Thomas Koonammakkal, *The Theology of Divine Names in the Genuine Works of Ephrem*. Mōrān Ethō 40 (Baker Hill, Kottayam, Kerala, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2015). Pp. 348.

LUCAS VAN ROMPAY (EMERITUS, DUKE UNIVERSITY), 'S-HERTOGENBOSCH, THE NETHERLANDS

This is a beautifully written study by an author who has lived with Ephrem for many years. The centrality of names for Ephrem ("without names there is no knowledge": *Sermons on Faith* 2, 651) allows this study to develop into a wonderful overview of the very rich thought world of the fourth-century poet and theologian. Originally submitted as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Oxford in 1991, the present publication, due to circumstances, could not be fully updated or revised (see p. 48). But even after twenty-five years the work has retained much of its original vigor and significance. In a thoughtfully written new foreword (pp. 20–27) Mary Hansbury highlights the book's implications for present-day theological studies and interreligious dialogue.

Following a general introduction, the study is divided in two parts and consists of six chapters. Part One (pp. 51–104) first introduces the reader to the concept of the "ontological chasm" (*peḥta*) between the Creator and the created world, which underlies Ephrem's entire theology, before detailing, in chapter 2 (pp. 73–103), its implications for humanity's search for God. Through nature, Scripture, and the Incarnation, God reveals himself to us across the ontological chasm. Humans stand at the receiving end of this revelation. Ever mindful of this ontological divide, they ought to refrain from investigating and scrutinizing what has not been revealed. Making use primarily of the *Hymns* and *Sermons on Faith*, the author explains the reasons for Ephrem's fight against all kinds of wrong methods of searching God, including those of (Neo-)Arians.

Part Two deals with Ephrem's theology of the divine names more specifically, in four thematic chapters. In chapter 3, "God's descent into our language" (pp. 113–152), the author discusses among other things Adam's name-giving of the animals (partly based on the Commentary on Genesis) and introduces the important distinction between proper, or "exact" names (*šmahē ḥattitē*) and "borrowed" names (*šmahē š'ilē*). While the different lists show some variation among each other, the proper names include "Being" (*'ityā*), "Creator," "Good," "Just," "Father"—all Scripture-

based names belonging to God properly—while the borrowed names, covering a number of biblical anthropomorphisms, are names that properly belong to us, humans, and that God adopts ("borrows") for our benefit in the process of his self-revelation. While God borrows human names, He allows us to borrow names from him. This "exchange of names" (p. 260) is part of "God's incarnation in human language" (p. 202). This chapter also discusses the "reality behind the name" (p. 143) as well as the power that names possess for "self-interpretation of meaning" (pp. 151–152). Continuing the discussion of the names "Father" and "Son" in chapter 3, chapter 4, "From his names, we learn about Him" (pp. 153–206), has an even stronger Trinitarian focus. Ephrem does not always list the name "Father" among God's proper names and as for the name "Son," its status as proper name is primarily based on its being implied in "Father". That both the names "Father" and "Son" are "trustworthy and true" (pp. 143 and 145; *Hymns of Faith* 46,4: *mhayman…w-šarrir*) is testified by God himself at Jesus's baptism. The topic of the name and its truth first appears in chapter 3, but it recurs throughout the book and leads to important reflections on the relationship between the name, on the one hand, and the pair of *kyānā* and *qnomā*, on the other—the latter term, *qnomā*, being particularly difficult to grasp and to translate (a whole range of translations has been proposed, from Beck's "Ding," "Dinglichkeit," or "Da-sein" to "unique and concrete identity").

Chapter 5 deals with the "Manifestation of *Kasyātā* in and through *Galyātā*" (pp. 207–266). The author brings to light insights from G. Noujaim's unpublished 1980 dissertation (*Anthropologie et économie de salut chez saint Éphrem autour des notions de «Ghalyata», «Kasyata» et «Kasya»*, Gregorian University, Rome), and places the theology of names in the larger context of Ephrem's thought and reflections on the notions of "hidden" and "revealed." These polyvalent terms, both paradoxical and complementary, are always deeply intertwined. Chapter 6, "Imprint of the Living Name on us" (pp. 267–306), explores the image of flock and sheep (elsewhere, on p. 206, the author argues that in his use of the term *qenyānē* "possessions" for God's creatures Ephrem is aware of its etymological meaning "flock"). Ephrem applies this image to the True Church, in contrast to heretical groups which in their ignorance of the uniqueness of God's *'ityā* and *'itutā* and in their disregard of the

ontological chasm use stolen names or "a name without *qnoma*" (p. 294).

An important appendix (pp. 307–316) is devoted to *Ephrem's Treatise against Bardaisan's "Of Domnus"* (transmitted as part of the so-called "Prose Refutations"), in which names are particularly relevant. Ephrem discusses here certain Platonist and Stoic views, as he accuses Bardaisan of misunderstanding them and falsely claiming that "the nature (of things) is like their names" (p. 312). The author situates this treatise in Ephrem's later, Edessene period and assumes that it was written for teaching in the school, where the students may have been "linguistically better equipped than Ephrem as regards the Greek philosophical world" (p. 314). Since Ephrem's own insights into names were shaped in the pre-Edessene period, the late articulation of his views in this anti-Bardaisan treatise, in the specific Edessene context, may perhaps be seen as "an apology for his own concept of names" (pp. 307 and 314–315).

Throughout his study the author gives precedence to long excerpts from Ephrem's works, which are presented in his own English translation. These are followed by explanatory narrative sections, which always remain text-focused. It is the author's aim to uncover Ephrem's thought on the ontological chasm and on divine names and this is found to be without "any inner inconsistency" (p. 323, comp. p. 157). The author maintains a consistent awareness of the liturgical, ecclesiological, and soteriological contexts of the passages under discussion. In the footnotes he provides references to publications that have guided his reading, mostly by Sebastian Brock, Robert Murray, and Edmund Beck—all three of whom, in different capacities, served as his mentors. Among the less frequently quoted scholars Tanios Bou Mansour and Peter Bruns should be singled out. Bou Mansour's 1988 monograph, *La pensée symbolique de saint Éphrem le Syrien*, while much broader in its scope, does indeed show similarities and points of contact with the present work. One would have liked to see the author engage the research of Bruns and Bou Mansour to a greater degree.

Not only in the appendix but throughout his work the author is eager to downplay Ephrem's exposure to Greek philosophical tradition or to anything Greek. He emphasizes instead Ephrem's "Semitic" character—whereby "Semitic" does not mean much more than "non-Greek" or "clearly distinct from Greek" (e.g., pp.

92, 109, 131, 137, 157, 166, 172, 184, 297, 299). He criticizes Beck for "imposing" Neoplatonic and Stoic ideas on Ephrem (p. 129, note 55, and 241, note 100), and he is ambivalent about Ute Possekel's 1999 study, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian*, which was too late to be fully considered in the original work and is mentioned in a couple of footnotes only (pp. 41, note 32; 48, note 41; and 312, note 18). In view of the ongoing scholarship of the last few decades, however, one wonders whether we would not benefit from abandoning the strict dichotomy between "Greek" and "Semitic" and widening our horizon so as to allow Ephrem to participate in the larger conversations that went on in the world of Late Antiquity—the world he inhabited as a Christian intellectual and an inspired poet-theologian. As some recent studies have indicated, this shift of focus does not weaken his unique voice, but rather makes it more powerful and more meaningful. Perhaps J. Wickes' 2015 publication ("Mapping the Literary Landscape of Ephrem's Theology of Divine Names," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 69, 1–13) may be singled out as a promising example of this different approach.

This slightly critical note in no way detracts from the author's impressive achievement. His rich descriptions and analyses, expressed with much clarity and in a lucid style, will inspire his readers in their own study of Ephrem. Even though the reader may occasionally pause when the author slides into the role of a staunch ally of Ephrem in his fight against fourth-century heretics in Edessa, his work stands out as a model of engaged reading of our greatest Syriac poet.