PART I

100–800
CHAPTER THREE

NATURE AND SCRIPTURE:
THE TWO WITNESSES TO THE CREATOR

Pamela Bright

The phrase, “the two witnesses to the Creator” comes from a “teaching song,” madrashe, of the fourth-century exegete, Ephraem, the Syrian. Throughout a range of sophisticated hermeneutical practices within the Christian communities of third and fourth centuries, the Hexaemeron tradition—a series of Lenten sermons on the “six days” of creation in Genesis—demonstrates that both nature and Scripture are sources of revelation of God’s presence and loving purpose throughout Creation.

Long separated from the West by distance, the exigencies of history, and above all by language, the fourth-century Syrian exegete and liturgical song-writer, Ephraem, speaks directly to the topic of the present chapter in one of his “teaching songs” or madrashe:

In his book Moses
   described the creation of the natural world,
so that both Nature and Scripture
   might bear witness to the Creator;
Nature, through man’s use of it,
   Scripture through his reading of it.
These are the witnesses
   which reach everywhere;
they are to be found at all times
   present at every hour,
confuting the unbeliever
   who defames the Creator.1

1 Brock 1990, 102–3. In his fifth hymn ‘On Paradise’ St.Ephrem speaks of the Bible and the natural world as the two requisite witnesses to God (see John 8:17). This is the theme to which Ephrem returns elsewhere: these two witnesses point the way to the New Covenant, the one providing the Torah for the Jewish ‘People,’ the other the source of natural law for the Gentile ‘Peoples,’ in both cases in preparation for the coming of the “Lord of Scripture and of nature”:
   Look and see how Nature and Scripture
Are yoked together for the Husbandman; Nature abhors adulterers,
   Practices of magic and murderers;