

The poetic face of rhetoric: Ephrem's polemics against the Jews and heretics in *Contra Haereses* XXV¹

Dr. P.J. Botha
(University of Pretoria)

1 INTRODUCTION

From the second to the fourth century C.E., the Roman Empire experienced a revival of the rhetoric of the classical period. The influence of the literary exuberance of this so-called “second sophistic” also penetrated the church, and profoundly transformed the style of preaching and writing of many fourth-century C.E. Christian bishops. Representatives of this new style were: John Chrysostom, and the three Cappadocians (Basil of Caesarea, his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzus).² Unlike these four; Ephrem the Syrian wrote in Syriac, had no classical education, and was a poet rather than an orator. For this reason Ephrem's affective approach to persuasion and argumentation, and his command of a range of technical literary and rhetorical devices are all the more striking. To further the study of the relationship between the Greek and Syriac speaking branches of Christianity in the fourth century C.E., and also because Ephrem's work is a rewarding subject in itself; I propose to give a translation of one of his hymns against heresies, and then to proceed with a discussion of its rhetorical features. Ephrem's course of argumentation will be analysed with reference to the effective use of rhetorical devices. Some remarks on the relationship between the style of Ephrem and that of the Greek fathers of the fourth century C.E. will be made in conclusion.

Hymns 25 and 26 in Ephrem's cycle *Contra Haereses* are bound together by the same melody and the mutual theme of “the way of life”. These two are effectively demarcated from the preceding part of the composition, since hymns 22-24 have a different melody and theme. While hymn 27 is related to the preceding two, expanding on the different “milestones” on the way of life, it has the same melody as its successor (28), thereby drawing a line

between 25-26 and 27-28. On account of their melody, hymns 25-26 can thus be seen to form a unity. Only the first of these two will concern us here.

2 TRANSLATION OF *CONTRA HAERESSES XXV*

On the melody: “Your divinity, oh Lord, has astonished me”.

1. Let us rebuke those that have gone astray
and proceed on the ways of deceit
while the way of life is our witness -
(the way) which the messengers of peace trod out,
and the wise through the Spirit declared,
and by removing the stumbling blocks, they
transformed it into a clear space.
The prophets and apostles handed it down,
on it are the milestones which truth set up,
also the inns which love completed.
And us, my brothers, let us follow it,
for the Father sent his Son on it.
Let us all proceed on the way of the King
so that all of us will recline with the Son of the King!

Response: To you be the glory from the true
(Christians)!

2. For this is the way which the army of the King
prepared when it marched out before the Son of the
King
so that the heir of the kingdom can march in triumph
on it,
(He) who would come to the city of the King
in which was set right and prepared
the throne of David for the Son of David.
The King put on (the apparel) when He was despised,
He bound the diadem when He was mocked.
He ascended and reigned on Calvary.
He completed the way of his prophets,

and prepared it again for his apostles.
Let us all proceed on the way of the Son
so that we may go and see the glory of the Father.

3. In the torah Moses prepared
the way of symbols before that people
that was straying on all ways.
Our Lord, however, in his testaments
completed, established the way of truth
for the peoples that came to the way of life.
All the symbols therefore journeyed on
this way that Moses prepared,
and they were fulfilled in the way of the Son.
Let therefore our mind be
cleared ground for this way.
Instead of earthen surfaces, let us on souls
tread out, my brothers, the way of life.

4. The mouths of the unbelievers
condemn themselves without them realising it
since they admit through John that He came.
Let us now see whether it is not the rule
of the envoys that precede the King,
that they come to an end and cease, once the King has
come.
For that John who is
the last and the end of the prophets,
saw Simeon, the first of the disciples.
And our Lord Himself stood in the middle
between the first and the last ones.
The trumpets of prophecy kept silent;
the rams' horns of apostleship resounded.

5. Before the Messiah, "He who is coming",
John came to the Jews
to make preparations according to their word.
When it has been prepared, my beloved,

the great, royal road,
everyone perceives that the King has arrived.
Behold, three hundred years ago, John
prepared the royal road,
and where is the King, you unbelievers?
It is evident, without dispute,
that that preparation of John
preceded the Son of the King, He that came in his
tracks
and as a result of whose arrival the heralds fell silent.

6. It is the road on which Abel travelled,
and Enoch and Noah and also Abraham,
Moses and Joshua, also Samuel,
from the house of David and his offspring, Joseph
with many that were between.
It is the chain of the children of light.
Behold, the unbelievers therefore admit
that our Lord came to Zion
as the Master after his servants.
The way suggests that He arose
as King and set out after his army.
While they contrived to disown (Him),
they attested the way in the Master of the way.

7. Everyone that says that he is a messenger,
but who avoids the road of the King,
that one is a thief beside the road.
For they also, the robbers,
come to the edge of the road
to fall there upon the merchants.
And those who understand to instruct
and who go out on their tracks,
are caught in theft.
Let us also follow, let us go out
on the wandering path of the unbelievers:
investigate their words and hiding places

and seize the sheep which they cut off and stole.

8. For the false worship is a dung-hill;
it prepared secret ways, my brothers,
to the left of the way of life.
And behold, its instigators are on its ways,
relatives of the primeval snake,
the pervert guide that leads the upright astray,
whose counsel is detestable like himself
in whose tracks they set out,
the doctrines that pervert the way.
And on all who are simple they bestow
the hateful secrets of their mysteries.
And everyone who is upright, they pervert by
instructing him
so as to be suitable for their ways.
9. Since then - as is proclaimed -
the cleared way is the confused one,
because the ways of deceit is conjoined with it
(for sin has sown on the way of life
tracks of death
to confuse the children of the light,
deceit imitating truth
so that also truth becomes suspected of deceit or
deceit is being believed)
you must carry on, on the road and take note
and inscribe its beauty in your mind
lest the accursed snake encounter you
and make you fall on the hateful path and throw you
away.
10. The First-born that walked on the water
and prepared a way for that disciple of His,
formed, showed symbols to him in the waves
and there were types in the storms.
On the floods He established a path
and signs of the dry ground He engraved on the sea,

for thus He prepared for his disciples
ways of proclamation
in the world which was represented by the sea.
Oh, Voice that rebuked the storms
and smoothed the way which is on the water,
rebuke the stumbling blocks like the waves
and smooth the way of truth for your servant!

3 THE RHETORICAL INCLINATION OF THIS HYMN

According to El-Khoury³, the works of Ephrem consist of: homilies (*memre*), songs (*sogijâta*), hymns (*madrâse*), Bible commentaries (*pusage*), Church hymns, and anti-heretical works. All the manuscripts containing the present collection of hymns, bear the title “*Madrâse luqbal yulpâne*”, and Beck therefore edits them under the heading “*Hymnen Contra Haereses*”⁴. He attributes the 1740 edition of Petrus Benedictus, having the title “*Sermones polemici adversus Haereses*” to the confusion between the Syriac terms “*madrâsâ*” and “*memrâ*”⁵. Since we are presently concerned with a hymn (rather than with a sermon), the rhetorical inclination in it is all the more conspicuous. The introductory phrase of *Contra Haereses* 25 reminds one of the beginning of a sermon:

Let us rebuke those that have gone astray...
(*Contra Haereses* 25:1a)

If the particle “*dein*” is translated, the phrase may be rendered “let us (thus) rebuke those...”. But even without translating it, the declaration of intent is similar to that in a sermon of John Chrysostom⁶: “Today I wanted to finish the topic...”; a phrase which in fact serves to explain a change in topic from that of the previous sermon. Some other instances of the particle in this hymn exemplify its rhetorical function:

The mouths of the unbelievers (thus) condemn themselves...
(4a)

Let us (now) see whether it is not the rule...

(4d)
Since (then) - as is proclaimed - the cleared way is the
confused one...

(9a, b)

The believers are, in fact, addressed so many times that they cannot possibly forget that an appeal is made to them:

And us, my brothers, let us follow it...let us all proceed
on the way of the King, so that all of us will recline with
the Son of the King!

(1j-m)

Let us all proceed on the way of the Son so that we may
go and see the glory of the Father

(21-m)

Let therefore our mind be cleared ground for this way.
Instead of on earthen surfaces, let us prepare on souls,
my brothers, the way of life

(3j-m)

When it has been prepared, my brothers, the great, royal
road...

(5d-e)

Let us also follow, let us go out...

(7j)

The false worship...prepared secret ways, my brothers
...'

(8a, b)

You must carry on, on the road...

(9j)

In four of the ten strophes, the last four lines are given up to a direct appeal for certain action, closely resembling that made in a Christian sermon of the time. But the rhetorical and argumentative character is equally strongly presented in the imagery employed.

4 METAPHOR

Many of the sermons of John Chrysostom begin with a long metaphor (or series of metaphors). This technique is a powerful aid to the rhetor's attempt to hold the attention of his audience and to let them enjoy the play of words, while at the same time illustrating smaller details of his argument.⁷ In sophistic use, images are often elaborated in great detail so that the things compared are not just equated with one another, but an effort is made to find numerous points of comparison.⁸ In *Contra Haereses* XXV, Ephrem's arguments are based on the metaphor of orthodoxy as a way on which the traveller proceeds. It is a complex metaphor and sometimes acquires the dimensions of a simile. He describes the preparation of this way by the messengers of peace, how it was explored by the wise men and cleared of stones by them, how truth erected milestones and love created inns. But the underlying metaphor of a certain way of life as a road is a biblical motif.⁹ It represents a dormant metaphor¹⁰. This way is variously called "the way of life (salvation)" (1c, 3f, 3m, 8c and 9d), "the way of truth" (3e and 10m), "the royal way" (5e and 5h), and "the cleared way" (9b).

As to the origin of this metaphor, one should think of the image that predominates in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the way of man is viewed in its relation to the way of God which, through God's intentions and commandments, provides a norm for human action.¹¹ These ideas are further expanded upon in the New Testament, with the Christian doctrine of salvation becoming a central notion - it is the way *par excellence*, and the Leader on the way is Christ (Himself also being the way).¹² The Christian teaching about the two ways is similarly founded upon the Old Testament notion of contrariety between the way of God and the way of man.¹³ Expressions such as "the way of life" and "the way of truth" recall the imagery of John 14:2-6. But the one incident from the gospels which is certainly alluded to in this hymn is the question of the vocation of John the Baptist, whose mission it was to prepare the way of the Lord (cf. Mk 1:1-6, Mt 11:10, and Jn 1:21-23; compare with *Contra Haereses* 25:5).

The way of life (salvation) is used as the constant pole of a whole set of polarities:

the ways of deceit: the way of life (str. 1 and 9)

the way of the prophets: (the way) of the apostles (str. 2)

the ways of symbols: the way of truth (str. 3)

the way prepared by Moses: the way of the Son (str. 3)

the false ways: the way of the Son (str. 8)

The contra-poles (the list on the left-hand side above), can be divided into two groups: those with the singular “way”, which all refer to the Old Testament era (“the way of symbols”, “the way prepared by Moses”, and “the way of the prophets”); and those which use the plural and which refer to heresies (“the ways of deceit”, and “the false ways”). There seems to be a “spatial” distinction between the polarities: in the eighth strophe, Ephrem says that false worship is a dung-hill that prepared secret ways to the left of the way of life. Those ways of deceit became entangled with the cleared way, since sin has sown tracks of death on the way of life. But it is precisely to prevent the believer from falling onto that hateful path, that Ephrem gives warning of the confusion.

The way of the prophets, on the other hand, forms a preliminary stage to the road of life. The hymn following the one presently under discussion speaks of three stages, namely that of the uncircumcised (who carried the symbols), that of the circumcised (made of types) and that of the Son (*Contra Haereses* 26:5). But other divisions are also made (from the tree in paradise to the tree on Calvary; from Eden to Zion; from Zion to the holy church; and from the church to the kingdom - *Contra Haereses* 26:4). In the present hymn, the contrast is between that section of the way which is associated with the Jews as a national entity, and the next stage which came to be associated with the Christians as a religious entity; since it has an anti-Judaistic polemical object.

There thus seem to be two separate polarities - heterodoxy and false religion contrasted with orthodoxy, and the Old Testament era contrasted with the New Testament era. The first part of the hymn is concerned with the

latter opposition, and Ephrem's objective is to demonstrate that the road of the Jews has ended and was replaced by that of the church. By insisting that it is the same road which connects the two era's, Ephrem emphasises that it was not Christianity that branched off from Judaism, but that it was the Jewish people that had "strayed on all ways" (3c). Ephrem might have had textual references such as Isaiah 57:17 in mind. The extended metaphor therefore becomes an effective technique of visualisation of contrast, and enhancement of polemic quality. On the way of orthodoxy the believers follow the prophets and apostles, but also the King himself who set out on it after his army had prepared it. The army sent out before the King included the heroes of faith such as Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, and his offspring Joseph (the husband of the mother of Jesus, str. 6). But John the Baptist is the last of the prophets, and thus concludes this procession chronologically. Jesus is the King that followed his messengers, and he thus stands between the prophets and the apostles, with Peter as the beginning of a new era in contrast with John, the last of the old era. Since the Jews recognised John as the fore-runner of the Messiah, their unbelief is condemned by their own admission (str. 4a-c).

For the sake of this polemic "prophets" and "apostles" are no longer seen as a merism (a totality of thought, cf. str. 1g), but as the elements of an antithesis:

The trumpets (A) of prophecy (A') kept silent (A");
the rams' horns (B) of apostleship (B') resounded (B")
(*Contra Haereses* 25:41-m)

In this isocolon the contrast of thought is accentuated by the contrasting equality of the elements.¹⁴ Each single word of the Syriac text in the two lines has an opposing equivalent. Both trumpets and rams' horns are wind instruments, but Old Testament usage suggests a contrast that is exploited here: trumpets are used to sound the end of battle; rams' horns the beginning of battle.¹⁵ The association between "prophets" and "last", and between "disciples" and "first", earlier in the same strophe suggests an antithesis between prophecy and apostleship; and this notion is strengthened through the clear opposition between "kept silent" and "resounded" as the third antithetical word pair.

This contrast between the Old Testament era and the New Testament dispensation, which illustrates that the Messiah (to whom the symbols had referred) has come, highlights the opposition between Jews and Christians:

In the torah (A) Moses (A') prepared the way of symbols (A'') before that people (A' ") that had strayed on all ways (A' "). Our Lord (B'), however, in His testaments (B) completed, established the way of truth (B'') for the peoples (B'') that came to the way of life (B' ").

(*Contra Haereses* 25:3a-f)

The testaments¹⁶ are contrasted with the torah; Jesus who gave it, with Moses the lawgiver; the truth that came, with the symbols that had prefigured it; and the Christian peoples with the Jewish people. The one people, it is said, moreover strayed on all ways; while the peoples came to the way of life. Not only is the expectation of the Jews of a coming Messiah denounced, the Jewish people itself is presented as being finished. The argument is carried further in strophe 6, where it is stated that the Jews (and not the followers of Marcion, as Beck would have it¹⁷) unwittingly acknowledged that Jesus is the Messiah by identifying John with Elijah as the prophet who would be a messenger to prepare the way of the King:

While they contrived to disown (Him),
they attested the way in the Master of the way

(*Contra Haereses* 25:6k-l)

In the second part of the hymn (str. 7-10), Ephrem directs his attention to the heterodox teachings and mystery religions. Paths of deceit came into being, running to the left of the way of life (str. 8). On these ways there are those whose mission it is to deceive and pervert the upright, and therefore they came to the edge of the way of life like thieves and robbers. They present themselves as messengers of the King, but in reality they avoid the way and only come to fall upon the merchants (the orthodox believers) so as to abduct them or to force them from the truth (str. 7). As a result of this, it is

difficult to distinguish between the ways of deceit and truth. Footsteps of death have been sown on the way of life in order to confuse the children of light.

Ephrem introduces a new image in the concluding strophe. The (spiritual) world is like a stormy sea, dangerous for the religious traveller. But Jesus once walked on the water and established a level path on the waves for Peter, symbolising his power to prepare “ways of proclamation” for his disciples in the world. Upon the Owner of this voice that once rebuked the storms, Ephrem now calls to smooth the way of truth. In this manner, the same basic analogy between spiritual life and a road is used to demonstrate the surpassing quality of Christianity over Judaism; the dangers of lurking heresies for the orthodox believer; but also the possibility of conquering such stumbling blocks through the power of Christ.

What is the significance of the use of metaphor in this hymn? As has already been suggested, it is an aid to the author’s attempt to hold the attention of the congregation. But it is also an instrument of argument. The expression “the way of salvation” is derived from the analogy “orthodoxy is to salvation as a way is to its destination”. Through the metaphorical fusion the analogy is presented not as a suggestion, but as a datum; since metaphor enhances the standing of the analogy.¹⁸ Once the analogy is accepted, the argument it presents follows suit. The listener is therefore enticed into accepting that salvation is only possible through persistence in the orthodox faith. By using imagery derived from biblical contexts, rather than that of ordinary life such as is found in some Greek authors of his time, Ephrem further enhances the argumentative quality of his reasoning.

5 ANTITHESIS

Besides metaphor, antithesis itself becomes an argumentative device. The double polarity Christian salvation :: Jewish belief and orthodoxy :: heresy is reflected in the refrain of the hymn; in which the word “true” represents truth, in contrast with deceit, but also truth in contrast with the symbols of

the Old Testament era (cf. 1b and 1h; 3b and 3e). These polarities are emphasised through the continual use of antitheses. Through the association of one half of these with terms carrying a negative semiotic value, and the other half with terms carrying a positive semiotic value, antithesis is converted into an impressive argumentative device. So, for instance, are both the ways of heresy (cf. 1a) and the ways of symbols (cf. 3c) spoken of in close connection with verbs such as “to stray/wander”. The strong negative value of the terms used to describe this false worship builds up to such strength that it culminates in what may be seen as an invective or *psogos* (the sophistic style of unrelieved denigration¹⁹): the false worship is a “dung-hill” that prepared secret ways to the left of the way of life; its “instigators” are “relatives of the primeval snake, the pervert guide”, whose “counsel is detestable like himself” (str. 8). Over against this attempt to vilify, it is clear that the object of the first strophe is to glorify and honour the orthodox belief, thus constituting an *encomium*: the “messengers of peace” prepared it; the “wise through the spirit” declared it; “truth” set up milestones on it and “love” completed inns along it.

In the second strophe, the need is felt to demonstrate that the Messiah had indeed come to be made King. Since Ephrem later argues that the Jews have waited 300 years in vain for their King, the counter-argument that the Christians do not have a real king either, but rather One who was crucified, is envisaged; and it is precluded by another instrument known in the second sophistic, that of *paradoxism*. It is an antithesis formulated by using words that appear to be mutually exclusive²⁰:

The King put on (the apparel) (+) when He was despised
(-)
He bound the diadem (+) when He was mocked (-)
He ascended and reigned (+) on Calvary (-)
(*Contra Haereses* 25:2q-i)

The implication of the last line is that the cross was a throne, and crucifixion enthronement. As is always the case with paradoxical expressions²¹, this statement calls for an effort at dissociation. The cross means foolishness and death, but for the Christian it means the wisdom of God and salvation.²² It is

in effect, thus, the exact point of difference between Jews and Christians that is touched upon (and the Jews that are dissociated from the Christians in this strophe). Another example of such a paradox is found in strophe 6:

While they contrived to disown (Him),
they attested the way in the Master of the way
(*Contra Haereses* 25:6k-1)

In this case, the Jews are made to appear ridiculous, since the two phases of the event destroy each other. The Jews plotted against Jesus and denied that he was “King of the Jews”²³, but by acknowledging that John was the messenger that came to prepare the way of the King²⁴, they attested both the way and the King.

In strophe 9 Ephrem uses *chiasmus* to demonstrate the confusion between truth and deceit:

...deceit (A) imitating truth (B)
so that also truth (B) becomes suspected of deceit (A)
(*Contra Haereses* 25:9g, h)

In this way, as well as through the antitheses of the preceding lines, the danger of losing track of orthodoxy is emphasised. It shows that such figures of speech are not used only for their aesthetic value, but also for their argumentative quality.

6 APOSTROPHE

For the same reason the instance of direct address to the Jews (5i-m) should not be regarded as intended dialogue, but as a rhetorical device. *Apostrophe* is a frequent feature of the second sophistic, and is used for the sake of liveliness and focusing of attention.²⁵ By addressing the Jews, the real-life situation of the dispute between Christians and Judaists is called to mind:

Behold, three hundred years ago John
prepared the royal road,

and where is the King, you unbelievers?
It is evident, without dispute,
that that preparation of John
preceded the Son of the King, He that came in his tracks
and as a result of whose arrival the heralds fell silent.
(*Contra Haereses* 25:5i-m)

7 INVOCATIO

The *invocatio* at the end of the hymn, which is a recurrent feature in the hymns of Ephrem, can likewise be viewed as a technique of enlivenment. The *cohortative* clauses at the end of a number of strophes (1, 2, 3 and 7), and the warning at the end of strophe 9, also serve to present the structure of a dialogue between author and audience.

8 HYPERBOLE

Yet another rhetoric technique which Ephrem uses in this hymn is that of *hyperbole*:

In the torah Moses prepared
the way of symbols before that people
that had strayed on **all** ways
(*Contra Haereses* 25:3a-c)

While it has been prepared, my beloved,
the great, royal road
everyone perceives that the King has arrived.
(*Contra Haereses* 25:5d-f)

And on **all** who are simple they bestow
the hateful secrets of their mysteries,
and **everyone** who is upright, they pervert by instructing
him
so as to be suitable for their mysteries
(*Contra Haereses* 25:8j-m)

It may not be true to say that hyperbole is *the* outstanding rhetoric device in Ephrem's work - such as can be said of the second sophistic²⁶ - but he does seem to be prone to a frequent use of the terms "all" or "everyone".

9 ACOUSTIC DEVICES

Finally, there are also numerous acoustic devices in Ephrem's hymns. In the present case: examples of *rhyme* (1d and 1e, 1j and 1k, 2j and 2k, etc.); *alliteration* ("beth", "daleth" and "rish" in 1l and 1m may serve as a good example); and *assonance* (cf. e.g. "mile", "shelichê", and "nebiyê" in 1g and 1h) can be found. But some acoustic devices also have argumentative value, for example *antistrophe* (in the last two lines of the first strophe, and the first two lines of the second strophe; which all end in "malkâ"). In this case, it serves to emphasise the connection between the Father and the Son ("malkâ" – "bar malkâ"), and strengthens the cohortative impact of the first strophe:

Let us all proceed on the way of the King
so that all of us will recline with the Son of the King.

The same rhetorical function can be detected in the *rhyme*, *assonance* and *alliteration* of the last two lines of the second strophe:

nerde' kulan be'urche dabera'
denizal nechze shubche da' ba'

Let us all proceed on the way of the Son,
so that we may travel to see the glory of the Father.

I conclude with an example of *paronomasia* (similarity of sound with dissimilarity of sense). In the ninth strophe, Ephrem describes the confusion between deceit and truth:

...for sin has sown on the way of life
tracks of death (*demawtâ*)
to confuse the children of the light,
deceit imitating (*demajat*) truth...

(*Contra Haereses* 25:9d-g)

The danger of this imitation is vividly (or acoustically) demonstrated through the approximation of sound between “death” and “imitate”.

10 THE POETIC TRADITION

Besides these similarities in the use of rhetorical devices, there is a resemblance in the arguments and biblical proof-texts that Ephrem and John Chrysostom use in their respective polemics against the Jews; while Ephrem and Gregory of Nyssa have many individual themes and points of emphasis in common.²⁷ As Brock²⁸ remarks, however, Greek and Syriac cultures had already been interacting for over half a millennium at the time when Ephrem lived. It is therefore not necessary to assume that the Syriac, or Greek, authors of the fourth century C.E. themselves were being subjected to “foreign” influence. It is, on the contrary, quite evident that Ephrem had had access to a “native” Syriac source. Aphrahat had, for example, employed in his demonstrations such diverse devices as: *rhyme, alliteration, assonance, apostrophe, hyperbole, paronomasia, dialogue, paradox, metaphor*; all of which have been touched upon in this discussion, but a host of others as well.²⁹

It is the importance of *antithesis* and *polarity* in the work of Ephrem that possibly gives the clearest indication of his indebtedness to a Semitic tradition in general. Ephrem’s approach to theology can be described as a **theology of paradox**.³⁰ His favourite paradoxes relate to the difference between God and man, and the changes that took place in the incarnation. This rich source of *antitheses* was already exploited by Aphrahat.³¹ In Aphrahat it seems to have been the result of influence from the Heraclitic philosophy³², but this came to him from a Semitic background (that of rabbinic theology, with which he seems to have been well acquainted).³³

It is also to this Semitic background that Ephrem’s use of stylistic devices and, indeed, his preference for poetry as a means of theological expression must be traced. His preference for biblical imagery, instead of the rather fanciful style of the Greek fathers, point in the direction of an influence from rabbinic exegesis (rather than that of the schools of rhetoric). Moreover, he seems to be heir to ancient Mesopotamian and Judaistic traditions.³⁴ Although the dichotomy between “hellenistic Judaism” and its supposedly more purely “Semitic” counterpart should be reconsidered in favour of a

cultural hybridism³⁵, the stylistic features of Ephrem's hymns should not be related in a direct way to the writings of contemporary sophists.

While there may thus be a common purpose, a similarity in method, and even thematic correspondence between Ephrem and the Greek fathers of his age; his symbolic and polar approach as opposed to their philosophical approach seems to prohibit a surmise of direct influence in the sphere of rhetorics.

WORKS CONSULTED

Beck, E. *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers hymnen Contra Haereses*. CSCO 169/Syr. 76 (text) and CSCO 170/Syr. 77 (translation). Louvain: Durbecq, 1957.

Brock, S.P. *The luminous eye, the spiritual world vision of St. Ephrem*. Rome: 1985.

El-Khoury, N. *Die interpretation der welt bei Ephrem der Syrer. Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte*. Tübinger Theologische Studien, Band 6. Mainz: Grünewald, 1976.

Haefeli, L. *Stilmittel bei Aphrahat dem Persischen weisen*. Leipziger Semitische Studien, Neue Folge Band IV. Leipzig: 1968.

Krašovec, J. *Antithetic structure in biblical Hebrew poetry*. Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 35. Leiden: Brill, 1984.

Meeks, W.A. & Wilken, R.L. *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the first four centuries of the Common Era*. Society of Biblical Literature, Sources for Biblical Study, no. 13, 85-104. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978.

Migne, J.P. "Homily, against the Jews". *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 48, cols. 839-942. Paris: 1862. Translation by W.A. Meeks & R.L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the first four centuries of the Common Era*. Society of Biblical Literature, Sources for Biblical Study, no. 13, 85-104. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978.

Murray, R. "Hellenistic-Jewish rhetoric in Aphrahat". III *Symposium Syriacum* 1980, *Les contacts du monde syriaque avec les autres cultures* (Gosler 7-11 Septembre 1980). Édité par R. Lavenant. *Orientalia*

Christiana Analecta 221. Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1983.

Nötscher, F. *Gotteswege und menschenwege in der Bibel und in Qumran*. Bonner Biblische Beiträge 15. Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1958.

Perelman, C. & Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. *The new rhetoric, a treatise on argumentation*. Translation by J. Wilkinson & P. Weaver. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971.

Ruether, R.R. *Gregory of Nazianzus, rhetor and philosopher*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1969.

Wilken, R.L. *John Chrysostom and the Jews: rhetoric and reality in the late 4th century, the transformation of the classical heritage* (Vol. IV). Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

ENDNOTES

¹ Financial assistance from the Human Science Research Council in researching this article is acknowledged. The opinions expressed and the conclusions reached are those of the author and not necessarily those of the HSRC.

² Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, 96.

³ El-Khoury, *Die Interpretation der Welt bei Ephrem der Syrer*, 21. Cf. also Brock, *The luminous eye*, 5-6.

⁴ Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen Contra Haereses*.

⁵ Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen Contra Haereses*, i.

⁶ Homily "Against the Jews"; text in Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 839-942. Translation by Meeks & Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 85-104.

⁷ Meeks & Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 109.

⁸ Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 86.

⁹ The complexity of this image in the Bible is amply illustrated by Nötscher, *Gotteswege und Menschenwege in der Bibel und in Qumran*.

¹⁰ Metaphors are subject to erosion, and become "dormant" when they are no longer seen as a fusion of terms taken from different spheres, for example in the

- expression “a way of life”. Cf. Perelman, & Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The new rhetoric* (transl. by J. Wilkinson & P. Weaver), 405.
- 11 Nötscher, *Gotteswege und Menschenwege in der Bibel und in Qumran*, 121-122.
- 12 Nötscher, *Gotteswege und Menschenwege in der Bibel und in Qumran*, 122.
- 13 Nötscher, *Gotteswege und Menschenwege in der Bibel und in Qumran*, 91.
- 14 Cf. Krašovec, *Antithetic structure in biblical Hebrew poetry*, 6.
- 15 Cf. e.g. 2 Sam. 20:22; Amos 3:6.
- 16 It is not clear why the plural is used. Beck (CSCO vol. 170/Syr. 77, 92 n. 5) thinks of the Old and New Testament as a unity.
- 17 Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen Contra Haereses*, 93-94 n. 11 takes “*nahri*” as a clear reference to Marcion. But it was the Jewish people that “contrived” or “plotted” to disown their King.
- 18 Perelman, & Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The new rhetoric*, 400.
- 19 Cf. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, 113.
- 20 Perelman, & Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The new rhetoric*, 444.
- 21 Perelman, & Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The new rhetoric*, 443.
- 22 See the same argument in 1 Corinthians 1:22-25.
- 23 Cf. John 19:15, 21.
- 24 Cf. John 1:21-23.
- 25 Cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 74.
- 26 Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, 107.
- 27 Cf. Brock, *The luminous eye*, 118.
- 28 Brock, *The luminous eye*, 118.
- 29 For a comprehensive list, cf. Haefeli, *Stilmittel bei Aphrahat dem Persischen Weisen*.
- 30 Cf. Brock, *The luminous eye*, 11.
- 31 Cf. Haefeli, *Stilmittel bei Aphrahat dem Persischen Weisen*, 28; and Aphrahat’s demonstrations VI 118, 8ff.; II 42, 3ff.
- 32 Haefeli, *Stilmittel bei Aphrahat dem Persischen Weisen*, 150.
- 33 Haefeli, *Stilmittel bei Aphrahat dem Persischen Weisen*, 150.

³⁴ Cf. Brock, *The luminous eye*, 6-9.

³⁵ Cf. Murray, *Hellenistic-Jewish rhetoric in Aphrahat*, 79-80.