

Ephrem, Against Heresies, Hymn 22

Translated by Adam C. McCollum

The translation¹ was made from the standard edition of the Syriac text: Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra haereses*, CSCO 169 // SS 76 (Louvain, 1957). I have added only a very select number of annotations. The hymn is acrostic, that is, the first letter of each stanzas follows the order of the alphabet, and they are so marked (and numbered) below; there is also an extra stanza, beginning with a letter out of order (the eighth, beginning with *šin*), which brings the total number of stanzas to twenty-three instead of the expected twenty-two.

To the melody of "The infants have been killed"

1A

Like the form of the alphabet,
Which is complete in its parts —
It lacks no letter,
Nor does it add another —
So, too, is the truth written
In the holy Gospel
With the letters of the alphabet,
A perfect measure that admits
Neither lack nor surplus.

Response: Blessed is your image that is in the alphabet!

2B

Because Marcion added falsehood,
The church has removed him and cast him out,

¹ Commissioned by Mr. Roger Pearse. The translator welcomes corrections, comments, and queries sent to acmccollum101 AT gmail DOT com.

Valentinus, because he deceived,²
The Quqite added and perverted,³
Bardaiṣan ornamented his falsehood,
Mani, who was wholly insane,⁴
A bundle of thorns and thistles.
May the good one in his mercy turn them
From wandering into his pasture!
Response: Blessed is the one who is unconcerned about evil ones!

3G

Valentinus stole a flock
From the church and called it by his name;
The Quqite named one after his name;
The crafty Bardaiṣan stole one;
And they made the flock a common one.
Marcion kept his sheep separate,
Mani captured from him,
One rabid creature bit another,
They called a flock by their names.
Response: Blessed is the one who threw them out of his house!

4D

The Arians, because they added and erred;⁵
The Aetians, because they were subtle;

² This verb (*ṣṭā*) is used when commentators and lexicographers explain the etymology of “Satan” (*sāṭānā*).

³ This second verb has a range of meanings from “destroy” to “pervert.”

⁴ This line rhymes, the last two syllables matching Mani’s name.

⁵ This stanza has no main verb: it seems to be a list of why these groups are considered heretics.

The Paulinians, because they acted perversely;
The Sabellians, because they acted with guile;
The Photinians, because they were cunning;
The Borborians, because they were defiled;
The Katharaites, because they kept themselves pure;⁶
The Audians, because they were ensnared;
The Mesallians, because they were unrestrained.

Response: May the good one turn them to his fold!

5H

Look! Their hands have lost hold of everything,⁷
And they have no handle to grasp,
They called us Palutians,
And we escaped that and rejected it.
Let there be an anathema⁸ on the one
Called by the name of Paluṭ,
If not by the name of Christ.
The furnace of the anathema has exposed them,
For they do not wish to be banned.

Response: Blessed is the one by whose anathema they have been exposed!

6W

Paluṭ did not want
People to name themselves after him,
And if he were alive, he would curse

⁶ The Syriac verb points to the etymology of the sect's name: καθαρός "pure."

⁷ In lines 1, 3, 4, and 6 of this stanza are words having the root *plṭ*.

⁸ Syr. *ḥermā*, also in l. 8 and the *response* of this stanza.

With every anathema⁹ concerning this,
Because he was a disciple of the Apostle,
Who was clothed in suffering and brought to grief
Concerning the Corinthians, who had left
The name of Christ and called themselves
By the names of people.

Response: Blessed is the one who has truth!

7W

A teacher who does not add
Anything shameful and hateful
To the teaching of Christ,
His disciples are Christians.
But if he adds a little falsehood,
He leaves the name of Christ,
And his disciples call themselves
By the name of a weed,
Because falsehood does not match the truth.¹⁰

Response: Blessed is the one who has established us with his truth!¹¹

8Š (!)

Smooth to the simple is the way —
Which is the faith —

⁹ In this and the previous line together are the noun *ḥermā* again and the verb from the same root; “to anathematize with every anathema” is somewhat awkward in English, and so I have translated the expression as above.

¹⁰ Syr. *quštā*.

¹¹ Syr. *šrārā*.

Which¹² extends lodgings and milestones
From paradise to paradise,
[From] which the exit [was] through Adam,
[To] which the return [was] through the robber,
And investigations, like winding roads,
Have thrown those who have searched
From a smooth to a hard place.
Response: Blessed is the one who preserves the perfect!

9Ĥ
See, my brothers, how [with] the image of the king
Every coin is struck,¹³
But a great general is unable
To stamp a penny with his image.
When [someone] stamps the image of the king,
One who stamps it in secret,
He is either burned or cut off.
How indeed he has dared, the one who
Stamped the image of himself instead of [that of] our Lord!
Response: Blessed is the one who stamps us with his name!

10Ṭ
Quite despised is gold to our king,
Who does not stamp his image in money;
In a human being, the one greater than all,

¹² Grammatically, the subject could be either “way” or “the faith,” but the former makes the most contextual sense. The following verb is used in the sense of “offers.”

¹³ The verb is *naqšā*, a passive participle with feminine subject, that is *moniṭā* (< Latin); Beck’s text has *kolēb*, but we should probably read *kolāb* to agree with that noun.

Our savior stamps his beauty.
Who[ever] has believed in the name of God
Receives the stamp of God,
But if he has called himself by the name of a human being,
Then he receives a human stamp,
Because he despises the living name.
Response: Blessed is the one who has chosen us by his names!

11Y
Judas, when he stole,
Was called a disciple,
And when¹⁴ he was a chief to the left,
Our Lord called him friend and and taught
That even the sinful [can be] a disciple.
As long as he forms no sect, he is a disciple,
But if he establishes a faction and forms a sect,
He becomes [the Lord's] contrary "friend."
Here is his type in Iscariot!
Response: Glory to you from my weakness!

12K
Scripture says,¹⁵ "What king,
Going to make war
With another king, his friend...?"¹⁶
It calls them friends, not because they agree,

¹⁴ The conjunction *d-* points back to *kad* in the first line of the stanza.

¹⁵ Lit., "He writes."

¹⁶ See Lk 14:31.

But because they are equal
In the names of royalty,
Because of which the zealous one¹⁷ feared
And did not allow the Corinthians
To call themselves by the name of a human being.
Response: Appeal to the king against the rebellious!

13L

Falsehood clothes the truth¹⁸
In order to seduce with borrowed beauty,¹⁹
And if an unbeliever confesses [Christ]
That he might pretend faith in the clothing of a lamb,
Even Judas to our savior
Said, “Greetings, Rabbi!”
But in his ranks²⁰ he was exposed,
As, too, was Mani in his deeds,
Because he had established a faction with his disciples.
Response: Blessed is the one who endured his arrogance!

14M

He²¹ has been called a false Christ;
A lying wind²² blew in his prophets,

¹⁷ I.e. Paul.

¹⁸ Syr. *quštā*.

¹⁹ Beck’s text has the noun “beauty” as singular and the adjective “borrowed” as plural, and if this is the correct reading, I cannot make good sense of it.

²⁰ Syr. *sedrā*: presumably a reference to the ranks of soldiers with whom Judas came for Jesus’ arrest.

²¹ That is, Mani, as at the end of the previous stanza.

²² Of course, the word also means “spirit.”

He broke his body²³ for his disciples,
And he divided the earth for his heralds
In the name of our Lord against our Lord;
And although he tried not to be opposed,
Openly before many
He named himself an apostle,
The Paraclete that existed [only] yesterday!
Response: Blessed is the one who delayed and then captured him!

15N

We should know that these things are slight
To the one who acted boldly, and he²⁴ is of little account to him
Who opened his mouth for a curse
And sharpened his tongue for a lie:
“Even the soul in a dog
Is of divine nature.”
So it was not hard for him if he
Made himself God,
Because he had made God dwell in a dog!
Response: Blessed is the upright one who did not burn with anger!

16S

All the rebellious²⁵ witness

²³ The eucharistic language in the translation mirrors that of the original.

²⁴ “These things” in the first line points back to the indictments of the previous stanza and “he” here refers to Jesus.

²⁵ This reading is from a manuscript reading recorded in Beck’s apparatus and fits the meter and sense well; the word in his text is “disturbed,” which fits the meter slightly less well and strikes me as a strange expression here. The readings differ merely in the placement of a dot in Syriac.

That there is one yoke upon them,
One spirit²⁶ that has blown in them,
One error that has spoken in them,
Those who have contrived and written doctrines,
Perverse and abominable prohibitions²⁷
That are not from the apostles and prophets!
And who, my brothers, can remove
Their mud from within their books?
Response: May the merciful one cleanse them!

17 'ayin

About their times let them be asked:
Which one was older than the other?
[Is it] that Mani snatches the right of the firstborn?
Bardaiṣan is his predecessor.
[Is it] that Bardaiṣan is made the elder?
His time is younger than [his] predecessors.
Marcion is the first thorn,
The firstborn of sin's thorny growth,
The weed that came first and and sprouted.
Response: May the upright one wipe out his growth!

18P

Wisely let them be asked:
From whom have they received this?
If they have received [it] from us and rejected [it],

²⁶ Or, as above, "wind," as in stanza 14.

²⁷ Syr. *ḥermā*; cf. notes 7 and 8 above, where the word is used differently.

It's enough for our truth,
But if they have daringly acted as priests,
This is enough to reprove them,
This is sufficient for their shame:
That anyone is a priest who wants
to lay his hand on his head!

Response: Confusion of desperation!

19§

The high one inclined to Mt. Sinai
And covered²⁸ Moses with his hand;
Moses put it²⁹ on Aaron
And it extended to John,
So our Lord said to him,
“It is righteousness³⁰ that I be baptized by you,
Lest order³¹ be lost.”

Our Lord gave it to his disciples,
And look! Its succession is within our church!

Response: Blessed is the one who has handed down his order!

20Q

The voice of our Lord has encompassed them,

²⁸ On the verb here (*aggen*) see S.P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, pp. 110-111.

²⁹ That is, the authority handed down ultimately from God. Grammatically the “it” here is feminine and so agrees with “(his) hand” (*idēh*) of the previous line.

³⁰ Syr. *kēnutā*.

³¹ Syr. *tukkāsā*, as again in the last line of this stanza: the meaning is “order” in the sense of arrangement and proper structuring, not in that of commandment.

And look! their pledges³² are invalidated,³³
[Those] of the Aetians and Arians,
Sabellians and Katharites,
Photians and Audians,
Who had received authority³⁴ from our church,
And cast [that] authority from them
In [the matter of] the faith that was recorded
In that splendid council.³⁵

Response: Remembered is the king who gathered them!

21R

Leaders were in churches,
And some priests and deacons,
Others, scribes and readers,
And one from whom came the covenant.³⁶
From the church they have stolen the order³⁷
Of the service of various forms
By serving as priests and baptizing,
By celebrating the eucharist and teaching
That our Lord has already come and will come.

Response: Blessed is the one who has encompassed them in his truth!

³² The consonantal form of the word might be read also to mean “tents,” but the meter confirms the translation above (i.e. we have here *meškānā*, not *mašknā*).

³³ Lit. “taken away, removed.”

³⁴ Or perhaps “tradition.” This is the word that commonly means “hand.” Cf. n. 21 above.

³⁵ The Council of Nicaea.

³⁶ Syr. *qyāmā*. This stanza continues to describe the pseudo-churches that Ephrem sees his heretics as belonging to, and this line is possibly a reference to particular devotees of those pseudo-churches, devotees whom he considers here as counterfeits of the true *bnay* and *bnāt qyāmā*.

³⁷ Cf. n. 23 above.

22Š

Those who mixed³⁸ have troubled and become ensnared:

Death's poison is in their doctrines;

There is searching and investigating,³⁹

There are those who have mixed revelations

And other Acts of the Apostles,

Those who ...⁴⁰ magic,⁴¹

And others something foreign,

But Mani dared to clothe

Everything with evil without end.

Response: Blessed is the one who has spared us from them!

23T

Furthermore, there are those who have dared to say, "The prophets

Did not reveal⁴² concerning our Lord."

From his future coming

They are proved concerning the one that has already happened.

The prophets have revealed the first one,

As, too, the apostles

Have revealed to us the future one:

Learn the [one] coming in the [other] coming,

³⁸ No object is stated, but the meaning is presumably "those who mixed true doctrine with false." Cf. the fourth and fifth lines of the stanza.

³⁹ Cf. lines 7-8 of stanza 8 above.

⁴⁰ A lacuna. It must be a verb and apparently ends with *k*, but possibilities such as *drek*, *hallek*, *hpek*, *hsak*, *krak*, *nsak*, *sayyek*, and *šrek* make little sense. Should we read *barrek*, "blessed"?

⁴¹ Syr. *kaldāyutā*

⁴² Beck does not supply a supralinear dot over *bdqw*, but the meter calls for it. Cf. line 5 in this stanza, which *does* have a supralinear dot.

The first one in the future one!

Response: Blessed is the one who has revealed concerning them both!