

# **THE CONCEPT OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVENESS IN THE NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS FOUND IN GENESIS AND ITS SCRIPTURAL EXEGESIS ACCORDING TO EPHREM, JACOB OF SERUGH (SYRIAC ORIENT) AND AUGUSTINE (LATIN WEST)**

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Fathers of the Church have solidified the core of the spiritual message of the various narrative accounts found in Genesis and its close interrelationship with other episodes of the Scripture. The particular way of interpreting the ascending dimension of the believer's spiritual growth is internally consistent in each episode of Biblical figures in the Scriptures. The fathers of the Church have made every Biblical figure/image into an interpretative possibility that amplifies a spiritual framework with a promising destiny in the believer's life. By invoking such a possibility, the Fathers of the Church in the Syriac Orient and Latin West actively composed commentaries as visible signs leading to invisible spiritual accomplishment.

## 2 THE SCRIPTURAL NOTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVENESS

The Judeo-Christian exegetical world considered the Genesis/*Bereshit*/*Beginning* account of creation and its continuous episodes as the Book of Beginnings explaining the beginning of the universe and humanity in the first eleven chapters of the book and the origin of Hebrew people who walked with God/*Elohim*, highlighting the Scriptural patriarchal figures, Abraham/*Avraham* as a man of staunch faith, Isaac/*Yitzchak* as a man of integrity, Jacob/*Yaakov* as the seeker of the true spiritual meaning of life, and Joseph as one who ideally leads a spiritual life with integrity and its true meaning. We could perceive in the life of Abraham, the inspiring spiritual growth which goes through abandoning his land, his birthplace, and his father's house. Tracing back to the patriarchal spiritual life and its relevance today is analyzed by Rabbi Zvi Grumet, in his book *Genesis: From Creation to Covenant*. Grumet calls Abraham's transformation into a faithful follower of the divine commandment to begin a renewed journey of life aiming at the destiny of the covenant/*beritov* with God. According to Grumet, the command to "go, go forth" (*lekh lekha*, Gen 12:1)<sup>1</sup> had witnessed a new legacy of a spiritual generation (*toledot*) of Abraham moving from Ur Kasdim in Chaldea through Haran and from there to the final destination of Canaan where in between was found the crossroads of three major continents in ancient times which had all flora and fauna of Africa, Asia, and Europe.<sup>2</sup> To move in a particular direction forsaking behind (Gen 12:1-3) his land

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible: Torah, Nevi'im, Kethuvim*, Oxford, 2014, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Zvi Grumet, *Genesis: From Creation to Covenant*, New Milford, 2017, 125.

(*aretz*)<sup>3</sup>, birthplace (*moledet*)<sup>4</sup>, and father's house (*beit av*),<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Zvi Grumet analyzes that Abraham had shown us in which way we have to move when responding to the Divine call. It is a spiritual exodus of preparation as the beginning, following the Word of God as the Way and deciding to live out in the participatory dimension of Heavenly praise as the Destiny of humanity and the universe. Followed by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob approved for themselves and their families the way of transforming the spiritual atmosphere and its final destiny.

In connection with spiritual transformation and growth according to Genesis 37:3, we read, " Israel loved Joseph/*yovsef* more than any other of his children because he was the son of his old age/*ben zekunim*, and he had made him a long robe with sleeves." This style of presenting a Biblical figure through a stage of life pertains to the Semitic method of Scriptural interpretation. Here, mentioning the term "old age" points to the mature stage of spiritual life in an ascending sense.<sup>6</sup>

The trichotomic dimensions of spiritual growth in the life of Moses/*Mosheh* widen the imagery circle towards a youthful dimension of essential characteristics and virtues acquired by a human being in the divine milieu. His initial years in Egypt/*mitzrayemah* were compared to a life of valley which stands for the immature spiritual stage; from which he embarks upon an exodus to the mountain of Horeb/*chorevah*, where the dichotomic dimension of hidden promise and revealed mission intertwine to be the place of the Word of God, and after that to climbing

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<sup>3</sup> Zvi Grumet, *Genesis: From Creation to Covenant*, 125

<sup>4</sup> Zvi Grumet, *Genesis: From Creation to Covenant*, 2017, 125

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible: Torah, Nevi'im, Kethuvim*, 27. See also Zvi Grumet, *Genesis: From Creation to Covenant*, 126-126.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, R. E. Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Bangalore, 2013, 36-43.

the mountain of Sinai/*sinai*, where the worshipping soul experiences God.<sup>7</sup>

When we consider this spiritual pattern, the Semitic allusions to the spiritual and patriarchal figures in the Old Testament books - *Psalms*, *Sirach* are wrapped up with the men of God who walked with Him, and its continuing presentation in the New Testament book of *Letter to Hebrews*, is also following the same pattern. In *Psalms* 104:7-11, God is praised as the Creator and the Provider who has kept His Covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/*Yisrael*. Spiritual progressiveness occurs through three continuous generations: making the covenant with Abraham, promising the covenant to Isaac, and confirming the covenant to Jacob (Ps 105:9-10). In *Sirach*, the chapters from 44:1 to 49:1-16, create a spiritual pattern that describes the graciousness of God and the appropriate response of significant biblical patriarchs and figures. In the forty-fourth chapter, *Sirach* even starts with a hymn in honour of the Old Testament patriarchs, and the chronological formation of them who found favour before God, beginning with Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses in the same chapter itself. They were all called to embark on a spiritual journey toward the destiny promised by the Lord. We find this particular call as a personal quest to walk with God. To walk with God (Gen 3:8); “Then Enoch walked with God”/*Chanovch vaiyithallech ha’elohim* (Gen 5:22) is a Scriptural phrase that indicates spiritual growth in God-experience and walking with God. When God created human being, He created it as a “living being/ *chaiyim lenefesh*” (Gen 2:7); God has envisioned a sacred life for humanity that has implications in its paradisiacal life. The biblical context of the meaning of faith and God-experience, and it is reaffirmed in the letter to Hebrews, the dependable graciousness of God, the meaning of faith and its accomplishment seen in

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible: Torah, Nevi'im, Kethuvim*, 136-137.

the exemplary lives of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Judges, and the saints of the Israelite people (Heb 11:1-39). God's solemn promise and ongoing presence find their final fulfillment in Jesus Christ, according to the witness of the letter to Hebrews (Heb 12:1-6).

### **3 THE ANCIENT LITERARY WORKS OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH**

The Scriptural explanations in the ancient Church, especially in the patristic period had fitted the trichotomic dimensions of literal, spiritual, and transcendent approaches which analyze the spiritual formation of the Christian faithful through different aspects of natural, theological, and eschatological facets. According to the patristic teaching, the signal of the Creator in the universe promises a potentiality to everything that acts as a witness to the Creator. The emergence of such thinking marked the preliminary findings within an exegetical framework of each biblical episode by the three eminent fathers of the Church which are justifiable in their exegetical works named, *Hymns on Paradise*, *Commentary on Genesis* by Ephrem; *Hexaemeron*, *Four Homilies on Creation* by Jacob of Serugh; and *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* by Augustine. The understanding of the cosmological order and beauty, the anthropological stewardship, and their theological accomplishment through spiritual progressiveness are the key themes found in the writings of Ephrem, Jacob of Serugh, and Augustine. By analyzing their commentaries, we learn to discover the biblical figures who are the most treasured witnesses to the glory of the Creator.

### **4 THE THEME OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVENESS IN THE WORKS OF EPHREM**

Ephrem addresses the creation theology and its interrelationship between the natural world, humanity, and the Creator with the theological



notion of sacramentality in his works of *Hymns on Paradise*, *Commentary on Genesis*, and *Hymns on Virginity*. Ephrem has laid great stress upon the salvation of human beings as it reveals its proper spiritual growth and significance. The particular characteristic of the anthropological creation account in the Scriptural commentaries of Ephrem is connected to the spiritual progressiveness acquired through different stages of human life: “the river of humanity consists of people of all ages with old, young, children, babes and infants in their mothers’ arms and others still unborn in the womb, such is the sequence of Paradise’s fruit.”<sup>8</sup> Ephrem has identified different stages of spiritual growth with an ideal type of human growth and its symbolic meaning with the theme of personal advancement in receiving the Creator’s gifts.

Tracing back to the account of the creation of man, makes us recall the intermediary status of the first man/humanity with the robe of glory which had covered the human soul through the breathing of the Creator.<sup>9</sup> Tryggve Kronholm recollects that Adam/humanity received the image of the Creator’s glory as an experience of a spiritual vision and as an existing reality: “human soul was breathed into it in divine love, to make Adam a living image of the glorious Creator in his unity.”<sup>10</sup> The beginning of humanity was marked by the Signal of the Creator and Jesus’ salvific initiative that witnessed the transformation of renewed humanity. In Ephrem’s theological conception, the fundamental sense of spiritual

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<sup>8</sup> Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 10/13:1-8, S. P. Brock (transl.), *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, New York, 1990, 152.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* II/4, S. P. Brock (transl.), *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, New York, 1990, 199-200.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns on Ephrem the Syrian with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Tradition*, Uppsala, 1978, 57.

renewal was hidden prophetically at the beginning of the image of the first paradise and in the first man.<sup>11</sup>

## **5 THE IMAGE OF BOOKS OF THE NATURAL WORLD, SCRIPTURES, AND INCARNATION**

Ephrem offered the thought of the hidden divine signs in the pages of the natural world and the Old Testament Scriptures and its revealed nature of continuing creation and salvation which became the core of cosmological creation and the spiritual existence of humanity. Ephrem befriends with the divine wisdom in the marvelous folios of the creation, Scriptures, and Incarnation which are three stages that help the dynamism of the whole universe and humanity to attain its accomplishment. This trichotomic principle guides all things to Christ through a transformative indication and fulfillment. Ephremian *Hymns on Virginity* 27:4 gives us a quick gaze at a religious perspective of spiritual dynamism: “Blessed are you, O Church, whose congregation sings with three glorious harps, your finger plucks the harp of Moses, and the harp of your Saviour and the harp of the natural world.”<sup>12</sup> The believer participates in praise of three harps; humanity and the universe become honoured and saved through them. Ephrem, again in his *Hymns on Paradise* 5/2:1-4, depicts the interrelationship between the two books: “In his book, Moses described the creation of the natural world so that both the natural world and Scripture might bear witness to the Creator. The natural world, through man’s use of it, Scripture, through his reading of it.”<sup>13</sup> Ephrem did not separate the natural elements and their knowledge from the unity of the Scriptures and Incarnation. The setting of the first Paradise profoundly

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. E. Beck, *Die Theologie des H. Ephrem in seinen Hymnen ueber den Glauben*, Vaticana, 1949, 49-61.

<sup>12</sup> Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity* 27/4, E. Beck (transl.), *Hymns on Virginity*

<sup>13</sup> Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 5/2:1-4, S. P. Brock (transl.), *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, 102.

carried an instructive spiritual dimension which had its beginning in the book of the natural world/*kṭāḫā d-kyānā (in Syriac)*, nurtured by the book of Scriptures/*kṭāḫā d-Melṭā (in Syriac)* and accomplished in the book of the Incarnation/*kṭāḫā d-Barnāšā (in Syriac)*. The accomplishing movement was hidden in the Creation (*The Books of Moses*) and in the OT Scriptures (*The Books of Prophets, The Books of David*) which had its full manifestation in the New Testament. Ephrem's spiritual concern for creation is evident in his works on the *Hymns on Faith, Hymns on Nativity*, and *Hymns on Unleavened Bread*. The idea of accomplishment is seen in the *Hymns on Faith* 26:2: "The creation/*briṭā (in Syriac)* is situated in time from the beginning, and it is transcendental at all times from the beginning." The natural world and the Scriptures witnessed and foretold the mystery/*razā (in Syriac)*<sup>14</sup> of humanity and divinity of the Lord of natures (*Az. 4:24-28*). Thus, the cosmic character of salvation stands as the first motivating symbol for the fulfillment of the restoration of humankind.<sup>15</sup>

Along the way, in the various Scriptural episodes, the active concern of covenant relationship with YHWH is marked as a sign of man's fidelity to the Creator. According to Ephrem, it is evident in the Scriptures that the imagery of spiritual youthfulness is seen in the Jewish patriarch, Joseph who resembled Paradisiacal glory<sup>16</sup>, and the imagery of Moses who is in the youthful stage of spiritual growth and possessed the complete character of a worshipper at Mount Sinai, and also Samson who

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *raz* (Hebrew term), originates from a Persian word that means mystery, restricted knowledge of heavens, and a term that foretells future events. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible*, Oxford, 2004, 1639.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. S. Vethanath, *Divinization in St. Ephrem*, OIRSI 419, Vadavathoor, 2016, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Hebrew Bible translates the term *passim ketonet* as "multicolor tunic" of Joseph as the spiritual vestment given by Jacob in honour of Joseph's fidelity to the Covenant of God (*Gen. 37/3*): "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons because he was the son of his old age and he made him a varicolored tunic."



possessed Nazirite blessings.<sup>17</sup> Ephrem continues: “Such is the sequence of Paradise’s fruit; first fruits issued forth with the autumn harvest, wave upon wave, fecund with blossoms and fruit.”<sup>18</sup> T. Kronholm opines that the body of Adam in Paradise is the beginning that is leading to an end which means, it becomes “the body of Christ, the image of God, in his redeeming debasement i.e. adopting Adam’s body”<sup>19</sup> to reveal himself in the Scriptures and the Creation. The pre-eminence of the Creator’s intervention in Creation is admitted by Job/*Iyovv* (a biblical figure of human suffering), as “As for me, I would seek God, and to God, I would commit my cause” (Job 5:8, See also Job 37:14). Ephrem in his hymns on Paradise 7:10 describes the mature stage of spiritual growth as the “Old Age” which helps the believer to rejuvenate the life in Paradise: “bind up your thoughts, Old Age, in Paradise whose fragrance makes you young; its wafting scent rejuvenates you, and your stains are swallowed up in the beauty with which it clothes you. In Moses, He depicted for you a parable: his cheeks, ashen with age, became shining and fair, a symbol of old age that in Eden again becomes young.”<sup>20</sup>

Ishodad of Merv in his *Commentaries - Book XI*, presents Melchizedek as the Scriptural figure of the Book of the Natural World and Moses as he represents the Book of Scriptures and their zenith of accomplishing what is revealed in the Book of Incarnation and hidden

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 7: 7, 8, 9, 10, S. P. Brock (transl.), *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, 121-123.

<sup>18</sup> Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 8/13: 7-12, S. P. Brock (transl.), *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, 152.

<sup>19</sup> T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns on Ephrem the Syrian with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Tradition*, 56.

<sup>20</sup> Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 7/10: 1-12, S. P. Brock (transl.), *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, 122.

sacramentally in the natural world and prophetically in the Scriptures.<sup>21</sup> The future-oriented plan of Genesis account is not dependent on a factual basis rather it follows the spiritual platform and dynamism that have their beginning in the Creation, progressiveness through the Scriptures, and fulfillment in the Coming of the Promised One. At each turn of the Scriptural account, the Fathers of the Church point to the spiritual growth of the believer in the form of natural preparation, Scriptural nourishment, and accomplishment in spiritual life.

## **6 THE WAY OF JESUS CHRIST, AS THE SALVIFIC EXEMPLAR OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVENESS IN THE WRITINGS OF JACOB OF SERUGH**

The centrality of Jesus Christ in salvation history commenced in a hidden way in the Genesis account of Creation, prophesied in the OT Scriptures, and became the Word of God at the Epiphany and fully revealed at the Transfiguration<sup>22</sup> to fulfill the promises. The road of Christ/*urhā d-Mšiḥā*, the way of prophetic promises and their fulfillment accomplished in Christ, is an instructive theological teaching found in the works of Jacob of Serugh that identifies itself with the OT as the path of Law and the NT as the road of Christ.<sup>23</sup> It is one of the characteristics of Syriac theology to analyze the hidden dimension and revealed dimension, emphasizing the perspective carefully prepared by the Semitic Scriptural world.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ishodad of Merv, *Commentaries - Book XI*, A. Mekkattukunnel (ed. & trns.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on the Gospels: New Testament III, Luke/Višudha Luka Ariyicha Suvišesham*, Kottayam, 2016, 207-208.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *Four Homilies on Creation III/691-778*, Khalil Alwan (trns.), *Jacques de Saroug: Quatre Homelies Metriques sur la Creation*, CSCO 509/215, Louvain, 1989, 66-70.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Thomas Kollampampil, *Salvation in Christ According to Jacob of Serugh*, Bangalore, 2001, 119.

Jacob of Serugh introduces to us the spiritual revelation of the Christological proclamation experienced by the Shepherds, Magi, and house of Jacob, and its essential revelation happened in the baptism of Jesus: “Angels came down to preach the good news about the birth, and the shepherds saw the miracle of the hosts. Persia processed with offerings of Magi. To receive the star that dawned from the house of Jacob. He came to baptism, and the Father and the Spirit attested that he is God.”<sup>24</sup> The shepherds, Magi, and the house of Jacob stood before the revelation, contemplating the language of salvific splendour. Jacob of Serugh in his *Hexaemeron*, homily 1:307, presents prophet Ezekiel as having a spiritual vision of mysteries hidden in creation.<sup>25</sup> According to him, in the beginning, God’s creational plan was hidden and filled with full of mysteries.

In Jacob of Serugh’s *Hexaemeron* 6:333-344, five stages of human growth from baby/*yūlā*, infant /*yalūdā*, child/*thalyā*, youth/*alyamā* and man/*gaḥrā* are compared to five covenants, starting with Adam, Noah, Abraham, the family of Moses and the Son of man.<sup>26</sup> Though there are slight variations in the exegetical presentation of salvation history through various stages starting from the Old Testament period, connecting it to the New Testament newness, the intention of both Jacob of Serugh and Augustine are similar to give a systematic reflection symbolically and figuratively to salvation history.

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<sup>24</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on Thomas and the Resurrection* 4:215-221, Philip Michael Forness (ed. & transl.), *Jacob of Serugh: Homily on the Apostle Thomas and The Resurrection of our Lord*, CSCO 691/266, Louvain, 2022, 41.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *Hexaemeron* 1:307, T. Muraoka (ed. & transl.), *Jacob of Serugh’s Hexaemeron*, Leuven, 2018, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *Hexaemeron* 6:333-344, T. Muraoka (ed. and Transl.), *Jacob of Serugh’s Hexaemeron*, 221.

## 7 THE SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVENESS IN THE WRITINGS OF AUGUSTINE

Among the greatest literary works of St. Augustine (354-430), *Confessions*, *De Trinitate*, and *City of God*, we typically do not encounter another amazing work on the two-volume Christian theology of creation, *La Genesi I* and *La Genesi II*.<sup>27</sup> Augustine's patristic time was confronted with a lot of philosophical attacks on human freedom and its existence, and his work on Creation is considered as an answer to these attacks. It was proper to present apologetically the relationship between reason and faith in order to invite us to penetrate the anthropological perspective found in the Scriptural exposition of human creation. The sacramentality of creation was inherent, and the creative and sustainable action of the unique Creator, God, who is hidden in every creature small or big, singular or universal, according to Augustine. God is sacramentally present in all things, but the distinction is in our way of looking at things and that of the spiritual.

We can find a literary form of impression with the cultural context of hexameral literature emerging in the patristic age. Christian literature concerning the relation and works of that day often constituted a continuous comment on Biblical account. Y. Congar comments, "The Christian doctors to base *theo-logia* have conformed to the Word of God; also, have spoken of cosmology and anthropology."<sup>28</sup> According to him, in order to understand the importance of the symbolic and spiritual strength of cosmology and anthropology in theology is pivotal to point to the truth about God and the natural world. Augustine positively and apologetically gathered the literal truth of the Biblical exposition of

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *La Genesi I*, L. Carrozzi (transl.), *La Genesi Difesa Contro I Manichei Libro Incompiuto Su La Genesi*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma, 1988.

<sup>28</sup> Y. M. Congar, *Le theme de Dieu-Createur et les explications de l'Hexameron dans la tradition devant Dieu*, Paris, 1963, 198.

creation using the theological-philosophical method. The hermeneutical methodology of Augustine exposes literally and spiritually the secrets of great things of the cosmos by employing a doctrine of faith together with reason. Whenever we speak of Scripture as revelation, it is to comprehend the truth revealed in Scripture and to go beyond the factual approach.

The creative action of God is visible in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, verse by verse, and confronting the Manichean objections. The second work of Augustine, *La Genesi II*, discusses the successive passages of the second and third chapters of Genesis.<sup>29</sup> He adopted the exegetical method of describing the Christian doctrine of creation with a judgmental approach to the attitudes of his adversaries. He finds such confrontations to be cultural positions related to philosophical beliefs or pagan religious practices or the consequence of heretical syncretism of gnostic-Manichean arguments. In contrast to these arguments, Augustine presented the Christian monotheistic concept of God the Creator, and the created human being in the image of God. And in the light of biblical revelation, the problem of creation was confronted. He distinguished the portrayal of the physical world from the spiritual one. According to him, the beauty and goodness of every living being can be judged only in the spiritual sense and not in a physical sense.<sup>30</sup>

This spiritual sense is explained by him through the exposition of the six ages of salvation history in correspondence to the six days of the creation account of the first chapter of Genesis. The first age (Gen 1:3) is called the infancy/*Infantia* of the world from Adam to Noah, and it is extended to ten generations.<sup>31</sup> The first six ages correspond to Genesis's six days. The second age (Gen 1:6) is marked by the childhood/ *Pueritia*

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *La Genesi I*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *La Genesi I*, 97.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *La Genesi I* 23, 35, 107. See also Augustine of Hippo, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos I*, D. Weber (ed.), Universität, Salzburg, 1998, 104-111.



of the world from Noah to Abraham, which lasts for ten generations.<sup>32</sup> The third age (Gen 1:9) is depicted as the adolescence/ *Adolescentia* of the world from Abraham to David and is similar to the third day of creation.<sup>33</sup> Those who follow the command to worship the One God are like the irrigated land so that it may produce the best fruits and would receive the Sacred Scripture and the Prophecy. It points to the generation of the people of God and extends to fourteen generations. The fourth age (Gen 1: 14) belongs to the kingdom of David as a young age/*Iuventus* and as an ornament of all the ages.<sup>34</sup> It is similar to the fourth day of creation when God created the stars of heaven, and it allegorically points to the splendour of the people of God. The timeframe was between David and deportation to Babylon with fourteen generations. The fifth age has evolved from Babylonian captivity to Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup> The captivity period was just like the strangeness of a foreign land with a declining young age. The fifth day (Gen 1: 20) of creation was marked by the creation of all living beings, which typically represented the pagans. This grown-up age/*Gravitas* was symbolically blind since they did not recognize the Lord Jesus Christ. The sixth age (Gen 1: 26) is blessed with the advent of a new human being. The next morning begins with the announcement of the Gospel for the mission of Jesus Christ.<sup>36</sup> This is represented between the old age/*senectus* and a new birth of mankind in a spiritual way that allows us to think of everlasting life. In this age, the human being was created in the image of God, and in the same age, our Lord Jesus was born of flesh. God created Adam and Eva that day, and this age bears witness to the birth of Jesus and the Church. In this regard, the human being becomes the steward of all living beings, and at the same age, Christ starts to reign

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *La Genesi I* 23, 36, 107.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *La Genesi I* 23, 37, 109.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *La Genesi I* 23, 38, 109.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *La Genesi I* 23, 39, 111.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *La Genesi I* 23, 40, 113.

over all the souls of those who follow. This age is marked by the age of the spiritual human being who imitates Christ, receives spiritual nourishment, and begins to be accompanied by the Sacred Scriptures, and the law of God founded on the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. The seventh age is marked by the return of the Son of Man on earth; the Lord comes in the splendour of his eternal glory.<sup>37</sup>

Augustine wanted to explain the doctrine of creation, founded on the concept of spiritual light as more than just visible light. It appears that the comparable demonstration of the six days of creation and its progressive stages of growth of the human being who passes through the stages of infancy, childhood, youth, and gentle-manhood, and his being king and heir to God's house. The vision of the master of the visible cosmos, found in Jacob of Serugh's *Hexaemeron*, which corresponds to the description of six ages of salvific dynamism in Augustine's *La Genesis*, shows that he has his re-sourcement in ancient Patristic wisdom.<sup>38</sup> It is certain that patristic wisdom on Scriptural accounts has drawn a vast panorama through which we have valuable witnesses in the Church. The Scriptural episodes and patristic interpretations have gathered testimonies of spiritual life as a treasure safeguarded by the Christian community.

## 8 CONCLUSION

We have been insisting that the vitality of Scriptural interpretations would extend to beautiful witnesses of faith who have kept alive deep conviction that they are supreme proofs of testimonies to the Word of God. It would bring the incorporation of Christian renewal and progressiveness which was founded in the Christocentric revelation prophesied in the Book of Beginnings, initiated through the Book of Scriptural episodes which has instituted its fulfillment in the Book of Incarnation, according to the teachings of the Fathers of the Church in the Syriac Orient and in the Latin West. The various stages of spiritual life explained by the Fathers of the Church carry a meaningful prophetic voice of the Church in a material world dominated by mere ideologies.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *La Genesi I* 23, 41, 113.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *Hexaemeron* 6, 620-636, T. Muraoka (ed. and Transl.), *Jacob of Serugh's Hexaemeron*, 195.