The Lenten Prayer — 'of St Ephrem'? A Few Observations on a Varied Textual Tradition

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Introduction

I would like to do something perhaps a bit unusual in my presentation to this conference on St Ephrem; namely, I would like to look at the saint, and one text that bears his name (even though it is dismissed by most as not originating with him), in the context of his liturgical appropriation in Orthodox worship.

Generally, we who labour in the realms of patristic scholarship tend to be 'originalists' in the orientation of our studies: our focus is on the original contexts of the patristic sources, the origins of their writings and the milieux into which their texts were delivered; as well as, importantly, on the legacy of influence left by each, grounded in the transmission of documents, textual redactions, broader influences and so on. We tend to touch much less frequently on anything that deliberately divorces the study of a patristic source from those concrete, historical environs, and we shy away even more aggressively from legacies that date to long after a patristic source lived and wrote.

But the fact of the matter is that, for Orthodox Christianity, St Ephrem the Syrian (or at least, the 'persona' of St Ephrem) is known, and generally encountered, first and foremost in a distinctly liturgical setting, and most particularly a Lenten one, which — with the oldest customs of current Great Lenten practice dating to no earlier than the ninth century, and most to the eleventh through thirteenth — places it in some cases almost a full millennium after the saint's life. The St Ephrem of scholarship remains largely unknown to the broad populace (though a few publications have attained popular status[1]); but the St Ephrem of Great Lent, encountered almost exclusively through the brief prayer that bears his name but which, to repeat, is almost universally thought not actually to have been written by him, is a cherished part of a patristic-liturgical legacy, central to lived Orthodox praxis.

Trusting that the majority of our colleagues will, over these days, focus on the concrete St Ephrem of history, I would like to take a few moments to look at the tradition of St Ephrem liturgically, examining what has to be one of the most well-known prayers attributed to a specific author in the whole of Orthodox hymnography.

The 'Lenten Prayer of St Ephrem'

More specifically, I would like to focus on two textual traditions of the famous Lenten prayer, in particular as it represents a 'school' or legacy of Ephremite spirituality, and the way this

[1] Perhaps the most well-known volumes in general spheres are St Ephrem's *Hymns on Paradise* and, to a far greater degree, the excerpted collection compiled by St Theophan the Recluse, *A Spiritual Psalter, or Reflections on God*, both of which have gained wide popular circulation.

legacy has been varyingly borne witness to as the Church has significantly modified the prayer over history.

It is a well-known fact that the prayer ascribed to St Ephrem of which I am speaking, known most often as the 'Lenten Prayer' given its centrality to the weekday services of the Great Fast and found as the twelfth of his twelve 'Prayers for Various Occasions' in the Greek edition, is not found in the Syriac corpus of St Ephrem, and in all its known forms dates to a later period of coenobitic monastic development than was contemporary to Ephrem.[2] For many, of course, this is enough to banish discussion of the prayer from Ephremite studies altogether, given that it cannot be proven to be from his pen at all; however, the Church has consistently ascribed to it Ephremite authorship, in the way she often does with hymnography generally: not insisting upon a direct ascription of the text to his hand, but on its being a part of the 'received legacy' of the saint, consistent with his writings, spirit and ascetical theology.[3] The Sabbaite *Typikon* is certainly not the first text to give St Ephrem as the source of the prayer; and this is maintained in Orthodoxy's liturgical service books to the present day.

It is precisely the Ephremite ascription of the prayer that makes its textual variations an interesting subject of study. The prayer, as it has been received into the present day in Greek and Church Slavonic versions, differs in each. While the variation is usually thought merely to reside alternative terms provided for one of the vices ('idle curiosity' [περιεργίας] in the Greek, and 'despondency' [оунынїѧ] in Slavonic), the history of the Slavonic version itself is in fact rather more complex, and reveals an interesting second tradition of the prayer in common use until the mid-seventeenth century — one that may, in fact, be more supportable as a product of an Ephremite origin.

The key to understanding the variations between the consistent Greek text and varying forms of the Slavonic, and to seeing how these in fact speak to the attribution of the prayer, lies in the unique 'monastic' context of St Ephrem's life and focus.[4] It is when we see the Lenten Prayer, not a work of general penitential sobriety (even if it may be used as such in the *euchologia* of the Church at large), but specifically a product of a monastic milieu, focussed on the traditional temptations of the monastic ascetical struggle, that the textual history of the prayer begins to make sense.

The Greek version

To begin with the version known to most, and that which gives rise to the basic form used in a majority of English translations, the standard text of St Ephrem's prayer in the Greek *Euchologia* (and referred to in Assemani's edition) is as follows:

> Κύριε καὶ Δέσποτα τῆς ζωῆς μου, πνεῦμα ἀργίας, περιεργίας, φιλαρχίας, καὶ ἀργολογίας μή μοι δῷς.

[2] See Fr Ephrem Lash, 'The Greek Writings Attributed to Saint Ephrem the Syrian', in J. Behr, A. Louth, D. Conomos (eds.), *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West – Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos Ware* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 81. He notes that Assemani's edition of St Ephrem's works contains the prayer only in the form it is found in the Greek prayer books.

[3] In a similar vein to the way much Biblical scholarship is want to speak of certain Pauline epistles in the New Testament as from the 'Pauline school' rather than St Paul's own hand (though, in the case of the Pauline epistles, Orthodoxy is not always quite so keen to agree with modern scholarship in the denial of direct Pauline authorship).

[4] Bearing in mind that 'monastic', in St Ephrem's case, does not equate to the kinds of cenobitic monasticism of a later generation (superimposed upon him in his later *Life*), but to the unique form of the cenobitic 'covenant' communities, found in cities, of which others will speak in this conference.

> Πνεῦμα δὲ σωφροσύνης, ταπεινοφροσύνης, ὑπομονῆς, καὶ ἀγάπης χάρισαί μοι τῷ σῷ δούλῳ.
>
> Ναί, Κύριε Βασιλεῦ, δώρησαι μοι τοῦ ὁρᾶν τὰ ἐμὰ πταίσματα, καὶ μὴ κατακρίνειν τὸν ἀδελφόν μου, ὅτι εὐλογητὸς εἶ, εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν.

In English, this reads:

> O Lord and Master of my life, give me not a spirit of sloth, idle curiosity, lust for power and idle talk;
>
> But grant unto me, Thy servant, a spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love.
>
> Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see mine own faults and not to judge my brother; for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen.

In the first petition, I have rendered περιεργίας as 'idle curiosity' — a term relating to that classical monastic vice of an undiscriminating intellect, left unguarded and therefore wandering after whatsoever interests strike its immediate fancy (about which St Ephrem speaks in various ways in his extant works[5]). In some translations this word is rendered simply 'curiosity', but this seems to lose something of the Greek's nuance.[6] The term can also be translated metaphorically as 'meddling' (in patristic Greek the word essentially means 'futile questioning', but it also refers at times to interfering with others' affairs); but again, this paraphrase puts in more general language what is, in the prayer, a specific monastic theme: the unguarded intellect that challenges the monastic's stillness and grounding in God's presence. St Ephrem writes writes about the dangers of such 'idle curiosity' in more or less every work he produces.[7]

In the second petition, there has been some commentary offered on the word σωφροσύνης (which I have translated 'chastity'), namely as to whether it ought to be rendered according to another category of its usage in Classical Greek, 'soundness of mind', 'prudence', etc. The late Fr Alexander Schmemann advocated 'whole-mindedness':

> If one does not reduce this term, as is so often and erroneously done, only to its sexual connotations, it is understood as the positive counterpart of sloth. The exact and full translation of the Greek *sofrosini* and the Russian *tselomudryie* ought to be *whole-mindedness*. Sloth is, first of all, dissipation, the brokenness of our vision and energy, the inability to see the whole. Its opposite then is precisely *wholeness*. If we usually mean by chastity the virtue opposed to sexual depravity, it is because the broken character of our existence is nowhere better manifested than in sexual lust—the alienation of the body from the life and control

[5] On the need for discernment, set against the undiscriminating actions of the mind, see e.g. *Nisibene Hymns* 15.4; 16.12; *Pearl* 7.6.

[6] So it is, unfortunately, translated in Holy Transfiguration Monastery's popular *Prayer Book for Orthodox Christians*.

[7] Just a few telling examples will suffice. See *Pearl* 4.1: 'The fool, who goes astray, grazes the faith, as it were an eye, by all manner of questions. The probing of the finger blinds the eye, and much more doth that prying blind. the faith.' Cf. *On Admonition and Repentance* 7, 13. On a 'singular voice of truth' and the need to avoid gossip and idle conversation, see e.g. *Nisibene Hymns* 21.11-13

> of the spirit. Christ restores wholeness in us and He does so by restoring in us the true scale of values by leading us back to God.[8]

While this is an edifying gloss, and Fr Alexander is certainly right to suggest that we should not think of chastity in solely sexual terms,[9] translating σωφροσύνη as 'whole-mindedness' in the context of this prayer would be to rend it from a distinctively monastic context, where 'chastity' is a key virtue of ascetical transformation and one of the common virtues discussed in monastic ascetical literature. Indeed, it is one of the triumvirate of classical monastic virtues (chastity, humility, obedience); a fact that sets it in concert with St Ephrem's prevalent focus on physical (as well as spiritual) chastity in his writings,[10] even while it may also be a support for the later dating of the prayer (as these 'classical virtues' of monasticism were not so clearly defined in the fourth century when St Ephrem himself wrote).

In the final petition, the clause καὶ μὴ κατακρίνειν τὸν ἀδελφόν μου ('and let me not judge my brother') is occasionally rendered in English periphrastically, 'and let me not judge my brother and sister'; and sometimes also in the plural for communal use, 'and let me not judge my brothers and sisters'. This is, however, once again a gloss rather than a good rendering of the prayer's background or intent. Particularly within St Ephrem's ascetical approach, the context of acknowledgement of sin, wrong-doing and repentance is always radically personal.[11] This is the case in Syriac writings broadly, and in St Ephrem's texts even more particularly. The condensing of St Ephrem's works into a 'Spiritual Psalter' (Псалтирь прп. Ефрема Сирина) by St Theophan the Recluse bears telling witness to the degree to which St Ephrem thought, spoke and wrote in the expressly personal, singular, first-person. It is always 'I' who am a sinner, and I always sin against 'you' — another person, another individual: be he God or my brother. St Ephrem tends not to generalise man into 'men': sin is always a broach of communion one-by-one; and repentance is similarly one-by-one.

Theologically, it is the prayer's μή μοι δῷς ('give me not…') that is perhaps its most interesting phrase. Rather in the same spirit that the Our Father implores God to *lead us not into temptation* (Matthew 6.13), the Greek form of the Lenten Prayer implores God to 'give me not' a spirit of sloth, idle-curiosity, etc. In both cases (the Lord's prayer and this), the question as to why one implores God not to give something that it cannot be conceived God ever *would* give, has provoked the interest of commentators. In his 'Explanation of the Lord's Prayer', St Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain notes that 'based on these words, many unlearned and insecure people fall into various thoughts concerning God: that God supposedly throws us into temptations.'[12] He follows this with a quotation of James 1.13, 14 (*Let no man say, when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'*), in order to disclose that, ultimately, it is man's free will that brings about temptation, from which he requests deliverance. The Greek tradition of the prayer follows the same approach and casts the injunction of its first petition in similar terms. Just as the Lord's prayer begs God not to lead us where we ourselves, at the devil's provocation, freely choose to go (but instead to deliver us from such evil), so the Lenten Prayer, in its Greek recension, implores God not to give those

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[8] Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemann, 'The Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian', in *Great Lent: Journey to Pascha* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1969/1974), p. 36.

[9] On this I have recently written a few things 'Traditions of Orthodox Monasticism', my introduction to the *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press; 2nd edn. 2016), 1-10.

[10] See e.g., *Nisibene Hymns* 15.3, 4; 19.2; 21.4; *On Admonition and Repentance* 8.

[11] See, e.g., his homily *On Admonition and Repentance* 3, 4, 12.

[12] St Nikodemos, 'Explanation of the Lord's Prayer' §7, in *Concerning Frequent Communion*; translation in Hieromonk Patapios, *Manna from Athos: The Issue of Frequent Communion on the Holy Mountain in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Peter Lang, 2006), p. 00.

things which the untrained monk, through his lack of obedience and temperance, seemingly asks for by the actions of his life.[13]

The oldest Slavonic version

Clarity on this matter of begging God not to give what He would not give, lies behind one of the notable variations from the Greek in the older Church Slavonic traditions of the Lenten Prayer. While the modern Slavonic version closely mirrors the Greek text (a trait to which I will return), the older versions present multiple, notable, variations. The following is the prayer in Church Slavonic as employed prior to Patriarch Nikon's reforms, and still used by the Old Believers:

> Господи и владико животоу моемоу, духъ оунынїѧ, небрежєнїѧ, срєбролюбїѧ и празднословїѧ ѿжєни ѿ мєнє.
>
> Духъ же цѣломоудрїѧ, смиренїѧ, терпѣнїѧ и любве дароуй ми рабоу твоемоу.
>
> Ей Господи Царю, даждь ми зрѣти моѧ согрѣшенїѧ, и еже не ѡсуждати брата моегѡ, якѡ благословенъ еси во вѣки. Аминь

Translated quite literally, this reads:

> O Lord and Master of my life, drive from me the spirit of despondency, carelessness, lust for money and idle talk;
>
> But grant unto me, Thy servant, a spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love.
>
> Yea, O Lord and king, grant me to see mine own faults and not to judge my brother; for blessed art Thou unto the ages. Amen.

We see immediately that instead of 'idle-curiosity' we have 'despondency' (оунынїѧ), that well-known divergence between the two traditions that we already mentioned. But far more interesting is the difference in the first petition's main verb: where the Greek has 'give me not', the Slavonic has what might be rendered 'take from me' (ѿжєни ѿ мєнє), or, as I have translated it more literally, 'drive away from me'. The wording here seems intended mimic the Church Slavonic of Psalm 50.11: и Духа твоего святаго не отими от мене (*and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me*); though, again, the vocabulary of the prayer is more severe. отженить means not simply to 'take away', but to 'drive out'; and thus in this rendering, the prayer petitions God to *cast out* those vices which plague the monk, and particularly the monk in community.[14] Rather than imagery reminiscent of

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[13] The one who says this prayer, therefore, petitions God not to grant those things for which his licentious manner of living seem to beg: that is to say, the monk who lives lazily, haphazardly, without ascetical conviction, seems by his life to be asking God to grant him idleness, for this is what he enjoys; but in the prayer he asks God to grant not what the monk's own life apparently begs, but to grant instead those things known to be necessary.

There are parallel themes in St Ephrem in, e.g., *Hymns on Fasting* 1.2.7; 1.8.12; *Nisibene Hymns* 2.15; 5.2; and esp. 3.8: "We know that the Blessed wills not the afflictions, that have been in all ages; though He has wrought them, it is our offences that are the cause of our troubles"; and 10.16: "The medicine that I hoped, it is sorrow decreed; the binding up I looked for, it is bitter calamity, that it seeks to work for me."

[14] Though here I am, for the sake of brevity, using this term somewhat loosely. In fact a 'monk' in St Ephrem's cultural world likely looked rather different from a monk in the type of monasticism that

the Our Father's 'lead us not…', here the imagery reflects Jesus driving out the money changers from the Temple (cf. Mark 11.15; Luke 19.45), casting away from the place of holiness those things which are perversions of it.[15]

The list of vices which the prayer employs God to 'drive away' is also different. There is no equivalent of the Greek's first clause, 'spirit of sloth' (πνεῦμα ἀργίας), and the Slavonic goes immediately to 'spirit of despondency'. The late Archimandrite Ephrem (Lash), much-beloved by many in this room, noted that the Slavonic оуныні҃ likely corresponds to the Greek ἀκηδία, a 'peculiarly monastic vice' found regularly in the ascetical corpus.[16] Further, where the Greek has 'lust for power' (φιλαρχίας), the Slavonic has the more specific 'lust for money' (срєбролюбїѧ).

The closing phrase of the third petition, which confesses God's blessedness 'unto the ages' (во вѣки), is also different from the Greek, which reads 'unto the ages of ages' (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων). This is not overly significant in its own right, but becomes telling when examining later Slavonic versions of the prayer, simply as evidence of the wholesale way in which the prayer is eventually modified in the attempt to bring the Slavonic into closer conformity to the Greek version.

What is notable from this earlier Slavonic version in its own right, however, is that two distinct traditions of the prayer were in existence prior to the reforms of the seventeenth century. The differences between the Greek and Church Slavonic versions are not simply matters of terminological shifts or translation issues between the two languages: they represent significant variations as regards their petition against the vices, and indeed in terms of the vices they indicate. Both represent a monastic framework of development, though with differing emphases and classifications of the vices that most directly concern the cenobitic monk. It is an interesting, and as-yet under explored fact of the two versions, that the old Church Slavonic form of the prayer in many ways more closely resembles the ascetical language and imagery of St Ephrem than the Greek.[17] The Greek version speaks in broad terms in a way that St Ephrem tends not to do, while the Slavonic version highlights concrete monastic vices which Ephrem was want to emphasise.

The revised version of the Kievan Sluzhebnik of 1639

The old Slavonic form of the prayer, representing as it does an apparently distinct tradition of its reception, remained in use up until the Nikonian reforms, despite being updated as the language developed. The Kievan *Sluzhebnik* of 1639 represents a 'modernised' version of the prayer in its older Slavonic tradition, taking into account grammatical and orthographical shifts in the language whilst still remaining faithful to the distinct tradition of the older Slavonic texts. It predates the service books issued by Patriarch Nikon by less than two decades, and so makes explicit the degree to which his revision marks a dramatic change in the prayer. The 1639 version reads as follows:

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would come to be homogenised in later generations; and of course his covenant communities in the cities also included women. But it remains accurate to say that he speaks of ascetical themes in a context of intentional community, and that despite the unique character of his own communities, the themes relevant to communal life there are similar to those of later (and largely Egyptian-styled) monastic cenobia.

[15] Cf. St Ephrem's language of God 'driving away' or 'casting out' vices and pains in, e.g., *Nisibene Hymns* 1.7; 3.9. Cf. *On Admonition and Repentance* 7, where he uses similar language of man's own need to 'cast out' the passions from himself.

[16] Archim. Ephrem (Lash), 'The Greek Writings Attributed to Saint Ephrem the Syrian', p. 82.

[17] See, for example, his poetic listing of the devil's 'new tactics' of working against man in *Pearl* 7.6, where Ephrem lists among these tactics: distraction, division, strive, envy, wrath, pride, fraud, prying and, interestingly, 'questionings' (i.e. idle curiosities), listed a second time as 'subtle questioning'.

> Господи и владыко живота моегѡ, духъ оунынїѧ, небреженїѧ, любоначалїѧ и празднословїѧ ѿжени ѿ мене.
>
> Духъ же цѣломоудрїѧ, смиреномоудрїѧ, терпѣнїѧ и любве, дароуй ми рабоу твоемоу.
>
> Ей Господи Царю, даждь ми зрѣти моѧ согрѣшенїѧ, и не ѡсуждати брата моегѡ, якѡ благословенъ еси во вѣки вѣковъ. Аминь.

In English:

> O Lord and Master of my life, drive from me the spirit of despondency, carelessness, lust for power and idle talk;
>
> But grant unto me, Thy servant, a spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love.
>
> Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see mine own faults and not to judge my brother; for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen.

The majority of changes are minor, chiefly reflecting developments in grammar. However, there is a noteworthy variation in the first petition, where the older Slavonic's 'lust for money' (сребролюбїѧ) has become 'lust for power' (любоначалїѧ), reminiscent of the Greek's more general terminology. In the final petition, the conclusion of the benediction has also changed. The older 'unto the ages' (во вѣки) has become 'unto the ages of ages' (во вѣки вѣковъ). Whether this represents an attempt to mirror the Greek, or simply to bring the closing into conformity with more widespread liturgical practice, is unclear (the closing benediction is, in any case, likely a later addition to the prayer itself; it is a standard conclusion, bearing little relationship, otherwise, to the prayer itself).

Apart from these minor changes, however, the prayer is essentially the same as the older Slavonic version. It still implores God to 'drive from me' the vices listed, which, like the older version, include 'despondency' rather than 'idle curiosity', and do not include slothfulness.

The Slavonic version of Patriarch Nikon's 1656 service books

This continuity with the more ancient Slavonic version, renders in sharp relief the changes made only seventeen years later. Patriarch Nikon's reforms of the liturgical texts of the Church in Russia have been much studied, sometimes praised and sometimes lamented; and time does not permit them greatly to consume us here. Suffice it to say that, generally speaking, he desired to render Slavonic liturgical texts in as close a conformity to their Greek counterparts as possible; and this is precisely what is witnessed in the prayer of St Ephrem as contained in the service books issued under Nikon's primacy in 1656:

> Господи и владыко живота моегѡ, духъ праздности, оунынїѧ, любоначалїѧ и празднословїѧ не даждь ми.
>
> Духъ же цѣломоудрїѧ, смиренномоудрїѧ, терпѣнїѧ и любве, дароуй ми рабоу твоемоу.
>
> Ей Господи Царю, даруй ми зрѣти моѧ прегрѣшенїѧ, и не ѡсуждати брата моегѡ, якѡ благословенъ еси во вѣки вѣковъ. Аминь.

Translated into English, this version of the prayer sounds strikingly similar to the Greek version, precisely as Patriarch Nikon intended:

> O Lord and Master of my life, give me not a spirit of sloth, despondency, lust for power and idle talk;
>
> But grant unto me, Thy servant, a spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love.
>
> Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see mine own faults and not to judge my brother; for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen.

The only major divergence from the Greek text that remains is that most famous variation of the first petition: between the Greek's 'idle curiosity' (περιεργίας) and the Slavonic's 'despondency' (оунынїѧ). The latter option has been retained from the earlier Slavonic editions; it has, however, been moved, so that праздности can be inserted immediately after духъ, thus causing the list of vices to begin with 'a spirit of sloth…', as in the Greek, though never before in the Slavonic. The older Slavonic's preference for petitioning that God will 'drive [these things] from me' has now given way to the Greek's 'give me not' (reflected in the new не даждь ми).

Conclusions

I would like to offer a number of conclusions that may be drawn from these observations on the textual history of the Lenten Prayer.

The first, and the most obvious, is that the result of the Nikonian revision was to transform the prayer in Church Slavonic into what is essentially a mirror of the prayer in Greek, the single term оунынїѧ excepted. This version has remained *en force* ever since in the Russian Orthodox Church, and is the version known to believers today. But what was lost, in the desire to conform the Slavonic to the Greek, was *a distinctly different tradition of the prayer*, represented in the older Slavonic editions. The variation between the two versions could now be expressed as simply a 'different nuance' to a single term, rather than two distinctly different — though by no means unrelated — approaches to the penitential refrain attributed to St Ephrem.

The second conclusion relates precisely to this Ephremite ascription to the prayer. I have not yet been able to trace out further details on the history of the origins of the older Slavonic form of the Lenten Prayer — and I am not certain that it will be possible to trace these out, unless some older Slavonic documents are discovered, as well as perhaps some later Syriac ones. Interesting questions, therefore, still remain unanswered. Where does the Old Slavonic come from? The Greek is rather ancient, though perhaps not quite so ancient as St Ephrem himself; but the Slavonic mirror of the Greek is, relatively speaking, almost modern. What tradition grounds the rather distinctive differences in the prayer as it originally came into Russian Orthodox praxis? Was it a Syriac textual tradition now lost to us? This seems extraordinarily unlikely, especially as the Slavonic is almost certainly a product emerging from the Greek, not the Syriac. However, this does raise the possibility of a different 'branch' of the Ephremite 'school' encapsulated in a different version of the Greek than we now possess. While there are perhaps interpretive ways to explain *some* of the variations in the old Slavonic from the extant Greek, none can realistically account for the whole host of differences.[18] It is a real possibility that there existed a different form of the

[18] I appreciate the note, made by one scholar in response to my comments on this, relating the situation to modern-day English translations: Whether these are made from the Greek or current Slavonic texts, in both cases the phrasing 'give me not' is now uniform in those versions; nevertheless, a preponderance of English translations render this 'take from me', which is not an accurate translation of either source. This is generally done for interpretive reasons (relating back to the question of whether

prayer in Greek, from which the earliest Slavonic translations were made; though for now, this must remain speculative.

These questions may be difficult, or even impossible, to answer at the present moment; but what seems significant to me is the way that the old Slavonic form of the Lenten Prayer sounds, in many ways, far more like St Ephrem than the Greek and current Slavonic versions. To recognise that the love of money, quite particularly (that is to say, that concrete possessiveness, rather than the more general 'lust for power') is a persistent monastic vice; to speak of the need for God actively to 'drive away' the wrong from the disobedient heart; to recognise 'despondency' as first among the temptations that befall ascetical strugglers — these are all turns of phrase, and theological-ascetical principles, that resonate extremely closely with extant works in the corpus of St Ephrem. There is certainly no evidence to suggest that the old Slavonic edition of the Lenten Prayer is anything close to an autograph — of course not — any more than we could claim that of the Greek; but I do feel that the older Slavonic form presents an interesting testimony to the possibility of a more direct Ephremite influence, lending support to the Church's liturgical ascription of the prayer to his legacy.

In the varied textual traditions of that prayer, there is evidence to support, at least in part, the idea that the St Ephrem of the Church's liturgical praxis and the St Ephrem of scholarship may not be quite so distinct as we sometimes assume.

God should be asked not to give what He never would give), and it is reasonable to think that the earliest translators into Slavonic might have made a similar interpretive choice in choosing 'cast away from me'. But while this may well be a reasonable explanation for this phrasing, it cannot account for the variation in the identification of the virtues, their ordering, etc., and so is not a compelling explanation for the full scope of variation in the earlier Slavonic form of the prayer.