Against Marcion 2

Ephrem the Syrian (c. AD 306–373)

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S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan. Transcribed from the Palimpsest B.M. Add. 14623 by the late C. W. MITCHELL, M.A., C.F., volume 2 (1921). Against Marcion II.

AGAINST MARCION II.

[P.103, l.5] about which Zechariah says, 'Lo ! thy King cometh unto thee,' in order to show us (?) that he is a king. And that other (passage) which Daniel uttered, 'One like a son of men came, and to him He gave the kingdom.' And one (coming) was in humility, as all the Prophets bear witness about [it], and the other in [exaltjation, as the Scriptures bear witness [P.104, l. 19] But. just as, O Marcion, when David [mentioned] the Messiah who is (foretold) in the Law, our Lord proved from David that he (i.e. the Messiah) is not David's son—and the matter remained in doubt among the Scribes—in like manner, when John recognised our Lord. . . . [l.43] And when [he] explained that he is David's son that cometh, how being David's son is he the Lord of David, seeing that David [P. 105.] testifies and our Lord confirms ? As Malachi testifies concerning John, 'Behold I send my messenger before thee,' and our Lord confirms it that John was Elijah, give me evidence from the other Scriptures that John is [the messenger] of whom Malachi spake.

Therefore according to the testimony of David and the confirmation of [our Lord], David's son, concerning this son of David [and] about this Lord of [David], are there then two Messiahs or two natures ? For [if in some respects he is the son of David] and in some respects the lord of David, is it not [clear that the two natures come together and] are mingled as one, and in relation to the manhood (he is) the Messiah and in relation to the Godhead [he is lord]. For why was a body required for God ? [P.106 l.30.] . . . so that if ye believe and do not doubt and "if there is in you belief," is it false belief, like (the belief) of that blind man or the belief of strangeness ?

"Because John was near to die, he sent his flock by the hand of two under-shepherds to the Lord of the flock : our Lord began to teach concerning him—' Did ye go out to see a great man on account of his raiment ?' " This man, the meek and humble, [P. 107.] and, if not, a trembling reed shaken by every wind, does he not thus go astray [a little], and is bent and beaten about by all manner of reports ? Because he knew whose coming he announced (lit. before whom he announced), for the witness of the truth and the herald of the kingdom of

the Lord of the kingdom is taught by the truth. If our Lord Isu, therefore, bore witness to John that he was meek, let us learn from this humility which of the Messiahs the humble herald resembles (lit. approaches), that Messiah (who is) the source of humility, or that one at whose side thousands fall. For it is necessary that the herald of the dispensation (lit. time) should be himself similar to the dispensation. But Malachi says, The messenger of the covenant, lo ! he cometh, and who endureth the day in which he cometh ?' But if the herald is humble and meek, and he who is heralded is set on high and exalted, lo, in this also there is strangeness !

But (as for) our Lord who says, 'John is greater than all who are born of women,' not because he saw the greatness of the herald, as ye say, that it was great and splendid like that of him who was heralded, (it was not) on account of this that He [P. 108.] said (it). Either give us the splendour of John which was eminently great as (befitted) that of the herald who (went) before the Pre-eminent One, or explain to us why our Lord called him great. For even as all the prophets were 'just,' like Him who sent them, so also this man, His herald, is like Him who is heralded. For if the greatness of him who is heralded is not shown in the announcement concerning him, who will believe that he is a great one? And if He performed signs, read (of them), and if He worked miracles, declare (them). For (with regard to) those messengers whom our Lord sends at the last and that token which appears before that terrible coming, is the sign (σημε ον) thereof terrible and glorious like the thing itself, or can it be that it is alien to Him in His lowliness ?

But it was not Moses or one of the prophets who said concerning John "He is greater than all who are born of women. What is there about him that magnifies John ? But can it be that the bonds of Herod magnify him, or that the head-asking of the daughter of Herodias exalts him, or that the executioner confirms for him (the application of) that (passage), 'Who can endure the day in which he cometh ?' A herald who was humbled [P. 109. and slain came before Him who comes on the clouds to destroy the slayers, and a lowly messenger who did not stand up for himself was sent before the King before whom no created beings can stand ! And he with whose head the girl played, who will believe that he was the apostle of that Stone which will cause all falsehood to pass away ? . . . and let us bring forward the aspects of the two Messiahs, and let us look at the aspect of John and see which Messiah he resembles — that Stranger [in whose] days he came beforehand, or this (Messiah) who is in the Law, of whom as yet not even a rumour had been heard ; for even from . . . and proximity (? it was possible to learn their true nature. Set therefore the two Messiahs over against one another, and set John between (them) ; with whom then does the slain herald agree, with the slayer or with the slain one ?

Whom does the meek and [despised] one resemble ? Him who was humbled or the shatterer of all ... ? And if it was because [P. 110. John announced the coming of that Messiah (lit. announced before that Messiah) that he became great, it is still the same thing ; for he caused us to ascribe the majesty of that King to the herald and the messenger who preceded Him, as is also the custom of kings and their messengers. Or can it be that the majesty of

him who was to come consisted in humility ? For lo ! [the majesty] of humility was also upon His herald, together with the rest (of His qualities). But because John was the messenger of the kingdom he was also wholly forgotten by them (?). When he comes, that Just One and the greater of the [two] Messiahs, does a herald or a messenger go before him ? Or [will it be sudden ?], that terrible coming of His, and does no messenger and herald come before it ? But if another herald does come before it, . . . he is greater than John. For that majesty which was ascribed to John bears witness concerning this (Being) that He is greater than John. And is that messenger who comes before that subjugator of the nations thus subjected [P. 111. and humbled and persecuted as John was?

If thus is his coming (?), the contest is ours, for if the messenger is thus humbled and scorned, how does the lowly announce the coming of the Mighty One, and the scorned (announce) the coming of the Exalted One ? Who will believe that he is the Messenger of the Saviour in a case where he cannot stand up for himself, or does not show terrible signs and does not cast fear and trembling upon mankind ? But if the messenger who comes is great and mighty, how necessary is it that He too should be great ! For (He is) like the Sun, and the herald also is a ray that precedes Him. If therefore it is so — as indeed it is — John, the humbled and lowly, announced the coming of Isu, who differs, by reason of his lowliness, from that high exalted King who is coming ; and he is alien, by reason of his abasement, to that mighty messenger who is sent before the face of that Mighty One. But does the Messiah come to save Israel or to torment it ? If he comes to save it, his messenger therefore convicts of sins or preaches salvation. But if he is one who convicts, when they repent [P. 112. then they are saved. And if they do not wish to repent, does he preach to them ease or salvation ? But if he preaches destruction to them, all those things which Israel expects are annulled.

And if he preaches salvation to them, by his character of Saviour he offers them a foretaste of the great salvations which come after him, as Moses did in Egypt.

Let us see therefore what foretaste of salvation John offered to them ; and, in the second place, lo, the Jews acknowledge all (manner of) prophets and righteous men, and this man, who is greater than all of them, they not only slew but do not even acknowledge ! When therefore the Just and Upright One comes, whom this persecuted and slain one announced beforehand, will He avenge his ill-treatment and murder and the refusal to acknowledge him upon all the tribes of the Jews, who unto the last continually refuse to acknowledge him, or will He not ? If He does not avenge (him), where is the Just One who delivered even the observer of the Law (and) avenged him on the Gentiles ? This man, who is greater than all the Prophets, [P. 113.] He does not avenge ! And if He executes vengeance on all these Tribes, who disbelieve in John and continue to do so, then He who comes is the destroyer of the Jews and not their Saviour. For those who slew His messenger slew Him Himself, and those who deny His herald are not able to acknowledge Him.

But if when all these sins are openly committed (lit. are in the midst) they are not punished, why was it necessary that John should come to baptize and absolve from transgressions, seeing that not one of the transgressions is punished ? But there is no one who is kinder

than He who forgives all these transgressions ; and how is it that this justice shows neglect, (this justice) which in no case neglected to punish ? Has that grace which comes to Israel at the last compelled us to say that it is alien to that justice which wrote for Israel 'blow for blow' ? But if sins are punished, that baptism which remits sins is necessary at the last; for lo, the baptism of John ceased (to exist) among the Jews thenceforward. Who therefore can [P 114.] bring it (back), and who can baptize, now that John is dead ? And if it (i.e. baptism) is not necessary at the last, why was it formerly necessary ? Is it withheld by Grace or by Justice ?

But (thou wilt say), ' Lo, these very things by means of which thou judgest me, (by asking) why they are not found in connection with John, are the things by means of which thou too art judged as to why they are not found in connection with John. For lo, the prophet testifies and our Lord confirms that those things which are said concerning Elijah are fulfilled in him (i.e. in John).' But I say that the herald is like Him who is heralded, that as about Him terrible things are written and as if in this world He is doing them, but it is at the last He is ready to do them. But the roots (i.e. causes) of retribution, since they come from this quarter, prophecy takes up, in order to pluck the fruits from their roots, according to that (passage), 'Lo, the kingdom of God among you !' —And they did not (then) see those good things and the pleasures of the Kingdom, but because He is the root of the aforesaid pleasures [P. 115.] He says 'Lo, the Kingdom !' Because those words which John proclaimed [give an earnest of what is to come] he called things of Yonder things of Here, just as in the case of a murderer who is slain after twenty years, the hour in which he committed the murder has slain him, as (it befell) Adam.

And if thou sayest. that they likewise teach that there is a proof (?) respecting these associates (?), then also the Messiah who is (mentioned) in the Law has two comings, one in which he deposited pledges, and another in which he redeems pledges. For from the actions of John I demonstrate (that he has) two comings, one to which the actions (?) of John bear witness that it was not a Lowly One who came to announce the advent of the Exalted One, and another (coming) promised by (lit. the promises of) Malachi in the passage "He cometh as a fiery furnace," that is to say, on account of the retribution which was hidden in the preaching of John, (the retribution) which is revealed at the last, as he said also concerning his Lord, "Thousands shall fall at thy side," and "Peace at the last," and as that (passage says), 'The LORD God shall give him the throne of David his father.'

Now the Baptism at the hands of John was so alien that not [P. 116.] even the angels, and righteous men and prophets were aware of it; let that Strangeness, therefore, of which no one was aware, appear in the days of this Strangeness of Isu, of whom no one had been informed ; but it was right that the Strangeness of our Lord should be bound together with the Strangeness of John by the conduct of our Lord, as John also was with the Law : Old Testament and New Testament (meet) in the new Baptism of John. But nevertheless if our Lord was David's Son, as all the prophets bear witness, and if He was not David's Son, as David too testifies and our Lord also confirms, on your account then it was said that He is

not David's Son, so that this very Strangeness to which ye have recourse might be found within the Scriptures, in order that your error might be hampered from running (abroad) throughout the world.

END OF DISCOURSE AGAINST MARCION. Note from Vol. 1 Introduction, p. (10): [Short lacunae are indicated in the translation by dots, and longer gaps by asterisks, but in neither case is the number of the dots or asterisks intended to bear any exact relation to the number of the missing words. In respect to this an approximately correct inference may be drawn by consulting the Syriac text. Double inverted commas mark quotations where the original has [Syriac] Single inverted commas are used in numerous cases where the words seem to be quotations or to belong to a special terminology. Words in italics inside square brackets are to be regarded as conjectural translations or paraphrases. In a few passages, where the text has suffered great mutilation, italics indicate an attempt to summarise the argument from suggestions in the fragments.] [P.101] indicates page 101 of the accompanying Syriac. [l.2] means line 2 of the current page of the accompanying Syriac. [RP]

FOOTNOTES I have moved the footnotes to the end. Those consisting of "Read [syriac] for [syriac]" or similar have been omitted, as it has not been possible to transcribe the fragments of Syriac. The pages are numbered with Roman numerals. Arabic numbers and line numbers relate to the Syriac text printed at the back of the paper volume. Greek text is rendered using the Scholars Press SPIonic font, free from here.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.