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Redaktor serii:

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Andrzej Uciecha

**Polemika św. Efrema
z manicheizmem
w *Refutationes***

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St Ephraim's Polemic with Manichaeism in *Refutationes* Summary

The main aim of this work was to characterize the impact of St Ephraim's anti-Manichaean polemic on the substance and the method of his theological discourse. The analysis covers the thoughts contained in his work *Refutationes*, more commonly known under its English title *Prose Refutations*. According to experts, Ephraim's work was intended for well-educated Christian circles, who were familiar with the intricacies of philosophical speculation. It was probably among those circles that the Manichaean propaganda was able to win the largest numbers of neophytes. To persuade such a knowledgeable audience, it was necessary to use the right method of reasoning. Compared to the blunt and sarcastic ripostes which the Syrian used in his hymns *Contra Haereses*, another anti-heretical work, the polemical discourse of *Prose Refutations* strikes with a more sophisticated way of reasoning and a more in-depth criticism of the Manichaean myths and their credibility. The hypothesis that the individual components of that polemical work form a well-designed whole seems highly probable.

Launching a research on the broadly defined polemical theology of the Deacon of Edessa is well justified by its chronological, geographical and linguistic proximity to the Syrian environment where Manichaeism appeared and grew. However, it is not the only motive for taking up the research. Preliminary research of the works devoted to Ephraim's polemic with heretical teachings demonstrates that his theology, and the way it evolved as a result of his discussions with heretics, has not received a sufficient degree of attention from the researchers so far. Research on the nature and role of the theological motifs in *Prose Refutations* has been neglected, while priority has been given to other themes traditionally associated with Ephraim, such as his familiarity and connections with Greek philosophy or the reliability of his account of Manichaean mythology. The present study contains a critical analysis of the so far neglected issues. While analyzing Manichaeism, whose teaching the Syrian quoted, commented and criticized, it was necessary to refer to the sources themselves and to the works of other anti-Manichaean polemicists. Conducting our comparative studies, we tried to avoid the mistake of anachronism, thus we gave priority to the authors that were rooted in Syrian culture and the works that appeared in chronological proximity to the era of Ephraim. Previous studies of the Deacon's of Edessa polemical work seem to have placed insufficient emphasis on such methodological discipline. While examining the issues related to the fight against Manichaeism, one must bear in mind an exceptional ability of that heresy to adapt to its environment. Strikingly, the Mani-

chaeans regarded themselves as Christians, while Ephraim attacked them as heretics. The occasional exceptions to the rule of avoiding anachronism in this study may be justified by the fact that the manichaica that are much later than those of Ephraim's, representing the Chinese, Uyghur and Arab literature, also preserved the original tradition dating back to the 3rd and 4th centuries. As a rule, references to the later sources have been placed in the footnotes, as an additional explanation of the Manichaean mythology.

The state of preservation of the original text is also an important factor influencing the quality of the analysis of Ephraim's polemic with Manichaeism: both the first translator of *Prose Refutations* (Mitchell) and the consecutive syrologists mention the disastrous state of the Palimpsest B.M. ADD.14623 and a number of its illegible passages. We were also confronted with the problem while working on this study, however we stressed that it was not meant as a philological discourse. In the cases of translation problems, the suggestions of the above-mentioned authors were used.

On the basis of the above-defined motives and methods of research, the structure of the work was designed.

The first chapter focuses on the historical context of Ephraim's polemic. It was stressed that, in *Prose Refutations*, Ephraim argues against not only Manichaeism, but also the views of Bardaisan and Marcion. He perceives all the three philosophical and theological schools as heresies. The main focus of the research on the historical background was determined by the question about the degree of methodological and substantive interdependence between the heresies and the possible analogies between the methods of combating them.

Comparative analysis makes Ephraim's message clear and simple: it is primarily faithfulness to the truth revealed in the Bible that defines orthodox teaching. Any departure from orthodoxy leads to heresy and gives rise to further divisions, also among heretics themselves. It is, therefore, possible to assess their degree of deceit and the level of threat they pose. All heresies are evil, but to a different extent; according to the Polemicist, the teaching of Mani is the most dangerous. Heretics' deceitful departure from the plain biblical truths results from their lack of discipline in the logic of reasoning and their inconsistency in drawing conclusions. The orthodox cosmogony and cosmology, which provide for only one and eternal prime cause as the origin and the basis of existence for all creation, make it possible to rule out any ontological and anthropological error, including the antisomatism of the heretical systems. It may be concluded that the thoroughness and objectivity of the Deacon of Edessa's polemical arguments were harnessed to defend the integrity of the universe, man and God on the one hand, and logical

coherence in the methodology applied in their study on the other. Getting to know the historical context of Ephraim's polemic made it possible to reveal not only the substantive similarities between the teaching of Bardaisan, Marcion and Mani, but also the literary tools of reasoning and the formal methods of rejecting their heretical errors.

In the second chapter, particular attention was devoted to the formal and literary methods of Ephraim's polemic with Manichaeism, to the possible influencing factors and to the interactions between the ideas. An analysis was made of the concepts, symbols, quotations, paraphrases and comments used for critical purposes in *Prose Refutations*, a necessary subject of study at the hermeneutical level of the Polemicist's reasoning. Detailed philological analyses served only ancillary purposes in the present work, however, we signaled the relevance of the formal aspect of the polemical motifs for the comprehension of the very nature of the subject under study.

Following the description of the literary forms and methods used in the anti-Manichaean polemic, the issue of true knowledge and cognition according to Ephraim was also discussed: his frequent allusions criticizing Manichaean epistemology and its methodological foundations clearly demonstrate the importance he attached to the arguments of "cognition theory" in his polemic.

Drawing from the results achieved by other scholars who specialized in the formal and literary aspect of Ephraim's polemic, we finally analyzed his arguments conveyed by the images of the animal world. As the Polemicist frequently quotes examples from the world of fauna, we thought it suitable to devote a separate subchapter to them. Ephraim's way of handling the polemical discourse suggests that he may have used some passages of *Prose Refutations* earlier, while preaching sermons and homilies, hence his tendency to give simple and vivid illustrations to explain complex theological and moral issues. In the metaphors referring to animal images, Manichaeism is accused of practising magic, lie, perversity and the lack of consistency in its myths.

The simplification of the form and the substance of the arguments seems to be a result of Ephraim's critical assessment of the confusion in the pagan and heretical thought. Both Greek philosophers and heretical teachers used methods that complicated the perception of things and contradicted the simplicity of the true faith. The scholars who stress a dominant role of the formal and literary elements in Ephraim's polemic claim that the semiotic polarization he made use of was meant to appeal to human emotions rather than to reasoning capacities; the ability to draw logical conclusions only served to ridicule certain aspects of human behaviour. Such simplification was reinforced by the liturgical context, which

precluded critical reflection. It was eventually the authority of the Bible characters that guaranteed the reliability of reasoning and dispelled any possible doubts on the part of listeners (Botha, Biesen). We believe that emphasizing the role of formal elements in the anti-Manichaean polemic is a positive aspect of the above-described original concepts, however, the formal devices must not be overestimated, otherwise Ephraim could be blamed for deliberately replacing logical reasoning with easy and popular sentimentalism in his argumentation. A researcher that forgets the specific way of describing and presenting wisdom in the world of the Syriac language, and ignores the rift dividing that world from the mentality formed by the Greek and Roman cultures, may easily fall into the trap of such a simplifying interpretation of Ephraim the Syrian's polemical skills.

In the last chapter of the dissertation, the results of our research on the historical context and the formal and literary methods of Ephraim's reasoning have provided a basis for an analysis of the underlying theological threads in *Prose Refutations*. Stimulated by the heretical teaching, the Deacon of Edessa made an effort to express the truths that had not yet been formulated and deepen the explanations that were no longer satisfying. It seems very likely that his polemical confrontation with Manichaeism influenced the selection and the contents of theological motifs discussed in *Prose Refutation*. What definitely had a significant impact on the theological shape of *Prose Refutations* was that the Manichaeans defined themselves as the "true Christians", while the Syrian polemicist fought against their "true Christian" label. To understand Ephraim's polemical theology, it has to be born in mind that Christian polemical discourses, including *Prose Refutations*, aimed primarily at strengthening the faith of the Church. Furthermore, it is not without certain significance that those works were also targeted at heretics, who were considered as potential converts. The course of the research undertaken in this chapter was determined by the questions concerning those Manichaean ideas which our Polemicist opposed most strongly, giving them particular attention. The criteria for sorting the heretical teaching of the Manichaeans were discussed; an attempt was made to elicit the most prominent motifs in the positive theological discourse and those articles of faith of the Church which were most often quoted in *Prose Refutations*; the non-Manichaean influences which determined the shape of Ephraim's apologetic discourse were analyzed; questions were raised concerning the choice and adjustment of the substance and the method of polemic according to the needs of its main addressees, i.e. Christians exposed to the Manichaean propaganda; the effect of the truths already familiar to them on Ephraim's anti-Manichaean reasoning was studied.

Our analyses show that among the elements of Manichaean heresy referred to in *Prose Refutations*, the teaching on God and cosmogony are the most frequent subjects of Ephraim's disapproval. The Syrian polemicist was not original in his

approach: the criticism of other anti-Manichaean writers also focused on the concept of God and the genesis of the world. Undermining the credibility of the main element of the doctrinal system inevitably led to the erosion of its entire structure. In accordance with the majority method applied in arranging the theological motifs of *Prose Refutations*, the issues relating to cosmology, anthropology and eschatology were discussed. It may be concluded that, in the above-mentioned fields, the reliability of Ephraim's account of the Manichaean myths raises no doubts. One must agree with the opinions of the scholars who claim that he always tried to engage in an objective dispute, without recourse to intentional distortion of the views of his adversaries in order to discredit them more easily, which seems to have been a frequent practice. However, mindful of his addressees, who were exposed to the threats of the Manichaean propaganda, Ephraim quoted the heretical thoughts in a moderate and reasonable way. It has to be noted, though, that he always signaled the introduction of such "pastoral censorship".

It seems that in his polemic, Ephraim was able to discern the nature of the Manichaean reasoning and the threats related to the contents of its mythological framework. To undermine the theses of his adversaries, he frequently used the argument of non-contradiction and insisted on observing the principle of identity of entities.

The majority method applied to the theological motifs in *Prose Refutations* gave rise to the question whether the shape of Ephraim polemical plan might have been influenced by other non-Manichaean elements. A comparison to the so called "short renouncing formula", which was used by the Church in the period chronologically closest to the Syrian writer, reveals certain similarities between the two. *Prose Refutations* do not contain the literal text of the anti-Manichean anathemas which every converted Manichean had to sign, nevertheless, it is highly probable that Ephraim's Church knew such renunciations and made use of them. That "Syrian formula" is reflected in *Prose Refutations*.

We believe that this dissertation may provide a contribution to further research on the conflict between Manichaeism and Christianity, early Christian orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Theological concepts presented here and the way they were conveyed in the Christian circles representing the Syrian tradition transport the reader rooted in the Greek and Roman cultures into an entirely different reality, where feelings take precedence over logic in the understanding of the mysteries of the world, and where the wealth of life experience and humanity is a decisive factor of man's wisdom. The theology of Syrian Christianity is characterized by the tradition of symbol and image, of poetry and understatement, of contrast and antithesis, of paradox and polarization; the tradition which is immersed in the world perceived as a book about God; the tradition which uses its own mature language to

communicate the Good News in a way different from that of the Greek and Roman Church; finally, the tradition which particularly emphasizes the Mystery of God. Such tradition is expressed in the writings of St Ephraim the Syrian.