investigation beyond this thesis is that, given even the very traditionalist Ibn Taymiyya writes positively about Sufism, why would *ḥadīth* collectors like al-Bukhari etc. demonstrate such a different approach by virtually excluding inner *jihād* from his *ḥadīth* collection while dealing with it in separate works?

[109] Reynold Nicholson, introduction to *The Kitáb al-luma' fi'l-Tasawwuf of Abú Nasr 'abdallah b. 'Ali al-Sarráj al-Tusi*, ed. and trans. Reynold Nicholson (Leyden: Brill, 1914), 2-6, 8.

[110] Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam,* vol. 1, The Life of al-Hallāj, trans. Herbert Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 532-56.

to travel, but rarely mentions critical self-examination nor striving with the *nafs*.[111] He rejects extreme asceticism but does speak of self-mortification, and this variation of definitions of Sufism adds to the difficulty of both defining it and counting its numbers.[112] In early Islam Sufism was not a clear movement, and many scholars, pietists, and intellectuals exhibited some Sufi tendencies. All Muslims were expected to fast and pray, so identifying how much of these were either "normal" or a Sufi-like amount is virtually impossible. Kharraaz in the middle of the third/ninth century could classify the advanced seekers in his *Book of Light* into seven kinds, including "*ahl-al mujāhada* (those who practice combat)."[113] To assert therefore that al-Muḥāsibī was a "Sufi" may be somewhat anachronistic as he was part of the mainstream and wrote about ascetic struggle. Even al-Ghazālī, recognised as a leading Islamic scholar and as the reformer of the age, writes at length about inner struggle in a way recognisably "Sufi," showing how blurred the boundaries are. This makes identifying how common Sufi practices were very problematic. At the very least it must be recognised that a sizable portion of Muslims followed the teaching of al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī on inner struggle, and that in some cases they were identified as Sufi. Given this complexity in defining (and counting) "Sufis," my thesis title is thus a shorthand way of saying that I am analysing the writings about struggle of two significant Muslim authors who are usually classified as Sufis and who emphasised the inner *jihād*.

Christian Influence on Sufism?

I have already raised the issue of the possible Christian influence on Islam, and the reactions against the theory. The issue of how much Christian influence there was on the teaching and practice specifically of early Sufi Islam is also a hotly contested subject. Historically, Smith, Nicholson, and Wensinck among others have argued that much of Sufism is derived from Christianity, while Massignon and others of the later twentieth century have shown that there is little evidence for this. Knysh refers to the decisive work of French scholar Louis Massignon (1883–1962) which he says:

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[111] Sarraj, *The Kitáb al-luma' fi'l-Tasawwuf of Abú Nasr 'abdallah b. 'Ali al-Sarráj al-Tusi*, ed. and trans. Reynold Nicholson (Leyden: Brill, 1914), 39, 51-3. See his long section on ecstasy, 78-81.

[112] Sarraj, *The Kitáb al-luma',* 110-12. In Chapter CXX Sarraj provides definitions of 143 Arabic words or phrases, and *jihād* is notable by its absence, yet it is true that these are a list of "obscurities" and *'ibadat, zuhd*, and *iḥsan* are not listed either, 86-99.

[113] Karamustafa *Sufism,* 8. Voll and Ohtsuka say that "Given the difficulty of defining Sufism, it is not easy to discern which Muslims have been Ṣūfīs." Voll and Ohtsuka, "Sufism."

marked a radical departure from the Orientalist obsession with the extraneous roots of Islamic mysticism. After analyzing the technical terminology of early Sufism (up to the fourth/tenth century), Massignon arrived at the conclusion that its origins can be found in the Qur'ānic text itself and, therefore, one need not look any further… According to Massignon, the fact of borrowing from such a source is difficult, if not impossible to prove, unless one can produce a decisive textual evidence to substantiate it. In most cases, such evidence simply does not exist. Why, then, not assume that certain similarities between Sufism and other mystical traditions are determined by the analogical workings of the human psyche. Hence, in Massignon's view, Sufism is essentially an "autochthonous" phenomenon within Islam that cannot be satisfactorily explained by references to "foreign" influences.[114]

There certainly appears to be little definitive evidence of early Sufi-Christian textual influence in either direction, hence the similarities I study may be indicative of connection at only the level of worldview and metaphor.[115] I shall now discuss the recent more nuanced views that take more evidence into account.

There were "fuzzy boundaries" between Christianity and Islam, as Penn's recent important work makes clear, a fact which may have facilitated exchange of ideas.[116] In Syria in particular, there was considerable dialogue and flow of knowledge between the Christians and Muslims in the early Islamic centuries, partly due to the similarity in language and culture. This was especially so at the House of Wisdom where theology and philosophy were discussed and translations made. Christians were a sizable group in Syria, probably larger than the Muslim minority, and were influential in government.[117] Cameron notes that prior to Islam there had been a Christian king in Yemen, and describes Christian influences in Arabia, even as far as Mecca. She laments that, "scholars of early Islam and of the Qur'ān, and

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[114] Alexander Knysh, "Historiography of Sufi Studies in the West," in *A Companion to the History of the Middle East,* ed. Youssef M. Choueiri (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 116.

[115] Grigory Kessel and Karl Pinggéra, introduction to *A Bibliography of Syriac Ascetic and Mystical Literature* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 4; Sohail H. Hashmi and others address this central question, "What historical evidence exists that Christian and Jewish writers on just war and holy war and Muslim writers on *jihād* knew of the other tradition? What is the evidence in treatises, chronicles, speeches, ballads, and other historical records, or in practice, that either tradition influenced the other?" Sohail H. Hashmi, *Just Wars, Holy Wars, and Jihāds: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Encounters and Exchanges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), abstract.

[116] Michael Penn, *Envisioning Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 4, see also 9-13, 54-56, and chapter 4, i.e. 142-182.

[117] Alexander Treiger, "Origins of Kalām", in Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford University Press, 2013), DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199696703.013.001, accessed October 15, 2018.

patristic scholars, seem to operate in different worlds," and this has meant that important evidence has been missed.[118] Treiger, for example, shows that there appears to be some derivation of the Muslim *qadar* (free will) versus predestination debate styles and positions from Christian sources.[119] The Qur'ān itself is "suffused with Jewish and Christian elements," including the importance of apocalyptic, the role of Mary etc.[120] As Penn reminds us, the first Christians met by Muslims were Syriac-speakers, and not all encounters were antagonistic.[121] One important piece of evidence is the extensive use of the name for God "Allah" in pre-Islamic poetry, which again demonstrates that Islam was not inimical to surrounding culture, but rather as the *ḥadīth* emphasises, it was the message from God "in Arabic language."[122] The enormous similarity of the religious terminology used by Syrian Christians and Muslims means that it was relatively easy for ideas to permeate between the faiths at the grassroots level, and even more so at the elite level where many spoke both Syriac and Arabic. Some of the main words in both religions derive from the same triliteral roots, for example, the following table shows some key religious terminology where both the Syriac and Arabic have the identical triliteral root:

Meaning	Arabic	Syriac
prayer	*salāt*	*selota*
remembrance	*dhikr*	*dukhrana*
fasting	*sawm*	*sawm*
renunciation	*zuhd*	*zuhd*
soul	*nafs*	*nafs*
repentance	*tawba*	*thuba*
spirit	*rūḥ*	*rūḥ*

This high level of cognate terminology also means that much of Muslim-Christian interreligious dialogue focussed on the differences not similarities, as the common points

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[118] Averill Cameron, "Patristic Studies and the Emergence of Islam," in *Patristic Studies in the Twenty-First Century,* eds. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, Theodore DeBruyn, and Carol Harrison (Brepols, 2105), 249-78 (249, 55-56). She also surveys the recent approaches by Hoyland, Crone etc, of situating early Islam within the late antique period of cultural richness.

[119] Alexander Treiger, "Origins of Kalām," cf. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, ch. 92, 'On that God is not the cause of evils.'

[120] Cameron, "Patristic Studies and the Emergence of Islam," 258, 261-2.

[121] Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, 2.

[122] The Arabic poet Imru' al-Qays (d. about 500-540 CE) has several occasions of a woman swearing by Allah, see Najmah Sayuti, "The Concept of Allah as the Highest God in Pre-Islamic Arabia," 2-6, for example, "She (his lover) said: 'I swear by Allah that you have no way of attaining what you desire, Even if I see allurement appear from you.'"

were virtually a given. For example in the Timothy-Caliph debates the focus was on Christology, and there is no argument over prayer nor *jihād*.

One possible clear example of influence, with an ambivalent implication, is Rabi'a al-Adawiyya who lived roughly 95-185 AH (c. 714-801 CE) in Basra, in what is now Iraq. Very little is known about her except her words and actions as recorded in various Sufi hagiographies. The earliest references to Rabi'a occur in al-Muḥāsibī (781–857 CE) but the fullest account of her sayings and behaviour are in Ibn ʿAṭṭar's *Account of the Friends of God* in the thirteenth century CE.[123] The unusual nature of Rabi'a's actions has been frequently noted, both during her lifetime and by her chroniclers such as ʿAṭṭar.[124] Rabi'a's celibacy and renunciation were seen as so different to normative Islam that she was frequently questioned about her practice. She responded with statements that bear a noticeable resemblance to common monastic answers but have no parallel in the Qur'ān. The statement by her accusers that she is "fit to be an abbess" is thus significant and must be seen as both complimentary and critical. The holiness of an abbess was highly regarded, but also understood as a deviation from true Islamic holiness. Ascetic withdrawal and renunciation as practiced by Rabi'a contradicted the Islamic sense of active engagement in daily life.[125] Thus a Qur'ānic or *sunna* basis for her actions is unlikely, and other influences must be sought.

In summary, possibly the most sensible course is to realise that there was extensive early interaction between the two faith communities so some influence is possible and likely, although this may have been a two-way influence and not as great as sometimes suspected. It may be more useful to consider that other sources of ideas helped shape both faiths, such as NeoPlatonism and Stoicism, and to see the similarities as being caused by the shared cultural context of the Middle East in Late Antiquity. This context would explain some similarities without positing direct influence. A reason for this approach is that if the existing similarities were as a result of direct influence, one would expect to find many more signs of direct quotes or indirect allusions. Al-Ghazālī and other Sufis often refer to earlier teachers, and quote the words or stories of Jesus. They also refer at times to Christian practice and to monks, and are candid about similarities and differences with Christian asceticism. This seems to argue against them feeling pressured not to refer to Christian influence. But even if

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[123] Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*,151.

[124] ʿAṭṭar's biography of Rabi'a is given in English translation in Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 151-70.

[125] Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 20.

they felt constrained against making a direct connection, any genuine influence would have shown up in the allusions or unconscious use of phrases and stories. This unconscious use however seems not to be the case in the texts that I review. Despite a long history of mining of Sufi texts for Christian sources, there is almost nothing that can be shown to be incontestably derived from Christianity. What is surprising in relation to the concept of struggle is that despite the enormous number of points of similarity, there are almost no evidences of either conscious or unconscious direct influence. This argues for the idea that the similarities are either due to a common cultural base, or that the source of divine revelation of ascetic teaching and practice is the same. Islamic scholars traditionally would affirm this common source of revelation, whereas Christianity due to its view of Islam would lean to the common cultural context model. Scholars who reject revelation would naturally prefer the theory of a common cultural base. We are left then with Massignon's assertion regarding the "analogical workings of the human psyche."

Irrespective of any possible influence, the cognitive psychological research discussed earlier in relation to metaphor indicates that it is a shared human experience of babies to have to struggle and fight to grow. This means that every culture and language shares some form of struggle mindset. The child battling to stand despite the existence of gravity shapes this reality.[126] Contrary to some criticism of metaphor theory, this is not "essentialising" any more than noting the existence of gravity in every place. It is possible that some humans raised in for example a zero-gravity environment, or a person whose first two years of physical growth was achieved without consciousness, could develop without these early shaping experiences of struggle. However, for the humans researched in this thesis, gravity was not an option, and struggle was central to everyday life. The extent to which this concept becomes a metaphor for many different domains may be different in different cultures, but it exists in every human culture where this has been studied. It also seems clear that at least in some cultures "struggle" is mapped onto all the domains of warfare, medical healing, and spiritual growth, as it was for the Syrian Christians and early Sufis. Further research is required to determine whether this is true of most or all human cultures.[127]

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[126] Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture,* 38; Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, 146-49.

[127] Karen Armstrong notes that this may be seen in the Iranian Shia Muslims. Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 47. Another possible explanation for the similarities which is beyond the scope of this thesis is the often noted usage of struggle and cosmic battle metaphors in various ancient Middle-Eastern cultures such as Zoroastrianism. See Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 19, 169-71.

Conclusion

The word *jihād* in early Islam encompassed both the internal and the external battle, but due to political reasons the outer battle became for many the dominant emphasis. Sufi authors teach that the "greater *jihād*" is an internal spiritual fight and this breadth of conception is supported by early mainstream Islam. In this chapter I have outlined some of the key contextual issues surrounding early Islamic Sufism and ideas of struggle, and addressed the question of how representative Sufi notions of struggle were for Islam as a whole. Ascetically-oriented Sufism was part of the mainstream and must be distinguished somewhat from the ecstatic kind. The possibility of Christian-Muslim influence specifically in relation to Sufism is contested, however there is no indication of wholesale appropriation—what is more likely is some parallel conscious and unconscious use due to the cultural context and the common human condition. The textual analysis of the two Muslim authors in the succeeding two chapters will provide evidence for the similarity with Syrian Christian metaphors, although the specific contexts of the Muslim authors means that they sometimes use metaphors from different domains. I shall at points note differences and similarities between the Christian and Muslim texts, and summarise these in the final chapter.

6. Al-Muḥāsibī and inner *jihād*

Al-Muḥāsibī (b. 165 AH/781 CE, d. 241 AH/857 CE),[1] was not the first Muslim to write about inner *jihād,* but he was the first author to extensively elaborate on the concept of internal spiritual struggle.[2] There are a few other surviving early ascetic texts on inner battle, for example from Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728 CE), but these are brief and do not expose the wide range of agonistic metaphors seen in al-Muḥāsibī's works.[3] The concept of inner *jihād* is mentioned in the Qur'ān and early *ḥadīth*, but al-Muḥāsibī develops the earlier scattered thoughts into a cohesive approach to spiritual growth.[4] Although considered part of the Sufi tradition, he was also a mainstream Islamic teacher and theologian, writing during a time of increased divisions within Islam.[5] His work is thus critical for understanding early Muslim views of the meaning of *jihād*. With the words, "Fight your souls with the war that is more beneficial for you than any other type of war," al-Muḥāsibī defines spiritual growth as being through war on the soul, an internal *jihād* more important than the external.[6]

In this chapter I discuss the context and literature surrounding al-Muḥāsibī, and then analyse his best-known text in relation to its metaphors for the inner struggle. I note the various terms and phrases he uses and how these show different yet related aspects of the *jihād* against the "lower soul" (*nafs*). These metaphors are important for understanding how al-Muḥāsibī sees the proper Muslim life, so I discuss the role of the inner *jihād* in this context. As with the previous authors, soul warfare implies a perspective on free will, and al-

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[1] Maha El-Kaisy, "Al-Muhasibi", in *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Islamic Philosophy,* ed. Oliver Leaman (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 344-6; Gavin Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam: The Life and Works of Al-Muḥāsibī* (London: Routledge, 2011), 46-47. Picken provides an excellent reference to all previous al-Muḥāsibī research.

[2] D.S. Margoliouth, "Notice of the writings of Abū ʿAbdullah al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, the first Ṣūfī author," in Transaction of the Third International Congress for the History of Religions (Oxford: 1908), cited in Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 2. *Jihād* means fighting, struggling, or combatting.

[3] Chittick asserts that al-Muḥāsibī's *Riʿāya* is "One of the earliest books to offer a systematic analysis of the moral imperative." William Chittick, "Worship", in *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology,* ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 218-36 (226). Some other earlier works include Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, see Michael Schwarz, "The Letter of al-Hasan al-Basri," *Oriens* (20, 1967): 15–30; *Adab al-'ibadat* (The manners of worship) by Shaqiq al-Balkhi (d. 810CE); Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn Burjulānī (d. 852 CE), *Kitab al-karam wa al-jud* (Bayrūt : Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1991).

[4] John Renard, "Al-Jihad al-Akbar," *The Muslim World* (78:3-4, July-October l988): 225-42 (230-33).

[5] Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 171.

[6] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitab al-Riʿāya li-Huquq Allah* cited in Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 195.

Muḥāsibī's struggle analogies are connected to his views on human agency *vis-à-vis* divine grace and determination. I elaborate on this theme and draw some preliminary comparisons with Isaac and the other Syrian Christians.

Al-Muḥāsibī is significant for being the first to extensively combine elements of Sufi asceticism and Islamic philosophical theology in his own still-surviving work.[7] As Toby Mayer notes, during al-Muḥāsibī's time there was a growing "tension" in Islam between "mysticism and theology."[8] By the later part of the third Islamic century, Sufism and *kalam*-like tendencies (Islamic speculative philosophy) were usually antagonistic, but in al-Muḥāsibī's period this split was not completely clear, and he weaves both approaches together in a seamless cloth.[9] Al-Muḥāsibī is a mainstream Muslim, and he rejects the views of groups such as the Muʿtazilites and Qadarites.[10] Ibn Hanbal, a central figure in Islam, criticised al-Muḥāsibī for, "engaging in kalam discourses … but he was not able to find other points of dispute to hold against al-Muḥāsibī."[11] This statement implies that al-Muḥāsibī's work was not a fringe Sufi text but an integral part of Islam in his era. His work becomes so definitive that it shapes many others and becomes the foundation for the greatest of Muslim scholar-ascetics, al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE), who explicitly bases his writing on al-Muḥāsibī.[12] In some ways al-Muḥāsibī should be considered first as a mainstream Islamic theologian and ascetic teacher, and only secondarily as a Sufi, and hence his writing is highly indicative of one mainstream view of inner struggle.

Al-Muḥāsibī: An Introduction

Al-Muḥāsibī was born in the first Abbāsid period, a time of enormous growth, diversity in knowledge and culture, and developments in Islamic theology.[13] This time followed the

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[7] Kermit Schoonover, *Kitāb al-Riʿāya li-Huqūq Allāh by al-Muhāsibī: a translation with introduction and notes* (PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1948), ii, vi, 2; Margaret Smith, *Al-Muḥāsībī: An Early Mystic of Baghdad* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1935), 5. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī did this earlier but little of his own work remains except in quotes.

[8] Toby Mayer, "Theology and Sufism", in *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology,* ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 258-87 (259).

[9] Victor Danner, "The Early Development of Sufism," in *Islamic Spirituality,* ed. Seyyed Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 239-64 (256).

[10] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya* (Schoonover, 137).

[11] Khalid Blankenship, "The Early Creed", in *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology,* ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 33-54 (52).

[12] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 1. See also Maha El-Kaisy, "Al-Muhasibi", 344-6.

[13] Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 1-24; See also Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 14; Picken adds that this time is often considered the "golden age of Islamic learning." See also Mayer, "Theology and Sufism", 260-1.

highly unstable earlier Umayyad era, and was a period of growing heterogeneity in Islamic thinking especially due to the impact of philosophy. Most scholars say that al-Muḥāsibī was born 165 AH/781 CE, of the ʿAnaza tribe, but very little is known about his life, and all that we know are a few anecdotes. His real name was Abū Abdullāh Harīth bin Asād al-Baṣrī ("al-Baṣrī" because he was born in Basra) but he is usually known as al-Muḥāsibī (self-examiner) because he was well-known for his practice of self-examination.[14] Basra, al-Muḥāsibī's birthplace, was a military camp established in the second/eighth century, that became a cosmopolitan city with an influx of Indians, Malays, Jews, Christians etc.[15] This made it a place where many ideas spread and mixed and it became a centre of early Sufism, which influenced al-Muḥāsibī's later life and work.[16] Al-Muḥāsibī moved to and then flourished in Baghdad, during the peak time of the translation movement under Caliph al-Ma'mun, who founded Baghdad's House of Wisdom (*Bayt al-Ḥikma*). Most of the translators were Syrian Christians who had language skills in Greek, Arabic, and Syriac, and their translations of Aristotle, Galen, etc., concerning medicine, philosophy, astronomy, geometry and other topics had a major impact on early Muslim writers.[17] In this climate then it would not be surprising to see use by al-Muḥāsibī of earlier Christian ascetic teachings, especially given the Qur'ān's reference to various Christian and Old Testament details. Another important contextual issue in understanding al-Muḥāsibī is the growth both in Basra and Baghdad of the Muʿtazilites, whose intellectualising approach to Islam was not to his taste and shaped his responsive teaching on the ascetic life.[18] Al-Muḥāsibī specifically condemns the Muʿtazilites at points, and certain aspects of his writings reassert the priority of the earlier more ascetic and less philosophical understanding of Islam. He warns that, "the Enemy will call him (a Muslim) to heresy … so that he will depart from the asceticism and satisfaction and the trust of the former Imams, by departure from the Sunna," mentioning those who choose "withdrawal" (*iʿtizāl*), that is, the Muʿtazilites.[19]

Al-Muḥāsibī is a prolific author, and he writes a reputed 200 works, although less

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[14] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 46-47; Kermit Schoonover, "Al-Muḥāsībī and his al-Riʿāyah," *The Muslim World* (39, 1949): 26-35 (26); Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī,* vii, 5.

[15] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 19, 23; Smith, *al-Muḥāsibī,* 2, 3, 60.

[16] Basra for example was the city of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (641-728 CE) and the ascetic school that he founded, Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 20.

[17] Victor Danner, "The Early Development of Sufism", in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. *Islamic Spirituality* (New York, Crossroad, 1987), 239-64 (254); Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 19; "Al-Muḥāsībī and his al-Riʿāyah," *The Muslim World* (39, 1949): 26-35 (28-30); Smith*, Al-Muḥāsibī,* 60-62.

[18] Picken*, Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 29-35, 59-60.

[19] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 87 (Schoonover, 137-38), الاعتزال See also Maha El-Kaisy, "Al-Muhasibi", 34.

than 25 are presently known.[20] He pens these in Baghdad, one of the two centres of Islamic civilisation at the time (along with Damascus), and he is usually considered as the founder of the Baghdad School of Islamic mystical philosophy, the first significant synthesis of Sufism and philosophical theology.[21] His sources include the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, the companions, and successors, and various earlier scholars and proto-Sufis such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728 CE).[22] According to Smith, one of al-Muḥāsibī's authorities was Sufyan b. ʿUyayna b. Abi ʿImran Maymun, Abu Muḥammad al-Hilālī al-Kufī (died 198 AH/814 CE), a severe ascetic.[23] Several of Al-Kufī's central teachings are reflected in al-Muḥāsibī including that, "the holy war for the sake of God (*jihād*) … consisted of ten parts, one of which was fighting against the enemy (of Islam) and nine parts fighting against the self."[24]

Fundamental to al-Muḥāsibī's approach is the early *ḥadīth* which is frequently quoted by Muslims, but which al-Muḥāsibī quotes in an extended version, vis,

> The Prophet, PBUH, said, 'You have returned from the lesser *jihād* to the greater *jihād* - the struggle against your souls. A man asked the prophet, 'What is the best form of *jihād*?' and he replied, 'Your personal struggle (*jihād*) against your soul and your desires (*mujahadatuka nafsaka wa hawak*).'[25]

Picken writes that al-Muḥāsibī is an important witness to early Islam as he is the first Sufi to have, "written works attributed to him," and although this is overstatement, the date and extensive nature of his struggle writings is certainly noteworthy.[26] Other authors such as ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak (118–181 AH/736–797 CE) wrote on *jihād* earlier than al-Muḥāsibī, but his writing is only known through a later transmission and mostly concerns the external fight.[27] Al-Muḥāsibī's approach therefore gives us valuable insight into exactly how some early mainstream Muslims understood inner *jihād*.

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[20] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 67; Smith, 44-59.
[21] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 28; Kermit Schoonover, "Al-Muḥāsībī and his al-Riʿāyah," *The Muslim World* (39, 1949): 26-35 (27); Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī,* 7.
[22] Smith lists these in detail in Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī,* 60-85.
[23] Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī,* 75.
[24] Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī,* 76.
[25] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 196-97; Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa wa 'l-Tanaqqul fī 'l-ʿIbāda wa Darajāt al-ʿĀbidīn*, ed. Aghnāṭiyūs ʿAbda Khalīfa al-Yasūʿī, in *al-Mashriq* (Beirut: Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), 480–1.
[26] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 2.
[27] Feryal Salem, *The Emergence of Early Sufi Piety and Sunnī Scholasticism: ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak and the Formation of Sunni Identity in the Second Islamic Century* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 93.

Al-Muḥāsibī has been relatively unstudied given his significant place within early Islam, and his immense influence on later Muslim writers such as al-Ghazālī.[28] Al-Muḥāsibī is the key source used by al-Ghazālī in his works which have become almost the core texts of Islam outside the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. He also had a great influence on al-Junayd (d.910 CE) and other Sufis.[29] Given this impact in Islam, it is surprising that a recent extensive literature review only lists 24 books and articles on al-Muḥāsibī in English, Arabic, and other European languages, written over the past century.[30] Most of these works summarise aspects of al-Muḥāsibī's thought or discuss one of his many texts, but have not examined his approach to *jihād* in any detail. In most cases the historiography is quite deficient as al-Muḥāsibī is generally presented as a "mystic." Margaret Smith's 1935 book, *Muḥāsibī: An Early Mystic of Baghdad* was so comprehensive and influential that later scholars seem to have avoided al-Muḥāsibī, although in this work she sometimes incorrectly interprets al-Muḥāsibī through the lens of Christian categories rather than in terms of his own logic.[31] Her designation of al-Muḥāsibī as a "mystic" is followed by many later writers, whereas there is almost no mention of any ecstatic style of experience in his works. Al-Muḥāsibī emphasises the ascetic and spiritual rather than the mystical, and this observation has only recently resulted in a re-designation of him as a Theologian-ascetic.[32] Margoliouth in 1908 wrote an early paper on al-Muḥāsibī showing that his ideas had some similarities to Christian practice, although Schoonover in 1949 argued that this influence was only indirect.[33] Schoonover's article demonstrates the significance of al-Muḥāsibī and situates his *jihād* emphasis within the broader framework of his teaching on repentance and self-examination. Michael Sells in 1996 interprets al-Muḥāsibī as a writer of "moral psychology," which is a more accurate portrayal, and he discusses briefly the themes of self-examination, self-restraint, and vigilance.[34] This description however is still in a book titled "Early Islamic Mysticism," a connotation that somewhat distorts the perspective on the quoted material by aligning it with the mystical authors and their esoteric utterances, *dhikr*, and dances. Josef van Ess provides a good summary of al-Muḥāsibī's life and a very organised and broad overview of the most

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[28] A.J.Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics Episodes from the Tadhkirah al-Awliya of Farid al-Din Attar*, trans. A.J.Arberry (Penguin, 1990), 183; Schoonover, "Al-Muḥāsībī and his al-Riʿāyah," 31; Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 124.

[29] Schoonover, "Al-Muḥāsībī and his al-Riʿāyah," 26-35.

[30] Gavin Picken *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 2-12. There are many references to al-Muḥāsibī in books on Sufism, for example Karamustafa, *Sufism, 5*, but these are usually brief outlines of his life and general thought.

[31] Margaret Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī: An Early Mystic of Baghdad* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1935).

[32] Mayer, "Theology and Sufism", 258-287.

[33] Kermit Schoonover, "Al-Muḥāsībī and his al-Riʿāyah," *The Muslim World* (39, 1949): 26-35.

[34] Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism,* 171-95.

important aspects of his approach to human psychology and the various virtues. In this work he briefly mentions the *kampf* (fight) of the intellect against the self but misses the other references to inner *jihād*.[35] A much earlier historian who discusses al-Muḥāsibī is ʿAṭṭār (c.1145 - c.1221, real name Abū Ḥamīd bin Abū Bakr Ibrāhīm), whose *Tadhkirat-ul-Awliyā* (Lives of the Saints) narrates a brief story that is important for showing al-Muḥāsibī 's asceticism and his opposition to the Qadarites.[36]

The most useful book on al-Muḥāsibī for this thesis is Gavin Picken's recent work, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* which discusses al-Muḥāsibī's approach to purification and does not link him to Western mysticism. Picken's text analyses well the purification theme and asceticism in al-Muḥāsibī and notes some of the related struggle metaphors, for example, "disciplining the soul." Picken discusses the theological implications of combat with the soul in five pages but does not however explore the specific struggle images to any extent, nor does he situate al-Muḥāsibī's metaphors within the theological context of debates over free will.[37] He draws from many texts but his purpose is not a close reading of any text in respect to the struggle metaphors. Picken discusses al-Muḥāsibī's life and identity and correctly notes him as primarily a Muslim scholar who taught asceticism rather than philosophy, and places him in the context of the Abbāsids, the Muʿtazilites, and the Al-Miḥna (time of inquisitions, c.833-848 CE).[38] Purification is certainly a theme in al-Muḥāsibī, but drawing from many texts somewhat obscures the larger and more central themes such as self-examination. I shal‚l however, refer below to Picken's useful contextualisation of struggle as a form of purification before embarking on a close reading of al-Muḥāsibī's most important text using a critical metaphor analysis approach.

Central to al-Muḥāsibī is his teaching on inner spiritual struggle, manifested through a range of virtuous actions. He writes much about the one who engages in ascetic struggle (*mujāhada*) and the need to restrain (*amsik*) the soul from the passions.[39] Of particular note in understanding al-Muḥāsibī is his frequent mention of *muhāsaba al-nafs*, that is, self- or

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[35] Josef van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī* (Bonn: Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Bonn, 1961).

[36] ʿAttar, *Muslim Saints and Mystics Episodes from the Tadhkirah al-Awliya of Farid al-Din Attar*, trans. A. J. Arberry (Penguin, 1990), 183-85.

[37] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 194-99.

[38] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 14-44, 46-49.

[39] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 56 (Schoonover, 55), ‏أمسك ...مجاهدته‏ .

introspective examination,[40] which is probably the source of his own name of al-Muḥāsibī, meaning "examiner." Al-Muḥāsibī was known as one who strenuously took account of himself for every aspect of his life.[41] He writes extensively on knowing oneself and the, "failings in one's soul" (*maʿrifat al-insān nafsahu*) as a way to purification. He also describes "self-evaluation" (*murājaʿat al-nafs*) of the soul, or "inspection" (*mufattashat al-nafs*), and "scrutinising the soul" (*tafaqqud al-nafs*).[42] That this idea of self-examination is central to al-Muḥāsibī is seen when he asserts that, "for obedience is the path to salvation (*sabīl al-najāt*), and … the root of obedience is abstinence (*al-warāʾ*), and the root of abstinence is 'piety' (*al-taqwā*), and the root of piety is self-examination (or, examining the soul, *muḥāsabat al-nafs*)."[43] I shall return to self-examination and its relation to inner struggle later.

Spiritual combat in al-Muḥāsibī is often treated in the context of purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*).[44] As Picken elaborates, such purification is attained through fighting the soul and mortifying it. According to al-Muḥāsibī, self-mortifying is for the purpose of drawing near to and even returning to God. Al-Muḥāsibī's frequent use of the idea of return may show the influence of NeoPlatonic thought on his work but is more likely to be based on the Qur'ānic reference to return.[45] Sufism was not a full-blown separate movement and not very influenced by NeoPlatonism by al-Muḥāsibī's time, and older texts that emphasise Greek philosophical influence on Sufism are now generally seen as anachronistic.[46] Al-Muḥāsibī writes often using this "return" image and devotes a whole work to it—"Wayfaring (lit. going) to God and the return to him" (*Al-Qasd wa al-Rujūʿ ilā Allāh*). This idea of the soul's return journey back to its source became a popular image in Sufi thought, being a key element in the writings of e.g. Rumi, and al-Muḥāsibī is indeed seen as a "master of wayfarers."[47] These battle and combat concepts also exist within a broader framework which includes many ideas that are less "violent" yet still aim at overcoming unhealthy desires through some kind of antagonism to the soul. These non-warlike metaphors include,

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[40] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 4, 199. Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 48 (Schoonover, 35), المُحاسَبَ النَفس .

[41] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 47.

[42] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 75, 198-99.

[43] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 47 (Schoonover, 34); سبيل النجاة ... الورع ... التقوى ... محاسبة النفس cf. Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 199.

[44] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 3,4.

[45] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 75, 82. Qur'ān 2:156.

[46] Mayer, "Theology and Sufism", 264-83.

[47] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 46. He also writes "The Book of spiritual retreat and wayfaring through the categories of worship and ranks of worshippers," Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 83.

"cauterising the soul" (cf. Isaac), "forcing it to shun the worldly life and its pleasures," and "restricting it from its desires."[48] He also writes of, "reprimanding the soul" (*muʿātabat al-nafs*), "refuting the soul," and "subduing" it.[49] Further, the soul must be abased (*muhanat al-nafs*) and broken (*inkisār al-nafs*).[50] Al-Muḥāsibī alternates between these many terms in his works, often using several in close proximity. He also analyses the heart (*al-qalb*) and its nature in great detail, as well as love (*ḥubb*) and related ascetic practices (*zuhd*), and these are also connected with struggle.[51]

Textual Analysis of the *Kitāb al-Riʿāya li-Ḥuqūq Allāh*

Al-Muḥāsibī discusses many aspects of the inner soul struggle in his best-known work, the *Kitāb al-Riʿāya li-Ḥuqūq Allāh* (The Book of Observances owed to God, and hereafter simply "*Riʿāya*").[52] While in other books al-Muḥāsibī focuses on one or two particular practices, his *Riʿāya* attempts to cover the whole array of his thinking on the spiritual life. Smith says that it is, "perhaps, the finest manual on the interior life which Islam has produced."[53] Hence, while I will refer at times to other works, my analysis of struggle metaphors in al-Muḥāsibī is predominantly from the *Riʿāya*. Al-Muḥāsibī's *Riʿāya* consists of several chapters which cover a wide range of topics related to the general theme of the overall title, including struggle, ostentation, pride, and genuine obedience to God. Each chapter consists of several sections, many of which are indicated by starting with a question, for example, "(W)hat is abstinence? (*al-warāʿ*)."[54] The chapters and sections flow from topic to topic often with mentions of future subjects, and references back to earlier issues. Several sections of the work are of a question-answer format.

The intended audience of the *Riʿāya* is shown in several places. Al-Muḥāsibī in one long section discusses the "classes of penitents" and how each kind should act, and thus "penitents" (*al-tawwābīn* lit. "returnees") appears to be his audience since his whole work is

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[48] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 187.
[49] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 82, 196.
[50] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 186.
[51] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 3, 4.
[52] In the references that follow, the page numbers refer firstly to the original Arabic in *Kitab al-Riʿāya li-Huquq Allah* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1119 AH/1707 CE), and then to the English translation of Kermit Schoonover, *Kitāb al-Riʿāya li-Ḥuqūq Allāh by al-Muḥāsibī: a translation with introduction and notes* (PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1948).
[53] Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī,* vii.
[54] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 43 (Schoonover, 25), الورع .

about repentance.[55] The title itself indicates that it is for those who are serious about the "Observation of God's claims."[56] Al-Muḥāsibī is a reformer given he claims that, "most of the reciters of our time are self-deluded and deceived," but he continues that, "(W)e reckon ourselves among the self-mortifying and devout," thus implying that he is addressing others who seek also to be such.[57] At other points he addresses the reader as the "servant" (ʿabd) of God.[58]

The Riʿāya begins with the standard Islamic "Bismillah" and salutations, followed immediately by a statement of the Oneness of God. Al-Muḥāsibī then moves into his first topic per se, which he sees as a preliminary to all the rest of his work, namely listening (istimāʿ).[59] This listening is thus the foundational attitude and action of the Muslim, since before any other effort there must be attentive listening. Listening is according to al-Muḥāsibī a "discipline" (adab),[60] which he equates to when, "the servant restrain(s) his bodily members,"[61] and they are "put at rest," showing that the body is an opponent in the spiritual life. Al-Muḥāsibī then paraphrases Jesus' Parable of the Sower and argues that the good response is to listen. The significance of al-Muḥāsibī's use of Jesus as a source here must be neither overstated nor understated, an issue to which I shall return.

In the next section al-Muḥāsibī in a sense provides an overview of his whole work. The title includes the same Arabic words of the whole but expands it, "The Observation and Performance of our Duty to God," (Bāb al-riʿāyah li-ḥuqūq Allāh ʿz w-jal wālqyām bhā).[62] This part begins with the theme of observing God's commands and the importance of a shepherd being a good leader who will "guard (ḥafaẓ) that which he has been charged to watch (astarʿī) of their affairs."[63] Whereas in most cases al-Muḥāsibī writes about the person guarding their own hearts, it is noticeable here that leaders must also "watch." This is strikingly similar to Aphrahat and the Old Testament, although there is no evidence here of any non-Islamic provenance. Al-Muḥāsibī immediately after this discusses the topic of

[55] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 55 (Schoonover, 52), التوابين .
[56] Smith, Al-Muḥāsibī, 44; Schoonover, Kitāb al-Riʿāya li-Huqūq Allāh by al-Muḥāsibī, 11. Some translate this variously as, "Observation of the Law of God", "The Safeguarding of the Prerogatives of God," etc.
[57] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 45 (Schoonover, 30), لأن عامة قراء زماننا مغنزون مخدوعون، نعد أنفسنا المتقشفين المتنسكين .
[58] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 47 (Schoonover, 33), عبد .
[59] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 34 (Schoonover, 2), الاستماع .
[60] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 34 (Schoonover, 5), أدب .
[61] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 34 (Schoonover, 5), يكفّ العبدُ جوارحه .
[62] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 35 (Schoonover, 10), باب الرعاية لحقوق الله عز وجل والقيام بها .
[63] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 38 (Schoonover, 12), حفظ ... استرعي .

"monasticism" (*rahbaniyya*), as an introduction to his discussion of Islamic ascetic practice.[64] As discussed earlier, monasticism and asceticism was by this time a contentious issue in Islam, thus al-Muḥāsibī's comments are apposite. Islam often sees value in and derives authority from previous divinely-ordained practices so al-Muḥāsibī's discussion of the correct interpretation of the apparently anti-monastic *ḥadīth* is essential and validates his following chapters. He argues that God did not order monasticism for the Jews but that they chose it and then wrongly abandoned it, and states that this is the correct interpretation as agreed by various scholars. In this way he is defending his ascetic emphasis by delineating his teaching from the Jewish (and Christian), and providing divine support for his entire work.[65] Al-Muḥāsibī proceeds from this base to discuss piety, fear of God, and eschatology, a theme he returns to several times. Eschatology for al-Muḥāsibī is not an abstract dogma about future events—he teaches that true eschatological awareness brings a fear of the coming judgement and this in turn leads to piety. He writes, "let piety (*taqwā*), in public and in private, be the first with which you begin preparation for that place [paradise]."[66] He draws a direct connection between fear of God and piety and writes, "(F)ear (*khawf*) is before piety (*taqwā*)."[67] Further, "the root of piety (*taqwā*) is the fear (*khawf*) of God and prudence before Him."[68] Al-Muḥāsibī clarifies that positive actions of piety are more important than abstinence, although elsewhere he does affirm abstinence. He lists the actions of "true piety in the inner life" as "weeping and sorrow, prayer and fasting."[69] He also mentions those who "pray and fast and fight (*ghāzi*) and go on pilgrimage and weep," but have insincerity in their hearts.[70] The addition here of *ghāzi* (the one who engages in *jihād*), to three of the five basic Islamic practices is interesting. Al-Muḥāsibī does not make clear whether he means inner *jihād*, outer *jihād,* or even both. The surrounding chapter always refers to the struggle with the soul, but here al-Muḥāsibī seems to refer to external *jihād*, or possibly both forms. He may even be deliberately ambiguous, and only a close reading of all his work would confirm his intention, but his earlier quote comparing the value of inner and outer struggle would indicate that he believes that *jihād* means both kinds.

The third section of the *Riʿāya* is titled, "On Knowing Self-deception and the Extent

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[64] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 38 (Schoonover, 13), رهبانية .
[65] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 38 (Schoonover, 13-14).
[66] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 41 (Schoonover, 19), التقوى .
[67] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 40 (Schoonover, 17), الحوفَ ... التقوى .
[68] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 39 (Schoonover, 16), التقوى ... الحوفَ .
[69] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 43 (Schoonover, 25), بالبكاء والأحزان والصلاة والصيام .
[70] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 44 (Schoonover, 26), غازٍ .

of this Self-deception."[71] This chapter is brief but is replete with agonistic language, and al-Muḥāsibī ties many struggle concepts together that I elsewhere cover discretely as single words or short phrases. Al-Muḥāsibī discusses guarding the heart, self-examination, mortifying the soul, passions, and the Enemy. He also lists many of the specific sins that are addressed in other chapters of the *Riʿāya* such as heedlessness, self-esteem, pride, envy, haughtiness, and so on, as being temptations that must be guarded against and mortified.

Section Four is a brief statement in answer to the question, "(W)hat is the first thing with which I am commanded to begin?" Here too al-Muḥāsibī is introducing major themes in his work and outlining his understanding of reality. He writes that humans were, "placed in this world of trial (*l-al-balwa*, or "scourging") and testing (*al-ikhtibār*) only to the end that you will either obey God or disobey Him, and pass from this world to eternal punishment or to eternal bliss."[72] These two words "trial" and "testing" both evoke images of the ascetic, thus al-Muḥāsibī sees struggle as intrinsic to the true purpose of humanity. Al-Muḥāsibī also again mentions the theme of eschatological awareness—the fear of future judgement. After a further discussion of the importance of obedience to God, al-Muḥāsibī ends this chapter by recognising that such obedience is not easy. He concludes, "(W)orkers do not toil nor do merchants spend except with foresight and by knowledge of that for which they labour (*yaʿmalūn*) and of which they buy and sell."[73] Al-Muḥāsibī returns to this metaphor of spiritual labouring several times to show that obedience is not easy.

Self-examination (*maḥāsaba*) is the theme of Section Five, and is also a central idea for al-Muḥāsibī. As mentioned before, his honorific title of "al-Muḥāsibī" is due to this concept being so important in his writing. Al-Muḥāsibī begins by quoting several Qurʾānic verses about self-examination, including, "When you go forth to fight for the cause of God, be discerning (*fa-tabayyanu*)."[74] He equates this self-examination with judging one's actions, and quoting Muḥammad explains that, "'he who judges himself' means that he reckons with himself; that is self-examination (*maḥāsaba*)."[75] This discipline also has an eschatological dimension and al-Muḥāsibī quotes Abū Mūsa, "(R)eckon (*ḥāsab*, lit. examine, verb) with

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[71] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 40 (Schoonover, 20), باب فى تعريف المغتر بنفسه وطول غرته .

[72] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 53 (Schoonover, 47), للبلوى والاختبار .

[73] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 47 (Schoonover, 34), يعملون

[74] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 48 (Schoonover, 36), Qurʾān 4:94 or "investigate" فَتَبَيَّنُوا .

[75] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 49 (Schoonover, 39), المحاسبة .

yourself in convenience before the severe reckoning (ḥisāb, lit. examination, noun)."[76] One aspect of this self-examination involves self-restraint due to fear of God's judgement. It is the polytheists who do not fear God and "their faith does not restrain (yahjazuhum) them."[77] That this restraint can be a quite violent asceticism is shown in the next sentence. Al-Muḥāsibī says that ʿUmar, "used to strike (yaḍrib) his foot with a whip when night came, saying to himself, 'What have I done this day'."[78]

A little later al-Muḥāsibī emphasises the importance of foresight and effort as an aspect of self-examination, using further imagery of the labourer in his effort. He writes of the "workers of God" who should excel at deliberation. He says, "the workers (ʿumal) of God" should be like the "labourers (al-mustaʾjarun) of this world" who "judge" (maḥkumunaha) their work.[79] He elsewhere notes that for these labourers toil is to them a "severe pain."[80] The words "toil" and "labour" both emphasise the effort and struggle involved in obedience, and at times struggle and labouring are used by al-Muḥāsibī almost as synonyms.[81] Al-Muḥāsibī then spends another page noting the differences between the "workers/labourers of the world" and the "workers of God." One of the main points is that a Muslim gains the reward from the Great King, a "great and everlasting wage." This idea of future reward for present effort is standard Islamic theology, which I discuss further below, but for now it is sufficient to note that effort and struggle is one of the keys to "salvation."

Section Six is longer and more directly emphasises struggle imagery. I explore thematically the various metaphors that al-Muḥāsibī uses below, and in these he frequently links together a range of related terms such as "struggle" (jahadtuhu),[82] "ascetic struggle" (shaghalah, lit. work),[83] "contend" (tanazaʿahu),[84] and "subdue" (taqmaʿuha).[85] In this case, these four terms all occur in two adjoining sentences, which are linked to a third sentence, vis, that, "(H)is Enemy (ʿduwah) will remind the soul of what it has missed and will entice

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[76] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 50 (Schoonover, 39), حاسب...حساب .
[77] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 51 (Schoonover, 42), يحجزهم .
[78] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 51 (Schoonover, 42), يضرب .
[79] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 52 (Schoonover, 45; cf. 34), محكمونها ... من أهل الدنيا ... فعمال ... المستأجرون .
[80] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 80 (Schoonover, 119), التعب {وغمة} The Arabic is unclear.
[81] See the extended metaphor in al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 80-1 (Schoonover, 120-22).
[82] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 56 (Schoonover, 54), جاهدته .
[83] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 56 (Schoonover, 54), شغله .
[84] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 56 (Schoonover, 54), تنازعه .
[85] Al-Muḥāsibī, Riʿāya, 56 (Schoonover, 54), تَقْمَعها .

it."[86] Al-Muḥāsibī often uses this "enemy" language as part of his struggle metaphors. According to al-Muḥāsibī, the world along with Satan is another enemy to the heart, as, "the affairs of this world contend (*tanazaʿahu*) with it [the heart] and heedlessness overcome (*taghalaba*) it."[87] Al-Muḥāsibī writes at length about obedience, self-mortification, and the struggle required to be humble and submissive before God. He uses as a proof the Qurʾānic verse, "They who have believed and fled from their homes and striven (*jahidu*) on the path of God."[88] It is significant that al-Muḥāsibī has just discussed the notion of fleeing from sin and fleeing to God before he quotes this verse. Thus he is interpreting the Qurʾān as referring to a spiritual flight, rather than the historic flight from Mecca to Medina. He is hence also equating that specific Qurʾānic mention of outer *jihād* with an inner *jihād*.

Al-Muḥāsibī then deals with "reflection" upon God (*fikra*).[89] He says that this is difficult because of three conditions or requirements, the first of which is, "cutting off (*qaṭiʿ*) of the heart's delight."[90] This cutting evokes the idea of the sword and battle. He further says that the one who reflects "will imprison (*sajan*) his mind," using an image that is at times also associated with warfare.[91] He adds a reciprocal element, that a person should seek by reflection a fear of God, "which will cut (*yaqtaʿh*) him off from every pleasure."[92] The discussion then moves to psycho-social metaphors which are closely connected with the idea of imprisonment. Al-Muḥāsibī writes that in regards to the soul the believer will have to, "reproach it" (*bilʿitab*) and use "reproof" (*biltawbyakh*).[93] One reason for this reproof is that the soul does not like to be "imprisoned", and al-Muḥāsibī insists on the need to speak to one's soul and compare how, "I imprison (*asjun*) your mind" against the "imprisonment (*bisijnika*) in the eternal fire."[94] This self-imprisoning is another agonistic concept as it is a forceful limiting or restraining of the soul. Self-imprisonment benefits because it (speaking to the soul), "restrains (*taḥjizuka*) you from rebellion."[95] Al-Muḥāsibī writes of restricting physical and mental activity, and limiting what the heart becomes attached to. He speaks of

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[86] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 56 (Schoonover, 54), عدوُّه .

[87] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 57 (Schoonover, 59), تغلب ... تنازعه .

[88] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 60 (Schoonover, 66), Qurʾān 9:20. جَهَدُواْ .

[89] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 63 (Schoonover, 72), فكرا .

[90] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 63 (Schoonover, 72), قطع .

[91] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 63 (Schoonover, 72), سجن .

[92] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 63 (Schoonover, 73), يقطعه .

[93] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 64 (Schoonover, 74-75), بالتوبيخ ... بالعتاب .

[94] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 64 (Schoonover, 75), بسجنك ... أسجن .

[95] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 64 (Schoonover, 75), تحجزك .

the need to, "forbid (*yamnaʿ*) the heart" from being distracted by worldly interests.[96]

Al-Muḥāsibī switches to using a medical metaphor at this point. He likens the one who forbids the heart to one who, "cuts off (*qaṭiʿ*) the activity of his members from the world," thus connecting the ideas of restricting and cutting.[97] He speaks of medicine healing the sick in heart and says the servant will, "constrain (*al-ʾisrār*) his soul," with the sense of forcefully determining.[98] He then returns to battle metaphors, saying that the believer must, "continue in reflection, combatting (*dafiʾ*, with the sense of "pushing back" the enemy) the deception of the lower self and the Enemy … until he restrains his soul with repentance."[99]

In the following part al-Muḥāsibī discusses how hard it is to know and repent of all one's sins. He asserts that many sins are "concealed by passion" partly because "the Enemy and the lower self have deception (*khadiʿ*) in respect to that."[100] The believer forgets because of the "overwhelming (*maẓlamah*) of passions."[101] These references to combatting, the Enemy, deception, and overwhelming, continue the earlier military metaphors. Al-Muḥāsibī's solution to the attack of the passions is another military concept—watchfulness, and he says that a believer who is "watchful" (*mutayaqqiẓan*) will be more aware of his past sins.[102] Watchfulness is a vital practice for al-Muḥāsibī, and as this action of a soldier is a frequently mentioned metaphor and one also used often by Isaac, I discuss it below. Al-Muḥāsibī then mentions the one who daily reflects on his actions and, "calls to mind his speaking (*naṭaqah*) and looking (*aḥaẓah*) and his hearing (*ʾistimaʿh*)," and "recollects his sins one by one," a passage very similar to Isaac.[103]

The *Riʿāya* proceeds through a long series of definitions, usually introduced with a question such as, "(I)n what is carefulness?"[104] Each definition consists of teaching about why this virtue is important and how to obtain it. Al-Muḥāsibī often links the various virtues together, with one virtue founded upon another and leading to yet a third. For example he

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[96] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 67 (Schoonover, 81), يمنع .

[97] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 67 (Schoonover, 82), قطع .

[98] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 68 (Schoonover, 85), الإصرار .

[99] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 70 (Schoonover, 89), دفع .

[100] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 70 (Schoonover, 90), (also see 97), خدع .

[101] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 70 (Schoonover, 90), مظلمة .

[102] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 70 (Schoonover, 90), متيقظًا .

[103] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 70 (Schoonover, 92-3), استماعه احظه منطقه cf. Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.51 (Bedjan, 345; Hansbury, 380).

[104] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 75 (Schoonover, 103), الاهتمام بماذا .

writes:

> For obedience is the path to salvation, and knowledge is the guide to the path, and the
> root of obedience is abstinence (*warā*ʿ), and the root of abstinence is piety (*taqwā*),
> and the root of piety is self-examination (*muḥāsaba*), and the root of self-examination
> is fear (*khawf*) and hope (*rajā*).[105]

What this summary of the *Riʿāya*'s structure shows is that the concept of struggle is
intertwined with the main topics of the work. Whether al-Muḥāsibī is discussing self-
examination, piety, passions, or the soul, he uses battle, medical, or psycho-social metaphors
that all have an element of violence against something else. For al-Muḥāsibī this "other" is
usually an aspect of the self, Satan, or the temptations of the world. While this structure in the
Riʿāya shows a clear development from topic to topic, there are several recurring themes that
appear throughout and are not dealt with specifically in their own sections. One theme is that
ascetic practice is purifying in itself if unhealthy passions accompany the rituals, irrespective
of which religion in involved. Al-Muḥāsibī's understanding is that ascesis aims at,
"rectification of the desires and will, with a view to the loss of the self, in order that it may
find itself again in God."[106] Underlying this is an anthropology which teaches that humans
were created to be a unity of body and soul and thus the struggle aims to restore this unity,
rather than being a slave to fleshly lusts.[107] For al-Muḥāsibī this holiness is more important
than specific religious rituals, and he writes little about Islam as a religion *per se*. He follows
Hujwiri who says, "One whose every act depends on passion, and who finds satisfaction in
following it, is far from God, although he be among you in the mosque; but one who has
renounced and abandoned it is near to God, although he be in a church."[108]

A second recurring theme is that the soul is on a journey towards God, somewhat akin
to NeoPlatonic thought. The soul however has three opponents on this journey, namely the
lower self (*nafs*), the world (*dunyā*) and the Satan.[109] These enemies are mentioned frequently
in the context of many of the virtues, thus for al-Muḥāsibī all of life is a battling journey of
return. Another important aspect of the *Riʿāya* is the presumed authority of previous authors,
and al-Muḥāsibī quotes many early Muslims. In establishing the path of renunciation of the

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[105] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 47 (Schoonover, 34), ورع ... تقوى ... محاسبة ... خوف ... رجاء .
[106] Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī*, 111.
[107] Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī*, 111.
[108] Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 207-8 cited in Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī*, 113.
[109] Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī*, 112-20.

world, al-Muḥāsibī also quotes traditions of Jesus three times.[110] This shows his clear awareness of at least some ascetic elements in Jesus' teaching and a willingness to appropriate this for his purposes as an authoritative basis.

Having covered the overall structure and some recurring themes in the *Riʿāya*, it is time to investigate how struggle is portrayed in more detail. I shall now analyse al-Muḥāsibī's metaphors in relation to a number of core concepts, namely: combat metaphors, "enemy" language, watchfulness and guarding, the battle with the passions, self-mortification, self-examination and struggle, eschatology and struggle, and restfulness in relation to struggle. Al-Muḥāsibī uses many terms and images clustered around the central macrotrope of inner spiritual struggle.

Combat metaphors

Central to al-Muḥāsibī's concept of combatting the soul is the term *jihād* and various derivations. He writes that Muslims undergo a "struggle" (*jāhadtuhu*), and this "ascetic struggle (*shaghalah*, lit. work) for God is long (*tawil*)."[111] He writes in relation to the soul, that, "(I)t is incumbent upon you to oppose it … and strive (lit. do *jihād*) against it."[112] The Arabic here is *mujāhadatiha*, a verbal form of the word *jihād*. According to al-Muḥāsibī, the Muslim undergoes a difficult spiritual fight from two sources, the Devil without and the soul within. Al-Muḥāsibī writes that that for the Muslim, "(H)is soul will *contend* (*tanazaʿh*) with him."[113] The type of ascetic who has become somewhat mature in this inner fight with the soul, "will subdue it (*taqmaʿuha*) and struggle against (*jahadtuhu*) it and make it fearful in respect to consequences."[114] This fight is also against, "his Enemy (*ʿaduwahu*)" who tries to deceive the soul, but "God will affirm his ascetic struggle (*jahadtuhu*), and will restrain (*wa'amsik*) his soul from the passions (*alshahawāt*)."[115] In these quotes we see some of the various synonyms for *jihād* that al-Muḥāsibī uses—contend, subdue, and restrain, mixed in among *jihād*, showing how much they are almost parallels.

Other images that expand on the struggle metaphor but use near-synonyms for *jihād*

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[110] Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī,* 115.
[111] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 56 (Schoonover, 54), طويل … شغله … جاهدته .
[112] Picken's translation, Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 188.
[113] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 56 (Schoonover, 54), تنازعه .
[114] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 56 (Schoonover, 54), جاهدها … تَقْمَعها .
[115] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 56 (Schoonover, 55), الشهوات … وأمسك … جاهدته … عدوه .

are shown when al-Muḥāsibī asserts that the believer will become humble after he has, "compelled (*olzam*) his heart to a fair hope in his Lord,"[116] and "destroyed (*waʾazal*) pride in his heart,"[117] and is "opposing (*ʿatiraḍ*) the sins of his past life."[118] These phrases are a form of synthetic parallelism as each involves a forceful effort against some aspect of the self. He also writes of forgetting God as "desertion" (*alkhudhlan*), in the context of discussing the various "stations."[119] These stations (*maqāmah*) are a standard part of Sufism, and denote the place of overnight stay on the journey, but also connote a military outpost since these were the usual stations on the main roads.[120] Desertion in this context then is a military image. He also says the penitent has vanquished (*ghalabahuma*) both Satan and his own lower soul.[121] Al-Muḥāsibī warns that the one who forgets his sins and prayers will fail and, "he will not put his faith in Him because of desertion (*alkhudhlan*)," another action usually attributed to a soldier in war.[122] Al-Muḥāsibī uses quite a number of other verbs that sustain the struggle metaphor including some non-military terms that still evoke an image of antagonism. He explains the meaning of the one who has "guarded" (*ḥafizah*) his members" is that the ascetic has "searched (*tafaqid*) his heart," although this is possibly imagery of searching a captured enemy for weapons.[123]

Although these metaphors sound violent, Picken suggests that they have a positive connotation and should be seen as "training of the soul." Al-Muḥāsibī seems to equate this soul battle with "disciplining the soul" (*adab al-nafs*) in his works.[124] He also describes this growth process as purification of the soul, which he discusses in detail in several of his works.[125] His idea is akin to the Greek tradition of *askesis,* the wrestling with the soul's passions to attain to virtue. Al-Muḥāsibī writes of combatting the soul within a broader framework that encompasses many other virtues. He discusses in his *Riʿāya,* for example, aspects of repentance (*al-tawba*), scrupulouness (*al-warāʿ*), ostentation (*al-riyā*), and sincerity (*al-ikhlās*), among many other topics.[126] Al-Muḥāsibī has a well-developed schema

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[116] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 73 (Schoonover, 102), ألزم .

[117] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 73 (Schoonover, 102), قلبه عن العجب وأزال .

[118] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 73 (Schoonover, 102), بعد الا عتراض لذنوبه فلم مضى من عمره .

[119] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 72 (Schoonover, 97), الخذلان .

[120] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 73 (Schoonover, 100), مقامة See Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 196-211.

[121] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 70 (Schoonover, 90), غلبهما .

[122] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 72 (Schoonover, 97), الخذلان .

[123] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 45 (Schoonover, 29), حفظه ... هل تفقد فيه قلبه .

[124] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 75, 186, 190.

[125] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 74, 75.

[126] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 67-69.

that connects many aspects of the inner life with ascetic practice.

Struggle with the Enemy

Al-Muḥāsibī often describes the attacks as being from the "lower soul" and from Satan, who he calls the "enemy," linking the two attackers together in an often-used pairing, for example, "combatting the deception of the *lower soul and the enemy*" (*al-nafs w-al-ʿduwan*).[127] These are often linked such that the successful ascetic will have "defeated them both" (*ʾidhā ʿalimā ʾnahu qad ghalabahuma*).[128] Satan is termed the "enemy" or "adversary" using an Arabic word for foe (*al-ʿadu*), adding to the struggle metaphor by specifying the antagonist.[129] This devil uses military tricks in his attack and, "the Enemy is the owner of deception (*khadʿana*) in respect of enticement."[130] These attacks are constant because, "his Enemy (*ʿadu*) dies not."[131] He teaches that as the servant struggles, "the Enemy" (*ʿadu*) will "whisper" (*yawaswis*) to him and attempt to distract him away from remembrance of God,[132] building on the Qurʾānic image of Satan as whispering one (*yuwaswisu*) who retreats (*khanāsi*) in battle.[133] For al-Muḥāsibī, Satan attacks from both inside and outside, especially by inciting the passions and lusts.[134] Satan is the enemy of God, so naturally he is the enemy of humanity who he refuses to serve.[135]

Despite this, al-Muḥāsibī sees the other enemy—the "lower soul" (in Arabic *nafs*), as worse. According to Picken, al-Muḥāsibī considers, *"the internal enemy of the nafs as more dangerous than Iblis"* (i.e. Satan).[136] Al-Muḥāsibī writes that the *nafs* use the, "means of deception (*khadaʿ*)" to incite "pride" (*ʿojb*) in the believer.[137] He also warns about the "enticement of the soul (*al-nafs*) and the Enemy (*al-ʿdu*)."[138] The *nafs* is a concept somewhat difficult to translate but usually considered the more animal-like and easily-tempted part of

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[127] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 70 (Schoonover, 89, cf. 29, 90), (emphasis mine), النفس والعدواً .

[128] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 70 (Schoonover, 90), إذا علما أنه قد غلبهما .

[129] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 69 (Schoonover, 86, 87), العدو See also Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam*, 69, 198.

[130] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 69 (Schoonover, 86), خدعًا al-Muḥāsibī mentions "the Enemy" three more times on 87.

[131] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 75 (Schoonover, 103), عدوه .

[132] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 67 (Schoonover, 83), عدوه … يوسوس .

[133] cf. Qurʾān 114:4-6 خَنَّاس … يُوَسْوِسُ .

[134] Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī,* 119-120, 122.

[135] Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī,* 121. In Islam, Satan fell because he refused to bow down to Adam.

[136] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 75. See also more examples in Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 198.

[137] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 73 (Schoonover, 100), خدع … عجب al-Muḥāsibī has a whole chapter on pride (*ʿojb*), later in his *Riʿāya*.

[138] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 77 (Schoonover, 111), النفس … العدو .

the soul.[139] The Qur'ān speaking of the *nafs* says, "(H)e who purifies it has succeeded, and he who stunts it has failed."[140] For al-Muḥāsibī the soul combat is against specific aspects of the *nafs*. In his work *al-Nasah*, al-Muḥāsibī lists various elements of human nature that must be struggled against, for example against impatience during affliction, and for loving what God loves.[141] Al-Muḥāsibī writes in his *Kitāb al-Khalwa*:

> My brothers, this is the path of God, so adhere to what I have described to you, believe it in your heart, construct your actions based upon it, struggle against your souls (*jahidu anfusakum*) to establish it as, indeed, I see that the soul inclined to evil (*alnafs ammara*) is determined to disregard the command of God.[142]

Connected to this lower soul is the body, and al-Muḥāsibī says that the servant of God restrains (*yakuf*) his bodily members, accounting the body itself as an enemy needing constraint.[143] As Picken summarises, for al-Muḥāsibī, "*al-mujahada* (fighting the soul) is an essential feature of the purification process."[144]

Watchfulness and guarding

As well as the more active attack metaphors, al-Muḥāsibī also discusses the metaphors of watching, guarding, and protecting the heart, using several different Arabic words. This may appear less active but is actually a form of intense awareness involving at times even violent struggle against the enemy's attacks. The first stage of this is watching. Al-Muḥāsibī says that the spiritual one will be "wise and watchful" (*ʿaqilan mutayaqqaẓina*), with the word having the sense of the soldier being on alert attention against attack.[145] One aspect of this is that it is the "watchful" one who is more aware of his past and present sins.[146] Al-Muḥāsibī ties watchfulness to another of his main topics—the remembrance of God (*dhikr*). He says, "(I)f he is careful and prudent he will be watchful, and if he is *watchful* (*tayaqquẓ*) he will *recollect* (*dhikr*, lit. remember)," thus connecting watchfulness to his long discussions on

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[139] Yasien Mohamed, *Fitrah: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996), 101-03; Sells uses "ego-self" 176. See also M. Ajmal, "Sufi Science of the Soul," in Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality*, 294-307 (294-97).
[140] Qurʾān 111:9, 10. According to Winter this verse refers to the "lower soul" which is "the enemy" T.J. Winter, *Al-Ghazālī On Disciplining the Soul* (The Islamic Texts Society: Cambridge, 1995), xix.
[141] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 195.
[142] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in al-Mashriq (Tamūz/Tashrīn,1955), 45, cited in Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 195-196.
[143] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 34 (Schoonover, 5), يكفّ.
[144] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam*, 196.
[145] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 70 (Schoonover, 90), عاقلا متيقظًا.
[146] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 70 (Schoonover, 90-1).

carefulness and prudence and also to his emphasis on recollecting one's mind and remembering God.[147] He frequently uses this term *al-ḥadhar* (alertness or carefulness),[148] in relation to watching, a term emphasising the vigilant concentration aspect of the metaphor. Another term that expands the soldier-on-watch metaphor is wakefulness. Al-Muḥāsibī teaches that the believer will not succeed in keeping God's laws except by, "wakefulness from heedlessness (*biltayaquẓi min al-ghafla*)."[149] He says in an almost identical phrase to his earlier one on watching, that, "(B)y carefulness and prudence he will obtain wakefulness (*al-tayaqquẓ*),"[150] and then discusses wakefulness at length.[151] The military imagery is repeated when al-Muḥāsibī describes the wise person thus: "his heart is on guard (*al-ḥadhar*) lest he go to sleep and the hour of rising slip past him, he is awakened often in the night, at times other than that for which he is watching (*yantabih*)."[152] This idea of watchfulness is not unique to al-Muḥāsibī as other early Sufis also discuss it.[153] It is worth noting however that while al-Muḥāsibī writes of watchfulness this is not such a common theme for many later Sufis who emphasise a more ecstatic union with God and less ascetic approaches. Al-Muḥāsibī stands within the more "sober" stream of Sufism, in opposition to the "ecstatic" stream who emphasise "drunkenness."[154] Hujwīrī writes in the mid-eleventh century of these two schools of Sufi practice, of those who follow Bisṭāmī's ideal of ecstasy and those who follow Junayd's soberness (such as al-Muḥāsibī, Junayd's teacher).[155]

Closely related to watching, but involving the possibility of more direct engagement with the enemy who has come into close quarters, is the metaphor of guarding. Al-Muḥāsibī says the servant of Allah has, "guarded (*ḥafaẓ*) his tongue," where the Arabic has the sense of protecting or saving (from the attacker).[156] After explaining some related details of this guarding, which he sees as an aspect of self-examination, al-Muḥāsibī adds a related metaphor. He says that if a person does not carefully guard himself then he will be, "robbed

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[147] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 77 (Schoonover, 111), (emphasis mine), وإذا تيقظ ذكر .

[148] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 75-77 (Schoonover, 103, 104, 108, 111, etc.), الحذر .

[149] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 75 (Schoonover, 103), بالتيقظ من الغفلة . Indeed, wakefulness is essential otherwise its opposite will undermine him: "at the time of his heedlessness (*ghaflatuhu*)" his "soul will overcome (*taghalubahu*) him." Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 75 (Schoonover, 104), غفلته ... تغلبه .

[150] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 76 (Schoonover, 106), التيقظ .

[151] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 76-77 (Schoonover, 107-111).

[152] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 76 (Schoonover, 108), الحذر ... ينتبه al-Muḥāsibī also discusses the close connection between wakefulness in this world and concerning the world to come.

[153] For example Sarraj, see Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 202; See also http://www.sunnah.org/tasawwuf/early_scholarly_works.htm , accessed October 15, 2018.

[154] Renard, "Al-Jihad al-Akbar," 230.

[155] An excellent article that covers the differences is Christopher Melchert, "The Transition from asceticism to mysticism at the middle of the ninth century C.E." *Studia Islamica* (1996/1): 51-70.

[156] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 71 (Schoonover, 93, cf 28), حفظ .

of his faith," where the Arabic here for robbed has at root a term for war (ḥ-r-b).[157] Al-Muḥāsibī extends this image by explaining about the locked box that was robbed from, and thus the soul is metaphorically this treasure box.[158] This expands the struggle metaphor because robbery is a form of social violence where one's possessions are taken and one is attacked by an antagonist. Al-Muḥāsibī further explains that it is not only the tongue, but all aspects of the human that must be protected. He writes about the servant and whether he has, "guarded (*ḥafẓahu*) his members,"[159] and says that he must consider, "(H)as his mind been guarded (*ḥārisan*) from his passion," using a synonym.[160] Showing the breadth of this guarding, al-Muḥāsibī says the servant does this "with his sight and his hearing and his walking and with all his members."[161] Guarding is also required with respect to aspects of the mind and character, and he writes that the outcome of obedience to God is that, "one's resolution will be guarded (*muttaqyan mawafyan*, lit. scrupulously kept)," [162] since presumably resolution can also be robbed.

Guarding is essential for the servant, as losing awareness can lead to dire consequences. He writes: "(B)e on guard (*fayaḥadhir*, lit. warn) lest the soul turn him back (*ta'ud*) to its … pleasures (*ladhataha*) ... at the time of its heedlessness (*ghaflatuhu*)."[163] In this image the lower soul itself is attacking and turning him away from the fight. For al-Muḥāsibī, not guarding is "heedlessness", and he warns of being cautious, "lest his soul overcome (*taghalubahu*) him with its passion at the time of his heedlessness (*ghaflatuhu*) and forgetfulness (*nisyanahu*)."[164] Heresy is also a danger for Muslims, so al-Muḥāsibī warns that the good ascetic, "expels (*nafāhā*) it from his heart and guards (*ḥajab*) his heart from it."[165] The Arabic has the sense of "casting out" or "banishing" heresy, and of "blocking" or "screening" against something, both words expanding the image of antagonistic action.

Attentive listening as a form of watchfulness is important to al-Muḥāsibī and is

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[157] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ri'āya,* 71 (Schoonover, 94), حَرَب .

[158] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ri'āya,* 71 (Schoonover, 94-95).

[159] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ri'āya,* 45 (Schoonover, 29), حفظه .

[160] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ri'āya,* 45 (Schoonover, 29), حارساً .

[161] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ri'āya,* 45 (Schoonover, 29).

[162] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ri'āya,* 76 (Schoonover, 107), متقياً موفياً .

[163] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ri'āya,* 75 (Schoonover, 104-5), فيحذر ... تعود ... لذتها ... غفلته .

[164] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ri'āya,* 75 (Schoonover, 104), تغلبه ... غفلته ... نسيانه . He also warns about the heart that, "the affairs of this world contend with it (*tunaziʿahu*) and heedlessness (*w-al-ghaflat*) overcomes (*taghlub*) it." Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ri'āya,* 57 (Schoonover, 59), تنازعه والغفلات تغلب عليه . Here he also parallels being overcome with contending, and mentions "this world" in contrast to the future world, an aspect of his eschatological emphasis.

[165] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ri'āya,* 89 (Schoonover, 142), نفاها ... حجب .

another dimension of struggle. As well as opening his whole *Riʿāya* with the importance of "listening," al-Muḥāsibī also sees calm attentiveness as a key to developing the remembrance of God and watchfulness, and linked to self-mortification and the battle against the lower self. He writes about reflection on God that the way to begin it is by, "concentration of the attention" (*ijtimāʿ al-hamm*)[166] This is needed to ensure that the mind is fully "present" (*ḥāḍir*).[167] As the servant battles the *nafs*, then, "his mind is truly present (*ḥāḍir*) and it will not be disturbed (*yashgalahu*) by any external thing."[168] The word *yashgalahu* has the notion of distracted or otherwise-occupied, and this sentence is remarkably similar to the writings of Isaac on watchfulness and tranquility. The very direct connection to struggle is shown when al-Muḥāsibī further clarifies that when the servant, "cuts off (*qaṭaʿ*) the excesses of thought … then his attention is concentrated and his mind is truly present (*ḥāḍir*)."[169] The result of this is that the servant has, "tranquil (*al-istirāḥa*) trust in Him,"[170] which is contrasted to the "transient, the disturbing and troubled."[171]

Struggle with the passions

In his *Riʿāya*, al-Muḥāsibī writes of the battle with the passions and how to overcome addiction to passions and achieve virtue. This battle with the passions is vital as the Muslim cannot develop a proper fear of God, "as long as passions (*al-hawa*) rule the soul."[172] Al-Muḥāsibī discusses the passions several times,[173] and repeatedly urges his readers to, "overcome (*fatghalab*) the passion (*hawa*) of the soul."[174] He also speaks about the struggle, "against the passions and desires" (*mukhālafat al-hawa w-al-shahawāt*),[175] and "struggle (*mujāhidaha*) against" the soul.[176] The believer must be careful lest, "his soul overcome (*taghlabu*) him with its passion (*bihawaha*)", using a fighting term.[177] The Muslim therefore, "restrains (*naha*) his soul from passion."[178] Al-Muḥāsibī uses another struggle term when he notes the, "overwhelming (*lighalabat*, from root gh-l-b, also means dominance) of dark

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[166] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 64 (Schoonover, 77), اجتماع .
[167] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 65 (Schoonover, 78), حاضر .
[168] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 66 (Schoonover, 81), حاضر عقله فلم يشغله بشىء مما ظهر .
[169] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 67 (Schoonover, 82), حاضر ... قطع .
[170] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 73 (Schoonover, 101), or "rest" الاستراحة .
[171] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 77 (Schoonover, 110). The Arabic is unclear.
[172] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 61 (Schoonover, 68), الهوى . Possibly a better translation is "carnal desires."
[173] For example al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 75-6 (Schoonover, 104-106).
[174] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 57 (Schoonover, 56), نفسه هوى Note the text's فيغلب should read فتغلب .
[175] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 142, (my translation), مخالفة الهوى والشهوة .
[176] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 56 (Schoonover, 54), مجاهدها .
[177] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 75 (Schoonover, 104), تغلبه نفسه بهواها .
[178] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 59 (Schoonover, 64), نهى .

passions."[179] He also quotes Wahb that, "(B)lessed is he who is not overcome (*taghlabu*) by his passion (*shahwatuhu*), nor turned back to his desire (*raghbatih*)."[180] These quotes show al-Muḥāsibī's use of several near-synonyms all related to the macrotrope of struggle. In his chapter on the kinds of penitents, al-Muḥāsibī says that when a penitent has fought enough they attain to a, "pure heart which the passions (*al-shahawāt*) do not seduce."[181] The imagery here is of sexual temptation, understood from the surrounding discussion of youthful follies and of maintaining angel-like purity.

Al-Muḥāsibī uses some very strong language to describe the battle with the passions. He speaks of, "self-mortification (or self-death) (*taqashuf*)," [182] which he explains as preventing his tongue, sight or hearing from doing anything to displease God.[183] He also describes himself as a self-mortifying man (*al-mutaqashifīn*)[184] and says that this is essential for penitents. This metaphor involves significant self-violence in a metaphorical sense. Al-Muḥāsibī says that reflection on the soul's sins will help the soul because reflection will, "cut (*yaqtaʿ*) it off," from the pleasures.[185] Further, the servant of God, "cuts (*qaṭaʿ*) off the activity of his members from the world."[186] This language is quite vivid and invokes the sword images from earlier where a person does violence against their own inner selves.

Self-examination as a struggle

One metaphor with somewhat less military connotations is al-Muḥāsibī's emphasis on self-examination, where a person inspects and criticises one's own soul in order to purify it. Self-examination is a kind of inner low-level violence against the lower soul. This practice is so central to his teachings that the author gained his name "al-Muḥāsibī" from it. Al-Muḥāsibī writes that the ascetic reflects and has, "searched (*tafqada*) his heart"[187] and undergoes a self "examination (*al-muḥāsaba*)."[188] This is required because God also "examines" (*wa'itlaʿahu*) the human heart.[189] Further, the wise penitent is one who, "examines (*al-mutfatish*) his soul,

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[179] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 70 (Schoonover, 90), لغلبة .

[180] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 75 (Schoonover, 104), لم تغلبه شهوته ، لم ترده رغبته .

[181] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 55 (Schoonover, 52), قلب طاهر لم تعتوره الشهوات .

[182] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 45 (Schoonover, 28), تقشف .

[183] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 45 (Schoonover, 28-29).

[184] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 45 (Schoonover, 30), المتقشفين .

[185] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 63 (Schoonover, 73), يقطع .

[186] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 67 (Schoonover, 82), قطع .

[187] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 45 (Schoonover, 29), تفقد .

[188] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 48 (Schoonover, 35), المحاسبه .

[189] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 48 (Schoonover, 36), واطلاعه .

seeking out his defects,"[190] where this synonym has the meaning of "inspects," with the word possibly having the sense of a military review. Al-Muḥāsibī also equates this self-examination with self-judgement (*dan nafsih*).[191] One aspect of this self-examination is self-blame. Al-Muḥāsibī says that the heart is deficient so the servant must "blame (*aldham*) it and be prudent of it, and suspect (*atahamahā*, or accuse) it and abandon any trust in it."[192] The struggle flavour of this metaphor is highlighted when al-Muḥāsibī indicates that an outcome of self-examination is "destroyed (*wa'azāl*) pride."[193] After self-criticism the disciple "Compels (*'alzam*) his heart,"[194] a kind of inner violence.

Struggle and eschatology

For al-Muḥāsibī, this self-examination is associated with eschatological awareness: "(T)he examination (*al-ḥasab*) on the Day of Resurrection [Judgement] will be light for those who examine (*ḥasabuwa*) themselves in this world", and conversely for the others.[195] Al-Muḥāsibī also quotes ʿUmar as saying, "(E)xamine (*ḥasibu*) yourselves before you are examined (*muḥasibu*). Weigh yourselves before you are weighed. Be prepared for the judgement."[196] The Day of Reckoning is thus a motivation for self-examination as it is for the spiritual battle as a whole. Al-Muḥāsibī quotes the Qurʾān that, "as to him who shall have feared the majesty of his Lord, and shall have restrained (*naha*) his soul from lust, verily, Paradise - that shall be his dwelling alone."[197] Al-Muḥāsibī a little later explains that this verse means that the one who fears God, "restrains (*naha*) his soul from passion."[198] He teaches that humans have been, "placed in this world of trial and testing only to the end that you will either obey God or disobey Him, and pass from this world to eternal punishment or to eternal bliss."[199] Al-Muḥāsibī quotes Abū Mūsa (presumably Abū Mūsa al-murdar (d. 841 CE) a Sufi Muʿtazilite), "(R)eckon (*ḥasab*, literally examine) with yourself in convenience before the severe reckoning."[200] This surah is about the Day of Judgement, and like a number of other surahs, emphasises that Muslims should consider their current lives in the light of that "Day,"

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[190] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 71 (Schoonover, 95), المتفتش .

[191] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 49 (Schoonover, 39), دان نفسه .

[192] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 75 (Schoonover, 102), الذم ... اتهمها .

[193] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 75 (Schoonover, 102), قلبه عن العجب وأزال .

[194] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 76 (Schoonover, 106), ألزم .

[195] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 51 (Schoonover, 43), وإنما خف الحساب يوم القيامة ... حاسبوا .

[196] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 50 (Schoonover, 39), حاسبوا أنفسكم قبل أن محاسبوا، وزنوها قبل أن نوزنوا، وقهيئوا للعرض الأكبر .

[197] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 58 (Schoonover, 61), Qurʾān 79:40,41 نهى .

[198] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 59 (Schoonover, 64), نهى .

[199] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 46 (Schoonover, 33).

[200] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 50 (Schoonover, 39), حاسب .

the term often used as shorthand.[201] Scholars have noted that early Islam seemed to maintain a strong eschatological emphasis, based on these many surahs, but that this was later lessened.[202] Al-Muḥāsibī, like other early Sufis, seems to place much emphasis on reflecting on the final judgement, and discusses this topic at several points, quoting a number of earlier teachers and surahs including, "God said, 'Fear the day when you shall return to God.'"[203] Awareness of judgement is meant to bring a change in the soul according to al-Muḥāsibī. He writes, "God only causes us to fear the consequences in order that we frighten (*linukhawif*) our souls."[204] But the future judgement does not just bring fear, as al-Muḥāsibī says that the "bliss of the other world" (*naʿym alakḥira*) is a motivating factor.[205]

Al-Muḥāsibī's breadth of struggle terminology

A significant aspect of al-Muḥāsibī's approach is the breadth of metaphors he uses to describe the spiritual combat. The ideas he discusses in the *Riʿāya* are reflected across his other works as well. Al-Muḥāsibī's terms range from the philosophical to the everyday. He writes of States and Stations (*al-ahwal* and *al-maqāmah*), and the idea of the stations along the journey back to God.[206] He also writes of labourers and merchants, and the toil of doing business. I have mentioned al-Muḥāsibī's struggle metaphors from the military (fighting, subduing), psycho-social (self-examination, constraining the soul, accusation of the soul), labouring, and medical areas (cutting off), but according to Picken other of al-Muḥāsibī's works also include antagonist images from the legal, educational, and social domains. Al-Muḥāsibī was skilled at Islamic law, and several of his terms have a legal basis, for example contradicting or refuting the soul (*mukhālafat al-nafs*), and accusation of the soul (*ittiham al-nafs*), and these kinds of terms are used extensively in al-Muḥāsibī's works.[207] Picken argues that these ideas are virtually synonomous with combatting the soul.[208] He also notes examples of al-Muḥāsibī's use of educational terms, for example reprimanding, and social imagery, for example dispraisal (*dhamm al-nafs*), and contempt for the soul (*izdira' al-nafs*).[209] This review shows that al-Muḥāsibī has an extensive and well thought-out schema, drawing on

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[201] See for example Surahs 75 "al-Qiyāmah", 72, 73, 77, 81-86, 88-90, 100-102, 104, etc.
[202] Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 43-4.
[203] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, (Schoonover, 48-49, 60-62, 65-67, 70-72). Cf. Qur'ān 15:92,93.
[204] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 62 (Schoonover, 70), لنخوف .
[205] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 76 (Schoonover, 109), الآخرة نعيم .
[206] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 3; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 296-311; The third stage in Sufism is *ihsan*.
[207] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 186, 198.
[208] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 198.
[209] Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 186.

concepts from diverse domains of life, often with explanations of many facets of an activity from real life examples. His teaching on struggling with the soul is highly complex and comprehensive.

Human agency and struggle

Human choice and the action of God are important issues in Islam, and although it is somewhat misleading to ascribe the Christian category of "soteriology" to Muslim belief, these two agents of the divine and human play a central role in the Muslim idea of "salvation" through struggle. Because wilful choice and divine action are intricately entwined with human struggle both in Christianity and Islam, I shall summarise al-Muḥāsibī's views on this inter-relationship. For al-Muḥāsibī, the one who struggles will receive God's assistance in the fight. He says that after struggling, "it will not be long until God will affirm his ascetic struggle (*mujāhadatuhu*) and will restrain (*amsik*) his soul from the passions."[210] Further, to those who choose to obey the guidance they have received, He will "increase their guidance" (*zādahum hudā*),[211] and will guide them "on the *straight path* (*ṣirat al-mustaqīm*)", a reference to the *al-fatiha* prayer.[212] Al-Muḥāsibī summarises this teaching by writing, "(T)hus God promised them that he would carry them to the straight path and show them his truth forever. Since He is gracious to draw near unto those who are far from Him, how much more to those who draw near unto him!"[213] Similarly to the Syrian Christian view, there is a reciprocity of action. God will also have "love" for "those who love (*yataḥabab*) Him."[214] So the servant is expected to act—and al-Muḥāsibī's work has many calls to obedience, but is also dependent on God's support. In this al-Muḥāsibī is following the Qur'ān: "(T)hose who truly strive for Our sake, We shall surely guide to Our paths."[215]

Al-Muḥāsibī teaches that the Muslim ascetic receives real help from God when they choose to struggle. "The penitent will not fail to hasten to the place where God will bestow upon him His gracious help, by which he will overcome the passion of the soul and strengthen his weakness and lessen the clamour of his desires."[216] This is quite a positive view of the struggle, although the phrase "overcome the passion" is balanced by the realistic

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[210] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 56 (Schoonover, 55), أمسك ... مجاهدته .

[211] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 56 (Schoonover, 55), quoting Qur'ān 47:17 زَادَهُم هُدًى .

[212] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 56 (Schoonover, 55), الصِّرَطَ المُسْتَقِم .

[213] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 56 (Schoonover, 55).

[214] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 56 (Schoonover, 55-6), يتحبّب . Al-Muḥāsibī reverses the order of the Qur'ān.

[215] Qur'ān 79:37-41.

[216] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 57 (Schoonover, 56).

"lessen the clamour" rather than removing the desires completely. Human effort is urged, but ultimately salvation is not dependent on it, for "Fear and hope" are only gained "through the grace of God"[217] Al-Muḥāsibī makes it clear that, "(G)od engenders holy fear in the heart of the faithful servant by (means) other than his own effort, if He wishes to favour him with it."[218] So al-Muḥāsibī expects God's servants to act, but to also to see their actions as contingent. He also explicitly condemns the one who, "praises his own reason and his own intelligence and his own salvation and his own seeking, forgetting the kindness of his Lord."[219] Al-Muḥāsibī says that the wise servant prays, "(I) shall … be weak (ḍaʿīf) if You do not strengthen me."[220] As much as al-Muḥāsibī emphasises the importance of human effort, ultimately it is only, "by the grace of God" that he repents. Al-Muḥāsibī sees divine assistance as essential and human effort as limited in effect but still required.

In his comments on human and divine action al-Muḥāsibī never appears to embrace fatalism—he seems to reject the notion that evil deeds are predestined by God, following Ḥasan al-Baṣrī who he often quotes.[221] For al-Muḥāsibī, God's predestination is based on his foreknowledge of freely-chosen human actions. His understanding of the Islamic teaching of divine predestination thus does not lead him to inaction, and his work is full of prescriptions for the servant. He also condemns the Qadarites who teach an unconstrained and totally-free will and deny predestination (qadar).[222] It was not so much the Qadariyah teaching on the value of freely-chosen human effort that gained them infamy, but that they denied predestination and saw human effort as solely responsible for outcomes, and al-Muḥāsibī seems to pick a middle position between them and the other extreme of believing that all events are fatalistically pre-determined.[223] Al-Muḥāsibī's view of the limitation of human effort is consistent with the Qur'ān's, "(T)ruly the nafs incites constantly to evil, save when my Lord has mercy."[224] He even quotes Qur'ān 12:53 in explanation of why the penitent must be watchful and reflective: "for the heart (nafs) is prone to evil."[225] Mohammad Ajmal summarises well this understanding of the sickness of the soul and its relation to the Sufi

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[217] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 61 (Schoonover, 69), ذلك الخوف والرجاء - بمنة الله Cf. He says it is "only by the grace of God" that the soul is healed, 101.
[218] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 62 (Schoonover, 71).
[219] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 73 (Schoonover, 100). cf. Pelagianism.
[220] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 72, (my translation, cf. Schoonover, 98), ضعف ,
[221] Michael Schwarz, "The Letter of al-Hasan al-Basri," *Oriens* 20 (1967): 15–30.
[222] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya,* 87-8 (Schoonover, 137, 139), قَدَر
[223] M.A. Rauf, "The Qur'ān and Free-Will" (The Muslim World, Vol. LX No.4, October 1970): 289-99.
[224] Qur'ān 29:69.
[225] Qur'ān 12:53, إن النَفس لامادة بالسّوء See also Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 135.

prescriptions for cure.[226] In this debate between the differing views we can see parallels with the related Christian tensions as evidenced earlier in Macarius and Isaac. In summary, for al-Muḥāsibī the battle with the *nafs* is won by human effort and yet is totally dependent on God's assistance and will. Human action is required because positive actions are not pre-determined but freely chosen.

Comparison with Isaac of Nineveh

It is instructive to compare al-Muḥāsibī's approach to spiritual struggle with that of Isaac of Nineveh, because scholars often note the similarities between Sufis and Late Antique Christian ascetic thought, and Isaac is the best known and most extensive writer on this topic during this early Islamic period.[227] Isaac lived in the same region as al-Muḥāsibī although roughly 100 years prior. Isaac's work was early translated into Arabic but there is no evidence that al-Muḥāsibī was aware of it.

Isaac lived in the context of early Islam, and while there are distinct similarities between his and al-Muḥāsibī's work, overall Isaac's writing is more Stoic and NeoPlatonic, while al-Muḥāsibī's is more Qur'ānic with a slight amount of Aristotelian categories. Isaac writes more of attaining stillness while al-Muḥāsibī speaks of returning to God. Al-Muḥāsibī, writes of logical progressions under topical headings, and this is understandable given the context of the influence of Greek philosophy in the 8th century. During this time many works of Greek philosophy were translated into Arabic, and many Muslims adopted Aristotelian concepts. Isaac however follows more the Stoic-influenced tradition of the Syrian church, which was aware of but much less influenced by Aristotle. This difference in adoption of philosophy is also noticeable in their differing style of writing about spiritual struggle. Isaac uses the more disjointed aphorism approach of Stoicism and Jewish hagiography, whereas al-Muḥāsibī uses a more "scientific" Aristotelian categorisation approach of delineating multiple causes and effects of different aspects of the war in the heart. While keeping in mind these differences in framework and approach, and their use of different scriptures, it is interesting to note some similarities. Smith and others have discussed the cross-polinisation evident between Muslims and Christians in the 8th century, and al-Muḥāsibī's work may be evidence for this.

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[226] Mohammad Ajmal, "Sufi Science of the Soul," in *Islamic Spirituality,* ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987): 294-307.
[227] Smith*, Al-Muḥāsibī,* 84-5.

One of the most notable similarities is the idea that to grow close to God requires killing the appetites or passions. Al-Muḥāsibī says of the holy person that, "(H)e has killed his avarice with scrupulousness, terminated his desire (*al-hawa*) with piety and annihilated his appetites (*al-shahawāt*) with the light of knowledge.[228] For al-Muḥāsibī, the one whom God is pleased with is the "combatant of the soul" (*mujāhid li nafsihi*).[229] This is very similar to Isaac who writes of "mortification of the will's emotions" and the need to "wage war with the unseemly thoughts and crush them."[230] Isaac also says that the mind/soul, "continually needs the lash in order to be kept on the straight path."[231] He writes of "blaming" the mind/soul, which parallels al-Muḥāsibī's words.

Humility is a central virtue for both al-Muḥāsibī and Isaac, and both return to this theme repeatedly.[232] Isaac often characterises humility as the prime monastic virtue, and al-Muḥāsibī lists it similarly as central. Surprisingly, both al-Muḥāsibī and Isaac have a similar view of the soul. According to al-Muḥāsibī the soul has an evil nature,[233] a view generally in accord with Isaac and other Christian writers, but somewhat in conflict with later Muslim writers who see the soul as pure but able to be misled. There are a number of other phrases that al-Muḥāsibī uses that are very similar to Isaac. He says that the struggler has, "guarded (*ḥifẓ*) his tongue," and has also "guarded (*ḥifẓ,* lit. saved, kept, protected) his members to God," including his "mind."[234] Al-Muḥāsibī also in this passage uses *ḥarisan* (lit. escort, patrol, protect) for "guarding."[235]

What is markedly like Isaac is al-Muḥāsibī's use of fighting language and the need for military-like vigilance to withstand attacks. Al-Muḥāsibī uses some very strong language to describe the battle with the passions. He speaks of, "self-mortification (*taqashuf*),"[236] which he explains as preventing his tongue, sight, or hearing from doing anything to displease

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[228] Al-Muhāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, 102-4, cited in Picken*, Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 197.

[229] Al-Muhāsibī, *Riʿāya*, ed. ʿAṭā, cited in Picken*, Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 199.

[230] Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.66 (Bedjan, 475; Miller, 470, 72).

[231] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.26.1 (CSCO 554: 113; Brock, 125).

[232] Isaac, *Homilies,* 2.27 (CSCO 554: 115-16; Brock, 127), Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.77 (Bedjan, 580,; Miller, 538).

[233] Picken*, Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 186

[234] Al-Muhāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 45 (Schoonover, 29), حفظ .

[235] Al-Muhāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 45 (Schoonover, 29), حَرسا .

[236] Al-Muhāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 45 (Schoonover, 28), تقشف .

God.[237] Al-Muḥāsibī discusses the temptations of Satan and ways of resisting them, and in this he is very similar to Evagrius or Isaac. Satan has limited power and his attacks can be resisted.[238] One of the main ways to resist Satan is by wariness (*yayqaḍa*) which may be compared to Isaac's watchfulness. The soul needs to be, "constantly on its guard, lest it be taken by surprise and the suddenness of the attack mean defeat."[239] Overall, these are many phrases and concepts that sound similar in the two writers, and further research is needed to discover if there are any exact matches between al-Muḥāsibī's works and the Arabic translations of Isaac. Both authors use a range of metaphors to discuss spiritual struggle, with significant similarities to which I shall return in the final chapter.

Conclusion

Al-Muḥāsibī teaches that those who reach an advanced state of spiritual growth are those who "struggle (*mujāhidaha*) against" their soul.[240] For al-Muḥāsibī, spiritual life is a continual war on the soul's passions and Satan, a battle that is connected with a wide range of virtues and practices. He places internal *jihād* at the centre of his ascetic approach, a view directly correlated with Isaac's. Al-Muḥāsibī explains the macrotrope of "growth as struggle" using a wide range of metaphors, and many different Arabic root words, demonstrating a highly developed conception of the soul's battle. This understanding of the word *jihād* in a leading early Muslim teacher shows that *jihād* was from early times understood by at least some Muslims as primarily an inner spiritual struggle.[241] Al-Muḥāsibī's ideas do not fade with time but become central to one of the most important mainstream Sunni Muslim teachers and reformers, al-Ghazālī, and it is his development of al-Muḥāsibī's teaching that I now analyse.

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[237] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 45 (Schoonover, 28-29).

[238] Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī,* 122-127.

[239] Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī,* 126.

[240] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 56 (Schoonover, 54), مجاهدها .

[241] Al-Muḥāsibī does speak of the external battle several times. Usually this is an aside, but at times he makes this part of his argument. Al-Muḥāsibī, *Riʿāya*, 72 (Schoonover, 98), asserts that only the faithful Muslims who followed God were "resolute to fight God's enemies."

7. Al-Ghazālī and inner *jihād*

Abu Hamid Muḥammad al-Tusi al-Ghazālī, commonly known as al-Ghazālī, was born in 450 AH/1059 CE and died in 505 AH/1111 CE. He is known as the *Ḥujjat al-Islām* or "Defender of Islam" (literally "Proof" of Islam), in the Sunni heritage because of his extensive writings covering and consolidating a wide range of Muslim topics, and because of his challenging of deviations from the Islamic norm.[1] Of particular importance in Islam is his *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn,* hereafter simply *Iḥyā'*). Al-Ghazālī is famous for this work as being the integrator of Muslim thought and practice, unifying in one corpus the previously often conflicting streams of traditional Islamic theology, Sufi practice, and Hellenistically-influenced Islamic philosophy.[2] Griffel rightly asserts that al-Ghazālī "creates a new genre of literature" by combining Islamic legal rulings with philosophical-ethical and Sufi ascetical works.[3] Al-Ghazālī is a key witness to early Sufism because he is immensely popular as a systematiser of the thought of so many others.[4] As Winter notes, al-Ghazālī was a "polymath who excelled in most of the traditional Islamic disciplines," and he was knowledgeable about "Aristotelian logic," "Islamic jurisprudence, theology" etc.[5] A significant number of later Sufis, Jews, and even Christians drew from al-Ghazālī, sometimes

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[1] Moosa Ebraham, "Ghazālī, Al- (C. 1059-1111)," *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World,* Richard C. Martin ed., vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 274, Gale Virtual Reference Library, http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX3403500168&v=2.1&u=monash&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w&asid=36a67ae51b5a6ba799992c37ee665e77, accessed October 15, 2018.

[2] T.J. Winter, introduction to *Al-Ghazālī: On Disciplining the Soul, Refining the Character, and Curing the Sicknesses of the Heart* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1995), xv-xcii; W. M. Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazālī* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963), 172-80. See also a good analysis of historical views of this synthesis see Kenneth Garden, "Duncan Macdonald's Pioneering Study of al-Ghazālī: Paths Not Taken," *The Muslim World* (Vol. 104, Jan-Apr 2004): 62-70.

[3] Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30, 48.

[4] Smith rightly notes that, "al-Ghazali's influence was great even during his life-time, and the widespread appreciation of both his lectures and his writings made his teaching famous, while he was still alive, among all Arabic-speaking Muslims, in the West as in the East. At the same time, his fearless devotion to truth and his consistent support of the Sufi doctrine incurred much criticism and hostility on the part of the most orthodox theologians both before, and after, his death." Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic* (London, Al-Haira, 1944), 198-203. It is true that al-Ghazālī's books were burnt in places, especially in Andalusia, but this was the most anti-Sufi of all Islamic areas. His works were known throughout the Muslim world and mostly accepted, although understandably given his attacks on them, several philosophical Muslim scholars criticised al-Ghazālī during his lifetime or just after his death. His *Revivification* was put to the torch in 1109 CE and 1143 CE in Andalus, but by that time both Ash'arism, and direct disciples of al-Ghazālī were already settled in Andalusia. In a couple of decades, al-Ghazālī would exert immense authority even in these places. The most noticeable attack is from Averroes (d.1198 CE) who writes *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* in direct response to al-Ghazālī.

[5] Winter, introduction, xv.

extensively.[6] Smith discusses some of these writers and notes the various themes they derived from al-Ghazālī, concluding correctly that he was very influential, especially so because he synthesised mainstream Islam with Sufism.[7] In this chapter I analyse al-Ghazālī's barely-explored emphasis on struggle and how inner *jihād* is central to his *Iḥyā'*. I interpret his work in the light of his autobiographical emphasis on inner struggle, and discern how he uses philosophy to explain this battle. His metaphors of struggle are intertwined with an anthropology and perspective on free will. I also note how al-Ghazālī connects eschatology and love to his ideas of inner struggle.

Literature review

There is quite an extensive literature on al-Ghazālī, investigating various aspects of his philosophy, theology, and ethics. Böwering summarises the main events and issues surrounding al-Ghazālī's life and works.[8] Zeki Saritoprak's chapter on al-Ghazālī covers many of the most important events and themes discussed below.[9] Rosmizi and Yucel also provide a good introduction to al-Ghazālī.[10] Smith discusses al-Ghazālī's life and personality at great length but only briefly notes his ascetic teaching and does not analyse it in any depth.[11] She reflects upon al-Ghazālī's love of beauty and his "mystical" love of God and is the only writer to draw a parallel between al-Ghazālī and Isaac of Nineveh, mentioning their similar ideas about the person who is irradiated by the Divine Light.[12] The famous study by Watt mainly explores the philosophical and intellectual themes in al-Ghazālī, and also does not discuss his approach to spiritual struggle and character.[13] Umaruddin is one of the few who treat al-Ghazālī's ethical teachings in any depth, but he does not draw any connection between them and al-Ghazālī's ideas of struggle nor his years of isolation.[14] Gianotti, Janssens, Khan, and others focus on al-Ghazālī's approach to philosophy, his epistemology,

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[6] Sherif, Mohamed Ahmed, *Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Virtue* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1975).

[7] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 198-221. See also Eric Ormsby, *Ghazali: The revival of Islam* (Oxford: One World, 2008), 18-19.

[8] Gerhard Böwering, "Ḡazālī, Abū Ḥāmed Moḥammad," http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gazali-i-biography, accessed October 15, 2018.

[9] Zeki Saritoprak, *Islamic Spirituality: Theology and Practice for the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 95-112.

[10] Mohd Rosmizi and Salih Yucel, "The Mujaddid of His Age: Al-Ghazālī And His Inner Spiritual Journey," *Umran: International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies 02* (2016): 1-12.

[11] Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic* (London: Al-Hijra Publishers, 1944).

[12] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 122.

[13] Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazālī* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963).

[14] Umaruddin, M: *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazzali* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1996).

and his times of personal crisis.[15] Abu-Sway discusses the various theories concerning al-Ghazālī's motives for leaving Baghdad, and concludes that the autobiographical explanations in al-Ghazālī's "Deliverance from Error" (*al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*) are authentic, and this is relevant for understanding al-Ghazālī's choice of an ascetic life of inner warfare.[16] Several academics analyse his *Incoherence of the Philosophers* and his thought in relation to Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd.[17] Overall, while some earlier scholars depict al-Ghazālī as a mystic who renounced all philosophy, recent sources generally present him accurately as a hybrid Sufi ascetic and theologian who is reacting to abstract intellectualism, but who uses aspects of philosophy when this suits his purpose.[18]

It is surprising that despite the production of many books and articles on the great reformer, there has been almost nothing written specifically about his teaching on inner *jihād,* and no one has analysed his frequently used "struggle" metaphors. This is particularly odd given that al-Ghazālī himself says that he concluded after much study and personal seclusion that, "my only hope of attaining beatitude in the afterlife lay in piety (*taqwā*) and restraining (*kaff*) my soul from passion. The beginning of all that, I knew, was to sever (*qaṭ'*) my heart's attachment to the world."[19] He uses the same core struggle metaphor terms we will see in his ascetic writings. Al-Ghazālī repeats these ideas a little later in his autobiography when he adds that during his seclusion time:

> My only occupation was seclusion and solitude and *spiritual exercise (al-riyādat)* and
> *combat* (or struggle, *al-mujāhadat*) with a view to the *purification of my soul (tazkiyat*

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[15] Timothy J. Gianotti, "Beyond Both Law and Theology: An Introduction to al-Ghazalı's 'Science of the Way of the Afterlife' in *Reviving Religious Knowledge (Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*)," *The Muslim World*, Vol 101, October, 2011): 597-613; Jules Janssens, Al-Ghazālī between Philosophy (*Falsafa*) and Sufism (*Taṣawwuf*): His Complex Attitude in the Marvels of the Heart ('Ajā'ib al-Qalb) of the Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn, *The Muslim World (*2011), 614-32; Masood Ali Khan, "Ghazali," in *Encyclopedia of Islam,* Vol. 6 (New Delhi, Anmol, 2003), 45-51, 92-110.

[16] Mustafa Mahmoud Abu-Sway, "Al-Ghazālī's 'Spiritual Crisis' Re-considered," *Al-Shajarah* (vol. 1, no. I, 1996): 77-94. Nakamura largely agrees, Kojiro Nakamura, "An approach to Al-Ghazālī's Conversion," *Orient* (vol. XXI, 1985): 46-59; Also see Muhammad Hozien, "Al-Ghazālī's Turning point: A critical look at writings on Al-Ghazālī's Crisis," http://www.ghazali.org/articles/crisis.htm, accessed October 15, 2018.

[17] Barry Kogan, "The Philosophers Al-Ghazālī and Averroes on Necessary Connection and the Problem of the Miraculous," in Parviz Morewedge ed., *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* (Caravan Books, 1981), 113-32; J. P. Montada, "Ibn Rushd versus Al-Ghazālī: Reconsideration of a Polemic," *The Muslim World* (Vol. 82, Jan-Apr 1992): 113-31; G. J. Tomeh, "The Climax of a Philosophical Conflict in Islam," *The Muslim World* (Vol. 42, 1952): 172-89 ; See also Eric Ormsby, *Ghazali* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 56.

[18] See for example Ormsby, *Ghazali*, 65-86, who portrays this complex reality very well; Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19.

[19] Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh,* in *Al-Ghazālī's Path to Sufism and His Deliverance from Error: An Annotated Translation of Al-Munqidh Min Al Dal−al,* ed. and trans. Robert McCarthy (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2001), 53, كان قد ظهر عندي أنه لا مطمع (لي) في سعادة الآخرة إلا بالتقوى ، وكف النفس عن الهوى ، وأن رأس ذلك كله ، قطعُ علاقة القلب عن الدنيا بالتجافي عن دار الغرور .

al-nafs) and the cultivation of virtues and *cleansing of my heart* (*taṣfiyat al-qalb*) for the remembrance of God.[20]

This could almost serve as a summary of his core "struggle" chapters in his *Iḥyāʾ* since he uses the exact same terms there. Hence this thesis chapter identifies the metaphors that al-Ghazālī uses to discuss this inner combat and cleansing of heart, filling a lacuna in scholarship. I also show how he connects the struggle macrotrope to key issues such as free will, eschatology, and anthropology. Al-Ghazālī's many military, medical, and psycho-social metaphors will also be briefly compared to Isaac's phraseology, as a preliminary to the comparison in the final thesis chapter.

Al-Ghazālī's life and struggle

Given that others have provided much detail on al-Ghazālī's life, I shall briefly outline only the main events that bear most relation to his development of the concept of spiritual struggle.[21] Abu Hamid Muḥammad al-Tusi al-Ghazālī, commonly known as al-Ghazālī, was born in 1059 CE and died in 1111 CE.[22] The toponym "al-Ghazālī" is due to his birth in the village of Ghazāla, near to Tus in modern-day Iran. He was therefore likely a Persian, although most of his writings are in Arabic.[23] Because his father died when he was young, al-Ghazālī was raised by a Sufi who greatly influenced his future life, instilling in him an appreciation for the Sufi approach to character building.[24] As a young scholar he then spent time teaching in Khurāsān before being appointed the Chair of Theology at Baghdad's Niẓāmiyya College in 1091 CE, where he gained great prestige.[25] During this time he observed the character and impact of various leaders and saw first-hand how a person's inner life was reflected in their outer ostentation, pride, greed, and corruption.[26] Being in contact with the leaders of society he also noticed how much such poor character can corrupt society as a whole.[27] Böwering notes that he was also at this time, "particularly disillusioned by the

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[20] Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, (McCarthy, 56). لا شغل لي إلا العزلة والخلوة ؛ والرياضة والمجاهدة ، اشتغالاً بتزكية النفس ، وتهذيب الأخلاق ، وتصفية القلب لذكر الله . (emphasis mine).

[21] For example Ormsby, *Ghazali*, 21-64.

[22] Ebrahim, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, 275.

[23] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 10.

[24] Ebraham, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, 274; Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazālī,* 19-24.

[25] Abu-Sway, "Al-Ghazālī's 'Spiritual Crisis' Re-considered," 78; Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 19-20.

[26] Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazālī,* 108-16.

[27] Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazzali,* 28.

corruption affecting the scholarly circles of the college."[28] His teaching on inner spiritual conflict and social virtues is developed later during his seclusion period based on this specific historic context. While others may have also drawn similar conclusions, it was the more unique next phase of al-Ghazālī's life that cemented these lessons in his mind, and enabled him to write with such great depth.

While still a boy, al-Ghazālī studied Sufism for three years under the guidance of Yusuf al-Nassaj, and then learnt theology, philosophy, and natural sciences under Abu'l-Ma'ali al-Juwayni (d.1085 CE). Smith says that it was during this time under al-Juwayni that al-Ghazālī, "became impatient of dogmatic teaching and abandoned the policy of dependence upon authority," an approach that was central to his teaching from then on.[29] Al-Ghazālī became an experientalist in terms of his epistemology but stayed close to traditional Islam in his theology. Unlike many Sufis who became eccentric individualists, al-Ghazālī was eager to find truth from all sources and stayed close to the middle ground.[30] Smith writes that he undertook the "exhaustive study of the writings of the scholastic theologians, the philosophers, and finally, of the Sufis, believing that the truth must have been attained by one of these groups of thinkers."[31] This wide reading explains in part why he was able to find and then integrate truth from disparate sources, using his own experience and the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* as his guide. A breadth of teaching is evident in his works on theology such as the first Quarter of his *Iḥyā'* and in his best-known book *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*).[32] In these he teaches the standard Islamic approach to ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), poor tax (*zakāt*), pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*) etc. as found in traditional Muslim authors for example al-Bukhārī (d. 870 CE).[33] At the same time he argues against any dry rationalism that undermines the "spiritual" or mystical side of Islam. He says that the Islamic philosophers are "heretics" who have "renounced the faith altogether, by having indulged in diverse speculations" based on "Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle."[34] This is a theme repeated throughout many of his works, although it is the over-use of *falsāfa* (philosophy) rather than the appropriate use that he rejects, as seen by his own application of Greek

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[28] Böwering, "Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmed Moḥammad."

[29] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 15,16; See also Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology,* 30.

[30] Khan, "Ghazali," 45-51, 92-110; Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, (McCarthy, 19).

[31] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 22.

[32] Ebrahim, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, 275. For the dating of this and other works, see Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, 35-7.

[33] Author of the well-known *ḥadīth* collection the *Sahih al-Bukhari*.

[34] Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut Al-Falasifah*, Sabih Ahmad Kamali trans. (Lahore, Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963), 1, 2.

thought.

As a young scholar al-Ghazālī then spent time teaching in Khurāsān before being appointed as the Chair of Theology at Baghdad's Niẓāmiyya College in 1091 CE, during the Seljuq era.[35] It was during this time that he wrote *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, before undergoing a crisis and a "conversion" experience that shocked his colleagues and friends.[36] Despite all his academic knowledge, it seems that al-Ghazālī was unhappy with the state of his heart. For six months he struggled with what to do to cure his soul, and suffered an emotional breakdown. As a result of this crisis al-Ghazālī left Baghdad and went to Syria where he lived in solitude for two years, pursuing detachment from the world, especially from reputation and wealth.[37] Al-Ghazālī himself seems to emphasise ascetic struggle themes in his retelling of this time. He says that he engaged in, "retreat and *solitude*, *self-discipline* and *self-mortification*, being pre-occupied with the *cleansing of the soul*, the *amendment of character*, and the *purification of the heart* for the recollection of God Most High."[38] This self-description uses many terms from his *Iḥyā'*, especially in the chapter titled "The Book of Disciplining the Soul, Refining the Character, and Curing the Sickness of the Heart."[39] Al-Ghazālī commonly describes this inner struggle to develop character as the *jihād* against the *nafs,* or "struggle with the lower soul." His understanding displays a depth of lived experience and shows that he reflected much on his own inner temptations. Böwering says that this "intellectual exile" was a "period of intense intellectual incubation."[40] It was this time of separation and seclusion that greatly clarified and amplified al-Ghazālī's insights that he had started developing in Baghdad, and this is reflected in his linking of inner *jihād* with solitude, silence, and vigilance.[41]

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[35] Ormsby, *Ghazali,* 3-6; Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 19-20. Smith also notes that at this time Baghdad had 36 libraries, and medicine and philosophy were taught alongside theology following the tradition started in the House of Wisdom.

[36] Ebrahim, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, 275; Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 23.

[37] Khan, *Encyclopedia of Islam,* Vol. 6, 310-23; Ormsby, *Ghazali,* 87-98. Smith summarises this important period given his later emphasis on inner struggle: "He had come to realise that knowledge of the way to God was not the same as experience of that way; that to know the meaning of the renunciation of worldliness was not the same thing as actually to renounce this world and all its gifts. From his study of the writings of the Sufis and their lives, he saw that Sufism consisted not in words but in actual experience." Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 23. Smith describes his struggle to leave in detail on p.24.

[38] Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 25, (emphasis mine), citing Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 22; See also Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazālī,* 143-47.

[39] Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazālī,* 151.

[40] Böwering, *Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmed Moḥammad*, paragraph 2.

[41] Muhammad Hozien discusses this period of crisis and seclusion, and shows that attempts to explain this period away are invalid, in Hozien, "Al-Ghazālī's Turning point." See also Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazzali,* 81-3.

After two years in Syria, al-Ghazālī moved to Damascus and lived in a mosque, attracting the attention of more seekers.[42] There he lived an ascetic life, "wearing coarse clothing and practising the greatest abstinence in the matter of food and drink."[43] It was during his time of seclusion that he writes his *Iḥyā'*.[44] It is evident from his writing that al-Ghazālī learnt much from this time of ascetic retreat as it is richer than previous works and deals with asceticism both intensively and extensively. His work is replete with nuance and metaphor and expresses a deep appreciation for the ebbs and flows of devotion and the diversities of temptation. His understanding of the struggle with the soul (*nafs*) displays a depth of lived experience and shows that he reflected much on his own inner *jihād*. Yet because his teaching was immediately so popular, he fled Damascus and went to Jerusalem.[45] There he started "visiting various sanctuaries and shrines, living all the time the life of an ascetic, eating dry bread, wearing rags, carrying a bag for his scanty provisions and a staff in his hand, seeking to purify his soul by self-discipline and good works."[46] After ten more years al-Ghazālī returned to society, and his works and person became so popular that the Vizier appointed him as a teacher at the Niẓāmiyya College in Nishapur.[47] He again had close contact with the leaders of his country and sought to influence them for the better, before he died a few years later in 1111 CE.[48] This is important as it indicates that even during his lifetime, and despite some opposition, al-Ghazālī was seen by some Muslim leaders as embodying and reviving Islam. Only some considered his teaching as deviant and thus what he writes on spiritual struggle cannot be seen as heretical or out of the ordinary.[49]

Al-Ghazālī was an avid practitioner of spiritual and ascetic disciplines. His chapters on inner *jihād* in the *Iḥyā'* are not abstract but reflect his own experiential "proof" of the efficacy of his ascetic teaching, using many stories from his own experience.[50] He also

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[42] Khan, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 6, 310; Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 26-27.

[43] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 28.

[44] Böwering, *Ḡazālī, Abū Ḥāmed Moḥammad*; Winter, introduction, xxiv.

[45] Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, (McCarthy, 56); Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 28.

[46] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 29.

[47] Khan, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 6, 311; Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 31.

[48] Mohd Rosmizi and Salih Yucel, "*The Mujaddid of His Age: Al-Ghazālī And His Inner Spiritual Journey*," 7-8; Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazzali*, 84-5.

[49] This raises a significant question about the nature of early Islam that I have earlier discussed, vis.: To what extent do the Sufi writings on inner *jihād* reflect normative or majority Islam, as opposed to those authors such as Muḥammad al-Bukhārī (810-870 CE) and Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328 CE) who write little about Sufism and who, when they do mention *jihād*, predominantly discuss the violent external form. This topic requires further research.

[50] This personal biographical approach could be compared to the roughly contemporary Symeon the New Theologian, died 1022 CE, the first Greek ascetic to write in a similar vein about the primacy of lived personal experience over "dry" theology. A comparison of their works is sorely needed.

enjoyed long times of solitude and these led to his profound insights into his soul. His crisis led him to become more contemplative and he rejected his former legalism and speculations. Al-Ghazālī writes:

> When I desired to set forth upon the Sufi Path, and to drink of their wine, I considered my soul and saw that it was encompassed by many veils. So I retired into *solitude* and occupied myself with *self-discipline and self-mortification* for forty days, and I was given knowledge which I had not possessed before, purer and finer than I had yet known, and I considered it, and lo, it contained a *legalistic* element. Then I betook myself again to solitude and occupied myself with *discipline and self-mortification* for forty days, and then I was given other knowledge, still finer and purer than that I possessed at first, and I rejoiced in it: then I examined it and behold, it contained a speculative element.[51]

This autobiographical passage tells us much about al-Ghazālī. He was still very concerned with truth and right belief, but realised that it came only as a result of spiritual discipline and via revelation. Ascetic discipline is not an end in itself, but a path to greater encounter with God. It is also for al-Ghazālī not a once-off event but a lifelong struggle with the *nafs*.

Context

By al-Ghazālī's era Islam had become fragmented between several major dynasties and intellectual movements, and was a "time of agitation and turmoil."[52] The reformer himself laments that, "the disagreement of the Community of Islam about doctrines, given the multiplicity of sects and the divergency of methods, is a deep sea in which most men founder."[53] Al-Ghazālī's writings on fighting the *nafs* occur within the context of his desire to purify Islam of what he sees as sterile intellectualism and confusion. He is very concerned by the nominalism and especially the "excessive formalism" he identifies in Islam.[54] Al-Ghazālī considers that the *ʿulamāʾ* are harbouring a "sickness in their hearts," specifically that of

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[51] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 18, (emphasis mine), citing Subkī, *Tab.*, IV, 9,10, M. Riḍā, *Abū Ḥāmid* 23, Murtaḍā, *Itḥāf*, 9. Al-Ghazālī's continues, "So I returned to solitude a third time, for forty days again, and I received other knowledge, still finer and purer, but when I examined it, behold it contained an admixture of knowledge acquired by human means ('ilm) and so I had not yet overtaken those possessed of knowledge from on high (al-ʿulum ai-Laduniyya).' So I realised that writing over what has been erased is not like writing on what was originally pure and clean, and I had not really separated myself from speculation except in a few matters."
[52] Richard Joseph McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfilment* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), ix.
[53] Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh* (McCarthy, 18).
[54] Winter, introduction, xvi.

preferring love of the world above loving God, and that they have been "overpowered by this disorder."[55] This lack of spiritual leadership by the religious scholars resulted in a "deadly" and "chronic" "malaise" (or sickness), because the science of souls was "obliterated" among them.[56] Al-Ghazālī also views negatively the fanatical and divisive attachment to the various Islamic schools of thought (*madhāb*). He asserts that one of the main "veils" that separates a Muslim from God "can only be removed by renouncing one's fanaticism for the school of thought (*madhāhib*) to which one subscribes … and by striving (*yaḥris,* lit. being careful) to render one's sincerity genuine."[57] At the same time, al-Ghazālī disagrees with the more extreme Sufi elements that are antinomian (*ibāḥa*) and warns against copying their behaviour which he says "leads to complete destruction."[58] He especially writes against the Bāṭiniyya, i.e., the Isma'ili Shi'is, who he considered were rejecting correct Islamic belief and dividing the community.[59] Al-Ghazālī steers a course between these two extremes in his writings and it is this synthesis that, like al-Muḥāsibī's, is widely accepted.

Experientialism with a rigorous logical and traditional basis is the foundation of al-Ghazālī's teaching. He does not reject philosophy outright but places it as secondary to revelation and personal encounter with God. He demonstrates this throughout the *Incoherence* and then applies this approach in the *Iḥyā'*.[60] When it suits, he uses Aristotelian categories, but this is to teach the role of ascetic balance between two kinds of desires that can harm the soul. Science has a place but it is as a kind of proof of the mystical approach of the Sufi. Al-Ghazālī especially rejects two aspects of the philosophical approach of the *ulama* to knowledge—the claims to perfect understanding, and the divorce from spiritual practice.[61] Firstly, al-Ghazālī is very sceptical about the amount of religious knowledge obtainable from science.[62] Secondly, for al-Ghazālī, true Islam is both a set of beliefs in the head as well as in

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[55] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn,* Al-Ghazālī: On Disciplining the Soul, Refining the Character, and Curing the Sicknesses of the Heart, ed. and trans. T.J. Winter (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1995), (hereafter *Iḥyā'*), 22.6 (BDM, 63; Winter, 47), فقلبه مريض كما أن ... وقد استولى عليهم المرض . The English text is from Winter, and the Arabic text is from Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn, Kitāb al-Ri'āya li-Huqūq Allāh*. (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1982), hereafter BDM.
[56] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.6 (BDM, 63; Winter, 47), فلهذا صار الداء عضالاً والمرض مزمناً ... أنكر . Note the medical terms.
[57] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 75; Winter, 86), وإنما يرتفع حجاب التقليد بأن يترك التعصب المذاهب ...ويحرص في تحقيق صدقه بأن يرفع .
[58] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 78; Winter, 95), وذلك هو الهلاك العظيم Winter in Note A lists the three kinds of antinomianism that al-Ghazālī rejects in his *Iḥyā'*.
[59] McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfilment*, xxiii. xxxviii-xl.
[60] Walter Skellie, "The Religious Psychology of Al-Ghazzālī" (PhD. Thesis, 1977), xxxvi-xxxix.
[61] Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, (McCarthy, 27-42).
[62] Al-Ghazālī writes using his typical metaphorical style: "The mere physicist is like an ant which, as it crawls over a sheet of paper, observes black letters spreading over it, and refers the cause to the pen alone. The astronomer is like an ant of rather wider vision, which catches sight of the fingers moving the pen, that is, he

the heart, and it is a lived experience of God and his commands.[63] Al-Ghazālī states that the Sufi way of life could only be actualised by "knowledge and activity" (or action).[64] This can be seen throughout his *Iḥyā'* where the use of various metaphors and stories makes practical Al-Ghazālī's teachings on disciplining the soul. His understanding of spiritual struggle is dynamic as it comes from a divine source and his actual experience; it is not a static abstracted philosophy. Al-Ghazālī cites the words of Abū Yazid al-Bisṭāmī (d. *c.* 874 CE) to the Islamic theologians of his time: "You have taken your knowledge from these learned in outward ceremonial, a dead thing from the dead, but we have taken our knowledge from the Living One, Who does not die,"[65] emphasising that true Islam is a living encounter with the living God.

Al-Ghazālī's Sources

Al-Ghazālī is noticeable for the wide range of sources he uses, yet he is selective with them in order to lend authority to his teaching. Smith asserts that "The wide scope of al-Ghazālī's studies, aided by his extensive travels, enabled him to draw upon many sources for the ideas which he develops, and the terminology which he uses…(but the) most essential source was his own personal experience."[66] While al-Ghazālī rejects many of the conclusions of philosophy, his writing still in places shows that he is, "deeply influenced by Greek thought and especially by Neo-Platonism, and this influence is to be seen throughout his mystical writings. From Plotinus is derived the idea of God as the One Reality, the Source of all being."[67] Al-Ghazālī derives his doctrine of emanation from NeoPlatonism when he writes of, "the Many as emanating from the One, the Supreme," and that, "God is the First in relation to existent things, since all have emanated from Him in their order."[68] Plotinus teaches that the first emanation from the One was the Universal Mind, and al-Ghazālī also makes use of this term (*al-ʿaql al-awwal*), which he calls the Prior of all existences."[69] The writings of Plato

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knows that the elements are under the influence of the stars, but he is unaware that the stars are under the control of the angels. So also those whose eyes do not look beyond the phenomenal world are like those who mistake servants of the lowest rank for the king himself." Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 69, citing al-Ghazālī, The Alchemy of Happiness, 35.

[63] For a detailed understanding of his epistemology see Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, (McCarthy, 22-3, 58-64).

[64] Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, (McCarthy, 51).

[65] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 126, citing M. Riḍā, *Abū Ḥāmid,* 15.

[66] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 105.

[67] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 105. This is in evidence when al-Ghazālī writes using very Neo-Platonic language and says, "He cannot be apprehended by the understanding, none can apprehend the One but the One," cited by Smith, 105.

[68] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 106, 112-13.

[69] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 106. Smith discusses al-Ghazālī's use of Plotinian and Neo-Platonic ideas on

and Aristotle had been translated from Greek into Arabic in the two centuries prior to al-Ghazālī and had made an enormous impact on some Islamic scholars. It is not surprising therefore that al-Ghazālī had also studied these works and although he rejects most aspects, there are several parts that he absorbs. Al-Ghazālī's use of Aristotelian and Platonic categories and ideas is most clearly seen in his approach to character. He follows Plato and Aristotle by teaching that, "the fundamental good traits of character are four in number: Wisdom, Courage, Temperance and Justice."[70] He further asserts that good character consists of finding the "balance" (*al-aʿatidal*) between extremes, for example between the excess of courage which he says is "recklessness" (*tahawaran*), and its lack which is "cowardice (*jubin*)."[71] He then spends three pages explaining in depth what these four virtues are and how the mean contrasts with excess or lack in each virtue, giving copious examples.[72] Elsewhere al-Ghazālī speaks of finding "equilibrium" between the two polarities, "so that one remains in the centre and at the greatest possible distance from the two extremes."[73] He adds that, "The authentic mean between the two extremes is exceedingly obscure, being thinner than a hair and sharper than a sword."[74] Al-Ghazālī says that this narrow way between extremes is in fact the "Straight Path" (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*), a reference to the first surah in the Qur'ān which is recited by Muslims in every prayer.[75] In this prayer Muslims ask God to lead them on the "Straight Path," so al-Ghazālī is interpreting the Qur'ānic verse in a very Aristotelian sense of the mean between two extremes. Further on in the same section he admits that it is difficult to stay right on the narrow path, and thus he suggests that the "servant of God … should he be unable to do this properly, must at least strive (*yajtahid*) to keep to its vicinity."[76] Al-Ghazālī's idea of struggle here is very practical and grounded in his own lived experience of a divided human nature.

Other occasional sources for al-Ghazālī are the Old Testament, Jewish traditions, and various Christian sources. Scholars have ranged widely on how influential these are, with

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107-13 including many quotes. She suggests that some of these ideas came through direct reading and others possibly via Islamic philosophers such as al-Kindi. Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 112-13.

[70] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.2 (BDM, 54; Winter, 20), فإذن أمهات الأخلاق وأصولها أربعة: الحكمة، والشجاعة، والعفة، والعدل compare Plato's Republic Book IV, 426-435, and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* J.A. K. Thomson trans. (New York: Penguin, 1955), Book 1.xiii, (Thomson, 90).

[71] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.2 (BDM, 54; Winter, 20) الاعتدال ... تهوراً ... جبناً Compare Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* Book 2.vi, (Thomson, 101-2).

[72] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.2 (BDM, 54-55; Winter, 20-23).

[73] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.6 (BDM, 63; Winter, 48), cf. *Iḥyā'* 22.9 (BDM, 72; Winter, 74).

[74] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.6 (BDM, 63; Winter, 49), ولما كان الوسط الحقيقي بين الطرفين في غاية الغموض بل هو أدق من الشعر وأحد من السيف .

[75] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.6 (BDM, 63; Winter, 49), الصراط المستقيم .

[76] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.6 (BDM, 64; Winter, 50), ولكن ينبغي أن يجتهد الإنسان في القرب من الاستقامة إن لم يقدر على حقيقتها .

most modern thinkers rejecting the earlier position of Smith who speculated that "Al-Ghazali undoubtedly owed much to Christian sources … and not infrequently he makes use of New Testament texts."[77] It would be wrong however to place too much emphasis on these sources especially in relation to his teaching on struggle. Very little of al-Ghazālī's idea of inner *jihād* has any obvious direct Christian provenance. Smith's claim in particular, that al-Ghazālī, "constantly quotes the words of Christ," is a great exaggeration.[78] Smith does however rightly conclude that al-Ghazālī's thought is based fundamentally on the Qur'ān and earlier Sufis, and, "developed on lines distinctively Eastern and Islamic … there is no doubt that his chief sources are to be found in the writings of Muslim thinkers."[79] Timothy Winter summarises Massignon's solid argument thus:

> Against the traditional Orientalist dismissal of the Muslim source texts as outpourings of an arid legalism, and the claim that the richness of medieval Muslim spirituality must perforce be the product of foreign influence, he argued convincingly that it was the Prophet's intense and sustained experience of God, supported by his moral excellence, which provided the ultimate reference for Sufism.[80]

We must therefore consider the various Sufi texts that al-Ghazālī uses, since these along with the Qur'ān are his main sources. Al-Ghazālī in his autobiography explicitly says that he consulted the "writings of Harith al-Muḥāsibī, Abu Talib al-Makki, and the fragments handed down of the teaching of Abu Yazid al-Bistami, Junayd and Shibli."[81] Several key aspects of al-Ghazālī's teaching are directly built on al-Muḥāsibī, and al-Ghazālī quotes him on such topics as purification, wealth, music, reason, revelation etc.[82] Al-Ghazālī's use of al-Muḥāsibī reveals also the chain of Sufis descended from him that were influential in his ascetic

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[77] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 114- 15. See also Al-Ghazzālī, *Al-Radd al-jamil: a fitting refutation of the divinity of Jesus* Leiden: Brill, 2016, and Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Treiger discusses the extensive evidence for Christian-Muslim theological interaction and influence, but little of this is evident in the Revival, Alexander Treiger, "Origins of Kalām," 1, 6.

[78] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 116. She provides several quotes on 116-18.

[79] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 122.

[80] Winter, introduction, xvii; summarising Loius Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane.*

[81] Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, (McCarthy, 51). Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 123-27 also notes various teachings drawn from Abu Yazid al-Bistami and Shibli (a disciple of Junayd). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Harith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī was "one of the most important, and probably the earliest, of al-Ghazali's written sources," Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 123.

[82] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 123-25. After comparing their ascetic writings it is evident that, "al-Ghazali draws very largely for both the main principles of his teaching and his illustrations" from al-Muḥāsibī. Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 124. Smith also notes various aspects of al-Ghazālī's appropriation of al-Muḥāsibī including on prayer, purification, and the differences between reason and revelation. She states that they shared "the same distinction between the knowledge which can be acquired by study (*'ilm*) and the intuitive understanding (ma'rifa)."

writings, and one example is Junayd, a disciple of al-Muḥāsibī. In relation to struggle, al-Ghazālī quotes Junayd's words which demonstrate the connection between the love of God and the inner battle: "The sign of love is constant activity and *continual conflict* with sensual desire: the body (of the lover) becomes weary, but not the heart."[83] Some other aspects of al-Ghazālī's ascetic practice and mystical teaching come from Abu Ṭālib, al-Qushayrī, and al-Hujwīrī, all of whom al-Ghazālī shows he read in depth.[84]

The authority for al-Ghazālī's whole approach to inner *jihād* is the prophet and the words of the Qur'ān. In one place al-Ghazālī quotes an important *ḥadīth* that has Muhammad saying, "The believer is beset with five afflictions; a believer who envies him, a hypocrite who hates him, an unbeliever who makes war (*yuqaṭiluh*) on him, a devil who misguides him, and *a soul which struggles against him*."[85] Al-Ghazālī interprets this *ḥadīth* by adding, "He thus explained that the soul is an enemy which struggles with one, and which must be fought (*mujāhadatuh*)."[86] Al-Ghazālī proceeds to add further *ḥadīth* and quotations including from Jesus whom he quotes as saying, "Blessed is he who renounces a present desire for the sake of something promised which he has not beheld."[87] Al-Ghazālī's extensive use of citations demonstrates his concern to firmly root his teaching in authoritative tradition. According to Smith, there are parts of al-Ghazālī's Qaṣīda al-Tāʾiyya "which might well have been suggested by a study of St. Paul's spiritual struggles," such as:

> I have become at enmity with my self (the flesh). For it bids me to sin and I seek to restrain it. We are two antagonists, warring one with the other, Patiently I strive to overcome the flesh, With the troops of lust, it takes the field against me. What can patience do to withstand its onslaughts? If I grow faint in the fight, the flesh waxes strong. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, and forgive me, For Thou didst create me and Thou art my Lord.[88]

At the same time, much of this could be derived from al-Muḥāsibī or other Sufis, and Smith seems over-eager to draw a link to Christian writings.

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[83] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 127, (emphasis mine), citing *Iḥyā'* IV, 286.
[84] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 128-132.
[85] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 65; Winter, 56), المؤمن بين خمس شدائد: مؤمن يحسده ومنافق يبغضه وكافر يقاتله وشيطان يضله ونفس تنازعه .
[86] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 65; Winter, 56), فبين أن النفس عدو منازع يجب عليه مجاهدته .
[87] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 56), طوبى لمن ترك شهوة حاضرة لموعود غائب لم يره .
[88] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 118, citing Al-Ghazālī, *Qaṣīda al-Tāʾiyya* (Cairo, 1348 AH), fol. 8b. Cf. Eph. 4: 22; 6: 13-14.

Al-Ghazālī's teaching on inner *jihād* in his *Iḥyā'*

Al-Ghazālī's *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn,* possibly better "Revivification")*,* is his most clearly ascetic work wherein he develops at great length various ideas of inner *jihād*. The work is divided into four "Quarters" each of ten books, making forty "Books" in total. Each "Quarter" has a particular focus, with the first being the "Acts of worship" (*Rubbʿ al-ʿibadāt*), covering *zakat, salah, hajj* (poor tax, ritual prayer, pilgrimage) etc.[89] These are the so-called Pillars of Islam and other related practices, and here al-Ghazālī is quite traditional. The second "Quarter" is titled "Norms of Daily Life" (*Rubbʿ al-ʿadāt*) with books on the etiquette of travel, marriage, earning an income, music, and eating etc. On most of these topics al-Ghazālī is not exceptional, except that on music he follows other Sufis and praises good music and its beauty as a blessing from God. In some sense these first two "Quarters" form a pair, discussing the broad range of Islamic personal and social practice.

The last two "Quarters" more clearly form a pair, dealing with the two ways of life, that is—the condemnation of evil behaviour, and the praise of good behaviour. "Quarter Three" is titled "The Ways to Perdition" (*Rubbʿ al-muhlikāt*), and "Quarter Four" is "The Ways to Salvation" (*Rubbʿ al-munjiyāt*). This idea of the "Two Ways" is originally Jewish, being used by God in giving the Israelites the choice of two ways to live.[90] Whether or not al-Ghazālī is aware of this provenance is irrelevant but it does show that his understanding of soul-discipline exists within a "Semitic" framework where the correct response to God is of obedience to a set of moral standards. This is an aspect of the Islamic notion of the *'abd*, the servant of God, who is meant to choose the ways of life. Hence when approaching al-Ghazālī's writing it is important to recognise that he is fundamentally interested in right behaviour, and because this is prevented by the *nafs,* this lower soul is thus the enemy. This explains why "Quarter Three," although titled "Ways to Perdition," starts with three books on disciplining the heart. It is only through a victorious battle against the *nafs* that the *'abd* (believer, servant of God) can overcome the vices condemned in the last seven chapters, vis, rancor and envy, the tongue, the world, love of wealth, ostentation, pride, and conceit etc. In some ways these three books are the key to the whole last twenty as they introduce the

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[89] Ormsby, *Ghazali,* 111-19.
[90] Deut. 27: 28. It is also taken up by early Christian writers, featuring in the words of Jesus and in the opening of the Didache. *Didache*, in The Didache: Window on the Earliest Christians, ed. and trans. Thomas O'Loughlin (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 28-30, 161-169.

positive practices that bring salvation, which is the theme of all the last Quarter. The ten chapters of the final Quarter deal with patience, thankfulness, hope, right intention, poverty, vigil and self-examination, and remembrance of the afterlife. It is in these and in the third Quarter that al-Ghazālī is most clearly teaching the way of inner soul-discipline and spiritual battle (*jihād*) against Satan and the *nafs*. His central theme is that "the soul is an enemy which struggles (*mujāhadat*) with one, and which must be fought."[91]

My analysis of al-Ghazālī draws mainly from the three "introductory" books numbered twenty-one to twenty-three which deal with the basics of inner warfare. These Books are titled "The Marvels of the Heart," "On Disciplining the Soul," and "On Breaking the Two Desires." Al-Ghazālī's framework for understanding inner *jihād* can be most clearly seen in his specific book on how to cure the soul. This is Book 22 in his *Iḥyā'*, usually translated in English as "The Book of Disciplining the Soul, Refining the Character, and Curing the Sickness of the Heart."[92] The title al-Ghazālī gives this section uses three phrases which include several of the key words in his thought. *Riyādat al-nafs* means "disciplining the soul," and has the connotation of competitive exertion.[93] The second phrase *tahdhib al-'akhlaq* (Refining the Character), introduces *khuluq*, meaning character or ethics. The Muslim is to "refine" the character, with *tahdhib* (from the Arabic root *hadhaba*) having the sense of train, clean, and improve.[94] Finally, "curing the sicknesses of the heart" (*muʿalajat 'amrad al-qalb*)[95] is clearly usage of a medical metaphor, and al-Ghazālī explicitly expands upon this in his book. In his prologue he says, "Foul characteristics are the very *sicknesses of hearts* and the *disease of souls*, constituting an *illness* which deprives man of everlasting life."[96] He adds that, "In this Book we shall indicate a number of sicknesses of the heart, and provide a general discourse on how these are to be treated, without giving details of cures for specific ailments, since these will be set forth in the remaining Books of this Quarter."[97]

The importance of this book within the *Iḥyā'* as a whole can be seen from the summary that al-Ghazālī provides at the end of the final section. He says that, "Having

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[91] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 65; Winter, 56), فبين أن النفس عدو منازع يجب عليه مجاهدته .
[92] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.0 (BDM, 48; Winter, 3), كتاب رياضة النفس وتهذيب الأخلاق ومعالجة أمراض القلب .
[93] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.0 (BDM, 48; Winter, 3), رياضة النفس .
[94] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.0 (BDM, 48; Winter, 3), تهذيب الأخلاق .
[95] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.0 (BDM, 48; Winter, 3), معالجة أمراض القلب .
[96] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.0 (BDM, 49; Winter, 5), والأخلاق الخبيثة أمراض القلوب وأسقام النفوس إلا أنه مرض يفوت حياة الأبد، (emphasis mine).
[97] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.0 (the Prologue) (BDM, 49; Winter, 5), ونحن نشير في هذا الكتاب إلى جمل من أمراض القلوب وكيفية القول في معالجتها على الجملة من غير تفصيل لعلاج خصوص الأمراض، فإن ذلك يأتي في بقية الكتب من هذا الربع .

presented these two books," that is, Book One on the nature of the heart, and Book Two which is this Book 22 under discussion, "we must … now complete the 'Quarter of Destructive Devices' with eight further books" and he lists and briefly summarises their contents.[98] Al-Ghazālī explains the role of Book 22 as being, "an overall indication of the way by which the traits may be refined and the diseases of the heart cured."[99] Here again he indicates his overall approach and the framework through which the later books should be interpreted. His dominant metaphor of spiritual sickness is medical, and his cure is a mix of medical analogy, military fighting, and psycho-social self-discipline and soul-rebuking. I shall now discuss thematically al-Ghazālī's metaphors for the inner struggle.

In discussing al-Ghazālī's understanding of inner *jihād*, it is important to note that al-Ghazālī's ascetic teaching is full of metaphor, and he was renowned even in his lifetime for "the subtlety of his allusions."[100] This is important for comparing him with the Syrian Christian writers because not only does he use similar terms at times, but even his allusions and metaphors are at points noticeably alike. At the same time he invents many images that while grounded in the same macrotrope of struggle, are distinctly of al-Ghazālī and underived from any known Christian source. Al-Ghazālī is a vivid imagerist at heart and shares with many earlier Iranian Sufi writers a poet's view of life. Smith notes that even al-Ghazālī's "lesser works show the same literary characteristics and are equally lucid and well-reasoned, containing a wealth of imagery and appeals to analogy."[101] While often metaphorical, al-Ghazālī is also quite practical and pragmatic in his understanding of struggle. He teaches on hunger, sexual desire, ostentation, anger, and many other aspects, noting how difficult it is to be perfect and how one may overcome desires in different ways. He also reveals a realistic pastoral heart when he says "The method of discipline (*al-riāda*) and struggle (*al-mujāhadat*) varies from one person to the next, in accordance with their circumstances."[102]

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[98] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 79; Winter, 100-01), فلهذا وجب علينا بعد تقديم هذين الكتابين أن نستكمل ربع المهلكات بثمانية كتب إن شاء الله تعالى .

[99] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 79; Winter, 100-01), إشارة كلية إلى طريق تهذيب الأخلاق ومعالجة أمراض القلب .

[100] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 21.

[101] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 68. Smith adds that al-Ghazālī was a "lover of both plants and animals and a close observer of Nature in all her manifestations, [and this] is revealed in al-Ghazali's choice of images and illustrations."

[102] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn,* T.J. Winter trans., Al-Ghazālī: On Disciplining the Soul, Refining the Character, and Curing the Sicknesses of the Heart (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1995), (hereafter *Iḥyā'*), 22.8 (BDM, 69; Winter, 65), وطريق المجاهدة والرياضة لكل إنسان تختلف بحسب اختلاف أحواله .

Jihād metaphors

Al-Ghazālī quite consciously uses metaphors to explain his teaching, and these metaphors are not incidental but quite central to his approach. In his introduction to *An Exposition Detailing the Method Used in Refining the Character* he says that acquiring an equilibrium in character traits is like having an "equilibrium of the humours of the body."[103] Having made this brief connection al-Ghazālī then says, "Let us therefore take the body as our metaphor, and proceed with our discourse as follows."[104] The rest of the section is an extended discourse on medicines for the soul and various medical analogies for how to treat the soul and body such as one would treat a patient.[105] For example he writes that the *Shaykh* (teacher) must be careful with what exercises he prescribes for the cure of his patients:

> Were he to charge all his aspirants with one kind of exercise, (he) would *destroy* them and *kill their hearts*. Rather, attention should be paid to the illness of each aspirant, his circumstances, his age, his constitution, and the capacity of his body to perform such exercises, which should be prescribed on this basis.[106]

When he is discussing struggle, al-Ghazālī also extensively uses metaphors related to fighting, swords, discipline, etc. I discuss these below when I analyse al-Ghazālī's treatment of the themes of *jihād*, character, solitude, etc. but for now it is significant to note that as in Isaac, these metaphors cluster together around central motifs related to fighting with an antagonist and conducting inner *jihād*.

Jihād is a key organising concept for al-Ghazālī. It is one of the main recurring terms he uses for the path of true religion and ascetic attainment. He writes, "the soul (*nafs*) is an enemy which struggles with one, and which must be fought (*mujāhadatuh*)."[107] Al-Ghazālī emphasises the central idea implicit in the agonistic imagery—that there is an antagonist which must be fought against, in this case the soul. He writes that, "the final purpose of self-discipline (*al-riādat*), then, is to find one's heart constantly in the presence of God. This it

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[103] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.5 (BDM, 60; Winter, 39), كما أن الاعتدال في مزاج البدن al-Ghazālī works from the classical conception of health and sickness as caused by imbalanced humours.

[104] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.5 (BDM, 60; Winter, 39), فيه فلنتخذ البدن مثالاً Cf, "To understand this thing a metaphor may be employed, as follows;" *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 59; Winter, 35), ويعرف ذلك بمثال .

[105] Smith discusses at length al-Ghazālī's extensive use of metaphor especially his use of zoological, biological and medical imagery, Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic,* 68-81. Smith says that al-Ghazālī's works contain "a wealth of imagery and appeals to analogy," 68.

[106] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.5 (BDM, 61; Winter, 41), فكذلك الشيخ لو أشار على المريدين بنمط واحد من الرياضة أهلكهم وأمات emphasis mine. قلوبهم . بل ينبغي أن ينظر في مرض المريد وفي حاله وسنه ومزاجه وما تحتمله بنيته من الرياضة ويبني على ذلك رياضته .

[107] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 65; Winter, 56), فبين أن النفس عدو منازع يجب عليه مجاهدته .

will only be able to attain … by virtue of long inward strife" (or struggle—the Arabic *bi-ṭūl al-mujāhada* has a verbal form from the same root as *jihād*).[108] Al-Ghazālī as evidence quotes the oft-cited *ḥadīth* about the two forms of *jihād*, vis:

> And our prophet (PBUH) said to some people who had just returned from the jihad: 'Welcome! You have come from the lesser to the greater jihad.' 'O Emissary of God!' he was asked. 'And what is the greater jihad?' 'The jihad against the soul,' he replied.[109]

Al-Ghazālī continues by adding that Muhammad also said, "The real mujahid is he that wars with himself (or his *nafs*) for the sake of God."[110] Al-Ghazālī understands the essential nature of *jihād* as an ongoing effort (*tatul jihād*), much like Isaac does with *agōna*. He writes that to overcome bad desires requires "a protracted effort."[111] In reference to becoming a person of good character (one of his main goals), al-Ghazālī writes of, "the acquisition of these traits of character by means of spiritual struggle (*al-mujāhada*) and exercise (*al-riāda*)."[112] It should be noted here that the term "exercise" means self-discipline and strenuous effort, and these terms *al-mujāhada* and *al-riāda* are often paired in al-Ghazālī. The struggle also requires a continuous striving all through life, and al-Ghazālī writes that, "When your soul is pure, clean and of good character you should strive to keep it in this way and strengthen and purify it yet further, and when it is not, you should struggle to make it so."[113] This struggle is sometimes difficult and so the ascetic will at times experience the "bitterness of the struggle" (*mararat al-mujāhada*).[114] In many places al-Ghazālī links the central term *jihād* with his other very common ideas, for example he warns, "Know that a man who is dominated by sloth will consider unpleasant any spiritual struggle (*al-mujāhadat*) and discipline (*al-riāda*), or purifying of soul (*bi-tazkiat al-nafs*) or refinement of character (*tahdhib al-ʾakhlaq*)."[115] These six Arabic terms are central to his discussion of the struggle macrotrope.

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[108] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 78; Winter, 98), فإذاً منتهى الرياضة أن يجد قلبه مع الله تعالى على الدوام ولا يمكن ذلك غلا بأن also see 22.3 (BDM, 55; Winter, 24). يخلو عن غيره ولا يخلوا عن غيره إلا بطول المجاهدة

[109] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 56), وقال نبينا ةلقوم قدموا من الجهاد "مرحباً بكم قدمتم من الجهاد الأصغر إلى الجهاد الأكبر" قيل يا رسول الله ومال الجهاد الأكبر؟ قال "جهاد النفس" .

[110] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 56), المجاهد من جاهد نفسه في طاعة الله عز وجل .

[111] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 77; Winter, 91), فيه تطول المجاهدة .

[112] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 31-32), اكتساب هذه الأخلاق بالمجاهدة والرياضة .

[113] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.5 (BDM, 61; Winter, 40), فكذلك النفس منك إن كانت زكية طاهرة مهذبة فينبغي أن تسعى لحفظها وجلب مزيد قوة إليها واكتساب زيادة صفائها، وإن كانت عديمة الكمال والصفاء فينبغي أن تسعى لجلب ذلك عليها .

[114] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.5 (BDM, 61; Winter, 40), مرارة المجاهدة .

[115] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.3 (BDM, 55; Winter, 24), اعلم أن بعض من غلبت عليه البطالة استثقل المجاهدة والرياضة والاشتغال He uses the same terms as in the Chapter 22 Book title. بتزكية النفس وتهذيب الأخلاق

Military Metaphors

Jihād according to al-Ghazālī is against specific antagonists, and he quotes affirmatively al-Rāzi who said, "Man has three enemies (ʾaʿdaʾ): the world, the devil, and the soul."[116] Al-Ghazālī believes in a real being Satan who attacks from the outside trying to distract the Muslim from encountering God. He says, "Satan is like a dog at the door of the King of kings, hindering men from entering in."[117] Regarding the fight against the world, al-Ghazālī compares this world to a snake which is, "smooth to the touch and attractive in appearance, but possessed of deadly poison, and he advises men to beware of what they admire in it, because its allurements cloak the power to do men deadly harm."[118] In his discussion of these antagonists al-Ghazālī uses a number of related metaphors featuring shields, wrestling and bandits etc. He asserts that:

> Just as the shield serves to turn aside the arrow and water causes the plants to spring out of the earth, and the shield contends with the arrow, so also Prayer and evil wrestle together, and belief in the pre-determining power of God does not debar anyone from using armour or from watering the earth, after sowing the seed.[119]

Al-Ghazālī also teaches that there are four practices which "guard against bandits on the road to God," and these four are "solitude and silence, fasting and vigils," discussed in detail below.[120] This metaphorical use of bandits on the road demonstrates the existence of lawlessness in parts of the Middle East at the time and contrasts somewhat with Isaac who speaks mostly of soldiers and athletes. However the underlying macrotrope is still that of a kind of fight against another, and al-Ghazālī's wide range of metaphorical images for this "other" is quite impressive.

Military equipment features somewhat in al-Ghazālī as it does in Isaac. Book 22 includes the teaching, "Fight (*jahāda*) your soul (*nafsaka*) with the swords (*biʿasyāf*) of self-discipline (*al-riāda*)."[121] This is an image of quite violent internal battle especially given the popular conception of the Muslim warrior armed with twin curved scimitars. Al-Ghazālī explains the meaning of this fight by adding, "you should draw the sword of eating little from

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[116] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 57), أعداء الإنسان ثلاثة: دنياه وشيطانه ونفسه .
[117] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 156, citing the Iḥyāʾ, IV, 381.
[118] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ III,* 187, cited in Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 70.
[119] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 96.
[120] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 88), الخلوة، والصمت، والجوع، والسهر ; Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 92-93.
[121] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 57), جاهد نفسك بأسياف الرياضة .

the scabard of midnight prayer and sleeping briefly, and smite them" (ie. desires and sins).[122] He further lists the four practices involved in the struggle as "eating little, sleeping briefly, speaking only when necessary, and tolerating all the wrongs done to you by men."[123] There are other military metaphors that al-Ghazālī uses in relation to struggle that evidence his well-thought-through approach. He says that a person who has found a good spiritual master (*shaykh*) has found one who will "protect him and keep him safe in an impregnable fortress (*biḥusin ḥasin*) from which the highwaymen will be repulsed."[124] Al-Ghazālī continues that this fortress is built of four things: "solitude, silence, hunger, and sleeplessness (*al-khulwat, al-ṣamat, al-jawaʿa, al-suhura*)," mentioning aspects of struggle that I return to below.[125] Later he says that these four practices "constitute a shield and a fortress," adding shield to swords and fortress among his metaphorical weapons.[126] In a few places al-Ghazālī explicitly uses the term "soldiers" (*junūd*), for example in *An Exposition of the Soldiers of the Heart*.[127] Elsewhere he quotes a sage who says, "The man who is ruled (lit. captured) by his soul is a prisoner-of-war in the well of his desires, and is incarcerated in the gaol of his whims."[128] This example of synthetic parallelism is very evocative as it refers to the extremely painful experience of wartime prisoners who were sometimes kept at the bottom of wells.

Character and struggle

Good character (*khuluq*) forms a major part of Book 22, being central to al-Ghazālī's teaching on the inner struggle because good character is only obtained through "a long inward struggle."[129] He also warns against the person who thinks that he has already obtained good character and therefore that he can "dispense with any further struggle (*jihād*)."[130] Al-Ghazālī argues that "good character is equivalent to faith," showing how extremely important it is for him.[131] He cites the *ḥadīth* about Muḥammad that, "He was once asked, 'O Emissary of God! Which believer is best in faith?' and he replied, 'The one who is best in

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[122] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 57), جردت سيوف قلة الطعام من غمد التهجد وقلة المنام، وضربتها .

[123] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 57), القوت من الطعام، والغمض من المنام، والحاجة من الكلام وحمل الأذى من جميع الأنام .

[124] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 88). This imagery is remarkably similar to that used by Issac of the desert fortress. ويعصمه بحصن حصين يدفع عنه قواطع الطريق .

[125] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 88), الخلوة، والصمت، والجوع، والسهر .

[126] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 77; Winter, 91), جنة وحصن cf. Isaac.

[127] Book 21 of the *Iḥyāʾ*. Winter suggests that this word *junūd* is "probably an echo of the hadith 'Spirits are mobilised soldiers,'" Winter, *Disciplining the Soul*, Appendix III, 244, Note 3.

[128] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 58), قال بعض الحكماء: من استولت عليه النفس صار أسيراً في حب شهواتها؛ محصوراً في سجن هواها، .

[129] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.3 (BDM, 55; Winter, 24), بطول المجاهدة .

[130] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.9 (BDM, 69; Winter, 67), واستغنى عن المجاهدة .

[131] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.9 (BDM, 69; Winter, 67), فإن حسن الخلق هو الإيمان .

character.'"[132] Al-Ghazālī establishes the importance of good character with his opening chapter by quoting many *ḥadīth*, for example he cites the well-known *ḥadīth* that Muhammad said that, "I was sent only to perfect the noble qualities of good character."[133] He equates the ascetic life with noble character by citing al-Kattānī (d. 934 CE) as saying that, "Sufism is good character, so anyone who improves your character has improved your Sufism also."[134] He also cites the famous Sufi al-Junayd (d. 910 CE) who says that the four key virtues that lift a person "to the highest degrees" are "forbearance, modesty, generosity and good character."[135] He makes the connection between *khuluq* and the metaphor of soul punishment when he cites Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728 CE) as saying, "A man of bad character punishes his own soul,"[136] which highlights the irony that one who does not correctly "punish his soul" will endure more painful and destructive punishment.

This emphasis on good character has a solid base in the Qur'ān where Muhammad (specified in v2) is said to be of "great moral character," when it says, "And indeed, you are of a great moral character."[137] At the prophet's tomb in Medina the epitaph even emphasises the character (*khuluqu*) of Muhammad.[138] The triliteral root of *khuluq* is *khā lām qāf* (خ ل ق) which occurs 261 times in the Qur'ān, in eight derived forms, so it is clearly an important idea.[139] According to Lane, *khuluq* means "a natural, a native, or an innate disposition or temper," "moral character," and "fashion of the inner man."[140] The Qur'ān 2:21 says that God "created you," using a related verb *khalaqakum*. There is a connection between these two ideas—because God created humans to be holy, their true character is the created one, and implies that it is appropriate for humans to be like how God intended, that is, upright in character. This connection is made explicit by al-Ghazālī when he quotes the *ḥadīth* where Muhammad said that, "Never shall God make good the character (*khuluq*) and created form

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[132] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.1 (BDM, 50; Winter, 9), أحسنهم خلقاً

[133] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.1 (BDM, 49; Winter, 7). Winter notes several sources of this *ḥadīth*, see Winter, *On Disciplining the Soul,* 193, note 19. إنما بعثت لأتمم مكارم الأخلاق .

[134] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.1 (BDM, 52; Winter, 14), التصوف خلق فمن زاد عليك في الخلق زاد عليك في التصوف .

[135] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.1 (BDM, 52; Winter, 14), إنما بعثت لأتمم مكارم الأخلاق .

[136] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.1 (BDM, 52; Winter, 13), من ساء خلقه عذب نفسه .

[137] Qur'an 68:4, which has the Arabic *khuluqin,* moral character.

[138] Winter, Preface, in *Al-Ghazālī: On Disciplining the Soul,* v.

[139] 184 times as the form I verb *khalaqa* (خَلَقَ), twice as the noun *khallāq* (خَلَّاق), six times as the noun *khalāq* (خَلَاق), 52 times as the noun *khalq* (خَلْق), twice as the noun *khuluq* (خُلُق), 12 times as the active participle *khāliq* (خَالِق), twice as the form II passive participle *mukhallaqat* (مُخَلَّقَة), once as the form VIII verbal noun *ikh'tilāq* (اخْتِلَاق), "Quran Dictionary - خ ل ق" http://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=xlq#%282:21:6%29, accessed October 15, 2018.

[140] Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1863), 101. http://www.tyndalearchive.com/tabs/lane/, accessed October 15, 2018.

(*khalq*) of man and then allow him to be devoured by Hell."[141] He further teaches that "'Creation' (*khalq*) and 'character' (*khuluq*) are two expressions which may be used together. We say, for example, that 'So-and-so is good in his creation and his character', meaning that both his outward and inward aspects are good."[142] Here al-Ghazālī is emphasising the relation between the two derivatives of the same root which apply to the outer and inner person, and this connection between the two realms is common in both Sufi and Christian tradition. One aspect of good character is courage, and the connection between the character of courage and inner *jihād* is seen most clearly when al-Ghazālī writes, "Striving (*al-mujāhadat*) with one's self (*al-nafs*) is courage."[143] He expands his understanding of courage as inner *jihād* using very Aristotelian language when he clarifies that this courage "proceeds from the use of the irascible faculty under the control of the intellect and with just moderation."[144] Al-Ghazālī discusses bad traits of character at great length in his books.[145] He uses some especially vivid metaphors for bad behaviours in Book 22 "Disciplining the Soul," when he states that, "Bad traits of character are vipers and stinging scorpions" and that a sensible person would be busy "removing and killing the scorpion in question."[146] These images show the fighting nature of the effort to resist bad character. In the rest of Book 22 al-Ghazālī expands on the methods of struggle so as to obtain a good character.

Disciplining, Restraining, and Training the Soul

There are many places where al-Ghazālī describes this internal *jihād* as disciplining the soul or constraining it, for example, "Good traits of character may be acquired through self-discipline (*al-riāda*),"[147] and "through spiritual struggle (*al-mujāhadat*) and exercise (*al-riāda*, self-discipline)."[148] The person who has not yet attained to good character should "occupy himself with self-discipline (*al-riāda*) and struggle (*mujāhada*)."[149] Al-Ghazālī likens the soul to a young child that must be "disciplined" and "habituated to and instructed

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[141] *Iḥyā'* 22.1 (BDM, 50; Winter, 8). For the source of this *ḥadīth* see 194, note 26. A further *ḥadīth* has Muhammad asking God "Thou hast made good my creation (*khalqi*), therefore make good my character (*khuluqi*)."*Iḥyā'* 22.1 (BDM, 50; Winter, 9), note 37.

[142] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.2 (BDM, 53; Winter, 16), والأخلاق الخبيثة أمراض القلوب وأسقام النفوس إلا أنه مرض يفوت حياة الأبد،فنقول : الخلق والخلق عبارتان مستعملتان معاً، يقال : فلان حسن الخلق والخلق ـ أي حسن الباطن والظاهر ـ فيراد بالخلق الصورة الظاهرة، ويراد بالخلق الصورة الباطنة

[143] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.2 (BDM, 55; Winter, 23), والمجاهدة بالنفس هي الشجاعة التي .

[144] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.2 (BDM, 55; Winter, 23), ترجع إلى استعمال قوة الغضب على شرط العقل وحد الاعتدال .

[145] See for example Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* Books 23-30.

[146] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.7 (BDM, 65; Winter, 53), فإن الأخلاق السيئة حيات وعقارب لداغة: بإزالة العقرب وإبعادها وقتلها، .

[147] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 59; Winter, 35), هذه الأخلاق الجميلة يمكن اكتسابها بالرياضة .

[148] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 32), بالمجاهدة والرياضة .

[149] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.9 (BDM, 72; Winter, 74), بل ينبغي أن يشتغل بالرياضة والمجاهدة .

in goodness."[150] He uses several examples at one point to demonstrate good character and then concludes that, "These souls were made humble through discipline (*al-riāda*)."[151] This again draws a link between character, discipline, and struggle. After further explaining that good character comes through spiritual struggle he clarifies his meaning by writing, "By this I mean the constraining (*ḥiml*) of the soul to perform the actions which necessarily proceed from the trait desired. For example, a man who wishes to acquire the quality of generosity must oblige himself to do generous things."[152] While this may seem obvious as a way to build good habits, al-Ghazālī's use of the word "constrain" evokes an image of exertion and struggling. He explicitly says, "he should persist for a lengthy period in imitating the behaviour of the modest and struggling (*mujāhid*) against his soul," thus equating the two ideas in typical parallelism. Changing behaviour for al-Ghazālī is hard work, a kind of inner violence somehow like external *jihād*.[153] Elsewhere he summarises the "scholars and sages" who agree that "there is no path to felicity in the Afterlife except the denial of the soul's whims and desires."[154] He also writes of the one who "restrains (*naha*) his soul from its whims."[155] Further, "the bondsman (sic) of God is required to restrain (*manʿaha*) it from forbidden things. If the soul is not accustomed to being confined to the essentials, its desire will gain control."[156] This use of "restrict" and "confined" again evokes images of the prisoner or captured animal which no longer has freedom of movement. The soul must be restrained and limited. Al-Ghazālī's use of "control" also highlights the power conflict between the two sides in the "battle."

Al-Ghazālī at times uses the concept of training (*tarbiya*) to explain the struggle for the improvement in character. He says that character will "only be perfected through training (*tarbiyat*),"[157] and that a person must "train (*yumarin*) his soul."[158] In an extended simile al-

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[150] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.10 (BDM, 72; Winter, 75), رياضة ; يمال به إليه، فإن عود الخير .
[151] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.9 (BDM, 72; Winter, 74), فهذه نفوس قد ذللت بالرياضة .
[152] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 32), وأعني به حمل النفس على الأعمال التي يقتضيها الخلق المطلوب. فمن أراد مثلاً أن يحصل لنفسه خلق الجود فطريقه أن يتكلف تعاطي فعل الجواد وهو بذل المال، .
[153] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 32), فطريقه أن يواظب على أفعال المتواضعين مدة مديدة وهو فيها مجاهد نفسه ومتكلف إلى أن يصير ذلك خلقاً له وطبعاً فيتيسر عليه .
[154] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 67; Winter, 60), أن لا طريق إلى سعادة الآخرة إلا بنهي النفس عن الهوى ومخالفة الشهوات .
[155] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 65; Winter, 56), ونهى النفس عن الهوى He also asserts that the soul should not be given free rein and that "one should restrict (*muḍṭar*) oneself to what is necessary," Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 67; Winter, 60) مضطر إليه على قدر الحاجة والضرورة .
[156] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 68; Winter, 62), فالشهوة واحدة وقد وجب على العبد منعها من الحرام فإن لم يعودها الاقتصاد على قدر الضرورة من الشهوات غلبته .
[157] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.5 (BDM, 61; Winter, 39), إنما تكمل بالتربية وتهذيب الأخلاق والتغذية بالعلم .
[158] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.5 (BDM, 62; Winter, 43), ويلزمه خدمة من ساء خلقه حتى يمرن نفسه على الاحتمال معه .

Ghazālī likens the soul to "falcons to be trained (*tadibih*)."[159] He outlines how trainers use dark chambers and meat to train a falcon and likens this to how the Sufi must train the soul: "The soul is similar: it does not become tame before its Lord or enjoy His remembrance until it is weaned from its habits."[160] He then extends the simile by discussing the training of a horse, using the key term "restraining" again. Al-Ghazālī writes, "Similarly, the riding-beast initially shies away from the saddle and bridle, and will not be ridden, and has to be forced (*qaharān*) to endure these things, and must be restrained (*al-quyud*) with chains and ropes from roaming at will."[161] He then summarises, "The disciplining of the soul is similar to that of birds and riding-beasts," showing again his understanding of the soul as needing training and as being somehow animal-like.[162] That al-Ghazālī sees various training terms as roughly equivalent is shown in this section by his interchanging of "trained," "restrained," and "disciplining." These are a cluster of related struggle ideas that al-Ghazālī uses repeatedly and interchangeably for effect. The experience of seclusion allowed the very disillusioned al-Ghazālī to reflect on his own inner struggles and to develop a clear set of values for a healthy self and society. He understood from his time of withdrawal that the core values of courage, self-discipline, humility and so on require a training of the soul. Good character is only obtained by special effort.[163] Finally, the purpose for al-Ghazālī of this discipline is to both refine the character and to experience God. He summarises his whole Book by saying that his described methods are those "by which the aspirant should be progressively disciplined (*riadat*) and trained (*tarbiyatuh*) until he comes to the encounter with God."[164]

Medical and Psycho-Social metaphors

Medical and Psycho-Social metaphors are used by Al-Ghazālī in several places to convey this similar concept of cleansing of the soul through "inner violence." He writes that the purpose of developing good character and habits is "to cut (*yanqaṭ' 'an*) the love of this world away from the soul and to set firmly therein the love of God."[165] As well as the previously-noted metaphor of healing, al-Ghazālī also warns against "rejoicing in the world [which is] a deadly

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[159] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 68; Winter, 63), وفعلوا بها ما يفعل بالبازي إذا قصد تأديبه .
[160] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 68; Winter, 64), فكذلك النفس لا تألف ربها ولا تأنس بذكره إلا إذا فطمت عن عادتها بالخلوة .
[161] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 68; Winter, 64), وكذلك الدابة في الابتداء تنفر عن السرج واللجام والركوب فتحمل على ذلك قهراً، وتمنع عن السرج الذي ألفته بالسلاسل والقيود أولاً .
[162] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 68; Winter, 64), فكذلك تؤدب النفس كما تؤدب الطير والدواب .
[163] Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazzali,* 205.
[164] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 79; Winter, 100), فهذا منهاج رياضة المريد وتربيته في التدريج إلى لقاء الله تعالى .
[165] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 33), وغاية هذه الأخلاق أن ينقطع عن النفس حب الدنيا ويرسخ فيها حب الله تعالى .

poison (*sam qātal*) which runs in a man's veins."[166] Poison kills and thus must be rejected or counteracted, and al-Ghazālī's categorisation of the world as an attacking agent that must be repelled is thus a quite vivid struggle image. He also writes that Sufis have "weaned their souls" from their worldly delights, evoking the picture of the nursing mother and infant.[167] This is a less violent metaphor but still includes the notion of the self and an "other" that one must withdraw from.

Another term used by al-Ghazālī that is part of this cluster of related ideas is that of "refining" (*tahdhib*) the soul. This term is used in the title of the Book and also in several places in it.[168] Al-Ghazālī suggests that the role of the purified person, the good Shaykh, is that of "refining (*tahdhib*) the souls" of others.[169] Such a good teacher is a "physician" and the student should "stay with him, for it is he who will deliver him from his sickness," continuing the medical imagery we see many times in al-Ghazālī.[170] Fathers should also refine their children's character, and in a passage that links this to discipline al-Ghazālī writes, "A father may strive to protect his son from fire in this world, but yet it is of far greater urgency that he protect him from the fires which exist in the Afterlife. This he should do by giving him discipline, teaching him and refining his character."[171]

Rebuking and renouncing

There are points where al-Ghazālī writes of rebuking the soul in much the same way as al-Muḥāsibī. He notes that:

> Abu'l-ʿAbbās al-Mawṣilī used to say to his soul, 'O soul! Neither do you revel in the world with the sons of kings, nor do you struggle for the Afterlife with the ascetics (tajtahidin, lit. those who are extra struggling). It is as though you had imprisoned me between Heaven and Hell. O Soul! Are you not ashamed?'[172]

Given that shame is a central aspect of Arab culture this is a stinging rebuke. According to al-

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[166] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 68; Winter, 62), وذلك الفرح بالدنيا سم قاتل يسري في العروق فيخرج من .

[167] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 68; Winter, 63). He also says the soul must be "weaned from its habits" *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 68; Winter, 64) فطمت عن عادتها .

[168] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.0 (BDM, 48; Winter, 3), تهذيب الأخلاق .

[169] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.7 (BDM, 65; Winter, 54), تهذيب .

[170] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.7 (BDM, 65; Winter, 54), فمن وجد ذلك فقد وجد الطبيب فليلازمه فهو الذي يخلصه من مرضه وينجيه من الهلاك الذي هو بصدده .

[171] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.10 (BDM, 72; Winter, 75), ومهما كان الأب يصونه عن نار الدنيا فبأن يصونه عن نار الآخرة أولى؛ وصيانته بأن يؤدبه ويهذبه ويعلمه محاسن الأخلاق .

[172] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 57), لا في طلب الآخر مع العباد تجتهدين .

Ghazālī, Yūsuf ibn Asbaṭ says that good character involves "blaming oneself," which is another form of self-rebuke.[173] Al-Ghazālī extends this self-blame, which is a kind of violence against one's desires for prestige, and recounts a story that shows how far to attack one's public status. He says, "A woman once said to Mālik ibn Dīnār, 'You hypocrite!' And he said, 'Woman, you have found my name which everyone else in Basra has mislaid!'", a story of immense impact in a highly honour-valuing culture.[174] In his prologue to Book 22 he writes that his work will provide an, "Exposition of Textual Evidence Showing that the Sole Way to cure the Heart is by *Renouncing one's Desires*," which he lists along with several other themes and seems to see as an aspect of spiritual struggle (*mujāhadat*).[175] The word "renouncing" denotes a social activity where a person speaks against and shuns something or someone. This is another form of antagonism, and thus renouncing is an appropriate dimension of the struggle macrotrope. Many of the most explicit struggle phrases in this exposition have already been quoted above, as al-Ghazālī's section about "renouncing desire" mainly consists of his discussion of broader struggle concepts such as cutting off desire, fighting the soul, and watching over the heart etc.[176] Al-Ghazālī does however add a few thoughts on the importance of this renouncing. He says that this effort is short compared to eternity, and that, "one must struggle (*mujāhadat*) and endure," "for the *jihād* can only end at death."[177]

Self-mortification

At several points al-Ghazālī seems to use variations of the "self-mortification" language we saw earlier in al-Muḥāsibī. He says that in relation to one's desires and disobedience to God, these have to be, "destroyed (*kafā*) or weakened (*daʿīf*) by virtue of struggle (*bi-al-mujāhada*)."[178] Further, if one sins then he should, "compel his soul to accept a punishment for this," and "intimidate it" so that the soul will not defeat him.[179] This language is not as strong as self-death but is more of a kind of self-subjugation, using the metaphor of the total defeat of the enemy. Al-Ghazālī notes that for the successful Sufi, "His greed will have been

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[173] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.9 (BDM, 71; Winter, 73), والرجوع بالملامة على النفس .
[174] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.9 (BDM, 71-72; Winter, 74), وقالت امرأة لمالك بن دينار رحمه الله: يا مرائي، فقال: يا هذه وجدت اسمي الذي أضله أهل البصرة .
[175] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.0 (BDM, 48; Winter, 6), (emphasis mine), المجاهدة .
[176] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 66-69; Winter, 57-66).
[177] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 69; Winter, 66), للجهاد آخر إلا بالموت ; Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 69; Winter, فلا بد من الصبر والمجاهدة (65 .
[178] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 77; Winter, 92), فإذا كفى ذلك أو ضعف بالمجاهدة .
[179] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.5 (BDM, 62; Winter, 45), فينبغي أن يلزم نفسه عقوبة عليه ... النفس بعقوبة .

subjugated (*yankasir*)."[180] Earlier I noted that al-Ghazālī sees the bad traits of character as "scorpions'. Given that these traits are an aspect of one's soul, his suggestion that a person should focus on "removing and killing the scorpion in question" can also be seen as a kind of violence against a part of the self. [181] At other points al-Ghazālī writes of "opposing" (*muḍādat*) one's desires, which is less strong but still retains the idea of an antagonistic fight.[182] For al-Ghazālī, the *nafs* must not be so much "killed," as disciplined and then united to God. This reflects a certain view of the human to which I shall return in a section on al-Ghazālī's anthropology. As previously quoted several times, one of the main enemies in the spiritual battle is the *nafs* (lower soul). Al-Ghazālī writes often of the fight against the *nafs*, often as a parallel to the idea of disciplining the soul. Al-Ghazālī sees the *nafs* as needing discipline because otherwise it will enslave the Sufi and overwhelm with desires. He writes:

> Once I had been a slave: Lust was my master,
>
> Lust then became my servant: I was free.
>
> Leaving the haunts of men, I sought Thy Presence,
>
> Lonely, I found in Thee my company.
>
> Not in the market-place is found the treasure
>
> Nor by the ignorant, who know not Thee,
>
> Who taunt me, thinking that my search is folly,
>
> But at the end, Thou wilt be found with me.[183]

Sherif explains how al-Ghazālī delineates two meanings of the term *nafs* in his *Iḥyā'* Book 31.[184] While sometimes *nafs* can mean the soul as a whole, it is primarily used by al-Ghazālī to mean disordered passions or the "lower soul," which Sherif also calls the "baser faculties" of the soul.[185] Ultimately, al-Ghazālī is taking his view of the *nafs* from the Qur'ān.[186] It must be recognised that this Islamic view of the soul is somewhat different to the typical Western view, but has similarities to the Eastern Christian conception.

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[180] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.5 (BDM, 62; Winter, 43), وينكسر شرهه .

[181] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.7 (BDM, 64; Winter, 53), واشتغلنا بإزالة العقرب وإبعادها وقتلها .

[182] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 77; Winter, 92), مضادة .

[183] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 84, citing Murtada, *Ithaf*, 24.

[184] Sherif, *Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Virtue,* 119.

[185] Sherif, *Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Virtue,* 119.

[186] Zeki Saritoprak, *Islamic Spirituality,* 98-102. For an excellent overview of the fight against the *nafs*, protecting the heart, and repentance, see especially Saritoprak, *Islamic Spirituality,* 64-91. For a good discussion of the various elements or interpretations of *nafs* in the Qur'ān, see Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 129-42. The use of "*nafs*" alone without attributes refers to a human person, but with attributes can mean for example, the "evil commanding soul," the "self-reproaching soul," or the "tranquil soul."

Watching and guarding

In his *Iḥyā'* Book 21 al-Ghazālī teaches six "Steps Toward Change," namely *Mushāraṭah* (contract), *Murāqabah* (watching or guarding), *Muḥāsabah* (evaluating or self-examination), *Muʿāqabah* (consequence), *Mujāhadah* (struggle or effort), and *Muʿātabah* (return).[187] This idea of "steps" in the spiritual life connects with the metaphor of spiritual struggle as a "journey" undertaken by the "wayfarer."[188] This is not as violent as fighting, but is an exacting and protracted heroic effort, the root meaning of *jihād*.[189] Al-Ghazālī uses these expressions "path" and "struggle" together several times, for example he writes of the "path of struggle,"[190] (*tariq al-mujāhada*) and of "deadly traps and hazardous places which lie along the Path."[191] He warns that a person without a spiritual teacher is like one who "sets out alone and with no guide along the dangerous roads,"[192] and that, "The obstacle which bars us from attaining to God is therefore our lack of *wayfaring* (*sulūk*)."[193] While in this context *jihād* is just one of the six steps alongside vigilance and self-examination, elsewhere these other ideas are described as a kind of *jihād*, and thus it is better to see all the terms as inter-related within the broader over-arching macrotrope of struggle.

The second of al-Ghazālī's "steps" is *murāqabah* (watching or guarding) and he writes frequently of the importance of watching over the soul and guarding it. He says, "Constantly watch (*turāqib*) over your soul."[194] Using a parallel phrase he says that the person who has worldly success should renounce it and then "keep watch (*li-rāqib*) over his heart until it occupies itself with nothing but remembrance of God."[195] This watching involves staying attentive to the desires that arise in the soul, "until he extirpates the stuff of which these are made," directly linking watchfulness with the discipline of the soul.[196] This watchfulness is ongoing and requires much effort, and al-Ghazālī describes watching continually as a struggle (*jihād*). "Let him persevere in this [watching] for the remainder of

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[187] I shall not discuss the theme of mu'atabah (return) because it is more the result of ascetic struggle, or a sister aspect of Sufism along with inner jihad, and is discussed by other authors. See for example Reynold Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1914), 148-68.

[188] Brock Bingaman, "A Common Vision: John Cassian and al-Ghazali's Correlative Conceptions of the Spiritual Life," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* (20:2, 2009):171-182 (172-3); cf. al-Muḥāsibī's similar language.

[189] I noted earlier that *agōna* in Syriac has this similar heroic journey meaning.

[190] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 77; Winter, 92), طريق المجاهدة .

[191] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 78; Winter, 95), هذه مهالك الطريق ومواضع أخطارها .

[192] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 88), فمن سلك سبل البوادي المهلكة بغير خفير فقد خاطر بنفسه وأهلكها .

[193] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 75; Winter, 84), فإذن المانع من الوصول عدم السلوك .

[194] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.6 (BDM, 63; Winter, 48), فلا تزال تراقب نفسك .

[195] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 69; Winter, 65), ليراقب قلبه حتى لا يشتغل إلا بذكر الله .

[196] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 69; Winter, 65), حتى يقمع مادته مهما ظهر .

his life, for the *Jihād* can only end at death."[197] The very term *murāqabah* literally means watching over "another" and this implies a sense of an antagonism between two elements, in this case the "true self" and the lower soul.[198] This antagonism thus makes it an appropriate metaphor related to the macrotrope of struggle. Another part of watching is to notice in what way one's character is flawed and how the *nafs* are active in one's heart and actions. Al-Ghazālī writes, "draw inferences about your character from the evidence of what deeds it finds easy and which ones hard, until the connection between your heart and money is broken."[199] Al-Ghazālī uses his discussion about the heart's attachment to money as one example of a more general principle about breaking the heart's attachment to the world. The evidence that watchfulness reveals will indicate where the corruption of the heart lies, and the solution of "breaking" is another metaphor with a violent edge.

One whole section of Book 22 concerns how to discipline children so as to develop their good character. While the advice given is all very reasonable and practical, the language used at points about "discipline" and "watching" makes it possible that this functions simultaneously as a metaphor for the human soul. Al-Ghazālī writes that a parent must "watch over" (*yurāqibuh*, from the same root r-q-b as *murāqabah*) their child, and especially when "signs of discretion appear in him" then he must be "watched over (*murāqabatah*) carefully."[200] Whether or not this serves as an extended struggle metaphor, the emphasis is again on watching over the soul to expel the desires so it is at least a parallel to adult inner struggle. He continues, "The first trait to take control of him will be greed for food; he is to be disciplined (*yuʾdib*) in this regard," making a chronological and causative link between watching and its attendant discipline.[201] This is an interesting parallel to the common Syrian ascetic advice for young monks, for example John Climacus and others who write of overcoming the desire for food as a first step to developing strength to fight the more difficult lusts of the flesh.[202] Ultimately the model of watching is God Himself. Al-Ghazālī advises that even young children should be taught to recite every day that "God watches (*shāhidi*)

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[197] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 69; Winter, 66). Winter here for some reason does not translate the Arabic but leaves it as *jihād*. وليلازم ذلك بقية العمر فليس للجهاد آخر إلا بالموت .

[198] Sherif, *Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Virtue,* 119.

[199] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.6 (BDM, 63; Winter, 48), وتستدل على خلقك بتيسير الأفعال وتعسيرها حتى تنقطع علاقة قلبك عن الالتفات إلى المال فلا تميل إلى .

[200] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.10 (BDM, 72; Winter, 76), يراقبه ... ومهما رأى فيه مخايل التمييز فينبغي أن يحسن مراقبته .

[201] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.10 (BDM, 72; Winter, 76), وأول ما يغلب عليه من الصفات شره الطعام فينبغي أن يؤدب فيه .

[202] John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent,* trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (New York: Missionary Society of St Paul, 1982), 169-70; See also Philoxenos, *The Discourses of Philoxenos of Mabbug* trans. Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 2013), 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."

over me."[203]

Just as in Isaac, al-Ghazālī also speaks of guarding the soul. In relation to the "three enemies" he says, "Be on your guard (*faḥtaras*) against the world through renunciation, against the devil by disobeying him, and against the soul by abandoning desire."[204] Those who want to be a servant of God must reject envy and other false desires, and "guard" (*ḥadhara*) against such.[205] As the aspirant grows in remembrance of God, "he should guard (*yurāqib*, lit. discipline) his heart against whisperings (*wusāwus*) and notions connected with the world."[206] Here al-Ghazālī is making a connection between this idea of guarding the heart with the Qur'ānic prayer of protection against Satan and with the Surah about the whisperings of the jinn.[207] This is shown by his teaching just a few sentences later that, "The devil may whisper (*wusāwas*) to him things which constitute disbelief," but these can be fought and will "do no harm" if he "strives to extirpate them from his heart."[208] So we can see that for al-Ghazālī, one aspect of watching is to notice the inclination to bad deeds so as to overcome the desires, and guarding is to ensure that the heart does not fall into bad desires and behaviour. These activities are a constant struggle and require significant discipline for the *murīd* (aspirant or disciple).[209]

Self-examination and Vigilance

The third of al-Ghazālī's steps is Self-examination (*muḥāsabah*). He writes about this at length in his Book 38 *On Holding Vigil and Self-Examination*, linking these two themes together.[210] Al-Ghazālī quotes an early Sufi that, "The pious person examines (*muḥāsibat*) his soul more severely than if he were a tyrannical ruler," a vivid and terrifying image that emphasises the social violence to the self.[211] He further discusses how such self-examination includes reproaching oneself about every word and action, and evaluating whether the

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[203] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.10 (BDM, 74; Winter, 81), الله شاهدي .

[204] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 57-58), فاحترس من الدنيا بالزهد فيها، ومن الشيطان بمخالفته، ومن النفس بترك الشهوات .

[205] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 79; Winter, 99), حذر .

[206] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 77; Winter, 94), عند ذلك يلزمه أن يراقب وساوس القلب والخواطر التي تتعلق بالدنيا .

[207] Qur'an 7:200. "And if a whisperer from the devil come to you, then seek refuge in God."

[208] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 77; Winter, 94), ساوس al-Ghazālī also says a few sentences later that one must "drive them away," referring to these whisperings. من وساوس الشيطان ما هو كفر وبدعة. ومهما كان كارهاً لذلك ومتشمراً لإماطته عن القلب لم يضره ذلك .

[209] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 74; Winter, 83), المريد .

[210] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 38, *Al-Ghazali on Vigilance and Self Examination*, Anthony Shaker trans. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2015).

[211] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 38.3, (Shaker, 35), التقي أشد محاسبت لنفسه من سلطان غاشم .

motivation was from God or the commanding soul.[212] This is because every action will be judged by God on the "Day of Resurrection," and thus "The faithful one manages his soul and calls it to account for the sake of God. The Reckoning is lighter for those who examine (ḥasāb) themselves in this world."[213] This understanding is very similar to the approach of al-Muḥāsibī who also links self-examination with the fear of judgement, and who discusses it with similar social violence metaphors. I will therefore abbreviate al-Ghazālī's repetition of al-Muḥāsibī's approach, and only analyse al-Ghazālī's teaching on vigilance, in particular the night vigil prayer.

Vigilance and Self-Examination are related according to Sherif because, "both apply to states of the soul in its inner struggle against its baser faculties."[214] Al-Ghazālī himself links them as two of the six essential components in the "struggle to subdue" the *nafs*.[215] Prayer is an important aspect of the spiritual struggle for al-Ghazālī as for most Sufis.[216] Al-Ghazālī also at times specifies the particular value of prayer in the night vigil, although not in the same depth as Isaac. He writes that the person should not despair of being able to "perfect" his soul even "when he has wasted one night."[217] Al-Ghazālī emphasises the importance of the night prayer as an aspect of the inner *jihād* when he writes, "you should draw the sword of eating little from the scabbard of midnight prayer and sleeping briefly, and smite them" (meaning the desires and sins).[218] He also lists "sleeping briefly" as one of the four activities that are essential in spiritual battle with the soul, since it "purifies your aspirations."[219] Sleeplessness and the night prayer is also seen as being "wakeful," a concept in Sufism that broadly means attentive awareness all through life. There is a connection between the wakeful state of the Sufi and the first steps into the inner spiritual battle—Al-Ghazālī describes the beginning of the spiritual struggle as being when a man is "awake."[220] He elsewhere notes four important defensive practices in the spiritual fight that are like a fortress: "solitude, silence, hunger and sleeplessness" (*al-khulwat, al-ṣamt, al-jawaʿa, al-*

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[212] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 38.3, (Shaker, 35-7).
[213] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 38.3, (Shaker, 34), المؤمن قوّام على نفسه يحاسبها الله. وإنا خف الحساب على قوم .
[214] Sherif, *Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Virtue,* 119.
[215] Sherif, *Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Virtue,* 119.
[216] Allahbaksh Brohi, "The Spiritual Dimension of Prayer", in *Islamic Spirituality,* ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 131-43.
[217] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.4 (BDM, 60; Winter, 36), تكميلها … بتعطيل ليلة .
[218] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 57), جردت سيوف قلة الطعام من غمد التهجد وقلة المنام، وضربتها .
[219] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 57), ومن قلة المنام صفو الإرادات .
[220] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 75; Winter, 85), متنبه .

suhra), and all of these relate to the solitary and wakeful night vigil.[221]

Hunger is important for al-Ghazālī because, "Sleeplessness is also a consequence of hunger."[222] He says that other Sufis attained their high state because of, "hungering the belly, sleeplessness, silence, and isolation from men," and adds that, "The benefit yielded by hunger to the illumination of the heart is an obvious thing to which experience attests." [223] Sleeplessness and hunger work together according to al-Ghazālī, because sleeplessness, "clears, purifies and illumines the heart."[224] When this is added to the clarity brought about by hunger the heart will be "as a shining star."[225] Night prayer and vigil was a common practice of al-Ghazālī's, not just his teaching. Smith says that, "Much of his time was given to the prayer-life: we know that he spent whole days and nights in devotion and he has left us many of his prayers, both of intercession and adoration."[226]

Silence, Solitude, and Peace

Closely linked to prayer and vigilance are Silence and Solitude, which are two more dimensions of the inner *jihād* that enable the servant of God to reach perfection. Al-Ghazālī teaches that "speaking only when necessary" is essential in the inner war with the soul because it saves you from "hazardous afflictions."[227] He asserts that, "Silence brings about a fecundity of the intellect, conduces to scrupulousness (*warāʿ*), and instructs one in piety."[228] Al-Ghazālī also notes that one of the main signs of good character is "little discourse."[229] To become silent requires solitude and al-Ghazālī teaches that to become perfect a person should "remove himself from the company of others and remain by himself."[230] He notes also that even in a retreat centre someone still brings the meals and interrupts one's silence, hence it is better to speak as little as possible even to the host.[231] Yet overall he affirms the positive value of the retreat because "it dispels distractions and enables one to control one's hearing

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[221] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 88), ويعصمه بحصن حصين يدفع عنه قواطع الطريق .

[222] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 89), السهر أيضاً نتيجة الجوع فإن .

[223] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 89). Al-Ghazālī also says that Jesus said, "(M)ake your bellies hungry, that haply your hearts may behold your Lord," similar to Luke 6:21, and possibly derived from that saying.

[224] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 89), فإنه يجلو القلب ويصفيه وينوره .

[225] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 89), كالكوكب الدري .

[226] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, (London: Al-Hijra Publishers, 1944), 95.

[227] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 66; Winter, 57), والحاجة من الكلام ... من غوائل آفاتها .

[228] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 90), فالصمت يلقح العقل ويجلب الورع ويعلم التقوى .

[229] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.9 (BDM, 70; Winter, 69), قليل الكلام .

[230] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.8 (BDM, 69; Winter, 65), ولينفرد بنفسه Winter's translation here is overlong.

[231] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 90).

and vision, which are the entrance halls of the heart," using yet another heart metaphor with a common physical architectural element.[232] Al-Ghazālī makes clear the link between silence and solitude when he writes, "As for silence, this is facilitated by isolation."[233] Silence and solitude are at odds with the very "wordy" world, especially of the intellectuals that al-Ghazālī so often criticises. He aphorises that, "The believer loves solitude and isolation, while the hypocrite loves company and assemblies."[234] One of the outcomes of the struggle for al-Ghazālī is to be at peace. Al-Ghazālī writes that after overcoming evil desires, "At this point it (the heart) will return to its Lord, at peace, content in His good pleasure."[235] Al-Ghazālī writes about peace and contentment in several places, for example he says that ascetic souls will reach an "equilibrium" which bears fruit in "contentment."[236] When the Sufi has reached the state of union with God, "The soul is now called the tranquillised soul (*al-nafs al-mutmaʾinna*), the soul at rest, which returns to its Lord, satisfied and giving satisfaction to Him."[237] Al-Ghazālī also writes, "The heart is at rest when it is filled with the sweetness of love, for the true lover is satisfied with all that is done by the Beloved, and it seems to him to be his own desire."[238]

Love and *jihād*

Love is one of the main themes in al-Ghazālī, and similarly to many Sufis he sees love of God as another result of spiritual battle.[239] Nicholson, Sells, Smith, and others discuss al-Ghazālī's emphasis on love in depth, but it is sufficient in this context to note that this ecstatic love of God is the final stage of the spiritual fight, and is linked with solitude, remembrance, and other ascetic practices. Al-Ghazālī narrates a tradition that God said to David that, "Those who long for Me are those whom I have cleansed from all defilement and

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[232] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 90), وأما حياة الخلوة ففائدتها دفع الشواغل وضبط السمع والبصر فإنهما دهليز القلب.

[233] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 90), وأما الصمت فإنه تسهله العزلة .

[234] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.9 (BDM, 70; Winter, 69). Again, al-Ghazālī's teaching on the importance of four practices as like a fortress defence is relevant: "This fortress is built of four things: solitude, silence, hunger and sleeplessness," mentioning aspects of struggle that I return to below. *Iḥyāʾ* 22.11 (BDM, 76; Winter, 88) ويعصمه بحصن حصين يدفع عنه قواطع الطريق . Smith discusses al-Ghazālī's emphasis on solitude at length in her work. Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 91-3, 169. She writes that "al-Ghazālī relates that a certain monk was asked how he could endure his loneliness and the monk replied: 'I am not alone, I have God as my Companion: when I wish Him to talk with me, I read His book, and when I wish to talk with Him, I pray'." Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 95.

[235] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.6 (BDM, 63; Winter, 49), ولا متشوقة إلى أسبابها، فعند ذلك ترجع إلى ربها رجوع النفس المطمئنة راضية مرضية داخلة .

[236] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 22.9 (BDM, 72; Winter, 74), عتدلت ... الرضا .

[237] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 174.

[238] Smith, Al-Ghazali the Mystic, 185, citing Al-Ghazālī, *Rawḍat al-Ṭālibīn*, 250-51.

[239] Reynolds Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (n.p.: World Wisdom, 2003), 73-86; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism,* 56-74; Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 173-84.

have aroused to eagerness, and I have opened their hearts so that they may contemplate Me," linking spiritual cleansing with the stage of love of God.[240] He also asserts that, "It is reasonable to give this passionate love to that One from Whom all good things are seen to come. In truth, there is nothing good or beautiful or beloved in this world, but comes from His loving kindness and is the gift of His grace, a draught from the sea of His bounty."[241] This kind of love according to al-Ghazālī is only obtained after extensive spiritual struggle, and he links these together at several points.[242] He says for example that the only way to salvation is "love … and devotion to God", which comes through "self-discipline (*al-riādat*)," building on the many mentions of *jihād* in the previous paragraphs.[243]

Al-Ghazālī's anthropology

Al-Ghazālī's anthropology is quite complex and has been discussed by Claudia Upper and others.[244] He writes with considerable nuance, finding a position between various extremes. In a passage quite reminiscent of Isaac, al-Ghazālī, referring to human desires, writes, "This is also an error, into which a faction has fallen which imagines that the purpose of spiritual struggle (*mujāhadat*) is the complete suppression and effacement of these attributes." He continues that:

> Such a view is absurd, for desire has been created for a purpose, and is an

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[240] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 181, citing al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* IV, 278. Smith also summarises al-Ghazālī's thought that "joy prevails with him because he has approached the Object of his desire and has entered into the presence of his Beloved and is contemplating the Beauty which is revealed to him, that joy in the sense of intimacy is called Fellowship," showing that this love in the presence of God involves both joy and ascetic contemplation. Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 181.

[241] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 178, citing al-Ghazālī, Iḥyā' II, 247. Al-Ghazālī also links the ascetic practices of solitude and the night vigil with love. Smith summarises al-Ghazālī's teaching thus: "It is the mark of the lover, too, that he is eager to be alone, so that he may converse in secret with his Beloved, and he longs for the approach of night, in stillness and silence he may meet with Him Whom he loves." Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 179. Al-Ghazālī writes of several kinds of love, with the third being the most pure. He says that this third type is "love of a thing for its own sake, not for the pleasure to be obtained from it apart from itself, and this is real love, which can be relied upon to endure, such as the love of Beauty and Goodness." Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 175-76. He is here describing the nature of the deepest kind of love for God− not love as a result of receiving rewards from God, but love of God as He is. Smith summarises al-Ghazālī's teaching: "God is Beauty … He is the only real Benefactor, and the Ultimate Cause of all benefits. If, where beauty is found, it is natural to love it, and if beauty consists in perfection, then it follows that the All-Beautiful, Who is Absolute Perfection, must be loved by those to whom His nature and Attributes are revealed." Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 175-76.

[242] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.6, 8 (BDM, 63, 67; Winter, 47, 60).

[243] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 67; Winter, 60), حبه والتفكير فيه … الرياضة .

[244] Claudia Upper, "Al-Ghazālī's Thought Concerning the Nature of Man and Union with God," *The Muslim World* (Vol. 42, Issue 1, January 1952): 23–32 is a quick introduction; Taneli Kukkonen, "Receptive to Reality: Al-Ghazālī on the Structure of the Soul," *The Muslim World* (Vol. 102, Issue 3-4, October 2012): 541–61 is a thorough treatment; See also Jules Janssens, Al-Ghazālī between Philosophy (*Falsafa*) and Sufism (*Taṣawwuf*): His Complex Attitude in the Marvels of the Heart ('Ajā'ib al-Qalb) of the Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn, *The Muslim World (*2011), 614-32.

indispensable part of human nature; should the desire for food cease, man would die; should the desire for sexual intercourse cease, man would die out; and should man feel no anger he would not be able to defend himself from those things which threaten his life… What is required is not the total extirpation of these things, but rather the restoration of their balance and moderation.[245]

For al-Ghazālī the inner struggle is not always the best way—he prefers a natural from-the-heart delight in God rather than struggle. He writes:

> As long as worship and the renunciation of forbidden things are felt to be unpleasant and burdensome their performance will be defective, and cannot bring one to full felicity. Certainly, to struggle (*bi-al-mujāhadat*), to persevere with them is a good thing but only in comparison to not abandoning them, not in comparison with doing them willingly.[246]

According to al-Ghazālī, it is much better to, "Worship God with pleasure, and if you cannot, then with perseverance."[247] In a direct contradiction with legalism he adds "Obedience to God should be found to be delightful (*astildhādh*)," and bring "happiness" (*al-saʿādat*).[248] The soul is at war according to al-Ghazālī, caught between its natural *fiṭrah* ("pure human nature," "disposition," "constitution," or "instinct") and the temptations of the world. He writes:

> Since the soul commonly takes pleasure even in vain things and inclines towards ugliness, how could it not take pleasure in the Truth were it to be restored to it for a while and made to persevere therein? The soul's inclination to these disgusting things is unnatural, and resembles the inclination to the eating of mud; yet even this may gain control over some people and become a habit. As for the inclination to wisdom and love, knowledge and worship of God, this resembles the inclination towards food and drink. It is the expression of the heart's nature, and is a divine command, while an inclination to the demands of one's desires is in itself something strange, and it is not

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[245] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.3 (BDM, 56-57; Winter, 27-28), المجاهدة Note again the Aristotelian sense of moderation.

[246] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 32), ومهما كانت العبادات وترك المحظورات مع كراهة واستثقال فهو النقصان ولا ينال كمال السعادة به. نعم المواظبة عليه بالمجاهدة خير ولكن بالإضافة إلى تركها لا بالإضافة إلى فعلها عن طوع.

[247] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 32), اعبد الله في الرضا فإن لم تستطع ففي الصبر على ما تكره خير كثير This is far from the stereotype of the legalistic Muslim, and is reminiscent of Rumi.

[248] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 33), السعادة الموعودة على جسن الخلق استلذاذ الطاعة Al-Ghazālī also writes of "taking delight in remembering" God. *Iḥyā'* 22.6 (BDM, 62; Winter, 46).

part of its nature.[249]

In this long exposition al-Ghazālī is asserting the standard Islamic doctrine of *fiṭrah*, the belief in the innate goodness of human nature as created by God. Islam does not share with Western Christians any idea of a catastrophic "fall" in the Garden of Eden. Yasien Mohamed says *fiṭrah* is an "inborn natural predisposition which cannot change," because, "No wrong action can pollute the Divine spirit that Allāh has blown into man."[250] The "diseases of the heart" must be cured according to al-Ghazālī, so that the person can engage in the "proper" activity of the heart which is "the acquisition of knowledge, wisdom and gnosis (*maʿrifa*), and the love of God and His worship, and taking delight in remembering Him."[251] He says that this is the "specific property of the human soul which distinguishes man from animals."[252] The child according to al-Ghazālī has a "pure heart," and can be shaped for both good or evil, hence the importance of developing good habits.[253] He quotes Muhammad that:

> A child is a creature whose essence is receptive to both good and evil: it is only his parents who cause it to be disposed to one or the other. As the prophet said, 'Every child is born with the sound natural disposition (*fiṭrah*): it is only his parents who make of him a Jew, a Christian or a Zoroastrian.'[254]

There is nothing remarkable about al-Ghazālī's anthropology at this point. He is repeating standard Islamic doctrine and is quite traditional. Where he is controversial according to his critics is in his insistence on Sufi practices in order to purify the heart and restore it to a close encounter with God.[255] Despite his belief in the initial pure state of the soul, al-Ghazālī clearly teaches that in practice it is one of the three enemies that attack the person. The soul has been distracted from its purity and now is more like an animal than like its Creator. Al-

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[249] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 59; Winter, 34-35), فإذا كانت النفس بالعادة تستلذ الباطل وتميل إليه وإلى المقابح فكيف لا تستلذ الحق لو ردت إليه مدة والتزمت المواظبة عليه؟ بل ميل النفس إلى هذه الأمور الشنيعة خارج عن الطبع يضاهي الميل إلى أكل الطين فقد يغلب على بعض الناس ذلك بالعادة؛ فأما ميله إلى الحكمة وحب الله تعالى ومعرفته وعبادته فهو كالميل إلى الطعام والشراب فإنه مقتضى طبع القلب فإنه أمر رباني، وميله إلى مقتضيات الشهوة غريب من ذاته وعارض على طبعه.

[250] Yasien Mohamed, *Fitra: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature* (London: Tah-Ha Publishers, 1996), 13, 23. For a comprehensive explanation see 13-31.

[251] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.6 (BDM, 62; Winter, 46).

[252] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.6 (BDM, 63; Winter, 47). Al-Ghazālī seems to identify gnosis as the one specific distinguishing feature but then links this to the others listed such that all the activities are distinguishing features. al-Ghazālī also in this passage makes a connection between base desires and ugliness.

[253] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.10 (BDM, 72; Winter, 75), قلبه الطاهر.

[254] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.10 (BDM, 74; Winter, 81), كل مولود يولد على الفطرة وإنما أبواه يهودانه أو ينصرانه أو يمجسانه.

[255] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 100 cites al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, I, 148, (emphasis mine), who says, "When you purify the place in which you pray, which is your outermost container, and then your garments, which are your nearest covering and then your skin, which is your inner rind, do not forget your kernel, which is your real essence, and that is your heart. So *strive* to *cleanse it* by repentance and contrition and therewith purify your inmost self, for He Whom you worship is looking thereon."

Ghazālī asserts that, "The disciplining of the soul is similar to that of birds and riding-beasts."[256] Due to its habituation to evil, al-Ghazālī teaches that, "the soul constantly enjoins evil" (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi'l-sū*), a somewhat more negative view than that held by other Islamic scholars.[257] This tension between the initial state of purity (*fiṭrah*) and the ongoing lived experience of evil tendency is not discussed in Book 22, and seems to be a given for al-Ghazālī.

Al-Ghazālī also has an integrative anthropology which like Isaac understands the body and soul as intimately linked. He teaches that forcing the body to imitate good character will eventually transform the soul, and explains, "This is one of the wonders of the relationship between the heart and the members (*jawāriḥ*), by which I mean the soul and the body."[258] Al-Ghazālī uses a very Aristotelian notion of circular movement in further elaborating his thought:

> The effect of every attribute which appears in the heart must emanate onto the members, so that these move only in conformity to it; similarly, every act performed by the members has an effect which makes its way up to the heart, thereby constituting a form of circular movement.[259]

This is a very practical form of asceticism and is remarkably similar to the advice of Isaac.[260] Al-Ghazālī is also like Isaac in being very practical in recognising that some sins are easier to overcome than others, and thus "one should address oneself to the easier ones first."[261]

At the highest stage of progress the Sufi attains to union with God or return to God, a controversial concept that al-Ghazālī teaches without going to the extremes of some Muslims. The idea of the soul achieving a "return to its Lord" features prominently in Sufi Islam, based on a Qur'ānic verse.[262] Sufis generally interpret this to mean a process of heart renewal and soul cleansing enabling the person to draw back into union with God. Some even go as far as to teach a form of merging with the divine where the self realises that it is a mere emanation

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[256] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 68; Winter, 64). For al-Ghazālī, the soul is animal-like and needs training and restraining.

[257] Winter, Appendix III, In Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā',* 233, citing al-Ghazālī, Wonders of the Heart, Part One.

[258] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 59; Winter, 35), وهذا من عجيب العلاقة بين القلب والجوارح - أعني النفس والبدن .

[259] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 59; Winter, 35), فإن كل صفة تظهر في القلب يفيض أثرها على الجوارح حتى لا تتحرك إلا على وفقها لا محالة، وكل فعل يجري على الجوارح فإنه قد يرتفع منه أثر إلى القلب، والأمر فيه دور، ويعرف ذلك بمثال .

[260] Isaac, *Homilies*, 2.14.42-43 (CSCO 554: 69-70; Brock, 80-1).

[261] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 77; Winter, 91), يشتغل بالأسهل فالأسهل .

[262] Qur'ān 6:108.

of God.[263] Hallaj's statement, "I am God" (literally "I am Truth") is the most extreme example of this, but al-Ghazālī teaches a more restrained version.[264]

With all his emphasis on the mystical side of spirituality it is valuable to consider what place al-Ghazālī has for the mind and mental struggle. He is not against the intellect but considers that it must be trained and made subservient to revelation and the heart. Al-Ghazālī's elevation of revelation over the mind is well established in the Qur'ān and in Sufi tradition.[265] Al-Ghazālī writes:

> Praise be to God Whose glory passes the comprehension of the hearts and minds of His creatures, and they remain amazed thereat, by the radiance of Whose Light their vision is dazzled, Who looks upon the secrets of men's inmost selves, Who is aware of what is hidden within their consciences, Who orders all things by His sovereign will, and none is His counsellor or gives Him aid: Who turns men's hearts to repentance and forgives their transgressions: Who casts a veil over their sins and comforts them in their sorrows-to Him be praise.[266]

In this passage al-Ghazālī not only privileges revelation but also emphasises divine sovereignty. He teaches that despite human effort, it is ultimately up to God who attains to perfection and a purified nature. At the same time, al-Ghazālī rejects any kind of fatalism which would negate the need or value of spiritual effort.

Free will is an intrinsic aspect of human nature for al-Ghazālī. He believes in divine predestination yet teaches that humans can choose to be of good character.[267] Al-Ghazālī seems to be arguing against a fatalist conception when he writes, "Were the traits of character not susceptible to change there would be no value in counsels, sermons and discipline, and the Prophet … would not have said, 'Improve your characters.'"[268] Yet al-Ghazālī is aware

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[263] Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism,* 266-71; Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (Sheldon Press, 1931), 236-43.

[264] Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, (McCarthy, 57-8).

[265] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "God", *in Islamic Spirituality,* ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 311-23.

[266] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 102, citing al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, III, 2.

[267] Masood Ali Khan, "An Exposition of Al-Ghazzali's Views on the Problem of Freedom of the Will," in *Encyclopedia of Islam,* Vol. 6 (New Delhi, Anmol, 2003), 324-37.

[268] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.3 (BDM, 56; Winter, 25), لو كانت الأخلاق لا تقبل التغيير لبطلت الوصايا والمواعظ والتأديبات، ولما قال رسول الله ﻇ "حسنوا أخلاقكم" .

that human action is constrained within limits.[269] He notes that just as a seed cannot be anything it wants to be, neither can a human. However, the seed can still grow into a tree if correctly nurtured. For al-Ghazālī human spiritual growth comes about precisely "should we so wish," through freely chosen "self-discipline and struggle" (*bi-al-riādat w-al-mujāhada*).[270] He asserts that "just as a seed is affected by human choice" and so is the human.[271] Al-Ghazālī teaches a balance between human effort and divine grace.[272] He discusses these together in his opening to the chapter on the actual ways and means of acquiring good character.[273] He writes, "The important principle in the spiritual struggle (*fi-al-mujāhadat*) is to carry out what one has determined upon: if one has determined to renounce a desire then the means to pursue it will be made easier (*taysarat*)," presumably by God.[274] Al-Ghazālī seems to follow Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and al-Muḥāsibī in believing that good deeds are not pre-determined.[275]

In discussing the struggle for righteousness, al-Ghazālī uses an Aristotelian approach by writing, "You have come to know that goodness of character proceeds from an *equilibrium* in the rational faculty brought about through sound wisdom, and in the irascible and appetitive faculties through their submission to the intellect and the Law."[276] He continues that, "This equilibrium may come about through two ways," which he clarifies as being "Divine grace" and "spiritual struggle and exercise" (*bi-al-mujāhadat w-al-riāda*).[277] He appears here to teach some kind of human-divine synergy or responsibility, but never attributes purification to human effort alone. He still privileges divine grace and is thus quite mainstream. In explaining divine grace al-Ghazālī uses the examples of, "Jesus, the son of Mary, and John, the son of Zacharias," who became "learned without an instructor, and

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[269] Khan, "An Exposition of Al-Ghazzali's Views on the Problem of Freedom of the Will," 331.

[270] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.3 (BDM, 56; Winter, 25), لو أردنا ... بالرياضة والمجاهدة See also See Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazzali,* 104.

[271] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.3 (BDM, 56; Winter, 25), فإذا صارت النواة متأثرة بالاختيار .

[272] Smith argues that al-Ghazālī, "forestalls the objection that there is no end to be reached by prayer if all is pre-determined by the Almighty Will of God, in saying that it is pre-determined that evil shall be averted by prayer and supplication for mercy," Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 96.

[273] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 31).

[274] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.5 (BDM, 62; Winter, 45), والأصل المهم في المجاهدة والوفاء بالعزم فإذا عزم على ترك شهوة فقد تيسرت أسبابها .

[275] Barry Kogan, "The Philosophers Al-Ghazālī and Averroes on Necessary Connection and the Problem of the Miraculous," in *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism,* ed. Parviz Morewedge (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1981), 113-32.

[276] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 31), قد عرفت أن حسن الخلق يرجع إلى اعتدال قوة العقل وكمال الحكمة. وإلى اعتدال قوة الغضب والشهوة، وكونها للعقل مطيعة وللشرع أيضاً (emphasis mine).

[277] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 31), وهذا الاعتدال يحصل على وجهين ... بجود إلهي ... بالمجاهدة والرياضة .

disciplined without being subject to any discipline."[278] Al-Ghazālī argues that they were created by God in this way, and that their character is created in them and proceeds from their "innate disposition" (*kamāl fiṭrī*).[279] He seems also to believe that God's efforts are attacked but not thwarted by the invisible spiritual enemies. He says, "what enlightens the heart is different from what darkens it: the former is celestial in origin and the latter a Satanic suggestion. It is by grace that the heart is enabled to receive what is good, and by the seductions of Iblis that it welcomes what is evil."[280] Al-Ghazālī thus considers the heart to be a spiritual battleground, acted on by the forces of God, the self, and Satan. This inner warfare requires constant chosen effort for the Muslim to respond to God and resist both Satan and their own lower soul.

Before leaving al-Ghazālī's anthropology, it is worth analysing his curious mentions of how the body is transformed upon success in the struggle. He affirms that after a good "fight" (*jāhada*) with "your soul" (*nafsaka*), "you will become a subtle spiritual body, and a radiance without weight."[281] Al-Ghazālī also writes that the result of sleeplessness and hunger is that, "the heart will be as *a shining star*, and a polished mirror in which the beauty of the Truth blazes."[282] This idea of a radiant and shining heart we have already seen in Isaac and appears to have been a standard Middle-Eastern motif.[283] Al-Ghazālī's use of this metaphor does not necessarily imply that he means a literal physical shining, although some Sufis teach this. It does however indicate that he considers that one result of spiritual battle is light in the soul which somehow affects the Sufi's experience of God and the world. In his *Iḥyā'* Book 21 titled *Wonders of the heart* al-Ghazālī argues for the validity of Sufi experience and connects light with ascetic struggle by writing, "For prophets and saints have had divine things revealed to them, and the light has flooded their breasts, not by learning and study of books, but by asceticism (*zuhd*) in this present world, by cutting self off from all its

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[278] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 31), والشرع فيصير عالماً بغير تعليم ومؤدباً بغير تأديب كعيسى بن مريم ويحيى بن زكريا .

[279] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.4 (BDM, 58; Winter, 31, 38), وكمال فطري .

[280] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 156.

[281] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 65; Winter, 57) al-Ghazālī is quoting al-Razi. جاهد نفسك بأسياف الرياضة فتصير ... عند ذلك نظيفة ونورية خفيفة روحانية .

[282] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11, (BDM, 76; Winter, 89), (emphasis mine). Winter italicises "a shining star" because it is a quote from the Qur'ān 24:35.

[283] This idea of a shining body was common in Syrian Christian late antiquity, being derived from both Jewish and Greek sources, see Hannah Hunt, *Clothed in a Body: Asceticism, the Body and the Spiritual in the Late Antique Era* (Ashgate, 2012), 144-9; Gregory Smith, "Physics and Metaphysics", Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012), 513-43 especially 515-16.

ties."[284] He asserts that "the prophet used to pray, 'O Lord! Give me light in my heart!'"[285] These quotes are within a chapter where al-Ghazālī argues against the Muslim speculative philosophers and their book study, and asserts the superiority of divine revelation, gained through asceticism, thus showing his close connection between his epistemology, anthropology, and teaching on struggle.

Eschatology

The Last Day and the Afterlife are also very important teachings for al-Ghazālī that motivate the servant of Allah to undergo inner *jihād*.[286] His concluding section of Book 22 concerns the requirements and basic teachings of spiritual struggle and starts with discussion on these themes. He writes, "Be it known unto you that the man who has in all certainty beheld the *harvest of the Afterlife* with his heart must needs aspire to it… Lack of desire for the *harvest of the Afterlife* and the meeting with God (Exalted is He!) is the outcome of a lack of faith in God and in the Last Day."[287] This remembrance of the Day of Judgement is so important that al-Ghazālī pairs it with remembrance of God himself. He writes of hearts affected "by the remembrance of God and the Last Day."[288] As discussed in the first chapter, the Last Day is a frequent concern of the Qur'ān, although it seems that over the generations this idea received decreasing attention. In contrast to his near contemporaries Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazālī certainly considers the future judgement very significant both as a motivator of good and as an essential idea for Sufi meditation. He explicitly warns of the danger of forgetting the "terrors of the Day (of Arising)."[289] For al-Ghazālī, eternity after judgement bears little comparison to life in this world, and this should inspire the Muslim to struggle while on Earth. He says, "When compared with eternity, it is as though all of one's lifetime is less than one month of one's life; thus one must struggle (*al-mujāhadat*) and endure."[290] It is fair to say that, "al-Ghazali bids all who draw near to God to forget this world and its people and to

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[284] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* Book 21, (Skellie, 83); Q.39:22. He also quotes the Qur'an regarding, "He whose heart God opens to Islam, so that he has a light from his Lord." Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* Book 21, (Skellie, 91).

[285] Winter, Appendix III, in *Iḥyā',* 240.

[286] Timothy J. Gianotti, "Beyond Both Law and Theology: An Introduction to al-Ghazalı's "Science of the Way of the Afterlife" in *Reviving Religious Knowledge (Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*)," *The Muslim World* (Vol 101, October, 2011): 597-613 (597-8).

[287] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 74; Winter, 83). Winter italicises the phrase "harvest of the Afterlife" because it is a Qur'ānic quote: Qur'ān 62:20 has "Whoever aspires to the harvest of the Afterlife, We give him increase in its harvest; and whoso aspires to the harvest of the world, We give him thereof, and in the Afterlife he shall have no portion."

[288] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 68; Winter, 63), عن ذكر الله واليوم الآخر .

[289] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 68; Winter, 62), وأهوال يوم .

[290] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.8 (BDM, 68-69; Winter, 65), وكل العمر بالإضافة إلى الأبد أقل من الشهر بالإضافة إلى عمر الدنيا. فلا بد من الصبر والمجاهدة .

approach Him as He will be approached on the day of resurrection, when the soul will stand in His Presence, with no mediator between."[291] This remembrance of the day of judgement is essential according to al-Ghazālī because such focus is required to become proficient in vigilance and self-examination. Continuing the metaphor of the traveller which we saw earlier, al-Ghazālī warns that temptations "might snatch the traveller back to the world he had abandoned."[292] In a concise summary of al-Ghazālī's thought, Sherif writes, "When a man knows that he has to account for everything he does in this life, he will watch over his desires and examine his motives so as to guard against what may bring God's wrath upon him in the hereafter."[293]

Conclusion

Al-Ghazālī is very concerned with self-discipline and inner struggle, and these concepts form a central part of his writings on the good character. He describes the spiritual life using a diverse range of metaphors that are foundational to his various sections on specific virtues and in regards to the various sins of the lower self that must be fought against. Al-Ghazālī consciously builds on previous writers and he uses metaphors in a way that is very similar to al-Muḥāsibī. These images are drawn from a number of domains—military, social, educational, and medical etc. and al-Ghazālī often links several metaphors and terms together in a form of parallelism. Even when the metaphors and terms used are not explicitly military they still evoke clear images of an antagonism between two elements and thus are all related to the macrotrope of struggle. In relation to medical metaphors, these are somewhat less violent than the military but still entail cutting imagery. Al-Ghazālī uses a vast number of metaphors and evidently has done much reflecting on the state of human hearts, probably strengthened by his time of seclusion. While affirming and even defending the orthodox Islamic doctrines, he defines an experiential approach to knowing God and developing good character through inner struggle. In terms of his overall program for purifying the soul, al-Ghazālī links the concept of inner warfare closely with his anthropology, soteriology, and eschatology. Because of his beliefs in the innate original purity of human nature and the freedom of the will, he sees ascetic struggle as efficacious and essential to having a good afterlife.

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[291] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 98.
[292] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 92-93.
[293] Sherif, *Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Virtue,* 119.

While many of al-Ghazālī's metaphors are quite similar to al-Muḥāsibī's usage, there are also noticeable similarities to Isaac of Nineveh. The use however of explicitly Christian language to summarise al-Ghazālī can be misleading, for example Smith writes that he understood asceticism to mean "striving against the world, the flesh, and the devil." At the same time it is true that the similarities between al-Ghazālī's soul struggle ideas and the Christian teaching are much greater than the differences.[294] This is especially so if al-Ghazālī is compared to the more NeoPlatonic Greek ascetic authors such as Gregory the New Theologian (d. 1022 CE) or Peter of Damascus (twelfth century CE), and such comparisons are needed. The issue of the similarities between the Syrian Christian and Sufi ideas of the inner fight, and what, if any, Christian influence there may have been on the Sufis, I explore in my final chapter.

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[294] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 155. Smith 122 is also possibly over-stating the situation when she writes that, "There is little doubt that al-Ghazālī, being educated and studying where he did, must have been in touch also with the mysticism of the Syriac-speaking Christians of the Middle East," but this contact may have just reinforced his ideas rather than shaped them.

8. Comparisons and Interactions

The concept of spiritual struggle is explained by the Muslim and Christian authors studied in very similar ways but with some noticeable differences. They write using distinctly similar metaphors involving fighting soldiers who conquer enemies, guard against attacks, and need healing of wounds. There are also notable differences in relation to the Syrian usage of athletic metaphor and in some aspects of anthropology. The role of the specifically Christian monastic tradition also somewhat influences the Syrians. Overall, however, the often parallel interpretation of the inner battle macrotrope is notable. This raises important questions about what connections there were between early Sufis and Syrian Christians.

In this final chapter I discuss these similarities and the divergences in the metaphors used for the inner struggle, identifying some developments across time. I also summarise the cognitive domains referred to by the authors and note overlaps, developments, and dissimilarities. The struggle imagery is embedded in both faiths in complex anthropologies and related soteriologies and these are discussed, especially regarding how in some ways both views are more similar to each other than to the mainstream of Western Christianity. After the coming of Islam, Syrian Christians continued to use *agōna,* and Arabic-speaking Christians used *jihād*, and I examine the significance of this ongoing usage in the context of Islamic *jihād*. The evidence points to a necessary re-dating of the concept of inner *jihād* in Islam, and also to Christians and Muslims having a shared perspective on inner struggle, even in the Arabic language. There are a number of possible explanations for the correlations between Christian and Muslim struggle rhetoric, and I reflect on these in the light of the current global political situation, before drawing some final conclusions. Recent authors have argued for a "fuzzy boundaries" approach to Christian-Muslim exchange and I interact with these ideas with respect to the struggle motif. In the previous chapters I have analysed the ways that the two Syrian Christian authors Aphrahat and Isaac discussed inner struggle using a range of warfare imagery, and the soteriology linked to their teaching. I have also shown how their view of salvation and the role of struggle is shaped by the anthropology underlying their perspectives. Similarly, I have examined almost all the most significant fourth-sixth century Syrian ascetic Christian writers, namely Ps-Macarius, John "the Solitary," Theodoret, the author of the *Book of Steps*, and Jacob of Serugh. Each has a slightly different viewpoint

regarding the inner battle which I noted. John of Apamea and Isaac are significantly more Hellenised than the other Syrians, emphasising Stoic-like ideas of *apatheia* and *ataraxia*. They creatively link struggle with the apparently contradictory theme of stillness. I also discussed the struggle metaphors in al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī noting their particular emphases. It is now time to compare writings and struggle themes of these selected Christian and Muslim authors, both at the level of metaphor and also in relation to their anthropology and soteriology.

Domain Analysis Comparison

The most obvious similarity in the struggle metaphors used by all writers is the military emphasis. Concepts such as fighting, conquering, using the sword in attack and the shield in defence, are very frequent in all the authors analysed. Many of them also use medical imagery such as wounds, gangrene, healing, and medicine, although it is difficult to know how much this is understood as an aspect of warfare or a separate category. Except for Aphrahat, medical metaphors are not used specifically concerning soldiers, so they may be connected to civilian illness. Al-Ghazālī uses medical imagery such as "healing" and "cauterising" slightly more than military metaphor and in this he is somewhat different, although this may be due to his later dating and an increased interest in medicine by then (possibly due to the increased accessibility of translated Greek medical texts by his era). All the authors see Satan as an attacker who must be fought and resisted, and he is portrayed as powerful yet able to be beaten with great effort, often involving fasting, which is seen as a weapon. The other antagonist repeatedly discussed is the passions or "lower soul" which must be fought, disciplined, tamed, and conquered. Authors in both religions speak of self-mortifying or self-examination, although to differing levels. One very noticeable and understandable difference is that the Muslim writers do not use the athletic imagery that we see in the Syrians, probably due to the lack of a living cultural history of the Greek games. The earlier Syrians prefer Old Testament stories to athletic imagery although they do use the terms athletes, arena, and gymnasium, but not as commonly as the later writers. For the Muslim writers, especially al-Ghazālī, their cultural framework and thus language is relatively more shaped by the psycho-social rather than the athletic, and this domain is more reflected in their writings. Metaphors of "disciplining the soul", "rebuking" the self, "constraining" the soul, and so on are thus more in evidence in the Muslims than any of the Christians. The Syrian writers sometimes mention labouring and agricultural metaphors, but

these are rarely seen in the Sufis, with al-Muḥāsibī only mentioning labouring a few times. Significantly, the Christian authors link struggle with sexual purity far more often than the Muslims. The different cultural and theological contexts shaped these divergences, and impacted on which domains are used and how often. Despite these variations, in all the authors there are a plethora of terms and images used which revolve around the macrotrope of spiritual struggle, and this indicates that they consider the concept worthy of extensive thought and elaboration.

Analysis of attack and defence metaphors

Both the Muslim and Christian authors most commonly describe the inner warfare using attack metaphors. They speak of soldiers and warriors who advance, conquer, kill, and overcome. These spiritual soldiers fight in the metaphorical open fields and in the heart, and use weapons, especially swords. The sword is often identified as prayer and fasting, but other virtues and practices are mentioned, such as humility, solitude, silence, and control of the thoughts and tongue. For all the authors, the attack is against three enemies or adversaries, specifically the world, the devil and the soul. These must be conquered and defeated, or at least subdued, for both faiths. Despite differences between Christianity and Islam, this fundamental similarity of idea has rarely been explored. Especially when contrasted with other world religions, the common tripartite war aspect of the inner personal daily ascetic stance could provide an avenue for shared exploration. Sometimes the offensive battle is a form of self-attack or self-denial. For both the Christian and Muslim writers this includes self-examination and self-mortification. The soul must be trained and disciplined lest it go out of control, and this asceticism often requires violent treatment of the self, irrespective of author. There is a noticeable flexibility in the various writers' use of fighting metaphors, for example fasting can be both a weapon and an armour. Similarly, it is interesting that these authors creatively use the image of the fortress in contrasting ways—at times it is the place to attack and elsewhen it is the place of defence, with the reader taking the respective roles of attacker or defender.

The military metaphors of watchfulness as a defence is particularly evident in Isaac, al-Muḥāsibī, and al-Ghazālī. The Islamic term w*arāʿ* "denotes religious scrupulousness and delicacy of conscience" which is very similar to Isaac's references to self-awareness and self-

criticism.[1] Both the Christian and Muslim authors link this to the metaphor of the fortress with its concept of alert defensive resistance. In both cases the attackers are the external Satan and demons, but also the internal passions or *nafs*. In relation to the defence of the fortress, "shields" and "swords" are used when the attack is close, but they all consider that longer-range watchfulness and alertness is better, to prevent attacks before they happen. The site of the defence for almost all the Christian and Muslim authors is the soul, the thoughts, and the tongue. The similarity of how they view the various aspects of the person and their psychologies here is notable, and the extent to which they share underlying Aristotelian or Platonic perspectives warrants further study. Several of the authors mention that the failure to defend oneself properly results in wounds or even gangrene. This wounding therefore requires healing, and the authors often thus link battle-medicine metaphors to the attack and defence metaphors.

One particular form of watchfulness is the night watch or vigil, which is used by several authors and entails various images of the military camp surrounded by possible attackers. The night vigil has a cultural pre-history before even the Syrian Christian usage, and Prosic shows that in Jewish and other Middle-Eastern cultures it was "an attempt to control powers that are otherwise beyond human reach."[2] She also explains how the Vigil was not just any kind of wakefulness but an intentional sleeplessness with ritual meaning. The Passover was a type of ritual vigil which emphasised "watching" and "remembering God" on its first night.[3] This would appear to be a possible antecedent for the Church's idea of the night vigil, focussing as it does also on watching and remembering God.[4] There may also be a connection with the story of Jacob's wrestling (or struggling, in Hebrew *abaq*), with an Angel of God at night.[5] Such imagery is very evident in Isaac and al-Ghazālī, but is also used at times by the other authors. Another noticeable difference is that the Muslim authors do not write very much about fighting lust, in sharp contrast to the Syrian Christians, especially Aphrahat, John, and Isaac. This is because monastic singleness is condemned by Islam as abnormal. Sexual temptation rarely appears in al-Muḥāsibī or al-Ghazālī's lists of

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[1] D. Urvoy, "Waraʿ," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/wara-SIM_7861?s.num=108&s.start=100, accessed October 15, 2018.

[2] Tamara Prosic, *The Development and Symbolism of Passover until 70CE* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 116. See also 109-11.

[3] Prosic, *The Development and Symbolism of Passover*, 109.

[4] The Passover was also seen as the forerunner for the Eucharistic liturgy as Christ is described as the "Lamb of God" in replacement of the Passover lamb.

[5] Gen. 32:24-31. אָבָק .

lusts to be conquered.

Common conceptual framework for struggle

Despite some noticeable differences, there are major significant similarities in the worldview that underlies both the Syrian Christian and Muslim writers. They have a roughly common conceptual framework for inner struggle in relation to their soteriology and connected aspects of their underpinning anthropology, especially when contrasted with the most dominant Western Christian understandings. This is important for understanding the importance attached by both religions to their practice of inner struggle. One central issue in the soteriology of both groups of authors is the role of free will in the spiritual fight. This topic is explicitly dealt with by the Christian authors Macarius, Isaac, and Jacob of Serugh, and by both al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī, and I have discussed their respective viewpoints in earlier chapters. On this issue there is a surprising level of commonality in thinking, especially when compared with the dominant Latin/Western Christian view. While their respective views on free will persist within different religious systems, functionally all see a real role for the human choice and struggle. Both sets of authors also understand God as somehow sovereign, yet not predetermining human behaviour. So while the Syrians consider God's predestination based purely on his foreknowledge, and the Muslims teach a version of occasionalism, both attempt to reconcile God's role without limiting the need for human soul combat. They equally emphasise that such inner warfare is efficacious for attaining future benefit, and even for obtaining virtue and some bliss in this life.

Some Western interpreters of Islam have anachronistically read post-Reformation debates over "works" into Islamic teaching on inner warfare, failing to understand the broader Near-Eastern context for a more nuanced approach that involves synergy between two wills—the human and the divine. Attention has often been focussed on the monastic context of Syrian asceticism which supposedly contrasts it with Islam and makes it more similar to the West, however, the difference in the external monastic framework hides a far more significant and fundamental Syrian Christian and Muslim agreement on anthropology. It is easier to understand the Muslim position when the Syrian Christian idea is contrasted with the Latin Christian, so I will summarise that difference first. The clearest statement of the Western view roughly contemporary with the Late Syrians and early Islam is the statement of the Second Council of Orange (529 CE). In this document we read:

The sin of the first man has so *impaired and weakened free will* that no one thereafter can either love God as he ought or believe in God or do good for God's sake, *unless the grace of divine mercy has preceded* him.

We also believe and confess to our benefit that in every good work it is *not we who take the initiative* and are then assisted through the mercy of God, but *God himself first* inspires in us both faith in him and love for him without any previous good works of our own that deserve reward."[6]

These quoted sections teach two doctrines that the Christian East rejects, specifically that it is God who always works first, and secondly that after the Fall human free will is completely powerless on its own to do good. Isaac in contrast explicitly writes that: "What is the first path and beginning that conducts us to wisdom? It consists in a man's going in search of God with all his strength, in striving with his whole soul until the end of his pursuit."[7] Further, "in proportion to a man's volition to strive toward God, and in proportion to his purpose to attain his goal for God's sake, God works with him, helps him, and manifests His providence in him."[8] This is in keeping with the Eastern church as a whole, for example John Chrysostom writes, "He (God) does not anticipate (precede) our willing, lest our free-will should be outraged (suffer)."[9]

In contrast with the Second Council of Orange, the Syrian position elevates free will to being an essential aspect of human nature, even after the Fall. This is most eloquently described at length by John of Damascus in his *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* in the chapters about free will, predestination, and salvation.[10] While John of Damascus writes in Greek, he is a leading administrator to the Muslim Caliph in Damascus, and is familiar with Syrian traditions and teaching as well as Arabic terminology and thoughtforms.[11] He

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[6] Carl Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church, from the Original Documents Volume IV. A.D. 451 to A.D. 680* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark. 1895), 164-5, (emphasis mine). This Second Council of Orange conclusion section continues: "If anyone denies that it is the whole man, that is, both body and soul, that was changed for the worse through the offense of Adam's sin, but believes that the freedom of the soul remains unimpaired and that only the body is subject to corruption, he is deceived by the error of Pelagius."

[7] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.37 (Bedjan, 225; Miller, 289).

[8] Isaac, *Homilies*, 1.39 (Bedjan, 271; Miller, 321).

[9] John Chrysostom, *Homily 12 on Hebrews*, ed. and trans. Frederic Gardiner, NPNF, 1.14, 425. See also Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 117-18.

[10] John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,* NPNF 2.9, ed. and trans. Philip Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898), 489-95.

[11] Sidney H. Griffith, "The Manṣūr Family and St. John of Damascus," in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State: Lamine 1- Late Antique and Medieval Islamic Near East,* eds. Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016), 29-51.

argues at length in his section titled "*Of the things which are in our Power, and not in our Power*" that humans have free will, by nature. He says that this is because humans are not like animals but are created in the image of God, and since God has real freedom, so do humans. He asserts that Christ *as a true human* had will and desire, because free will is inherent in humans, being a part of the very image of God.[12] This ability to freely choose, even after the Fall, is vital in Christ's human nature, since he also struggled and won as a true human, as previously discussed. In a way reminiscent of Jacob of Serugh, John writes concerning Christ's human free will and the place of his *agonia* in the Garden:

> So, then, He had by nature, both as God and as man, the power of will. But His human will was obedient and subordinate to His divine will, not being guided by its own inclination, but willing those things which the divine will willed. For it was with the permission of the divine will that He suffered by nature what was proper to Him. For when He prayed that He might escape the death, it was with His divine will naturally willing and permitting it that He did so pray and *agonize* and fear, and again when His divine will willed that His human will should choose the death, the passion became voluntary to Him. For it was not as God only, but also as man, that He voluntarily surrendered Himself to the death.[13]

This high view of human freedom is often echoed in Muslim texts which criticise Western views of the fall as creating an unjust God who determines human action.[14] Again, on this issue, the Syrians argue much as the Muslims, following early church authors such as Justin who writes:

> If all things happen by fate, then nothing is in our own power. For if it be predestined that one man be good and another man evil, then the first is not deserving of praise or the other to be blamed. *Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions.*[15]

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[12] John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,* NPNF, 2.9, 485. The "will" in humans includes a deliberative or *gnomic* will, but John argues however that there was no deliberation in Christ's will because God already knows the right action and does not have to consider and choose.

[13] John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,* NPNF, 2.9, (3.XVIII), 328-9.

[14] Yaseen Mohamed, *Fitra: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996), 13-32.

[15] Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, ed. and trans. A. Cleveland Cox, ANF 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 2004), 177, (emphasis mine). The full paragraph reads: "We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Otherwise, if all things happen by fate, then nothing is in our own power. For if it be predestined that one man be good and another man evil, then the first is not deserving of praise or the other to be blamed.

I have briefly discussed the Islamic theologies of free will, predestination, and struggle in the chapters on al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī. The ideas of *qadar* ("fate" or divine predestination) and *jabr* ("divine omnipotence") are explained in depth by Watt, and Watt's ideas are developed by Murad who discusses the complex theological issues involved and to what extent they are connected with varying political views.[16] Both al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī are concerned to maintain a middle position that affirms both God's sovereignty yet allows for human free will. In this they are perfectly traditional, as even Ibn Taymīyya emphasises the importance of maintaining a right balance between divine and human actions.[17] In Islam as in Christianity, there were cultural contexts that caused these concerns about human choice and divine action. Rauf discusses the history of *qadar*, pre-Islamic tendencies to fatalism, and how some Muslims taught human free will with the understanding that the doctrine of *qadar* was a comfort due to suffering by Muslims. As per other mainstream Islamic teachers, both al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī reject the opposite extremes of Jahm and the Qadarites etc.[18]

It is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss Muslim views on free will in depth as these have been well-covered elsewhere. It is noteworthy, however, that both the Muslim and Syrian Christian views adopt a dual source approach. While the philosophical explanations may differ, both understand that there are two sources or two causes for human actions, and that there is in some way a synergy in the spiritual life. This has direct implications for understanding the place of struggle in both faiths. There is a parallel between the explanations we have seen in Ps-Macarius, Isaac, and John of Damascus, and a *ḥadīth* where Muḥammad explains:

Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions-whatever they may be.... For neither would a man be worthy of reward or praise if he did not of himself choose the good, but was merely created for that end. Likewise, if a man were evil, he would not deserve punishment, since he was not evil of himself, being unable to do anything else than what he was made for." cf. Irenaeus, "But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect similar to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself his own cause that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff." AH. 4.4.3. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* A. Cleveland Cox, ANF 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 2004), 466.

[16] Montgomery Watt, *Free-Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London: Luzac & Co., 1948); Hasan Qasim Murad, "Jabr and Qadar in Early Islam: A reappraisal of their Political and Religious Implications," in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams,* eds. Wael Hallaq and Donald Little (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 117-32 (118); See also Khalid Blankenship, "The Early Creed," in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: CUP 2008), 37-54 (39).

[17] Thomas Würtz, "Reactions of Ibn Taymiyya and Taftāzānī upon the Mystic Conception of Ibn ʿArabī," in ed. Heike Stamer, *Mysticism in East and West: The Concept of Unity of Being* (Lahore: Multimedia Affairs, 2013), 41-52 (45-6).

[18] M.A. Rauf, "The Qurʾān and Free Will," *Muslim World* (60.4, October 1970): 289–299. For an extended discussion on free will and predestination in Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, see Suleiman Ali Mourad, *Early Islam between Myth and History* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 161-75.

There is none of you, but has his place assigned either in the Fire or in Paradise." They (the Companions) inquired, "O Allah's Messenger! Why should we carry on doing good deeds, shall we depend (upon Qadar) and give up work?" Muḥammad said: "No, carry on doing good deeds, for everyone will find it easy (to do) such deeds that will lead him towards that for which he has been created.[19]

Underlying this approach to free will is a somewhat common understanding that human nature is not deeply flawed, but is capable through human struggle of effectively attaining to "salvation." The approach to soteriology in both faiths is built on a very similar anthropology at this point.[20] This again is a noticeable area of connection in contrast to most Western Christianities—both groups see human nature as inherently good and able through a long struggle to attain to righteousness. This view is central to the Muslim idea of *fitrah* (instinctual human nature), and to Christian *synergeia* as discussed earlier. However, for the Syrian Christians, this concept of victorious inner warfare is also tied to Christology. This is best summarised by John of Damascus (d. 749 CE), who around a hundred years before al-Muḥāsibī writes:

> For it was sin that brought death like a wild and savage beast into the world to the ruin of the human life. But it behoved the Redeemer to be without sin, and not made liable through sin to death, and further, that *His (human) nature should be strengthened and renewed*, and *trained by labour* and taught the way of virtue which leads away from corruption to the life eternal and, in the end, is revealed the mighty ocean of love to man that is about Him. For the very Creator and Lord Himself *undertakes a struggle* in behalf of the work of His own hands, and *learns by toil* to become Master.[21]

I shall return to the significance of an Arabic Christian author using such struggle language in the context of Islam, but for now it is worth noting John's use of the Hellenistic ideas of *labour* and *struggle* in relation to the renewing of human nature, because for the Syrians, human nature is not "depraved" since the Fall, but merely weakened.

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[19] Muslim, "Sahih Muslim," http://sunnahonline.com/library/beliefs-and-methodology/186-summary-of-the-beliefs-of-ahlus-sunnah-wal-jamaah-pertaining-to-al-qada-and-al-qadr-a, accessed August 9, 2018, cf. "Sahih Bukhari," http://i-cias.com/textarchive/bukhari/077.htm, accessed August 9, 2018. Al-Ghazālī even quotes this in his *Iḥyā'*, Book 40: Remembrance and the Afterlife, see Muhammad al-Sharif (trans.), *Revival of Religion's Sciences* (Ihya Ulum ad-din), 1-4 Vol, 4, (n.p.: Dar Al Kotob Al Ilmiyah, n.d.), 745.

[20] Cf. Ps-Dionysius whose belief in human nature is such that, "evil is not an inherent part of nature as a whole" 92. Pseudo Dionysius, *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 64.

[21] John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,* Book III.1, 496, (emphasis mine).

A definite difference between the two religions is in the conception of struggle in relation to motivation. While both see obedience and struggle as motivated by fear of the final judgement, for the Syrians it is Christ himself who is important in the struggle in a way that Muhammad is not for Muslims. In both cases Christ or Muhammad are seen as models to imitate— Muhammad's words on struggle are frequently quoted by Muslims, and his *jihād* is sometimes used as an example, but not in the same sense that Christ's inner battles define the path of Christian salvation. In al-Ghazālī we see previous Muslims who struggled in some way fulfilling the role as exemplars, but for Jacob of Serugh and John of Damascus, Jesus' recapitulation of Adam's failure in spiritual battle is more than an exemplar—it actually *enables* effective struggle. As seen earlier in Jacob, struggle is central to Christology for the Syrians, and this is also crystalised by John, who also explains the Syrian idea of human nature:

> He was tried and *overcame* in order that He might *prepare victory* for us and give to nature *power to overcome its antagonist*, in order that nature which was *overcome* of old might overcome its former conqueror by the very *weapons* wherewith it had itself been *overcome*. The wicked one, then, made his *assault* from without, not by thoughts prompted inwardly, just as it was with Adam. For it was not by inward thoughts, but by the serpent that Adam was *assailed*. But the Lord *repulsed the assault* and dispelled it like vapour.[22]

In Syrian theology, Christ has conquered Satan and given to believers a share of His power to live out this victory. Jesus is both a role model and also enabler and guarantor of effective struggle. It must be added that for the typical believer in the 8th century CE, such details were probably beyond their interest, and in practical terms a follower of either faith may not have quoted the texts analysed above to explain why and how they performed inner struggle.

Another defining difference between the Islamic and Syriac Christian views concerns the outcome of striving. For some Sufis *Tawhid* (Oneness, or Divine Unity) defines the ultimate goal, which is often seen as a merging into the divine unity. This also affects the Sufi notion of free will in that, "Tawhid means the realisation that all things come from God and

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[22] John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,* Chapter 3.XX, 531, (emphasis mine).

secondary causes and means are of no account."[23] The true Sufi will, "abandon himself to God in complete trust and merge his will in the Divine Will."[24] Yet this is not as true for al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī, who speak more about being saved in the day of judgement, being rewarded in the afterlife, and attaining a good life and good character now on Earth. They do not share the NeoPlatonic worldview of the more "ecstatic" type of Sufis. [25]

There are some distinct similarities in the anthropology of the Syrian Christians and Muslims regarding the place of inner struggle and this should change how each sees the other, and how others view both religions. Despite some areas of difference, on the key concept of the freedom of human will to struggle while being dependent on God's help, the Muslim and Christian writers share much about the efficacy of struggle.

Correlative post- Muhammad Christian jihād texts

Isaac writes in the context of early Islam, and thus it is relevant to compare Isaac's treatment of the struggle motif with other authors living after the spread of Islam, to determine if his approach represents a continuing trend. Isaac develops the earlier Christian understandings of struggle, but he writes in Syriac, while early Sufis use Arabic. What is therefore deeply significant is how later Christian writers describe struggle when they write in Arabic, and the specific words they use. If they use words such as *jihād*, then they must have seen enough commonality between Muslim and Christian usages to warrant such usage. If *jihād* was a word exclusively used by Muslims to describe violent warfare, then Christians would hardly have used it in relation to the battle of the soul, since there are other less violent Arabic words that would suffice. There are numerous Christian Arabic writings in the 800-1000 CE period that show Christians very aware of the tenets and practices of Muslims and that they are quite keen to clarify the differences between the two religions, for example Timothy and his debates with the Caliph.[26] Any Arabic Christian discussion of inner *jihād* therefore occurs

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[23] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 167.

[24] Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 167-68.

[25] Smith summarises this point: "The real meaning of Meditation (*muraqaba*), al-Ghazālī says, is the attentive apprehension (muldhaza) of the omnipresence of God … the direction of all concern towards Him, a state of introversion in which the heart is listening to His voice, pre-occupied with Him, all the thoughts directed towards Him, being continually conscious of His Presence." Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, 169-170. This is not too different to the Syriacs who also teach that the overwhelming love of God is where the "soul is intoxicated with God" and where self is the listening servant of God. Isaac, *Homilies,* 1.1.6 (Bedjan, 2-3; Hansbury, 26).

[26] Erica Hunter, "Interfaith Dialogues: The Church of the East and the Abbassids," in *Der Christliche Orient und seine Umwelt*, eds. Sophia Vashalomidze and Lutz Greisiger (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 289-303 (289). The Syriac text and English translation and commentary of the debate is in A. Mingana, ed.,

within a context of sufficient understanding of the significance of using the term.

A very important piece of evidence is the earliest Arabic-Syriac dictionary definitions of *agōna* which equate it with *jihād*.[27] Hassan Bar-Bahlul was a tenth century CE Syrian Christian bishop living in Baghdad who composed a dictionary with lexical additions.[28] The Christian elite by this time was well-versed in Arabic, and Bar-Bahlul as a bishop would certainly have understood the implications of his translation choices, and this is evident by his criticism of Muslim warriors who were undertaking violent external *jihād*.[29] So despite his criticism of the external form of *jihād,* his equating of the Syriac *agōna* with *jihād* means that he understood that the Muslim inner *jihād* was equivalent to the Syrian Christian struggle.

One of the most telling pieces of evidence is the Arabic translation of the Syriac New Testament completed in Damascus in 867 CE (Ramadhan 253 AH), found in Mt Sinai Arabic Codex 151.[30] According to the colophon the translator was Bishr ibn al-Sirri. Interestingly, as Staal says, Bishr uses "many" Islamic phrases such as "Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim."[31] The translation includes lectionary reading marks showing that it was intended for use in the liturgy. In relation to the translation of the Syriac *agōna* and the Arabic *jihād*, the frequently cited passage 1 Tim. 6:12 "fight the good fight of faith" in this text is *"w-jahada fī malḥamah alamān alṣālḥa."*[32] The verb *jahada* is the verbal form of *jihād* and this usage is the same as in other later Arabic Bibles. It is curious that the Syriac words "good fight,"[33] (in Greek *agonizomai ton kalon agōna*) are translated into Arabic as *"al-malḥamah"* (the epic struggle), "of true faith." *Malḥamah* means "epic fight" or even "fierce battle", but also means "epic",

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Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūni, vol. 2 (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1928), 1-162.

[27] Syriac: ܒܪ ܚܝܠܐ · ܡܟܬܫܝܢ ܒܩܪܒܐ · ܘܟܠ ܕܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ Arabic: نان كلّ من فى جهاد مجاهدا lit. All those who were in the jihad doing jihad (verb and noun) Hassano Bar-Bahlule, *Lexicon Syriacum,* ed. Rubens Duval (Paris, 1901), 24-25.

[28] Ignatius Aphram Barsoum, *The Scattered Pearls: a History of Syriac Literature and Sciences,* trans. Matti Moosa (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004), 26.

[29] Bar-Bahlul calls them "donkey-like," Bar-Bahlul, *Lexicon Syriacum,* 24-5. As Penn notes earlier, educated Christians understood Arabic.

[30] This manuscript was discovered in 1950 by the American Foundation expedition and is presented in Arabic and English translation, edited by Harvey Staal in the CSCO series, *Scriptores Arabici* 40-43.

[31] Harvey Staal, introduction to *Mt Sinai Arabic Codex 151: Pauline Epistles- English* (Louvain: Peeters, 1983), v. The colophon is on fol. 186v and 187r.

[32] *Mt Sinai Arabic Codex 151: Pauline Epistles- Arabic,* ed. Harvey Stahl (Louvain: Peeters, 1983), 193. وجاهد في ملحمة الإمان الصالحة Another example is Phil. 1:30 "Patient in striving" which in Syriac is *agōna,* and Arabic 151 has *jihad. Mt Sinai Arabic Codex 151: Pauline Epistles- English* ed. and trans. Harvey Stahl (Louvain: Peeters, 1983), 150.

[33] ܐܓܘܢܐ ܛܒܐ ܕ.

"heroic poem", or "the good odyssey," since *malḥamah* is used in Arabic to describe the Homeric epic quest. This usage of *malḥamah* certainly continues the common understanding of *agōn/agōna* as a heroic struggle in the Greek tradition, but it is interesting to see it being used in the Arabic Bible. Bishr's use of *malḥamah* is very sophisticated—he is using two Homeric concepts—the epic journey and the *agōn*, to explain a Christian idea to an Arabic-speaking audience.[34] While in most other cases the Greek *agōn* and Syriac *agōna* is translated into Arabic as *jihād*, in one place Bishr uses *malḥamah* and a few verses later he translates the same Syriac word as *jihād*.[35] His repeated usage of both words and as virtual parallels shows that Bishr, translating a text that would be used in church liturgies, equates Islamic struggle with the Syriac and earlier Greek notions. Bishr goes beyond the most common translation of the Syriac word to use a synonym which invokes Helllenistic ideas which had never been forgotten in Syria, and which were resurgent with Arabs due to the translation movement.[36] This Homeric image of a long struggle for salvation contrasts with the instant legal justification view of some Western churches.[37] It is significant that the Syrian Christian approach is more similar in some ways to the Sufi model than the Augustinian/Anselmian, and thus Western attempts to understand Islamic theology would be better served by comparing it to Syrian teaching rather than to the scholastics, Calvin, or Luther.

One unresolved issue with the Arabic Bible translation is whether this was a new translation or simply a new copy of an earlier oral text. The evidence for the first Arabic scriptures is quite mixed. While there is no concrete witness of a pre-Islamic Arabic Bible, there is strong indication for an oral usage of Arabic passages in the liturgy, and possibly some written Arabic even in the fourth century CE, and significant early evidence of a written Arabic gospel in South Arabia in the fifth century.[38] Griffith argues that the Qur'ān itself assumes a high degree of Biblical knowledge among its hearers which would indicate at least

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[34] By this time Arabs were increasingly exposed to this culture, although the extent is still debated as discussed earlier.

[35] Codex 151: v1 لنا موضوعة هي التي الملحمة هذه نُحضر وبالصبر wabālṣabar nuḥaḍar hadhah *almalḥamah* altay hī mwḍuʿt lanā; Codex 151: v4 *al-jihād* الجهاد cf. Heb 12:1 "race" *agōna* ܐܓܘܢܐ 12:4 "in the struggle" (against sin) *agōna* ܐܓܘܢܐ.

[36] Nowieeny says "Hunain Ibn Ishaq (809-873 CE), the best known and distinguished translator at Baghdad, was traditionally cited to have been reciting loudly Greek verses from the Iliad, while walking in the streets of Baghdad," Magda El-Nowieemy, "Sulaiman Al-Bustani's Translation of Homer's Iliad:A Study of Creation and Trans-Creation" *Papyri – Delti volume 2*, 2013: 93-99, (96, note 25).

[37] Surprisingly, while much has been written on the difference between these two views, very little explores the different imagery of the court versus the marathon or quest, and this would be useful research.

[38] Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 2-4,13-16, 41-42. Shahid discusses the written evidence in Irfan Shahid, *Byzantine and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2006), 427-29.

a strong oral tradition.[39] Either way, the fact that the translator uses *jihād* if it was currently an abhorrent word is telling. These facts combined with the continued usage of *jihād* in Arabic Bibles and Christian writings till today, demonstrates that Arabic Christians consistently equate *jihād* with *agōna*, and they find no reason to qualify this usage in contrast to Islamic writings. Christians have always been aware that some Muslims see *jihād* as primarily violent while others see it as inward struggle. Even Bar Bahlul, while equating *agōna* to *jihād*, asserts that the violent external *jihād* is stupid ("donkey-like"), but this contrast was not sufficient to cause he and other translators to replace *jihād* with another word.[40]

John of Damascus is another very important early witness. I have noted above some of his writing on Jesus' struggle, and although he writes in Greek, John is well-aware of Islam and pens a significant diatribe against the "heresy of the Ishmaelites." What is noticeable in this is that he describes Islam as a Christian heresy and not as a separate religion, and although he criticises various aspects of Islam, there is no mention of contrasting views of *jihād*.[41] If this is an argument from silence then the silence is deafening, given the surrounding warfare and the consistent and persistent Christian usage of *jihād*. Christian polemicists were unafraid to challenge Islam in regards to many topics, for example in the debate over theology between Church of the East Patriarch Timothy 1 and the Caliph al-Mahdi, yet do not criticise the idea of *jihād*. Timothy engaged the Caliph for two days in 782 CE and disputed quite energetically with him. It is significant that in his single reference to external *jihād* he assumes the validity of the Caliph's battles.[42]

Even if individual Christian Arabic writers were mistaken using *jihād*, then given the various persecutions by Muslims at various times, the church as a whole would not be mistaken and might be expected to downplay any *jihād* wording, especially in the liturgy. On the contrary, we find that Arabic Christian hymnology extensively uses the actual word *jihād*, and frequently refers to the idea of spiritual struggle in many Arabic troparia and kontakia.

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[39] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic,* 16.

[40] Hassan Bar-Bahlul, *Lexicon Syriacum,* 24-5, مجاهدون ، مجاهات ، مجاهدة شدّة المروزى وزاد جهد جهاد . مجاحشون مجاهدون

[41] John of Damascus, *Fount of Knowledge*, part two: *Heresies in Epitome: How They Began and Whence They Drew Their Origin.* In Writings by St John of Damascus, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 37 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 153-60.

[42] Erica C. D. Hunter, "*Interfaith dialogues: The Church of the East and the Abbassids*," in *Der Christliche Orient und seine Umwelt,* ed. Sophia G. Vashaolmidze and Lutz Greisiger (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 289–302. For the full text of the debate see above note.

Troparia were developed in Greek and Syriac from the fourth century onwards and translated into Arabic over time from the sixth through eleventh centuries (and later, depending on when saints died), and at that time the translators chose to use *jihād*. Kontakia were developed by Romanos the Melodist (d. *c.* 520 CE) and added to later, and his kontakia were also translated early into Arabic. For example, the hymn to John the Baptist says: "You fought (*jāhadata*) for the sake of the truth," which uses the Arabic past tense of *jihād*, and this phrase is said by the priest before every liturgy and on every one of the various days commemorating John.[43] Many troparia use *jihād* for example the hymn for St Mamas, celebrated on September 2, says "Thy Martyr, O Lord, in his courageous contest (*jihād*) for Thee."[44] The Arabic word *mujāhidīn*, literally "those who do *jihād*," is also commonly used in the hymns as a description of the Christian martyrs. For example, during Great Lent the commemoration of the martyrs Terence and others has, "A multitude of torments were bravely endured by this company of martyrs (*mujāhidīn*).[45] Surveying just one random month of these troparia to the saints (September) reveals more than fifteen days where "struggle" is a main theme, and in most cases the Arabic translation for the word struggle is *jihād*, or derivations of the word such as *mujāhidīn* "martyrs." Further research is needed to see if this month is representative.[46] This extensive liturgical use of *jihād* which has persisted over time argues against any systematic Arabic Church desire to differentiate Christian *jihād* from Muslim *jihād*. Syriac and Arabic Christian authors appear to have considered that the term and practice encompassed both external warfare and inner spiritual struggle both for Christians and Muslims, and their translations demonstrate this equivalence.

Inner versus Outer struggle? The breadth of the struggle metaphor

Within both Islam and Christianity the same Arabic word *jihād* and related metaphors

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[43] Samir Girgis, *Kairon Prayers* (Melbourne: St Nicholas Church, 2010), 2; جاهدتَ .

[44] "Liturgics," https://www.stphilipedmonton.org/liturgics.html#_, accessed August 9, 2018. See also hymns used on other September days e.g. 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 7th. Samir Girgis, *Matins* (Melbourne: St Nicholas Church, 2010; بِجِهادِهِ .

[45] المجاهدين "Liturgics." In other parts of the liturgy there are also important references to the warfare metaphor that interestingly reveal the underlying Hellenistic worldview of the athlete's trophy and the military feat, for example at the beginning of every Matins there are prayers to Christ and Mary. The prayer to Christ says (emphasis mine), "(O) Christ our God … (that) we may be led to *victory over our adversaries* (*alghalaba ʿalī muharibihīm*), having in Your aid a *weapon of peace* (*salahān lilsalam*) and an *invincible trophy* (*ẓafrān ghīramqahūr*)." محاربيهم على الغلبةَ … مقهور غيرَ وظَفراً للسلام سلاحاً معونتُك لهم لتكنْ . "Liturgics." The ancient prayer to Mary which is still in use across the worldwide Orthodox Church, especially reveals the Greek notion of the champion who cannot be deceived by the enemy when it says, "(O) fearful *champion* who cannot be put to confusion … leading us all to that *victory* which is from heaven." The standard church Arabic translation has: المخذولة غيرُ الرهيبةُ الشفيعةُ أيتها … السماء منَ الغلبةَ وامنحيهم .

[46] More examples are found in the Pentecost prayers and in many parts of Vespers.

are used for both the inner and outer battles, the battle within the soul, and the external warfare for the faith. Some scholars have dichotomised the Muslim sense of *jihād* and attempted to create a false delineation between those who practice the inner *jihād* and those who engage in the outer. However, as Deborah Tor and others have shown, there was significant Sufi involvement in various fighter bands from the ninth century or earlier, and the two forms of *jihād* are often blurred.[47] In respect to the breadth of the notion of *jihād*, it is clear that al-Ghazālī understands *jihād* also in the sense of external violence as he writes about the positive uses of anger by saying, "severity can only arise from anger, and were there to be no anger, there could be no *jihād* against the unbelievers."[48] He also mentions amidst a discussion about inner warfare the man who is "unable to participate in the front lines of the battle in the *jihād* should provide water for the warriors."[49] He does not say that this external *jihād* is wrong, but merely secondary, and cites the well-known *ḥadīth* about the lesser *jihād* and greater *jihād* quoted earlier. The same is true of Christian writers in Arabic. Saint George is a well-known saint from as far apart as England and Persia. He is especially revered as one of the leading saints in the Syrian and Arabic-speaking regions where George's holiness is understood as due both to his external fighting and to his martyrdom, which is seen as a fight against the temptation to deny the faith. In his case the internal and external fights are blurred.[50] Other Eastern warrior saints also involve nuanced understandings of their involvement in war, for example St Theodore the General, and the Forty Holy Martyrs of Sebaste.[51]

The Eastern Orthodox view of the external war should not be confused with the later Western idea of a "holy war" or crusade. While there are some similarities, a fundamental difference is that in the East war was only fought if it was "just" and there was no real

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[47] Deborah Tor, *Violent Order: Religious Warfare, Chivalry, and the ʿAyyār Phenomenon in the Medieval Religious World* (Würzburg: Orient-Institut Istanbul, 2007), especially 229-249. In relation to early external *jihādis,* Sizgorich asserts that some early Muslim authors referred to Christian monks and monasticism as models to explain "the essential character of *jihād*." Thomas Sizgorich, "'Do Prophets Come with a Sword?' Conquest, Empire, and Historical Narrative in the Early Islamic World," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 112, No. 4 (Oct., 2007): 993-1015 (1003).

[48] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.3 (BDM, 57; Winter, 28), الجهاد لبطل الغضب بطل ولو الغضب عن الشدة تصدر وإنما بالشدة وصفهم .

[49] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 22.11 (BDM, 78; Winter, 97), القوم يسقي أن ينبغي القتال صف في الجهاد عن العاجز فإن .

[50] Norman Wetzig, "Sankt Georg – sanctus et militans: Ein Heiliger als Spiegel von Norm und Wirklichkeit des Christentums in Spätantike und Mittelalter," in: *Der Christliche Orient und seine Umwelt: Gesammelte Studien zu Ehren Jürgen Tubachs anläßlich seines 60. Geburtstags* (= Studies in Oriental Religions, Vol. 56), eds. Sophia G. Vashalomidze and Lutz Greisiger (Wiesbaden 2007), 227-247.

[51] Some warrior saints refused to fight, and their resistance was their *agōn*. See for example John D'Alton, "The Asceticism of Severus: An Analysis of struggle in his Homily 18 on the 'Forty Holy Martyrs' compared to the Cappadocians and the Syrians," In *Severus of Antioch: His Life and Times*, eds. John D'Alton and Youhanna Youssef (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 47-64.

concept of a holy war since any soldier who killed normally underwent a time of excommunication. There is no idea of a war granting any penance or indulgence in the East. This is in contrast to the crusades which were seen as a holy war and a remission of sins.[52] Neither is the Islamic external *jihād* identical with the crusade either, as discussed in my first chapter.[53] Heck notes concerning Islamic *jihād* that the internal and external battles were also not mutually exclusive—the exact relation between them is complicated and beyond the scope of this thesis.[54] Noticeably, the internal battle is described using external motifs so they are closely connected analogically at least. One area requiring further research is how these military metaphors were informed by the ongoing military developments. It is true that Sufis use concrete examples from the military *jihād*, and their *ribāṭs* (ascetic complexes) were often initially military bases too, but this is not true in the case of Syriac Christianity. I will not discuss any further the external struggle, but returning again to the "internal" struggle there is one further important similarity between the Syrian and Islamic ideas that has been somewhat evident in the studied texts. Several authors link inner struggle with martyrdom, which parallels the oft-made connection between external Islamic *jihād* and martyrdom. Significantly, some early Muslim writers explained internal *jihād* "as a ritualized martyrdom" and justified it by "comparing what they did to the life of the Christian monk."[55]

For Muslims, *jihād* as physical battle and *jihād* as personal struggle develop together. My analysis has reinforced the evidence that *jihād* means more than to fight—the term means more like "struggle" since it includes intellectual battle as well. Cole in a forthcoming book makes much the same argument, and shares my perspective on the similarity to the Greek word *agōn*. He asserts that, "the word "*jihād*" does not mean "to fight" but to engage in pious

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[52] Angeliki Laiou, "The Just War of Eastern Christians and the Holy War of the Crusaders," In *The Ethics of War: Shared Problems in Different Traditions,* eds. Richard Sorabji and David Rodin (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 22-43. See also Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki, "'Holy War' In Byzantium Twenty Years Later", In *Byzantine War Ideology: Between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion*, eds. Johannes Koder and Ioannis Stouraitis (Vienna: Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaffen, 2012), 121-32.

[53] Also see Mark J. Siljander, *A Deadly Misunderstanding* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 169-78.

[54] Heck, "*Jihād* Revisited," 99, says that "It was thus one's own soul that was to be slain, since detachment from all save God came about only through the mortification or even annihilation of one's own evil-inclined soul (Q 12:53). Waging *jihād* on oneself was therefore a temporary but necessary stage to mystical Union… *Jihād* as a struggle to purify one's interior state did not mean that ascetics and mystics dispensed with military conceptions of *jihād* ... The inner struggle to subdue the baser elements of one's own soul were a reflection of the struggle to subdue the baser elements of human society, such as anarchy and injustice. Both soul and society were to be purified of these elements."

[55] Heck, "*Jihād* Revisited," 101. Heck 101 adds that "The conception of *jihad* as a ritualized martyrdom was constructed through qur'ānic citation (Ibn al-Mubārak 1988, no. 2) and the reports of the first Muslims (Ibn al-Mubārak 1988, no. 62). Pious action, according to the logic of the frontier, went hand-in-hand with martyrdom," Heck is referencing Ibn al-Mubārak 1988 *Kitāb al-jihād*. Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'As.riyya. Also see Ibn al-Mubārak 1988, no. 15, 143, 149.

and ethical struggle (the same is true for other words from the same Arabic root). It has been suggested that it is similar to the Greek *agōn* or struggle, conflict, challenge."[56] For both Syrian Christians and Sufis, the concept of struggle permeated both the inner and outer worlds, and a sharp differentiation is not always possible.

Muslim-Christian Interaction

The social and intellectual boundaries between Christians and Muslims were not sealed, even during the wars of Muslim expansion. There is extensive evidence of Christian Arabs fighting alongside Muslim Arabs even against other Christian tribes.[57] Borrut and Donner summarise the body of evidence that the religious lines were blurred and that Christians played a significant role in early Muslim society.[58] This interaction is especially so at the level of the educated urban Arabs, from the time of the translation movement onwards. Ideas could thus easily permeate between the faiths on points where there was already general agreement, such as inner spiritual struggle. Recent research has shown that bi-lingualism and tri-lingualism were more common than previously believed and this facilitated transmission of ideas. It is almost certain for example that John of Damascus knew Syriac, Greek, and Arabic, and the Muslim scholar Hunain Ibn Ishaq (809-873 CE), "mastered Syriac, Greek and Arabic languages.*"[59]

The somewhat clearer split during later Crusader-Muslim wars should not be read back into the Abbasid era. Far from being antagonistic to Christians, Muslims were interested in Christian ideas, and their ideological attacks were mostly against "heretics," e.g. Manichaeans, extremist Sufis, Muʿtazila, etc., rather than against Christians.[60] Anti-Christian

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[56] John Cole, "Surprise! On how Muhammad never preached "Jihad," https://www.juancole.com/2018/07/surprise-muhammad-never-preached.html, accessed August 2, 2018.

[57] Wadād al-Qāḍī, "Non-Muslims in the Muslim Conquest Army in Early Islam," *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State*: Lamine 1- Late Antique and Medieval Islamic Near East, eds. Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016), 83-127.

[58] Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner, "Introduction: Christians and Others in the Umayyad State," in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State: Lamine 1- Late Antique and Medieval Islamic Near East,* eds. Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016), 1-10 (1-3).

[59] Sidney H. Griffith, "The Manṣūr Family and St. John of Damascus," in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State: Lamine 1- Late Antique and Medieval Islamic Near East,* eds. Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016), 29-51 (31). Magda El-Nowieemy, "Sulaiman Al-Bustani's Translation of Homer's Iliad: A Study of Creation and Trans-Creation" in *Papyri – Delti* volume 2, (2013): 93-99.

[60] Erica Hunter, "Interfaith Dialogues: The Church of the East and the Abbassids," *Der Christliche Orient und seine Umwelt*, Sophia Vashalomidze and Lutz Greisiger (eds) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 289-303 (289). Hunter argues that the two day debate of Timothy with the Caliph was not unique, and that Christians were "major contributors" to the intellectual growth of Islam, the introduction of Greek philosophy via

polemic mainly developed after the 800s CE. As Treiger asserts, during the first centuries of Islam the boundary between Islam and Christianity was "porous", and Christian converts to Islam brought across ideas and practices "spontaneously" not just via the scholarly interaction.[61] There was also extensive re-conversion and fluid boundaries between religions at the personal level until at least the eleventh century.[62] Fowden writes of the "crypto-Christians who never fully converted to Islam … and took with them some patterns of religious behaviour forged by experience on the ground of Christian asceticism."[63] Metaphor was a key ingredient in spreading ideas of inner struggle given the high level of orality in the Middle East in the period studied. For both Syrian Christians and Muslims, the ascetic texts were spoken texts read in monasteries and mosques, which were then memorised and recited by followers. To facilitate memory it was common to use poetry, pithy statements, metaphors, and aphorisms, and this methodology is common across the two faiths. Even today there is a distinct similarity between Sufi and monastic practice, and this must have assisted in the spread of innovation and ideas.[64]

In summary, research shows that there was a continuity of a blended somewhat-Hellenised Syro-Arabic culture in Damascus and many of the centres of early Islam. The educated urban Arabs, Syrians, Persians, Armenians, and Jews shared much of the Syrian ascetic tradition and despite theological debates the relatively non-controversial practices became common in Sufi Islam. The extent of easy acceptance is shown by the few instances of rejection, for example Muslims usually rejected celibacy.[65] Given that there was a "significant measure of intellectual crosspollination," it would be extraordinary if ascetic metaphor did not share in this mutual exchange.[66] Many of the words for spiritual practices

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translations etc. 289.

[61] Alexander Treiger, "Mutual Influences and Borrowings," In *Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Borrowings*, ed. David Thomas (London: Routledge, 2018) 194-206 (194).

[62] Uriel Simonsohn, "Conversion, Apostasy, and Penance: The Shifting Identities of Muslim Converts in the Early Islamic Period," *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam and Beyond*, eds. Arietta Papaconstantinou, McLynn, Daniel Schwartz (Farnham, England: Routledge, 2015), 197-217 (204-11).

[63] Elizabeth Kay Fowden, "Rural Converters among the Arabs," In *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam and Beyond*, eds. Arietta Papaconstantinou, McLynn, Daniel Schwartz (Farnham, England: Routledge, 2015), 175-96 (195).

[64] Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, v; See also for Innovation Diffusion Theory, Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of innovations* (3rd ed.)*,* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1983).

[65] Even here, in the case of Rabi'a al-Adawiyya who lived roughly 95-185 AH (c. 714-801 CE) in Basra, this was still praised although seen as her being like a Christian nun, as mentioned in Chapter 1.The statement by her accusers that she is "fit to be an abbess" is thus significant and must be seen as both complimentary and critical. The holiness of an abbess was highly regarded, but also understood as a deviation from true Islamic holiness. Ascetic withdrawal and renunciation as practiced by Rabi'a contradicted the Islamic sense of active engagement in daily life. See Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism,* 20.

[66] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic,* 2; Blum argues that al-Ghazālī influenced Bar Hebraeus and discusses aspects

are similar in Arabic and Syriac and this may also have facilitated exchange of ideas, as I discussed earlier.[67]

It is reasonable to believe that metaphors for the inner struggle may have been exchanged across the faiths. Indeed, an assumption that is often made about these similarities is that Islam copied these ideas from Christianity.[68] Yet one surprising result of my textual analysis is just how little evidence there is for any direct copying. Aside of a few references to the gospel, none of the metaphors or phrases used by the Muslims about inner struggle have any discernible Biblical or Christian basis beyond a general similarity. While some parts of Christian belief are explicitly mentioned in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, this lack of any explicit appropriation raises interesting questions. Since the concept of inner *jihād* appears to derive originally from the Qur'ān, did the early Sufis have sufficient oral Islamic and Syro-Arabic traditions to draw from that such copying was unneeded? Or did they deliberately on this subject develop their own metaphors in contradistinction to the Christian ascetics? These questions require further research. Either way, the similarity in struggle metaphor across religions in respect to the military and medical domains is striking. Sufi and Syriac Christian writers used very similar motifs to exhort their audiences to spiritual struggle against temptations, the world, and the evil spirits.[69]

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of the encounters between Syrian spirituality and early Sufism, noting many similarities and areas of possible cross-fertilisation. Georg Günter Blum, *Die Geschichte der Begegnung christlich-orientalischer Mystik* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2009), 479-710 (654-657).

[67] See also Mark J. Siljander, *A Deadly Misunderstanding* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 227.

[68] See my discussion in the first chapter, also Winter, introduction, xxiii, who writes of "substantial and verifiable Christian influence upon certain forms of Muslim piety."

[69] As late as the thirteenth century, Bar-Hebraeus, Patriarch of the Church of the East, collected and published stories of Christian ascetics and also the "profitable sayings" of various Muslim Kings and ascetics, and translates the Muslim's "conquered worldly lusts" using the typical Syriac word used of monastic struggle-*zakya*. Bar-Hebraeus, *The Laughable Stories,* trans. and ed. Wallis Budge (London: Luzac and Co, 1897), No. 292, 73, ܐܬܟܬܫ.

Conclusion: Implications for today

The Syrian Christian and Sufi authors that I have analysed describe the spiritual struggle in many complex ways using a wide range of metaphors and a broad cluster of related terms such as swords, fighting, wounding, victory, etc. They use these metaphors in relation to the military, medical, social, and athletic domains, showing a deep appreciation for how the inner world can be compared to everyday outer experiences. The Christian authors use athletic and labouring metaphors more often, and the Sufis employ medical imagery relatively more often. The same macrotrope of "spiritual life is struggle" is described, but interpreted in somewhat different ways based on cultural distinctions. I have shown that the metaphorical usage also assumes views of anthropology and soteriology that have marked similarities pertaining to the value of struggle and free will. While there are differences at points, the centrality of metaphors for struggle between the two faiths is evident, and their similarities are striking. This high level of correlation in the metaphors employed does not address the question of the relative prioritisation of the two aspects of inner and outer struggle in the two religions, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. Such a comparison is sorely needed, based on a comprehensive analysis of textual and historical evidence. This research would establish a factual base that beyond the shallow propaganda pieces that seek to demonise Islam and to exonerate Christianity of all violence.

A further implication of the evidence in this thesis is that there is no reason to doubt that early Islam included inner spiritual warfare as an aspect of the term *jihād*. Given that the surrounding Christians used *agōna* for both inner and outer struggle, and given the similarities in the many other religious terms shown earlier, it is not surprising that Islam also had an inner *jihād* from the beginning. The inner struggle as mentioned in the Qur'ān and early *ḥadīth* must therefore be considered authentic. This re-dating of the idea of inner *jihād* to the beginning of Islam is important because it shows that it is not a later invention but integral to Qur'ānic Islam. The focus of any criticism of Islamic *jihād* today must therefore be on those Muslims such as the Wahhabi movement who prioritise external violence in a way that is contradictory to al-Ghazālī and historical Islam.

My analysis of struggle metaphors also mandates a change in perceptions of early

Christian-Muslim relations, especially among those who practised asceticism. The fact that Arabic Christians used *jihād* from the beginning of the Arabic church and continues to do so up to the present day means that they saw sufficient equivalence in Christian and Muslim usage to not need to differentiate. The use of *mujāhidīn* for Christian martyrs in the liturgy is especially telling when viewed in the light of current world events. The relations between Christianity and Islam has been characterised as having a "fuzzy boundary" and more research is needed on exactly how permeable this boundary was: what do texts in both religions reveal about exchange of specific ideas and terminology.

The current "othering" of Islam due to its having a concept of *jihād* is thus neither historically valid nor sustainable. There are clearly differences between Islam and Christianity over the nature of Jesus and Muhammad etc., but historically the metaphor of inner *jihād* as such is not documented as an issue of contention. Christians accepted the validity of external Islamic warfare and what they criticised was rather the conduct of the *jihād*. Christians condemned the violence of the Muslims, while on the Muslim side the barbarous atrocities of the Crusaders were also condemned. Thus Islam is not "uniquely violent," and research is needed to clarify relative levels of violence between the two faiths across the centuries. The concept of *jihād* as inner spiritual soul warfare is highly valued by traditional Muslims, and simplistic Western media attacks on *jihād* as purely external and inherently violent merely confuse and frustrate Muslims. The non-Muslim world needs to recognise that there is a big difference between inner and outer *jihād* and appreciate that the interior Muslim battle has Christian parallels. This would defuse some element of uninformed broad-brush attacks on Islam and the term *jihād*. It would also allow for dialogue regarding the very similar practices of inner growth such as fasting and prayer, which would increase the possibilities for multicultural harmony and social inclusion.

Within the Christian tradition there is a need for Western scholars in particular to recognise the specific Syrian contribution to both Eastern Orthodoxy and to some parts of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The Syrian church never saw itself as secondary to the Greek tradition, and a significant portion of Syrian Christians even viewed themselves as superior. The more-highly-emphasized desert ascetic struggle theology of the non-Chalcedonian Syrians was sustained despite the somewhat official domestication of the Orthodox Church post-Constantine, and in some cases because of it. The Syrians were quite sceptical about the growth of an "effeminate" comfortable Christian lifestyle which was

lacking in struggle and fasting. Their motifs of struggle were therefore sometimes held up as an oppositional ideal, and continued to influence Eastern Orthodoxy through various Syrian writers and monks such as Isaac the Syrian, John of Damascus, and Peter of Damascus. In regards to the West, Isaac's teaching became the foundation for much of John Peckham's work on poverty and fasting. There is also evidence that it was instrumental in shaping the Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. Because Western theology has a somewhat lesser emphasis on the struggle motif it is possible to miss certain aspects of Syrian influence, thus many Western medieval texts may need to be re-analysed to discern possible Syrian influence.

A further significant contribution of the Syrian struggle theology is that it maintains a long continuity with the pre-Christian Hellenist notions of the *agōn* and the Old Testament ascetic flavour. Church texts in Syriac are far less removed from the Hellenised Jewish and Old Testament cultural milieus than medieval Latin or modern English texts. Aphrahat in particular writes prior to the growth of Greek and Latin monasticism. Thus Syrian theological and practical texts on Christology, asceticism, and many other topics must be viewed through the lens of a long Late Antiquity preserved in Syriac at least until the 1400s CE, and somewhat even to today. The Greco-Roman "martial" conception of life as discussed by Michael Stewart can therefore be seen as enduring in the Syrian ascetic tradition. While the authors and their primary intended audiences were ascetics or monks, all Syrian Christians were expected to embrace some asceticism. Hence the worldview of ascetic spiritual struggle was expected to be shared by all Christians, and this somewhat differentiates the Syrian church from other Christianities, giving added relevance and force to the spiritual battle texts.

Finally, my thesis demonstrates a need for further research on early Muslim-Christian relations. The similarities in worldview that I have shown in relation to the concept of spiritual struggle are very significant. The West especially needs a better education on the role of inner spiritual *jihād* in Islam and its similarities to Syrian Christian practice. This would do much to change interfaith relations and to reshape perceptions of Islamic struggle.

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