

Giovanni Colpani

**Poems on Bishops by Gregory of Nazianzus and Ephrem the Syrian**

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## **Volume 111**

Giovanni Colpani

# **Poems on Bishops by Gregory of Nazianzus and Ephrem the Syrian**

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Literary Comparison and Translation

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# Foreword

I began to conceive the present work in the first year of pursuing my master's degree, as I was learning Syriac. Among the texts proposed as exercise to the student in the chrestomathy of Healey's *Leshono Suryoyo*, the book we employed in the Syriac course, there was a passage from Ephrem's *Carmina Nisibena* (CN) 17, praising the bishop Abraham<sup>1</sup>. When the class firstly translated the text, it caught my attention. I had already read some studies on late antiquity in the line inaugurated by Peter Brown, and I thought that such a text, praising one of the rising powers of the time, could be very productive in that line of studies. My thoughts were confirmed also by one of my professors, Prof. Dr. G. Agosti, who also suggested that I look into Gregory of Nazianzus's poems on bishops. I set the idea aside at the time, so that I could complete my master's degree with a thesis on another fundamental author of late antiquity, Origen. With a better understanding of early Christianity thanks to Origen and more experience with the Syriac language, I could take up the idea again and decided to present it as a doctoral project to my *Doktorvater*, Prof. Dr. A. Schwab, and to the Cusanuswerk for financing. The present book is a revised edition of my doctoral thesis, presented to the philosophical faculty of the Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel in September 2022 and discussed at the same faculty in January 2023.

Among the many people who deserve thanks for this work of mine, my *Doktorvater*, Prof. Dr. A. Schwab (CAU–Kiel), counts as first. Working with me, he has been able to find that balance between experienced steering and generous allowance which alone can nourish responsible and fruitful freedom of research. Moreover, with remarkable kindness and bounty, he has also helped me learn to live (academically and otherwise) in Germany.

This work would not have been possible without the support of Cusanuswerk, which not only provided the financial grant that allowed me to research during the doctorate but also offers an all-round program of formation, covering the material and intellectual needs of a young academic as well as the spiritual ones. Furthermore, through their numerous initiatives I had the opportunity to know and interact with other, mostly German, graduate students, furthering my integration in the country. Thanks to them, I have felt warmly and generously welcomed.

I owe many thanks also to Prof. Dr. H. Leppin (GU–Frankfurt am Main), who kindly agreed to help me with my work and to confer with Prof. Dr. Schwab as needed, especially concerning the Syriac half of my research. His feedback and critiques have been very useful in improving my arguments. In addition, he has invited me to take part, both as listener and speaker, in the Kolloquium of the Leibniz-Projekt “Polyphonie des spätantiken Christentums.”

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1 Healey 2005, 176–177.

Various individuals and groups have discussed with me, critiqued, or otherwise commented on the whole or parts of my dissertation. For this valuable input I gratefully acknowledge Prof. Dr. G. Agosti (Università di Pisa), Prof. Dr. Haensch (LMU-München), the participants in the already mentioned Leibniz-Kolloquium in the summer semester of 2021, those in the Kolloquium zur Gräzistik und Wissensforschung der Antike in the winter semester of 2022, and those in the Internationales Kolloquium zur Gräzistik und Wissensforschung der Antike und ihrer Rezeption in the summer semester of 2022. During all of these Kolloquia I publicly presented parts of my work. Special thanks go to Prof. P. G. Borbone (Università di Pisa) and Dr. A. Varela Expósito (SNSF, Università di Pisa) for organising the research expedition of the Università di Pisa in Tur Abdin, Turkey, in September 2020 and letting me take part in it, although formally no longer enrolled in that university. I could thus visit Nisibis (today Nusaybin) in person and present my hypotheses on the church of Mor Yakup (§4.3) in front of the building itself. I would like to thank the other participants in the expedition, too, for discussion and feedback. I thank also Prof. Dr. C. O. Tommasi for help during the initial phases of the competition for the Cusanus grant and my friend Leonida Vanni (Università di Pisa) for bibliographical advice on late antique spectacles and Christianity. My gratitude goes also to the Sankt Matthias Gymnasium in Waldram, where I currently teach, for the encouragement and the freedom granted to me to prepare this work for publication. It goes without saying that any error and all responsibility for what is here written is mine.

Finally, I am grateful for the support and encouragement from my family: my parents and grandparents, whose perhaps exaggerated notion of my abilities is a continuous source of optimism and hope, and my brothers and sister, who through an adequate amount of teasing and irony help me remain sane and grounded. Last, but not least, I thank my wife Lara, who encouraged me and accompanied me in this journey, going so far as to share the tedious work of revision to turn the dissertation into a book: without her, this publication would have been impossible.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Maria Antonietta Sali, who saw its beginning and could not see its end: may she share the joy of its protagonists.



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## Abbreviations, Quotations and Names

The primary literature is abbreviated according to the *Reallexikon Antike und Christentum*<sup>2</sup>. Works and authors not included in the RAC list are written in full. The titles of works are in italics, and the articulation of the texts (by chapter, section, etc.) is always in Arabic numbers, divided by a comma. Consecutive quotations from the same work are given without repetition of the author and title. The abbreviations PG and PL indicate respectively the Patrologia Graeca and Patrologia Latina. They are followed by the number of the volume and, after a comma, by the page number and column letter.

As regards names of people, I have chosen the English spelling when possible and the customary transliteration when the name was not already well-known in English. Therefore, Ambrose is the famous bishop of Milan and Father of the Church, Ambrosius the less known friend and patron of Origen, although their name would be the same in Greek or Latin; Porphyry is the Neoplatonic philosopher, Porphyrius the less known bishop of Gaza. Titles of ancient works, when written in full, are given according to their most widespread name (e.g.: the *Apostolic Constitutions* and not the *Constitutiones Apostolorum*, but *Didache* and not the *Teaching*).

Biblical quotations in English come from the King James Bible<sup>3</sup>: although it is not normally used in an academic context, it seemed right to employ it because its influence upon English literature can be compared to the influence of the Bible on Ephrem's and Gregory's poetic diction; therefore, I also used King James diction to translated Bible quotations and allusions in the poems. Numbers of chapter and verses and the Greek text are given according to the Septuagint/Nestle-Aland editions,<sup>4</sup> except that when speaking of Ephrem, I have taken quotations from the Peshitta text<sup>5</sup>. Comparisons between Old Syriac and Peshitta versions of the Gospels were made on the website of *Peshitta New Testament*<sup>6</sup>. Syriac words are given according to the transliteration contained in the searchable lexicon of the *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*.

For the sake of expediency, I have omitted the author's name in the case of Ephrem and Gregory, except when it cleared a possible ambiguity. Moreover, Ephrem's *Carmina Nisibena* are always abbreviated CN (and not *carm. Nisib.* as in the RAC), the different sections of Ephrem's *De Paschate* and *De Nativitate/Epiphania* are referred to

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2 RAC; <https://www.antike-und-christentum.de/rac/abkuerzungen>. Last access: 17.07.2024, 16:23.

3 Genesis 1 - King James Version (KJV) – [www.die-bibel.de](http://www.die-bibel.de). Last access: 25.11.2024, 12:00.

4 See <https://www.academic-bible.com/en/online-bibles/septuagint-lxx/read-the-bible-text>. Last access: 17.07.2024, 16:24.

5 Cf. <https://cal.huc.edu>. Last access: 17.07.2024, 16:24.

6 See <http://dukhrana.com/peshitta>. Last access: 17.07.2024, 16:25.

with Beck's abbreviations (*Azym.*, *Crucif.*, *Resurr.*, *Nat.*, *Epiph.*), and the abbreviation for Gregory's *Poems* (*carm.*) has been omitted. Instead, I have maintained the Roman numerals of the Patrologia Graeca subdivision of the poems. The Greek text of Gregory's II, 1, 12 has been corrected in lection and punctuation on Meier 1989, but the capital at the beginning of the line has been retained from the Patrologia Graeca.

# Introduction

He, that increased the beauties of the Church with his teaching,  
and heaped praise on the High, Who does not lack in praise;  
He that was a second spring in our land,  
and in his flower-like poems blossomed our churches.  
—Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on Saint Ephrem*, 149–150

Here strums the God-stricken lyre  
Christ's Orpheus: away all ye beasts!  
Let Christ's every sheep hear the din.  
—John Geometres, *Epigram on the Book of [Gregory] the Theologian*, 124

The greatest poet of the patristic age . . . perhaps, the only theologian-poet to rank beside Dante.  
—Murray 1967, 222

The three quotations above, one originally in Syriac, one in Greek, and one in English, were written, respectively, during late antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and in the twentieth century, but they share a similar tone of praise for two poets, Gregory of Nazianzus and Ephrem the Syrian. They attest to the success enjoyed by these poets, and they sound an invitation to read them. In doing so, they prompt the unaided reader to ask wherein lies the poetic excellence praised by readers in the past: when confronted with texts written in a distant time and in dead languages, one often finds it easy to oversee the artistry and refinement that were obvious for the original audience of such texts. So it is with the poems of Gregory and Ephrem: even when they can be easily translated, these poems are often difficult to understand, to the point of being enigmatic. The reader is left asking, “What’s the point?” This is the question I meant to answer in the present work: What is the point of these texts? Or, put otherwise, what do they express precisely, and how do they do it? Wherein lies the artistry of this kind of poetry?

This approach, emphasising literary value and rhetorical phenomena, is natural enough in the field of classics, where texts enjoy a much more common and established appreciation as works of art. It is much less common, though not completely unheard of, when applied to late antique poetry, in Greek or in Syriac, since these authors and their texts have been studied under different assumptions, mainly by theologians or historians. Therefore, the novelty of my approach can be appreciated against the background of previous scholarship on the two authors.

## Gregory of Nazianzus and Ephrem the Syrian in scholarship

Gregory of Nazianzus, born to rich Christian parents in Cappadocia, was educated in the foremost cities of Christian and classical learning of his time: Palestinian Caesarea,

Alexandria, and Athens<sup>1</sup>. During his stay in Athens he befriended the fellow countryman Basil of Caesarea, an acquaintance that would prove crucial for Gregory's career. In the first years after his return from Athens, Gregory worked with his father, Gregory the Elder, bishop of his hometown Nazianzus, while keeping in contact with Basil. The younger Gregory was indeed part of the loose group of notable churchmen and prelates from Asia, whose leading figure was Basil and which more or less accepted Basil's interpretation of the Nicene Creed. But our Gregory was also the highly educated son of a wealthy landowner and thereby part of a network of friendship and family ties connecting the notables of his Roman province and of the eastern part of the empire<sup>2</sup>. As an educated Christian landowner, Gregory of Nazianzus opposed Emperor Julian's efforts towards paganism and against Christian teachers, notably through his two speeches against the emperor (*or.* 4 and 5). Later, as a Nicene prelate and Basil's friend, he likely opposed Valens's religious policy, too. Moreover, he was also an enthusiastic sponsor of Christian asceticism, as demonstrated by Gautier<sup>3</sup>. In practice, Gregory probably alternated periods of ecclesiastical, public activity and periods of ascetic retreat. During one of these retreats, around the year 379, he was invited to preach in Constantinople, the imperial capital. It was the acme of his career: there he declaimed the theological speeches (*or.* 27–31) that acquired him the moniker “the Theologian” (ὁ Θεόλογος) par excellence among the Byzantines; there he chaired the ecumenical council in 381. However, this was also his last moment in the spotlight, for his managing of the council was a failure, and he was forced (or chose) to retire once again as an ascetic. In this way he spent the last years of his life, still a prominent voice in the church but without an official appointment; he administered the diocese in Nazianzus, and most importantly he wrote poems and edited his previous works. He died probably in 390.

Scholarship on Gregory, and in general on the Cappadocian Fathers, is generally well developed. Apart from biographies and studies on late antique Cappadocia<sup>4</sup>, there are also global evaluations of his thought and his works: a good sample of the variety of questions elicited by Gregory can be glimpsed in two collective volumes, Børtnes/Hägg 2006 and Beeley 2012. A fundamental milestone of Gregory scholarship and an

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory famously wrote much about himself and his life, notably in the poem numbered II, 1, 11 in the *Patrologia Graeca* edition of the poems, and in the *or.* 43, the panegyric for the anniversary of Basil the Great's death. The most recent scholarly biographies on him are McGuckin 2001a and Bernardi 1995. Strictly speaking not a biography, but rich in biographical elements, especially for the first part of Gregory's career: Elm 2012. A critical assessment of Gregory's autobiographical writing is given by Storin 2019, McLynn 1998, McGuckin 2001b and Elm 2015, whereas Storin 2017 reviews critically Gregory's biographies.

<sup>2</sup> These ecclesiastical and civic networks in Cappadocia have been studied by Van Dam (see Van Dam 2002; Van Dam 2003a; Van Dam 2003b).

<sup>3</sup> Gautier 2002; see also: Sterk 2004, 119–140; Storin 2011; McLynn 2012a; *passim* in Elm 2012.

<sup>4</sup> See nn. 1–2.



inspiration for the present work is Elm 2012<sup>5</sup>, which, through an account of Gregory's confrontation with Emperor Julian, delineates the pragmatic significance and the political stance of many of Gregory's works in the Christian communities of the time. Looking at Gregory's works specifically, one can understand why his speeches or homilies (*or.*) have drawn the most attention. Theologians and church historians have tended towards *or.* 2, *On Priesthood*, and on the dossier of the theological speeches (*or.* 27–31), whereas historians and biographers have found the two speeches against Julian (*or.* 4–5) and the panegyric for Basil (*or.* 43) particularly interesting<sup>6</sup>. Recently, Storin has thoroughly studied Gregory's letter collection (*ep.*)<sup>7</sup>.

The poems (*carm.*) remain the least studied part of Gregory's oeuvre. It is a broad corpus, mainly in hexameters, elegiacs, or iambics, and with different themes. The constitution of the text is itself problematic: editions of single poems or of cycles of poems are available<sup>8</sup>, but we still rely for many texts on the Maurine edition in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* 37–38, dated 1842. The texts are transmitted by a wealth of manuscripts, and given the size of the corpus and its composite nature, almost every text has its own tradition; however, Werhahn divided the poems into twenty groups (*Gedichtgruppen*) on the basis of the most common groupings in the manuscripts, thus giving a good starting point for the *recensio* of the texts<sup>9</sup>. This was later undertaken by Höllger for *Gedichtgruppen* XX and XI and by Gertz for *Gedichtgruppe* I with supervision by Sicherl, who produced also the *recensio* for *Gedichtgruppen* II, III, V, VII, VIII, and XVIII<sup>10</sup>. Independently from these, Palla 1990 provided a *recensio* for *Gedichtgruppen* III and IV.

Among the poems treated in the present work, *To Himself and on the Bishops* (II, 1, 12) has enjoyed more philological attention than the others. Since it is included in *Gedichtgruppen* XI and XX (a Renaissance anthology), there is Höllger's recension, together with Meier's edition, complete with German translation, introduction and commentary (Meier 1989). For the other poems examined in this book, belonging to *Gedichtgruppe* I (II, 1, 10; II, 1, 13; II, 1, 17), Gertz 1986 can be supplemented by Palla 1990, which, though concerned with *Gedichtgruppen* III and IV, covers many manuscripts of *Gedichtgruppe* I. Moreover, an edition with introduction and commentary (Simelidis 2009) of II, 1, 10 is

5 Her other works on Gregory are also noteworthy, and nearer to the object of my research: Elm 1999; Elm 2000b; Elm 2015a; Elm 2015b.

6 On *or.* 2 see, for example, Lochbrunner 1993, 39–66; Louth 1997; Rapp 2005, 41–44; Elm 2012, 247–268; for the *or.* 27–31 see Norris 1991; for *or.* 4–5, Kurmann 1988; Elm 2012, 336–478; Niccolai 2023, 214–219, 276–279.

7 Storin 2017a; Storin 2017b; Storin 2019a. These studies culminate in his translation of the full *corpus*: Storin 2019b.

8 Werhahn 1953 (I, 2, 8); Jungck 1974 (II, 1, 11); Meier 1989 (II, 1, 12); Crimi/Kertsch/Guirau 1995 (I, 2, 10); Bacci 1996 (II, 2, 6); Moreschini/Sykes 1997 (I, 1, 1–5; 7–9); Tuilier/Bady/Bernardi 2004 (II, 1, 1–11); Moroni 2006 (II, 2, 4–5); Simelidis 2009 (I, 2, 17; II, 1, 10; 19; 32); Kuhn 2014 (II, 1, 34A/B); Conte/Fiori 2019 (II, 1, 30; 68).

9 Höllger/Sicherl/Werhahn 1985, 17–34.

10 Höllger/Sicherl/Werhahn 1985; Gertz 1986; Sicherl 2011.

available, and another edition with French translation and notes is comprised in Tuillier-Bady-Bernardi 2004. Bibliography for poems II, 1, 13 and 17 is rather scantier, though an Italian translation of these poems exists<sup>11</sup>.

As regards exegesis, the study of Gregory's poems has considerably progressed in the last thirty years. Two main trends can be highlighted: a more theologically and philosophically oriented one and one concerned with literary values and intertextuality. Examples of the first trend are the commentaries of Sykes and Schwab on theological poems<sup>12</sup>: both of them take into account literary issues too, but their main concern is with Gregory's argumentation against heretical and pagan doctrines, his use of classical sources to this effect, and his theological stance as expressed through poetry. To the literary trend of study belong the editions of Simelidis and Kuhn, both of which include commentary<sup>13</sup>; the first is important in showing Gregory's treatment of sundry literary sources and his rhetorical expertise, while the second analyses Gregory's poetic imagery and links it with his sources. Sources, indeed, have been the main focus of literary research on Gregory's poems: because Gregory is among the last classicising poets of antiquity, scholars have often assumed that his poetry can be explained by the reuse, combination, and citation of earlier poets. Although this approach can be too reductive, it has produced some useful studies on Gregory's poetry<sup>14</sup>, among which Prudhomme's monograph distinguishes itself by exceeding the *Quellenforschung* and offering a broader, literary interpretation of the poems<sup>15</sup>. What is still lacking in the scholarship on Gregory's poems is an exegesis that considers the pragmatic value of these works, their being communicative acts, and therefore the different contexts and debates for which they were intended; this has been masterfully done by Elm 2012 for some texts in *or.* but is yet to be done with the poems.

Sources on Ephrem's life are much scantier than those on Gregory's<sup>16</sup>. Ephrem was likely born at the beginning of the fourth century in Nisibis, today Nusaybin, in south-eastern Turkey. The town was an important trade and military centre at the border between the Roman and Sassanid Empires. For this reason, it was besieged three times by the Persians between 337 and 359; the sieges are recorded also in some poems by

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<sup>11</sup> Crimi/Costa 1999, including also II, 1, 10 and 12.

<sup>12</sup> Moreschini/Sykes 1997; Schwab 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Simelidis 2009; Kuhn 2014. A similar approach has been taken by Meier 1989 and, with much more emphasis on the *Quellenforschung*, by the Pisan commented editions (Crimi/Kertsch/Guirau 1995; Bacci 1996; Moroni 2006; Conte/Fiori 2019).

<sup>14</sup> E.g.: Lefherz 1958; Kertsch 1978; Frangeskou 1985; Demoen 1996.

<sup>15</sup> Prudhomme 2006. Useful articles in this direction: McGuckin 2006, Storin 2011, McGuckin 2012, McLynn 2012a; Elm 2015b.

<sup>16</sup> The hagiographical tradition is not reliable (see Amar 2011; Kavvadas 2018) and Ephrem's works offer but isolated clues on his person. Scholars have to rely on these clues and a few early testimonies, such as that of Jerome or Jacob of Serugh (see §1.2.1). I based my biographical sketch mainly from the general introduction on Ephrem in Brock 1992 and Wickes 2015a, 6–14. Also useful: Outtier 1973; Palmer 1998; Russell 2005.

Ephrem, who was likely present. In his Nisibene years, Ephrem served in the local Christian community, probably as a deacon and with some sort of teaching position. Maybe he was engaged in a local form of asceticism, one not yet influenced by Egyptian models. The most important date in his life was 363, when he witnessed Emperor Julian's failed expedition against Persia, the monarch's corpse returned in Roman territory, and the Romans' handover of Ephrem's city, Nisibis, to the Persians. In response to these events, Ephrem left Nisibis, and after a brief sojourn in nearby Amida (today Diyarbakır), he spent his last ten years in Edessa (today Urfa), dying probably in 373.

He wrote prose works—both exegetical commentaries and theological treatises—and poems. Among his poems, the *madrāšē* (singular *madrāšā*), stanzaic poems, are considered his speciality, whereas his *mēmṛē* (singular *mēmṛā*), stichic poems, are somewhat less famous. The two terms have been variously translated in modern languages. *Mēmṛā* is less problematic, because the word itself has the very ordinary meaning of “discourse”, “speech”. Given its metric (a succession of lines with the same number of syllables and without rhyme), the genre is nearer to prose than the *madrāšā*. Furthermore, it tends to be spoken by the poet in his own voice and to focus on the interpretation of Bible passages. For all these reasons, to translate *mēmṛā* as “homily” or “metrical homily” is not wrong. The case of *madrāšā* is much more complicated. The root of the word has something to do with “teaching”, coming from an original meaning “to tread” and formed by way of metaphor. The underlying connotation seems to be that of a repetitive effort resulting in a deepening of the matter at hand, an intensive approach to things<sup>17</sup>. The origin and import of the name have been extensively discussed in scholarship, with various results<sup>18</sup>: for example, Beck's editions oscillate between *hymni* (“hymns”) and *carmina* (“poems”), whereas Den Biesen, followed by Palmer, stresses the pedagogical and musical nature of the texts with his translation “Teaching-Songs”. I have chosen in the following pages to take a neutral position on the question and have translated *madrāšā* with “poem”, reflecting its basic meaning as a kind of speech observing metrical rules<sup>19</sup>.

Ephrem's poems are extant in complete form only in a group of fifth-to-sixth-century manuscripts from the Scetian Monastery of the Syrians. Excluding these manuscripts, stanzas are preserved, single or in groups, in liturgical manuscripts; however, the readings, groupings, order, and attributions of these stanzas from liturgical sources are very unreliable—not to mention that the material is far scarcer than the complete poems, to the point that without the Egyptian manuscripts we would not even be able

17 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 954, 956–957, s.vv. ܡܡܪܐ. Compare also the Greek root of τριβω, “to tread” “to thresh”, giving rise to διατριβή, “study”, “brief lecture”, “discourse”.

18 Beck 1983, 352–353; Lattke 1989; McVey 1999; Wickes 2015a, 13n57.

19 Wickes 2018, xiii rejects the term since it could mislead us into reading the texts under our aesthetic assumptions and not on their own terms. The point of my work is precisely to read the texts on their own terms; therefore, I do not think that the term “poems” will be misunderstood.

to recognise the poems and the cycles in which they are organised<sup>20</sup>. On the basis of the manuscripts and with moderate use of liturgical witnesses, Dom E. Beck produced a reliable critical edition of all of Ephrem's stanzaic and stichic poetry and a complete translation of these texts with short notes. The selection of poems discussed in the present work (CN 13–21) has its main witness in the sixth-century manuscript Brit. M. add. 14572 (Beck's R), containing the whole cycle of CN. It represents the basis of Beck's edition, which is here employed<sup>21</sup>. However, not only has the manuscript lost some pages, but it is also likely to represent an abbreviated text. Some of the lacunae can be filled with the help of Brit. M. add. 17141 (Beck's E), an eighth-to-ninth-century liturgical codex, which contains consistent excerpts from CN 15–21 and 34 and smaller portions of other texts. Beck's critical edition can be relied upon, but occasional philological reflections will be needed, especially since some texts contain considerable lacunae. Valuable instruments in interpreting and translating the texts are the translations by Beck himself, the older ones in Latin by Bickell and in English by Stopford, and the latest in French by Fhégali/Navarre<sup>22</sup>.

Studies on Ephrem's *madrāṣē* have been overwhelmingly concerned with his peculiar theology, resulting in important syntheses<sup>23</sup>. In this line of studies, Ephrem's rich symbolic language has been considered only in its theological import, far less in its rhetorical, poetic, and pragmatic effectiveness. This means that, for example, theologians have tended to collect single stanzas or passages taken from different poems in order to stress a point of content rather than considering single poems or cycles in their inner structure and argumentation.

Because Ephrem's Syriac could not boast the long and preserved literary tradition in which Gregory's Greek poetry was inserted, almost no *Quellenforschung* has been developed for his poems, and scholars, apart from theologians, have only begun to appreciate these texts' literary art. Besides some older contributions<sup>24</sup>, some recent works, in analysing thematically linked cycles of poems, have employed a very fruitful blend of literary or rhetorical analysis and reconstruction of the context of performance and the intended audience. Among these, the works by Shepardson on anti-Jewish language, by Wickes on the Bible in the *Poems on Faith* (*hymn. fid.*), and by Hartung on the treatment of Jesus' passion, must be mentioned as successful examples of this new scholarship on

<sup>20</sup> Brock 1997; Outtier 1975–1976.

<sup>21</sup> Beck 1961a (critical edition); Beck 1961b (German translation).

<sup>22</sup> Bickell 1866; Stopford 1898; Fhégali/Navarre 1989.

<sup>23</sup> E.g.: Murray 1975–1976; Martikainen 1981; Bou Mansour 1987; Brock 1992; Shemunkasho 2002; Murray 2004; Den Biesen 2006. Wickes 2015a and 2015b, though still mainly theological in focus, display a deep understanding for the literary and argumentative structure of the single pieces.

<sup>24</sup> E.g.: Martikainen 1974; Palmer 1995. See also Rouwhorst 1989 for its successful contextualisation of Ephrem's paschal cycles of poems.

Ephrem<sup>25</sup>. I find their approach very convincing, and, at least in part, this work attempts to extend it to another cycle of poems, namely the poems on the Nisibene bishops.

## Bishops

Fundamental to my approach to these texts are two assumptions, or two concepts, that I deem necessary for appreciating the texts when one scrutinises them as literature: first, that late antique poetry is public literature, a real-world act of communication; second, that the subject matter of poetry influences its form; that is to say, in order to grasp what a certain rhetorical form *means* or *does*, we have to understand how it interacts with the literal meaning and the things in the world it wants to describe or prescribe.

The first assumption is a relatively new acquisition for classicists treating late antique texts, who have long seen this poetry as a mere continuation (sometimes even as a degeneration) of Hellenistic literature: bookish texts without a real audience, stale experiments in combining and desecrating the genres of classical literature<sup>26</sup>. On the contrary, a more promising approach to these texts concentrates on their pragmatic value, their influence on late antique society and the political struggles they underlined and accompanied. Among many, I mention only the first study in this direction, Alan Cameron's "Wandering Poets"<sup>27</sup>. Over the years, the quantity and quality of contributions analysing these aspects of late antique literature has amply demonstrated the importance of poetry—among and sometimes above other genres—as a force shaping public discourse and legitimising authority and as the language of the elites in the empire<sup>28</sup>.

Given this assumption, it was only natural to look for texts whose theme could be easily linked to societal and political struggles, even to concrete episodes of such struggles. This enables a safer application of the assumption because the texts are more

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<sup>25</sup> Shepardson 2008; Wickes 2018; Hartung 2023.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, the harsh judgement of Ludwich in the foreword to his edition of Eudocia and Proclus (Ludwich 1897, V-VI); Keydell 1953 on Gregory; still Roques 2007 on Synesius and Hose 2004 and Hose 2006 with stress on the negative influence of school exercises; the first paragraph of Agosti 2001a describes this situation. Significantly, the overall picture of literary studies on late antiquity given by Dorival 1994 barely mentions poetry.

<sup>27</sup> Cameron 1965.

<sup>28</sup> In general, Garzya 1984; from the same Cameron, his book on Claudian (Cameron 1970); for Nonnus, the introductions to the Italian edition with translation offer this kind of contextualisation for the *Dionysiaca*, together with abundant bibliography in the same vein (Gigli Piccardi 2003; Gonnelli 2003; Agosti 2004; Accorinti 2004; see also Agosti 2006 and, on stone epigrams, Agosti 2010); for Ambrose's *Hymns*, Dunkle 2016; although it is on a prose author (Jerome); see also Hale Williams 2006. Although not so much concentrated on the pragmatics of these texts, as with their aesthetics, Roberts 1989 must be signalled for his effort to take late antique poetry in earnest and on its own terms, rather than discarding it for *a priori* reasons of taste.

easily dated and connected with a specific audience. Therefore, I chose to concentrate on Gregory's and Ephrem's poems on the bishops. This choice has the additional advantage of focusing the study on an unusual theme for poetry: since the very premise of the poems challenges our understanding of what belongs to the genre, the analysis of a given poem's treatment of its subject may prove exemplary of the art peculiar to Gregory and Ephrem, in accordance with my second assumption, that the literary form is really understood only in relation to the content.

Bishops are a very interesting theme on two other accounts. First, they are interesting in view of their rising importance in the late antique world and the likely necessity of defining and defending them before civic and religious communities on one side and the imperial power on the other. This applies in particular to texts written in the fourth century, because after Constantine the bishops, already important actors since at least the time of Aurelian, saw a massive increase in their relationships with secular powers, in their connections with elite society, in their ability to influence civic life through buildings, charity, preaching, or written texts, and, consequently, in the overall attention that contemporaries dedicated to them. Second, bishops are of interest because they have already been thoroughly studied by historians: this provides my work with a solid historical background against which to evaluate the strategies employed by the poets. Fundamental in this respect is Rapp's monograph on late antique bishops, as well as Sterk's book on their relationship with asceticism<sup>29</sup>. To round out their approach, I have also used two collective volumes on various themes surrounding bishops<sup>30</sup>. Apart from concrete questions, it was critical for my approach to the poems that I consider also the more general problem of episcopal authority and legitimation—that is, the question: With what rhetorical devices is the authority of the bishop imposed, and why is it formed? On this question I could count on much good scholarship, among which Peter Brown's must be mentioned for its influence<sup>31</sup>.

Here I must clarify what is the position of the present work in relation to this kind of historical scholarship. The aim of this work is not to solve concrete questions on fourth-century bishops, such as their typical activities, the functions they had in real-life communities, or their actual relations with other powers. For one thing, the data here examined are not nearly enough to form a historical judgment on these questions. Even if they could contribute discrete pieces of information, this was not my approach or my aim in dealing with the texts: I have not treated these poems as "sources" but as

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<sup>29</sup> Rapp 2005; Sterk 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Rebillard E., Sotinel C., *L'évêque dans la cité du IV<sup>e</sup> au V<sup>e</sup> siècle: image et autorité: actes de la table ronde organisée par l'Istituto Patristico Augustinianum et l'École française de Rome (Rome, 1<sup>er</sup> et 2 décembre 1995)*, Rome 1998; *Vescovi e pastori in Epoca Teodosiana, XXV Incontro di studiosi dell'antichità cristiana, Roma 8–11 Maggio 1996*, Rome 1997.

<sup>31</sup> Brown 1992. On bishops: Lizzi Testa 1987; Lizzi 1998; Cracco Ruggini 1998; Lepelley 1998; Elm 2000a; Leppin 2016; Leppin 2017. On ascetics: Brown 1971; Clark 1985.

“texts”<sup>32</sup>. This means that the argumentative direction has mostly gone *from* the historiographical syntheses *to* the literary analysis, *from* the general *to* the particular and not vice versa: I have used historiography to understand the texts, not the texts as sources to make historiography. The only partial exception is the question of authority: here a more focalised approach, concentrating only on a few texts and trying to trace broad historical developments in the concrete cases, can be useful, too, in order to verify and possibly correct the great syntheses.

## Reasons for a comparison

A further advantage of the theme of bishops is that both Gregory and Ephrem have written poems on it. I think this coincidence in theme justifies a comparison: Gregory and Ephrem are the first Christian poets of substance in their respective tradition (Greek and Syriac), they are both regarded as initiators of Christian literature in those traditions, they wrote in the same century, and, among contemporary treatments of the hot topic “bishops”, theirs stand out as being the only ones in poetic form. As I will demonstrate, they also had similar opinions on many debated topics of the time, especially in regard to asceticism. Perhaps even more interesting than the similarities are the differences: Gregory wrote in a long and imposing tradition of poetry that went back to Homer and that, at least since Callimachus, was characterised by a pervasive and structural recourse to intertextuality, whereas Ephrem, though participating in Greek culture, had a much less substantial corpus of literature in his own language drawn on. Gregory wrote about Constantinople and probably *for* Constantinople, the very centre of the empire, whereas Ephrem wrote in Nisibis, about Nisibis and primarily *for* Nisibis, a city at the border of the empire. Gregory was a bishop himself and treated the bishops as peers; Ephrem remained a deacon throughout his life and experienced the bishops foremost as superiors in his community.

This highly significant constellation of similarities and differences has attracted surprisingly little scholarly attention. This may be due to the difficulties of acquainting oneself both with the intricate tradition of Greek poetry and with the Syriac language, to the neglect surrounding Gregory’s poetry, or to the prevalent theological interest in these authors. Even the best monographs on Gregory, like Elm 2012, or the most advanced studies on Ephrem’s poetry, like Hartung 2023, lack a sustained comparison of the two *as poets*. For there have already been attempts to compare Gregory (and the Cappadocians more generally) with Ephrem, but none of them is both wide enough in scope and focused on poetry.

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<sup>32</sup> I take this distinction from Hartung 2023, 6 (who in turn is quoting Averil Cameron). In the whole introduction (pp. 1–29), he positions his work in respect to theology similarly to how I position mine in respect to history.

Comparisons have been attempted mainly in three directions: Trinitarian theology, stance towards Emperor Julian, and Ephrem's *Vita* tradition. The hagiographical tradition on Ephrem testifies to precocious attempts to connect the Syriac doctor with the Cappadocians, especially with Basil. The most important studies on the *Vita* deny the historicity of the encounter between Basil and Ephrem, though they confirm significant contacts between Cappadocia and Mesopotamia at least for the fifth century<sup>33</sup>. As will be seen, Ephrem's and Gregory's similar representations of asceticism hint to a similar Anatolian *koiné* for the fourth century. The other two dossiers enabling a comparison of Ephrem and Gregory stem from the fact that the two had common enemies: Eunomius and Julian. In the first case, the reference texts would be Gregory's *or.* 27–31 and Ephrem's *hymn. fid.* The comparison has been made by Russell, but his focus is mainly theological, and the difference in genre between the corpora (prose and poetry) makes a literary comparison less significant<sup>34</sup>. As regards Julian, the go-to texts would be Gregory's *or.* 4–5 and Ephrem's *Poems against Julian (hymn. c. Iulian.)*, and once again one would compare prose with poetry. One of the most recent and perceptive monographs on Julian, Niccolai 2023, treats Gregory but never mentions Ephrem, although the author knows Syriac. An attempt at comparison on this account can be found in an article by Papoutsakis, where the author begins with a discussion of Gregory and then focusses mainly on Ephrem<sup>35</sup>. Regrettably, the comparison is not carried out further, so that one cannot speak even in this case of a sustained comparative study of the two authors.

Given the current status of scholarship on these authors, I am confident that the present work, through its comparison of Gregory and Ephrem, may add something new to our knowledge and appreciation of both. Furthermore, in accordance with my second assumption, that a correct evaluation of literary form must take into account its relationship with the content, a comparative method seems advisable, enabling us to evaluate how two different authors deal with the same theme under similar constraints (metre in this case).

## Form, scope, and structure

As regards the form of the present work, it is true that a running commentary, especially if accompanied by general introductions, can best serve the understanding and appreciation of a piece of ancient literature. However, such an approach also comes with strings attached: the effort and time required by a well-made commentary prevent

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<sup>33</sup> Amar 2011; Kavvadas 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Russell 1994. The preface (pp. 1–5) is particularly interesting because of the author's arguments for the significance of his comparison. Some of them apply also to the present work.

<sup>35</sup> Papoutsakis 2018. The author goes so far as to postulate a direct knowledge of Gregory's orations on the part of Ephrem. I find his argument unconvincing, and I discussed it at §1.1.2.



one from considering more than a single longer text or a few shorter texts. The experiences of previous commentators of Gregory are instructive from this point of view, since they, albeit very useful for the scholar, share the same weaknesses<sup>36</sup>. First, they are isolated, and by this I mean that they, taking into consideration a single poem without a broader analytical project, fail to contextualise the poem in the literary work of the author; and thus are led to only a partial appreciation of the poem's aesthetic qualities. Isolation is a much more significant problem when we are dealing with a poet such as Gregory, who often rewrites passages and ideas in different forms. Here, we can notice the second weakness of such comments, the use of parallels. Since Gregory rewrites the same things with variations, the commentator is tempted to pile up parallels for every single expression. Add to this that Gregory comes after a long tradition of poetry, so that precedents for practically every single utterance can be found in earlier authors, and the typical commentary note will look like a series of numbers, which the reader will scarcely be able to manage. Thus, a commentary on a single poem by Gregory always risks turning into a maze of parallels, obscuring instead of clarifying the content and art of the poems. Ephrem does not present the commentator with these problems; however, a line-by-line commentary is still to be attempted, to my knowledge<sup>37</sup>.

To avoid the possible pitfalls of a commentary, I have chosen a more argumentative format, analysing groups of poems instead of single pieces, through a group of thematic kernels. A choice of groups of poems determined by a common theme (bishops) has one key advantage: it avoids the isolation that affected previous commentaries on Gregory, because it allows the interpreter to consider everything the poet wrote on the chosen theme, and it lends meaning to textual parallels. Now these can be examined in their variations as well as in their similarities, and since we are considering the context of every single occurrence, we can examine the process of rewriting more thoroughly. Considering entire cycles of poems, the researcher can trace recurring literary choices as well as structural elements of the single poems that in the analytic format of the commentary would remain unnoticed. Add to these the possibility of sustained comparison of two poets—which is impossible in the form of a commentary—and the contributions that historical studies make to a study of the common theme of bishops, and this work should be able to provide a guide to these poems—not necessarily exhausting every minor detail (as a commentary would do), but providing an introduction to an informed reading.

The major objection against this format is its fundamentally ambiguous nature. On one side, the aim is understanding and analysing texts, which, by virtue of their consistency and structure, impose their own rhythm on the interpreter. On the other,

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<sup>36</sup> This is true above all of Meier 1989 and of the Pisan commentaries, much less so of Moreschini/Sykes 1997 and Schwab 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Scott 2020, an unpublished but online available dissertation, comments a cycle of verse homilies by Ephrem. However, it is not a line-by-line commentary. Incidentally, the present work answers many questions raised in Scott's dissertation.

comparing two authors writing in two different languages requires a stronger focus on the common theme (bishops) and the common historical context, so that the work risks considering only the content of the poems and not their literary form, treating them as “sources” and not as “texts”. To this objection I hope my work will provide a fitting response: the choice of themes, under which I have analysed passages of the poems, has been determined by a combination of history and literature, meaning that I have chosen themes that not only figure prominently in the poems but also are formally determining for the poets and that we know from historical research were debated at that time. The closer my analysis adheres to the inner rhythms of the text, the surer will be the confirmation that these texts give on what we know on bishops. Moreover, the different responsiveness of Ephrem’s and Gregory’s texts to different thematic kernels should also give interesting information on their different concerns. However, I cannot deny a measure of whim in the choice of themes and in the analytic approach. In order to balance this arbitrariness, I have let the texts speak as much as possible whenever I quoted them in full. This means that the argument of the section may sometimes emerge after a longer analysis of the texts. For this reason, introductions and conclusions are appended to longer chapters, so that the reader may grasp the argument in its broad outline. To enable readers to employ the work as a commentary, I have appended an index of the text passages. To the main body of the work, I have attached an appendix with my English translation of the texts, which may serve as a reference to the reader who wants to locate in their context the passages analysed. Moreover, some of these texts have never been translated into English, or they have been translated in the nineteenth century, and therefore it is not unreasonable to make a new translation<sup>38</sup>. As regards the criteria of my translation, I have preferred to introduce a certain amount of interpretation instead of being slavishly literal, especially as regards Ephrem’s often elliptical texts; I have also avoided the proliferation of parentheses often found in translations from Syriac. For I believe that the main task of a translator is his choice among the many possibilities and that the choice must be resolute in order to offer a readable text. I think the analysis will persuade the reader also of the motivations behind my translation choices.

Among Gregory’s texts, I have selected only four poems, although many more could have been added. Indeed, Gregory’s experience in Constantinople is the starting point of his autobiographical poetry, and almost any poem could have offered interesting cues on his relationship with the bishops. However, in the majority of these, the theme is touched upon only in respect to other concerns; by contrast, the four texts I have

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<sup>38</sup> Ephrem’s *CN* have been translated: in Latin (Bickell 1866), in English (Stopford 1898), in German (Beck 1961b); in French (Feghali-Navarre 1989). Apart from the Latin translations in the *Patrologia Graeca*, for Gregory’s autobiographical poems there is a comprehensive Italian translation (Crimi/Costa 1999). II, 1, 12 has been translated by Meehan 1987 (English) and Meier 1989 (German); II, 1, 10 by Simelidis 2009 (English) and Tuilier/Bady/Bernardi 2004 (French). II, 1, 13 and II, 1, 17 have not yet been translated in a modern language, as far as I know.

chosen address the theme of bishops directly. They are marked as II, 1, 10; II, 1, 12; II, 1, 13, and II, 1, 17 in the *Patrologia Graeca* and, though all in different metres (except the two shorter poems numbered II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 17, both in elegiacs), have been provided by tradition with similar titles, reflecting a similarity of content. In the case of Ephrem, the choice fell on *CN* 13–21. This corresponds to the complete dossier of poems on the bishops of Nisibis, part of the broader collection of poems on the city (*CN* 1–21) and itself divided into two cycles (poems for Valgash, *CN* 13–16; poems for Abraham, *CN* 17–21). Other poems in the same collection of the *CN* as well as in other collections address in full or in part the theme of bishops, but these two cycles are the longest cohesive texts upon it, with the added bonus of being concerned always with the same community of Nisibis.

As for the thematic structure of the book, after a first chapter aimed at presenting the texts (§1), two chapters cover common questions in the Syriac and Greek poems, concerning language (§2) and content (§3). Finally, each poet gets his own chapter, one for Ephrem's peculiar themes and features (§4), one for Gregory's (§5). The first chapter (§1) is divided into three parts, one giving a generic outline of each poem (§1.1), another proving my assumption that these poems should be read as political acts addressed to a community (§1.2), and a final section clarifying the peculiarities of and reasons for the poetic form (§1.3). In the second chapter (§2), I will examine the texts in light of a much-debated question in the history of early Christianity: When and how and how much did the notion of “bishop,” as opposed to “priest,” develop? This means that I will describe the language our poets employ to describe the bishop and possibly to distinguish his office from other offices. The chapter is divided into two parts, one examining direct titles or nouns (§2.1), the other metaphors and imagery (§2.2). The third and longest chapter (§3) treats three themes fundamental for the history of the episcopate: first, the functions of the bishop in relation to his community (§3.1); second, his relationship with the rising ascetic movement (§3.2); third, the methods of selection as a way to gauge his claim on authority and legitimacy (§3.3). The most important theme peculiar to Ephrem is the uninterrupted succession of bishops through the history of the community, what he calls *yubbālā*: this occupies the first part of the fourth chapter (§4.1). Then I will explain for the first time some obscure passages of *CN* 13–16, alluding to a crisis in the community of Nisibis (§4.2) and to a hitherto unknown early veneration of saint Jacob of Nisibis (§4.3). In the fifth chapter, on Gregory (§5), I will address two fundamental directions of his poetry that are almost absent from Ephrem's, namely autobiography (§5.1) and invective (§5.2). A conclusion will collect all the results of my inquiry in a broader outline.

# 1 Texts and Context

## 1.1 The texts

### 1.1.1 Gregory's texts

The most important poetic text on the bishops by Gregory is II, 1, 12, titled εἰς ἑαυτὸν καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐπισκόπων, *To Himself and on the Bishops*<sup>1</sup>. The poem consists of 836 iambic trimeters, being the longest of the poems on this theme. It treats more or less all facets of Gregory's stance on the theme of bishopric, so that all other related poems can be compared to one or more of its parts. The genre to which the poem belongs is disputed<sup>2</sup>. It begins as a personal invective, in the tradition of iambic poetry, but it soon slips into didactic concerns. This tension between a concrete target and a broader intellectual stance characterises the poem. Because of these multiple influences (iambic invective, didactic poetry, the diatribe), Meier pointedly compares the poem to a homily or sermon<sup>3</sup>. Besides, some interpreters have stressed the apologetic character of this piece<sup>4</sup>: the hypothetical dates of the poem vary from the summer of 381 (immediately after Gregory's resignation from the see of Constantinople) to Lent 382, in any event making the poem a response to the incidents of the ecumenical council<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, apology was a key motive in the composition of this poem. The apologetic as well as homiletic genres also influence the overarching structure of the poem, which Gregory organised as an oration, with its fourfold division of προοίμιον, διήγησις, πίστις, and ἐπίλογος (see below)<sup>6</sup>.

There are some interesting fluctuations in the addressee and in the self-representation of Gregory. Regarding the addressee, sometimes the poem seems to address one bishop: this happens notably at 29–32 and 809–810, where Gregory says that if one should feel offended by his speech, then his criticism will have cut the offended to the quick<sup>7</sup>; but it also happens at 225, 432–434, and 570–574, all of which address an unworthy bishop<sup>8</sup>. Yet at 397–401 the discourse slips from a first-person plural to a

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1 I am adopting the division of Gregory's poem featured in the *Patrologia Graeca*.

2 Meier 1989, 15–16.

3 Meier 1989, 16, repeated in Prudhomme 2006, 68.

4 McGuckin 2001a, 375–383; 2001b, 160–164; Elm 1999; 2000b; McLynn 1997.

5 Meier 1989, 17.

6 For the fourfold division of the oration: Aristot. *rhet.* 1414b 8–9.

7 Τί τοῦτο; δείξεις; ἂν μάχῃ πρὸς τὸν λόγον, / σαντοῦ προδήλως ἐκφανῇ κατήγορος. (II, 1, 12, 29–30); Ταῦτα πρὸς ὑμᾶς τοὺς κακοὺς ὑπὲρ καλῶν/ Οἷς εἴ τις ἄχθεθ', εὖρεν ὃν ζητεῖ, λόγος (809–810).

8 Σοῦ δ' ἐκτρέπομαι, κἂν τι τῶν σεμνῶν φέρῃς... (II, 1, 12, 225); Σὺ δ' εἰπέ μοι, βέλτιστε, καὶ πράκτωρ φόρων/ Ἦ καὶ στρατοῦ τιν' ἐκλελοιπῶς ἀξίαν... (432–433); Πῶς δὲ σὺ βλέπων κάτω/ Τοῦτον μένοντα τοῦ Θεοῦ παραστάτην/ Ὑψαυχενεῖς τε καὶ θρόνων στέργεις κράτος, / Ἀλλ' οὐχὶ φρίσσεις οὐδ' ἐπιτρέμεις θρόνοις, / Μὴ βοῦς ἐλαύνῃς κρείσσονας βοηλάτου; (570–574).

second-person singular and, accordingly, from the bishops in charge of the election to the bishop elected<sup>9</sup>. The lines from 709 until the end of the poem are clearly directed to this collective of bishops, at first at the second-person singular but with clear reference to the choice of bishops, then from line 797 at the second-person plural<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, at 98–101 Gregory uses the second-person plural to call to witness people who knew well his behaviour during his three-year mission in Constantinople<sup>11</sup>. These could well be the bishops, but the sentence is more significant if referred to the Nicene community in Constantinople, the people who were most faithful to Gregory and who could lend support to his case before the other bishops. Finally, line 47 refers to posterity<sup>12</sup>.

As regards Gregory's self-representation, sometimes he seems to consider himself a bishop (for example, at line 136); other times not a bishop (for example, at line 35)<sup>13</sup>. These internal clues point to a specific situation: the poem is intended as a fictional last discourse by Gregory, imagined as being uttered before his departure from Constantinople. In this situation, both the bishops convened in Constantinople for the council and a group of representatives, mostly priests and deacons, of the Constantinople community would have been present. The setting is confirmed both by the ambiguous status of Gregory and by his own words: he considers himself a bishop, as this would have been his last address as bishop of Constantinople, and on the other side, as a resigning bishop, he can look on his colleagues as an outsider; moreover, he explicitly defines the end of the poem as “departing discourse” (ἐξιτήριος λόγος, 812), which points clearly to the end of the adventure in Constantinople and his departing from there.

The poem has the same setting as *or.* 42: this speech is a vindication of Gregory's actions during his tenure in Constantinople. This genre, the statement of a retiring

9 Ἡ κωμικὸν πρόσωπον ἀθρόως τεθὲν / Τῶν εὐτελεστάτων τε καὶ μικρῶν ἐνί – / Πέφηνεν ἡμῖν οὗτος εὐσεβὴς νέος. / ... Χθὲς ἦσθα μίμων καὶ θεάτρων ἐν μέσῳ (II, 1, 12, 397–399; 402).

10 Ἀλλ' εὐστροφὸς τις οὗτος ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν, / Ὅν οὐκ ἐπαινεῖς, ἐντελής τε προστάτης / Τρίβων παλαιῶν καὶ νέων κινήματων (II, 1, 12, 709–711); Εἰ δ' οὗτος ἡμῖν καὶ πρόεδρος ὢν τύχοι... (721); Πῶς οὖν ἄχρηστον, εἰπέ μοι, τοῦτον καλεῖς, / Πρὸς ὃν βλέποντες βελτίους γενοίμεθ' ἄν; / Ἡ πῶς ἄριστον προστάτην καὶ δεξιὸν, / Πρὸς ὃν βλέπων σὺ τοὺς ἐμοὺς διαπτύεις; (732–735); Τοῦτ' οὖν ὁρῶν ἔκαμνες εὐρεῖν ποιμένα; / Ὡς μικρὸν ἐσπούδαζες! Ἐγκαλύπτομαι. / Ὡςπερ λογιστὴν ἐσκόπεις τὸν προστάτην. / Κόπρων μέλει σοι, μειζόνων δ' ἐμοὶ λόγος. (747–750); and then Θρόνους μὲν οὖν ἔχετε, καὶ τυραννίδας / Ὑμεῖς, ἐπεὶ καὶ πρῶτα ταῦθ' ὑμῖν δοκεῖ / Χαίροιτε, ὑβρίζετε, πατριαρχίας / Κληροῦσθε, Κόσμος ὑμῖν εἰκέτω μέγας / Τόπους ἀμείβοιτ' ἐκ τόπων, τοὺς μὲν κάτω / Βάλλοιτε, τοὺς δ' ὑψοῦτε· ταῦθ' ὑμῖν φίλα. / Χωρεῖτ'... (797–803). On Gregory's consciousness and explicit acknowledgement that it is the bishops who elect new bishops; see §3.3.1.1.

11 Ὑμᾶς ἐρέσθαι τάπιλοιπα βούλομαι / (Ὑμεῖς γάρ ἐστε μάρτυρες μόχθων ἐμῶν) / Τί σκαιὸν ἢ πρόσαντες ἢ βλάβην φέρον / Ἡ εἶπον ἢ ἐπραξα τοῦτ' ἔτος τρίτον (II, 1, 12, 98–101).

12 Ἀλγοῦντός ἐστιν ἐξερευέσθαι πάθος / Θεῶ, φίλοις, γονεῦσι, γείτοσι, ξένοις, / Εἰ δ' οὖν, χρόνῳ τε καὶ βίῳ τοῖς ὑστερον (II, 1, 12, 45–47).

13 Ἀλλ' οἱ καλοὶ τε κάγαθοι συμποίμενες (II, 1, 12, 136) and Ἐν ἐκτρέπου μοι, τοὺς κακοὺς ἐπισκόπους, / Μηδὲν φοβηθεῖς τοῦ θρόνου τὴν ἀξίαν. / Πάντων τὸ ὕψος, οὐχὶ πάντων δ' ἡ χάρις. / Τὸ κώδιον παρέλθε, τὸν λύκον βλέπε. / Μὴ τοῖς λόγοις με πείθε, τοῖς δὲ πράγμασι. / Μισῶ διδάγμαθ', οἷς ἐναντίος βίος. / Τὰ χρώματ' αἰνῶν τοῦ τάφου βδελύσσομαι / Τὴν ἐνδον ὁδὸν τῶν σεσηπτότων μελῶν (35–42).

officer, presupposes that Gregory is already certain he will not be bishop of Constantinople anymore (*or.* 42, 25). Hence, the object of persuasion is not the future course of actions of the council (as in II, 1 13 and in the speech at II, 1, 11, 1600–1682), but the goodness of Gregory’s legacy. Even if *or.* 42 shares themes not only with II, 1, 12 but also with II, 1, 13 and II, 1, 11, 1600–1682 and 1828–1855, its fictive frame is the same as that of II, 1, 12. As in II, 1, 12, 812, in *or.* 42, 25 Gregory wraps up his speech with a “departing discourse”, a συντακτήριος λόγος<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, the communication context implied by Gregory’s use of grammatical persons and phatic expressions is remarkably similar: Gregory speaks mostly in the second-person plural to the bishops (*or.* 42, 1; 10; 25), calls to witness people who knew his pains (*or.* 42, 2), and presents as a gift to the other bishops the congregation of Constantinople as if it were present to the gathering (*or.* 42, 10–11). Occasionally, he employs a second-person singular to introduce contrasts and objections (*or.* 42, 8) and addresses the congregation of Constantinople directly with the second-person plural (*or.* 42, 26). On top of this, he uses the demonstrative adjective οὗτος to point the church of Hagia Sophia, setting the speech in it<sup>15</sup>.

And yet II, 1, 12 is consciously fictional, in that, besides the internal audience, it is addressed to posterity, too. This fictionality has led some interpreters into error: Meier, following De Jonge, thinks that the poem must have been written immediately after Gregory’s departure, or at least before he knew of Nectarius’s election as his successor, for Gregory seems to imply at line 818 that the election has not yet taken place<sup>16</sup>. However, that many of the critiques advanced by Gregory against bad bishops could be neatly applied to Nectarius’s profile, suggests that the poem was in fact written after Nectarius’ election<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, Gregory is more subtle: he consciously chose to embed his harsh critiques against his successor in the fiction of his last discourse before the

14 Ὑμεῖς μὲν οὖν τοὺς προπεμπτηρίους ἡμῖν μελετήσατε λόγους· ἐγὼ δὲ ὑμῖν ἀποδώσω τὸν συντακτήριον (*or.* 42, 25).

15 Address to the bishops: Πῶς ὑμῖν τὰ ἡμέτερα, ὦ φίλοι ποιμένες καὶ συμποιμένες (*or.* 42, 1); Τοὺτους δωροφοροῦμεν ὑμῖν, ὦ φίλοι ποιμένες, τοὺτους προσάγομεν, τοῦτοις δεξιούμεθα τοὺς ἡμετέρους φίλους, καὶ ξένους, καὶ συνεκδήμους (10); Τί φατε; Πείθομεν ὑμᾶς τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις, καὶ νενικήκαμεν; (25). Call for testimony: Τίς οὖν ἡ ἀπολογία; Καὶ εἰ μὲν ψευδής, ἐλέγξατε· εἰ δὲ ἀληθής, μαρτυρήσατε ὑμεῖς, ὑπὲρ ὧν, καὶ ἐν οἷς ὁ λόγος. Ὑμεῖς γάρ μοι καὶ ἀπολογία, καὶ μάρτυρες, καὶ καυχήσεως στέφανος (2). The congregation as gift: Τοὺτους δωροφοροῦμεν ὑμῖν ... Ἄρον κύκλω τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου, καὶ ἴδε, πᾶς ὁ τῶν ἐμῶν λόγων ἐξεταστής. Ἴδε τὸν στέφανον τὸν πλακέντα τῆς δόξης... (10–11). Fictitious interlocutor: Σὺ μὲν ἀριθμεῖς τὰς μυριάδας, Θεὸς δὲ τοὺς σωζομένους· καὶ σὺ μὲν τὸν ἀμέτρητον χοῦν, ἐγὼ δὲ τὰ σκεύη τῆς ἐκλογῆς (8). Address to the congregation: Χαίρετε, Ναζαραίων χοροστασίαι, ψαλμωδιῶν ἀρμονίαι, στάσεις πάννυχoi, παρθένων σεμνότης, γυναικῶν εὐκοσμία, χηρῶν, ὀρφανῶν συστήματα, πτωχῶν ὀφθαλμοί, πρὸς Θεὸν καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς βλέποντες. Χαίρετε, οἴκοι φιλόξενοι καὶ φιλόχριστοι, καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ἀσθενείας ἀντιλήπτορες (26). Reference to the Hagia Sophia: Σὺ τε ὁ μέγας ναὸς οὗτος καὶ περιβόητος, ἡ νέα κληρονομία, τὸ νῦν μέγας εἶναι παρὰ τοῦ Λόγου λαβὼν, ὃν Ἰεβοὺς πρότερον ὄντα, Ἱερουσαλὴμ πεποιήκαμεν (26).

16 Meier 1989, 17–18, with reference to Ἄλλον τιν’ εἰ λάβοιτε Γρηγόριον, φίλοι, / Φεῖδοισθε μᾶλλον (II, 1, 12, 818–819).

17 McGuckin 2001a, 375, 377, 382–383; 2001b, 163–164; Elm 2000b, 420–421; McLynn 1997.

election of the successor, in order to give an impression of impartiality to his remarks and to delegitimise the choice of the other bishops and the authority of said successor<sup>18</sup>. Nectarius, he is implying, was elected against the clearest indications of the senior bishop of the council, given on a most solemn occasion, namely the senior bishop's last discourse.

Here I give a brief synopsis of the themes treated in this long poem:

**1–69: προοίμιον:** motivations to write (1–32); the theme of bad bishops (33–42); the moral of the entire story, that life is unjust (43–69)

**70–153: δῆγησις:** G. is called to Constantinople (70–92); G.'s tenure as bishop (93–113); his moment of glory (114–135); G. is dismissed by the bishops (136–153)

**154–329: πίστις:** criticism of unprepared bishops, divided as follows: against their humble background (154–175); against uneducated bishops (176–191); the objection of the apostles (192–198); first answer, apostolic faith (199–216); second answer, knowledge, as a good, was granted to the apostles (216–244); third answer, the role of charisma (245–264); nature and use of knowledge (265–287); the form it ought to have (288–308); its contents (309–329)

**330–708:** criticism of morally unfit bishops, divided as follows: morally unfit bishops (330–354); their consequences for the church (355–370); first reason is a failing selection (371–396); second reason is lack of preparation (397–441); first objection: the grace of baptism (442–502); second objection, the grace of ordination (503–569); the relationship between an unworthy bishop and an earnest, faithful believer (570–633); the office hinders the moral progress of its incumbent (634–657); duplicity and imitation (658–708)

**709–791:** the politician and the monk, divided as follows: Should a bishop be a skilful politician (709–760)? Should a bishop be a good polemicist (761–775)? The strife for the biggest cities (776–791)

**792–836: ἐπίλογος:** renunciation of further action (792–810); last words (811–836)

Beside the long iambic poem, three more pieces refer to bishops in their titles: II, 1, 10, titled *To the Priests of Constantinople and the City Itself*; II, 1, 13, *Against the Bishops*; and II, 1, 17, *On the Different Lifestyles and against Fake Priests*. Among these, 10 and 17 are in elegiac couplets, and 13 is in hexameters.

Contrary to what one might assume when reading the title, II, 1, 17 is not one of those confrontational poems between two clearly characterised, and often personified, choices of life—poems such as Gregory wrote and are collected under the heading *Poemata moralia* in the Benedictine edition<sup>19</sup>. Rather, this is one of those elegiac laments so common among the poems of Gregory and collected by the Benedictines, with other pieces, in the *Poemata de se ipso*. In this kind of poem, Gregory moves freely between narration of personal facts and a moralising reflection upon those facts, lamenting his

<sup>18</sup> McLynn 1997, 302.

<sup>19</sup> An example of the genre has been edited by Werhahn 1953.

misfortunes and the delusions of earthly experience<sup>20</sup>. Sometimes there is some form of prayer or communication with God. However, these texts don't point unequivocally to a concrete recipient, seeming to be more of a personal outpouring. This is not to say that they did not have a concrete audience, but rather that they did not point obviously to it, thus giving the reader (or hearer) the impression of being engaged in Gregory's soliloquies. This is the case with our text, too. Because it has less of that diatribic quality that pervasively imprinted II, 1, 12, this poem gives a more intimate, reflexive impression, even when treating the same themes: we are led by the text to locate its enunciation not in an assembly context, before the gathered bishops of Constantinople, but in Gregory's own head; it seems to be his personal communication to us. On the theme, even if the title has the phrase "fake priests" (ψευδιερείς), it is clear that the bad bishops are implied, as there are not only references to the office of bishop and Constantinople but also criticisms similar to those to be found in II, 1, 12<sup>21</sup>. As regards its chronological setting, the poem seems to represent the whole Constantinopolitan experience of Gregory as an accomplished fact: therefore, no significant discrepancy can be surmised between the time of writing and the time implied by the poem. Whence, then, the title *On the Different Lifestyles*? The title is justified because the poem doesn't lack a confrontational character; it simply delivers it by means of lyric poetry rather than by iamb or diatribe. The behaviour of the good bishops and that of the bad bishops are contrasted by way of not one but two *Priamel*<sup>22</sup>, one made of similes at 1–16, the other, more personal, listing refused behaviours and concluding with Gregory's own choice, at 59–95. In a way, this whole poem can be seen as an amplification and a reflection on II, 1, 12, 49–69, where the bad and the good bishop are contrasted, and Gregory takes notice of the success of the former and the misfortunes of the latter. After all, those lines in the longer, iambic poem are more elegiac than the rest of the poem<sup>23</sup>.

The poems II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 13 are clearly linked, as they begin with the same line. Both of these poems address priests, but while II, 1, 13 clearly addresses the bishops gathered in Constantinople for the council, II, 1, 10 could be read as directed only to

20 Demoen 1996, 62 (genres of θρήνοι and of "elegiac autobiographical poems"); Prudhomme 2006, 81.

21 Reference to the office of bishops: Οὐχ ἔδρη τίσει με δικασπός, ἢ ἐ συνέδρῳ (II, 1, 17, 63); Οὐδέ τί που συνόδοισιν ὁμόθρονος ἔσσομ' ἔγωγε (91); Ἐμμεναι ἀντὶ θρόνων, ὧν πέρι μαρνάμενοι / Σχίζονται (98–99). Reference to Constantinople: Οὐ θνητοῦ βασιλῆος ὁμέστιος, ὡς τοπάρῳιθεν, / Γρηγόριος (59–60). Reference to Gregory's experience in Constantinople: Ὡς ἶδον αἴσυλα ἔργα, κακοῖράφην τ' ἀλεγεινὴν, / Ἀψ ἀναχασσάμενος ἐκτὸς ἔθηκα πόδα ... Λᾶες ἐμοί, κείνων δὲ Τριάς, θεότης νεόπηκτος (42–43.46). For the invective against bishops in II, 1, 17 as well as II, 1, 12, see §5.2.

22 The *Priamel* is a rhetorical structure typical of (but not restricted to) Greek poetry, especially Archaic lyric. It consists in a list of elements that are denied or refused, only to affirm the last element, at the end of the list, more strongly. Famous examples are the incipit of Pindar's *Ol.* 1 and Sappho's *frg.* 16 V. See Gärtner 2006.

23 See also how they are introduced at 45–48: Ἀλοῦντός ἐστιν, ἐξερεύεσθαι πάθος / Θεῶ, φίλοις, γονεῦσι, γείτοσι, ξένοις, / Εἰ δ' οὖν, χρόνῳ τε καὶ βίῳ τοῖς ὕστερον, / Μικρὸν δ' ἀνοίσω τὸν λόγον πορρωτέρῳ. On strong, negative emotions as trigger of the poetic utterance see §1.3.2.



the priests of the city<sup>24</sup>. Furthermore, II, 1, 10 addresses the urban community in addition to the priests, whereas II, 1, 13 is directed only to the bishops<sup>25</sup>. The two poems seem to be set on two different occasions: this guess is confirmed by their different themes. II, 1, 10 ends as a kind of epitaph for Gregory (35–36), an impression heightened by its elegiac metre<sup>26</sup>. This is easily linked to the idea of a “parting discourse” (ἐξιτήριοις λόγος), mentioned at the end of II, 1, 12. The elegy presumes that Gregory’s successor has already been elected (13–15 and 23–24)<sup>27</sup>. However, the spatial setting is not clear. At 24, the expression “this tribune” (βῆμα τόδε) entails the presence of the tribune in the act of speaking, and so Gregory’s presence in Constantinople. Yet the use of many aorist participles implies that Gregory has already left the city<sup>28</sup>. In this case, it is also unclear whether he has already reached Nazianzus or not, because the verbs describing his activities in the homeland are in the future<sup>29</sup>, whereas he says that he “has dropped [βάλων] the anchor in a steady haven” (33). Regarding this last problem, it can be resolved in two ways: we can take the image of the anchor as referring to the decision not to partake in active life anymore, instead of as referring to his current location in Nazianzus, or we take the future verbs as implying that the activities will begin right after the writing of the present text, and so Gregory is already in Nazianzus. The first problem is much more difficult, for both the aorist verbs and the demonstrative τόδε are very clear. Simelidis proposes a double redaction of the poem, whose first half was written in Constantinople and the second in Nazianzus, so that “this tribune” dates back to Gregory’s last days in Constantinople, and the aorist βάλον (33) to shortly after his arrival in Nazianzus<sup>30</sup>. However, βάλον is not the only aorist verb expressing Gregory’s departure from Constantinople; and, beyond the reconstruction of compositional stages, this explication doesn’t ultimately give a reason for the text as such. In other words, Simelidis is implying that Gregory left his poem incomplete or with a major inconsistency in the setting. This is unlikely both because of Gregory’s attention to the fictional settings of these polemical poems and because, given the brevity of the

24 cf. ταῦτα Θεοῦ θέραπες, / Οἱ δὴριν στονόεσσαν ἐπ’ ἀλλήλοισιν ἔχοντες, / Χριστὲ ἄναξ, οὐ μοι ταῦτα νοοῦσι φίλα (II, 1, 10, 15–17) with Αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν, εἰ καὶ με κακὸν καὶ ἀνάρσιον ἄνδρα / Πάντες ὁμοῦ θείητε, χοροῦ δ’ ἄπο τῆλε δίοισθε / Ὑμετέρου, βάλλοντες ἐπασσυντέροισιν οἴστοις, / Ἀμφαδίοις, κρυπτοῖς τε, τό περ καὶ φίλτερον ὑμῖν (II, 1, 13, 14–17) and Εἰδόσι μῦθος / Ὑμετέρην κακίην, ὅποσοι λαοῖο πρόεδροι (57–58). The priests at II, 1, 10, 7 are “generous” (Ὑμέας εὐγενέας). See Simelidis 2009, 155.

25 cf. II, 1, 10, 1–4 with II, 1, 13, 1–11.

26 Οὗτος Γρηγορίου λόγος, τὸν θρέψατο γαῖα / Καππαδοκῶν, Χριστῷ πάντ’ ἀποδυσάμενον (II, 1, 10, 35–36). Simelidis 2009, 150–151 interprets these lines as “this is my version of the facts”, a disclaimer against other accounts that probably circulated in Constantinople.

27 Ἄλλον δ’ αὖ μόχθοισιν ἑμοῖς ἐπι θυμὸν λαίειν, / Ἀρθέντ’ ἐξαπίνης θῶκον ἐπ’ ἀλλότριον, / Οὐ με Θεός τ’ ἐπέβησε, Θεοῦ τ’ ἀγαθοὶ θεράποντες (II, 1, 10, 13–15); οἳ ῥ’ ἀνέηκαν / Βῆμα τόδ’ οὐχ ὅσιως καιροθέοισι φίλοις (23–24).

28 Ἀφορμηθεῖς (II, 1, 10, 26); προφυγῶν (28); ἐκφυγον (31).

29 Τέρψομαι ἀτρεμῖν, (II, 1, 10, 26); θύσω καὶ σιγῇ, ὡς τὸ πάροιθε λόγον (34).

30 Simelidis 2009, 152–155.

poem, Gregory should have spotted the inconsistency, if there was one. Now, the importance of the demonstrative τόδε can be downplayed, since this kind of demonstrative need not point to objects that are literally near the speaker; rather, it can indicate that an object is in the emotional vicinity of the speaker while being literally nearer to the addressee<sup>31</sup>. One cannot deny the emotional relevance of the Constantinopolitan pulpit for Gregory, especially in a poem where his removal from it and its occupation by an unworthy successor are the declared and lamented theme<sup>32</sup>. On the other side, Gregory can express unity of place by reducing the concrete import of the aorist verbs. This can work in the cases of “I flew envy” (φθόνον ἔκφυγον, 31) or “I dropped anchor in a steady haven” (ἐν σταθερῷ πῆισμα βάλλον λίμενι, 33), because they clearly entail a metaphor. However, it is difficult to justify a metaphorical interpretation of “thence departed” (ἐνθεν ἀφορμηθεῖς, 26) or “having left the court, the city, and the clergy” (βασίλεια καὶ ἄστυα καὶ ἱερῆας / . . . προφυγών, 28). Therefore, it is more likely that these verbs signal the setting of the poem, while the demonstrative must be read as relating to the thematic significance of the lost pulpit in Constantinople. Then, we can describe II, 1, 10 as Gregory’s last letter to the community of Constantinople, written and sent after his departure from Constantinople, probably when he reached Nazianzus. In a way, it is also an epitaph, because the city won’t hear from Gregory anymore. From the point of view of content, it is a lament on the workings of envy against Gregory, which justifies his departure from Constantinople and his forsaking those that were faithful to him in the city.

II, 1, 13, which begins with the same line as II, 1, 10, is a longer hexameter poem, apparently directed to the council. It develops critiques similar to those contained in II, 1, 12, above all as it refers to the selection of bishops and their behaviour. At line 141, Gregory refers to himself as retiring, yet towards the end of the poem (196–204) there seems to be an alternative<sup>33</sup>: if his discourse persuades the council, then Gregory will have reached his aim; if not, then he will dissociate himself from the other bishops as much as possible. This alternative seems to point to a real discourse that Gregory held at the council, namely when he offered his resignation while hoping to be called back to his place<sup>34</sup>. This poem is the fictionalised version of the last discourse he held

<sup>31</sup> Kühner/Gerth 1898, 644.

<sup>32</sup> Simelidis 2009, 153–155; McGuckin 2001a, 361.

<sup>33</sup> Χριστὲ ἀναξ, μή μοι τις ἀπαντήσῃεν ἀνὴρ / Χαζομένω (II, 1, 10, 140–141); Σχέσθε, φίλοι· λήξωμεν ἀτασθαλίη μογιόντες / Ὅψέ ποτ’ εὐαγέεσσι Θεὸς τίοιτο θυηλαῖς. / Εἰ μὲν δὴ πεπίθοιμεν, ὀνησόμεθ’· εἰ δὲ καλύπτοι / Μῦθον ἐμὸν πολίην τε νέων θράσος, ἢ ἐκοιλιών / Οὖλον ἐπικρώζοντες ἐμοὶ νέφος ἀφραδίῃσι, / Μαρτύρομ’ ἀθανάτοιο Θεοῦ χέρα, καὶ τὸ κελαινὸν / Ἥμαρ, ὃ τὴν κούφην πυρὶ βόσκεται ὕστατον ὕλην, / Οὐ μὲν ἐγὼ κείνοισιν ὁμόθρονος, οὐχ ὁμοεργός, / Οὐδέ τι συμφράδμων, οὐ σύμπλοος, οὐ συνοδίτης (196–204).

<sup>34</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 172–173 and in particular 359–362, where the different speeches Gregory presumably gave in his last days at Constantinople are listed; McGuckin 2001b, 166–167; Simonetti 1975, 533–535. Cf. also the narration at the beginning of this poem (II, 1, 13, 27–58) with the narration at the beginning of Gregory’s speech to the council in II, 1, 11, 1600–1610; the remark on incompetent bishops

before the council as rightful bishop of Constantinople. Therefore, its fictional setting falls before that of II, 1, 10 and even of II, 1, 12. That this is the case is also suggested by the manuscript tradition. In fact, II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 13 are transmitted in the opposite order (13 before 10) in all but one witnesses<sup>35</sup>. The indication of manuscripts should not be taken as wholly conclusive, since the modern recensors have shown that the collections of Gregory's poems are posthumous, yet it is not impossible that smaller groups of poems were included in later collections as the author had previously ordered them<sup>36</sup>. Again, for this longer poem, II, 1, 13, I offer a brief synopsis:

**1–26: προοίμιον**

**27–74: δῆγησις:** praise of Constantinople and Christianity (27–39); Satan's plan to destroy the church, beginning with its leaders (40–58); the church has become a gathering of impurities (59–74)

**75–115: The herald's discourse:** call to the worst people (75–88); promise of thrones and grace (89–99); allowance of incompetent people as well as the spiritually trained (100–115)

**116–138: Counterexamples** of purity in the Old Testament

**139–183: The sins of the church:** sins of the leaders (139–163); sins of the people (164–183)

**184–195: Counterexamples** of obedience in the Old Testament

**196–215: ἐπίλογος**

Its poetic nature notwithstanding, the poem is organised yet again as an oration, with the same fourfold division found at II, 1, 12. However, the main bodies of the two poems differ in attitude and concerns. II, 1, 12 develops in a long πίστις, with arguments, objections, and counters to those objections, interspersed here and there with invective and other digressions. II, 1, 13, on the other hand, does not present a proper *confirmatio/confutatio*: instead, the poet alternates between invective and biblical examples, employing rhetorical devices such as *ethopoia* and similes. These different modes of argumentation correspond to different aims, with II, 1, 12 exposing a reasoned proposal for the betterment of the church and II, 1, 13 aiming at eliciting an emotional response to the abuses Gregory denounces (see §3.3.2.2).

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at II, 1, 11, 1648–1652 is expanded in the central part of II, 1, 13, the invective against bad bishops; the final *peroratio* at II, 1, 11, 1661–1679 finds correspondence at II, 1, 13, 198–217 with the same alternative between successful persuasion and defeat, the same threat of the final judgement in case of defeat and the same intention to retreat to ascetic life. The characterisation of Gregory's opposers is very similar at II, 1, 11, 1680–1682 and II, 1, 13, 198–200. The main difference of the two discourses is that the one at II, 1, 13 omits completely the *casus belli*, namely the question of Meletius' succession to the see of Antioch, in favour of an invective against bishops. In this regard II, 1, 13 exploits its fictional setting to expand into a tableau of general validity. Again, at II, 1, 11, 1724–1732 Gregory pronounces before the council a speech very similar to the herald's speech at II, 1, 13, 75–115.

35 Höllger/Sicherl/Werhahn 1985, 25.

36 Gertz 1986, 172–173.

Therefore, these four poems build an ideal chronological sequence: II, 1, 13 depicts Gregory's last attempt to regain control over the council, II, 1, 12 is his last, grandiose speech before the bishops after he has resigned, II, 1, 10 is his farewell letter to the congregation in Constantinople, and II, 1, 17 is a later reflection on the whole affair, "emotion recollected in tranquillity". 13 is an epic discourse, 12 a long iambic rebuke, 10 a verse letter but also an epitaph and an elegy, 17 an elegiac lament and a moral reflection. The same occasion—Gregory's resigning from his post as bishop of Constantinople and his failure in the council—is presented from different points of view, conveyed by different genre conventions and determined by different communicative conditions. The broader, unifying theme of bad and good bishops offers a lens through which the historical occasion can be interpreted and become widely significant.

These are not the only poems concerned with Gregory's experience in Constantinople: almost every poem and prayer Gregory wrote about himself reflects one or more of the themes developed in these four poems. Among these other poems different categories can be distinguished. Many poems, titled *πρὸς τοὺς φθονοῦντας*, *Against Those Who Envied Him*, allude, sometimes clearly, sometimes vaguely, to the other bishops: examples of these texts are II, 1, 7–9; 14; 18; 40. II, 1, 7 and II, 1, 9 are brief rewritings of II, 1, 12, 797–802 and 811–822, Gregory's "parting discourse", here conveniently summed up in a few lines. In II, 1, 7 Gregory highlights the importance of his doctrine of the Spirit, a reason that contributed to the hostility against him at the council but that he really wanted to enforce through a creedal statement. However, the theme is less prominent in the longer poems, because in the same period Gregory was working on the edition of his theological speeches (*or.* 27–31)<sup>37</sup>. II, 1, 9 is an instance of comparison between the ascetic and the worldly bishop, as seen notably in II, 1, 17. II, 1, 40 deserves a separate discussion: the poem is part of a triptych comprising also II, 1, 39 and 41. The order witnessed by the manuscripts for these three poems, which are transmitted together, is actually as follows: II, 1, 39; 41; 40<sup>38</sup>. They form a polemical cycle against Maximus. II, 1, 39 is an apology for Gregory's poetry and at the same time an attack against another writer of iambs (ἰαμβοποιός, 70), probably the same Maximus<sup>39</sup>. The following poem, II, 1, 41, is a tirade explicitly aimed at Maximus. Finally, II, 1, 40 is a plea, as before a law court, in defence of Gregory's ministry in Constantinople against those who doubted his skill among whom Maximus was still vocal in 381<sup>40</sup>. Poems like II, 1, 8; 14 and 18, with their sombre tone, can be seen as more similar to those elegiac pieces concerned with the spiritual side of the Constantinopolitan experience—as, for example, II, 1, 15 and 19.

Among these more intimate poems, a group is interesting for the theme of bishops. For Gregory wrote some poems addressed and related to the Orthodox community of

<sup>37</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 324, 376.

<sup>38</sup> Höllger/Sicherl/Werhahn 1985, 31.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. II, 1, 41, 1–7.15–19.21–25.32.39–40.46–47.54–58 with II, 1, 39, 1–7.68–81. McGuckin 2001b, 161; McGuckin 2006, 207; De Blasi 2020; on Maximus' literary activity, see also Hieron. *vir.* ill. 127.

<sup>40</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 315, 324, 350–351.

Constantinople, the first people supportive of his ministry there. As they used to gather in a church named Anastasia, the poems are titled πρὸς τὸν Ἀναστασίας λαόν, *To the Community of the Anastasia*. In these poems, II, 1, 5; 6 and 16, we see the relationship between a model bishop, Gregory, and his model community in a time of crisis: it is in fact a long-distance relationship, due to Gregory's "exile" (so he likes to present it) from Constantinople. II, 1, 5 represents this relationship as a loving one, using the language of desire on the model of Paul's addresses to the churches (see Rom. 1:11; Phil. 1:8; 2:26; 2Tim. 1:4). II, 1, 6, on the other side, presents the situation on the model of Lamentations (see Lament. 1:4), with the congregation grieving for the loss of its shepherd. The longer elegy of II, 1, 16 is much more elaborated: in it, Gregory relates a dream he had, in which he reenacted his career in Constantinople up until the council (or Maximus' affaire); after the dream, we read a long lament on his removal from Constantinople and from the Anastasia church in particular, and how this circumstance is very painful to him. Yet he manages to keep his communion with the congregation through spiritual means. He subtly casts doubts on the dignity of his successor and expresses his only care, namely that Anastasia keeps professing trinitarian orthodoxy. In the same group is II, 1, 15, lamenting Gregory's misfortunes and explicitly addressed to the Anastasia church. Among the autobiographical poems, II, 1, 15 is the most concerned with the problem of orthodoxy and the necessity for a Christian leader to be also an accomplished theologian. These poems can be linked with II, 1, 10, which, as we have seen, is addressed to the congregation in Constantinople and not directly to the bishops.

Another interesting text is II, 1, 30, a polemical piece aimed at the priests in Nazianzus and the bishops of Cappadocia. It revives many themes already employed in our poems against the bishops, but in a new context, namely the problems regarding the choice of a bishop for Nazianzus and the influence of Apollinarist theology among the priests of the town<sup>41</sup>. Finally, the famous poem *On his own life* (II, 1, 11) features many parallels to our poems, being for the most part devoted to an account of Gregory's ministry in Constantinople. Yet in this case, these features are embedded in an autobiographic and apologetic poem, in which the single incident is brought up to paint a broader spiritual and intellectual portrait of the author.

All these other poems will not be examined here: the shortest pieces entail the study of the longer ones, which, though significant, would broaden the scope of this work too much. Sometimes parts or lines from these other poems, most of all II, 1, 11, will be mentioned for the light they can throw upon parallel passages of our four poems (II, 1, 10; 12; 13; 17), as will be the case for some significant texts from *or.* However, the focus will remain on the four poems against the bishops.

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41 On this period of Gregory's life, see McGuckin 2001a, 384–396; Storin 2011, 236–238; Limberis 2012.

### 1.1.2 Ephrem's texts

The situation of Ephrem's texts is less chaotic but more mysterious. Our primary witnesses are large cycles of texts contained in early manuscripts (fifth to sixth century). Therefore, we read Ephrem's poems already divided into collections on the basis of their themes. These collections are fairly consistent, and the scarce and sparse material provided by reliable liturgical manuscripts does not challenge the organisation of the early manuscripts. Philoxenus of Mabbug, in a florilegium attached to a letter dated between 482 and 484, some 110 years after Ephrem's death, mentions his Ephremian excerpts as pertaining to cycles that have the same names as those attested in the manuscripts. Moreover, the witness of a later manuscript, containing a guide to the melodies (*qālē*, pl. of *qālā*) to be sung on Ephrem's poems, does not contradict the ancient manuscripts<sup>42</sup>. Whereas Gregory's tradition betrays an almost unceasing work of collection and selection, with numerous variations from witness to witness, the fifth-to-sixth-century collections of Ephrem are an authoritative, but isolated, monolith, which makes it almost impossible to surmise what was before them. This means that we have no element, apart from the texts themselves, to decide how much of the order and division of the texts was intended by the author and how much is a later arrangement. The situation is complicated by the modular form of these texts, in which single stanzas or groups thereof may be added or subtracted from a poem without leaving any sign of reworking<sup>43</sup>.

Among these collections, the one known as *CN* contains a cycle of poems about bishops. Our witnesses are remarkably consistent: the whole collection is transmitted by one manuscript, which contains only these works and repeats the title of *Book of the Poems on Nisibis* (*penqītā d-madrāšē da-nšībīn*) on the heading of each page; but the same title is given by an old manuscript as an introduction to an excerpt from the second part of the collection. An old liturgical manuscript, transmitting various passages of Ephrem's works, confirms the order of the main witness for *CN* 15–21, and then adds *CN* 34 and the second part of the collection. This, in sum, is the situation of the ancient collection, sustained by the consensus of our most ancient witnesses: *CN* is a collection of seventy-seven poems, of which the first thirty-four are concerned with historical facts and people and the other poems treat Christ's descent into Sheol and the liberation from Sin and Death. Despite the neat division between historical and theological poems, the whole collection went together under the same name of *Poems*

<sup>42</sup> de Halleaux 1972; de Halleaux 1974.

<sup>43</sup> A partial guarantee against such reworkings comes from the acrostic forms of many poems, although this criterion does not always apply and can be bypassed by a careful redactor. On Ephrem's manuscript tradition, see Brock 1997; Outtier 1975/6; Gribomont 1973 and recently Butts 2017; Hartung 2018. Beck's introductions to the single volumes of his critical edition are also an invaluable instrument. A more optimistic evaluation of the collection of the *hymn. fid.*, as preserving the author's organisation of his poems, in Palmer 1995.

on *Nisibis* since the earliest known moments of the tradition. However, not even the first part is totally represented by the title: in fact, only *CN* 1–21 are concerned with people and facts of Nisibis, whereas *CN* 25–34 (*CN* 22–24 are missing due to a lacuna) refer to Ephrem's stay in Edessa in his last ten years of life. The *Poems on Nisibis* proper are further ordered in two parts: from *CN* 1 to *CN* 12 the poems are devoted to the Persian sieges and attacks that the city faced before its cession in 363; from *CN* 13 to *CN* 21 run the poems on the bishops of Nisibis. Even though after *CN* 21 there is a lacuna, we can assume that the group of poems on the bishops ended with *CN* 21, because this poem ends with a stanza one line longer than the others, and that one line seems an appropriate ending<sup>44</sup>.

The nine *madrāšē* devoted to the bishops of Nisibis (*CN* 13–21) seem chronologically ordered. The poems from 13 to 16 refer to only three bishops in Nisibis, which means they must have been composed during the tenure of the third, Valgash. Their comprehensive title is *On His Holiness Jacob and His Successors*. Despite having the same title, poems 13 and 14 are in one metre, and 15 and 16 are in another<sup>45</sup>. To this metrical difference corresponds a thematic one, since *CN* 13–14 are concerned in a rather general fashion with the three bishops, whereas *CN* 15–16 clearly react to a moment of crisis in the authority of Bishop Valgash (see §4.2).

*CN* 13 is addressed to a female audience, as shown by the feminine personification at stanzas 10–11 and by the apostrophe in the last stanza<sup>46</sup>. Thanks to this last stanza, which caps the whole piece quite well, we can surmise that it is a self-sufficient poem. The comprehensive title of *CN* 13–16, *On His Holiness Jacob and His Successors*, fits better for this first poem than for the others, since it treats as well the succession of three bishops in Nisibis (Jacob, Babu, Valgash; see §4.1.1), giving pride of place to Jacob, the first bishop (see §4.3). *CN* 14–16, on the other hand, are more concerned with Valgash than with Jacob. *CN* 13 has a bipartite structure, with the two parts further divided in two: each of the two major parts is composed of a statement of the succession of the bishops and a reflection. Therefore, in the first major part stanzas 1–9 introduce the theme of succession (1–3), relate it to the history of Nisibis (4–6), and explain it with the metaphor of the sun (7–9). Then, Ephrem reflects on the relationship between Nisibis's history and the history of Israel (10–11). In the second half, stanzas 12–13 introduce again in a generic manner the theme of succession, stanzas 14–17 link it again

<sup>44</sup> “Glory be unto thee for thy gift!” (*CN* 21, 23, 11). This paragraph summarises Beck 1961a, I–V.

<sup>45</sup> On the metres of *CN* 13–16, see Beck 1961a, VI. *CN* 13–14 have stanzas made of six lines of seven syllables (7+7/7+7/7+7) and a refrain of seven syllables. *CN* 15–16 have stanzas made of five lines of seven syllables (7+7/7+7/7) and a refrain of seven syllables.

<sup>46</sup> “Who is she, daughter born of vows [*bartā ba(r)t-nedrē*], / enviable by all females [*neqbātā*]... It is to the daughter [*ba(r)t-eh*] of Abraham alone / that these images are applied, // or even unto you, daughter born of vows?” (*CN* 13, 10, 1–2.11, 1–3); “Imitate Nisibis, / O eloquent daughters of Nisibis [*mallalātā/bnāt-nšībīn*]” (*CN* 13, 21, 1–2). More on this at §4.3.

with the history of Nisibis, and, finally, stanzas 18–21 reflect on the figure of Jacob, the first bishop.

CN 14 has no clear addressee. If the reference to the countryside around Nisibis and its clergy in the first stanza has some significance, then maybe the poem is intended for people coming from the countryside. The last two stanzas are a self-effacing prayer of the poet, a stock close in Ephrem's poetry, which assures us that this poem too is an autonomous piece. The prayer for peace at CN 14, 1, 6 places this poem in the context of some Persian raids in the countryside of Nisibis<sup>47</sup>. Yet the topic shifts quickly to the features of Valgash's preaching and his continuity with its predecessors. But what really stands out in this poem is the long digression at the centre (CN 14, 5–14). The occasion is provided by Ephrem's metaphor whereby he compares Valgash's preaching to adorning his audience with earrings (*ḥšaltā*, literally "jewel" at CN 14, 4, 6), an expression of praise for Valgash's proficiency in this episcopal task. The metaphor recalls the biblical episode of the golden calf, because in that case Aaron took earrings (here *qdāšē*, as in the Peshitta version of Ex. 32:2–3) from the people to melt and cast the idol. The details of both situations are compared and contrasted: Aaron took the earrings from the people and made a calf, which brought spiritual death to the people (stanza 5), whereas Valgash gave earrings to the people made from the nails of the cross and saved the people (stanza 6). Then the comparison shifts to the calf and the cross, the first born of fire (feminine) and death (masculine), worse than its parents (stanza 7), the second born of grace (feminine) and the wood of the tree of knowledge (masculine), better than its father (stanza 8). In the next two stanzas, calf and cross are compared first to their fathers and then to their mothers (stanzas 9 and 10). At this point, Ephrem abruptly asks his tongue to hush on the theme of the cross, as if he had suddenly recognised he was straying from his theme. Yet, before getting back to praising Valgash, he spends four more stanzas (11–14) describing how his straying took place and why he can praise Valgash. The explanation proceeds from the biblical model of Jacob's and Esau's struggle over the birthright. Ephrem's praise of Valgash as Esau managed to get out of Ephrem's tongue before the theme of the cross, but the latter struggled and then obtained the birthright (stanzas 11–13, 3). In fact, as Jacob was destined to reign (Gen. 25:23), so the cross is the genuine firstborn (stanza 14). Therefore, it is right to praise Valgash first, as Esau—though he was not the true firstborn—was born before Jacob (stanza 13, 4–6). In any case, it is thanks to the cross that Ephrem can praise the bishops. What is the meaning of this long digression (stanzas 5–14)? From the point of view of content, Ephrem telescopes Nisibis's bishop against sacred history, creating a contrasting typology between him and Aaron, mediated by the cross. Employing Jacobs and Esau's story to portray the struggle in the choice of themes, the poet enhances the cohesion between the cross theme and the praise of the bishop. In an obvious way, the

47 "Three shepherds / had many musterers, // one mother in the citadel / had many daughters in every region: // since wrath ruined her folds, / may peace restore her churches! (*nebnē šaynā 'ēdātā*)" (CN 14, 1).



image suggests that the two themes are brothers; therefore, they are strongly related. Moreover, Ephrem presents the cross as the cause enabling him to praise the bishop, so that the bishop's ministry is brought in closer relationship with Christ's redemption. This way, Ephrem forestalls a possible criticism of his main theme—namely, that he should not praise a living bishop and should stick to praising Christ. From the point of view of form, the presentation of all these contents as a digression, and then his sudden realisation that he has strayed and his justification of straying in terms of similarity of arguments (which in some sense denies the digressive nature of the digression), give a sense of immediacy to the passage: it is as if the poet was improvising and let himself go, only to correct himself in front of the audience shortly after. Now, this is just an impression, for the ten stanzas show a skilful organisation of the themes and a subtle but effective communication of the content, both characteristics hardly consistent with someone straying from the theme for lack of preparation. However, it is interesting that in stanzas 11–14 Ephrem chose to highlight his rambling, because this gives an oral quality to his poetry. It is difficult to understand why he sought such an immediate, impromptu-like and oral quality: maybe it made the oral performance of the poem more convincing; or maybe the piece was never performed but had to simulate an oral performance. In this case, Ephrem used the same device as Gregory, dropping hints in his poem pointing to a fictive occasion of performance. Yet no clear intent can be found for this fiction<sup>48</sup>. The length of this poem benefits from a synopsis:

**stanza 1:** introduction

**stt. 2–4:** the three bishops

**stt. 5–14:** digression: Aaron vs. Valgash (5–6); the calf vs the cross (7–10); Esau and Jacob (11–14)

**stt. 15–22:** the succession of the three bishops

**stt. 23–26:** eschatological scenes: the community judged by God (23–24); Ephrem's prayer (25–26)

CN 15–16 must be treated in close relation to one another. Written in the same metre, both poems are an apology of Bishop Valgash. They do not present a clear beginning nor a clear end, in the sense that the first and last stanzas of each poem are not particularly marked and don't contain metapoetic statements. However, they both begin with an elaborate image that explains the current situation in terms favourable to the bishop and unfavourable to the community and the critics we can easily imagine in it<sup>49</sup>. The poems then go on for a long stretch reflecting on the situation, often wandering away

<sup>48</sup> More on the meaning of the digression on Aaron at §4.2.

<sup>49</sup> "If had not been the head straight, / perhaps would have murmured the limbs, // for from a crooked head / the course of limbs is disturbed, // and they'd find the cause in the head." (CN 15, 1); "In this is a mirror culpable, / if its clarity is clouded, // because of its own spots, / because the filth on it became // a veil before the beholder." (CN 16, 1).

from the initial image, which, however, briefly returns in the penultimate stanzas of each poem<sup>50</sup>. The poems do not seem to follow any overarching structure, but it must be admitted that, given the seven stanzas missing from CN 16, it is difficult to evaluate the structure of that poem<sup>51</sup>. There is a fundamental difference in tone between the two pieces, for, while the first is plentiful in first-person plural forms, the second uses the first-person singular<sup>52</sup>. In CN 15 Ephrem styles himself as a peer of the community and calls the congregation “brethren”<sup>53</sup>, thereby sharing the rebukes he himself makes with those to whom the rebukes are directed. This functions as a sort of *captatio benevolentiae*. A different mechanism is observed in CN 16, where the first-person singular must be intended as a personification of the congregation or the city of Nisibis. Perhaps this rhetorical device enhances the objectivity of the poem’s rebukes, detaching them from their real recipients. The personification collapses in the last stanza, where the subject becomes a first-person plural, suddenly involving the audience in the rebukes of the previous verses<sup>54</sup>. Maybe this final appeal to the audience, as the apostrophe in the last stanza of CN 13, acts as a threshold for the poem, providing a close, which from the point of view of content is lacking. Thematically, CN 15 seems more concerned with defending the preaching of Valgash (see stanzas 7–8 and 10–12), whereas in CN 16 the theme is Valgash’s mildness, seen by the community as a sign of weakness.

The group of poems numbered CN 17–21 presents us with a new metre, common to all the poems<sup>55</sup>, with a new title, *On Abraham, the Bishop of Nisibis*, this one also common to all the poems, and with a new context, for Bishop Abraham was the successor of Bishop

50 CN 15, 19 has a reprise of the image of the head and the limbs: “If with the head as first/ the limbs had run as second, // they would have lead the third, / and all the whole body would have // followed them.” At CN 16, 21, 5, “my adornments (*tašbyāt(y)*) according to my beauties (*šupray*)”, the mirror comparison is not explicitly repeated, but the reference to the ornament of the church thanks to the bishop hints at the analogous development of the mirror comparison at stanzas 2–5 (in part.: CN 16, 2, 1, “Since beauty (*šuprā*) is not adorned (*mešṭbat*) by it”).

51 According to Beck 1961b, 43–44, the main manuscript of CN (R) lost a folium after CN 16, 2, 2 until what is now stanza 9. Stanzas 2 to 8 have been reintegrated through the liturgical manuscript E. This witness, however, must have omitted some stanzas, since it gives just 6 new stanzas, whereas one page of the main manuscript R contains normally 13 stanzas. This means that 7 stanzas are missing between CN 16, 2 and 9.

52 Examples of first-person plural: CN 15, 2, 2 (*tlēn ḥnan sanyāt-an*); 4, 5 (*nešpar kull-an ‘am kull-eh*); 12, 3 (*‘akwāt-an*); 13, 3–4 (... *neda’ zabn-an / ḥnan-hu l-zabn-an ‘etnakrēn-an*); 15–16. Examples of first-person singular: CN 16, 14, 2–5 (*yubbāl(y) / ...da-hwaw lī / ...d-yab lī / ...d-mannī lī*); 16 (*mušḥāt(y) / l-ṭalyōt(y)... / la-‘līmōt(y)... / la-ḥkīmōt(y) wa-l-pārušōt(y)*); 17, 2–3; 18–21.

53 “Yet, even if we, my brethren (*‘aḥay* Beck, but *‘aḥayn* manuscripts) ...” (CN 15, 10, 1). Same vocative at CN 16, 9, 2, but after a substantial lacuna and apparently without further forms of the first-person plural until stanza 22.

54 “It is we now, who overthrow / this beautiful succession and order, // since in the time of mildness, / lo!, we are begging toughness, // which may rebuke us as children.” (CN 16, 22)

55 Ten lines of seven syllables: 7+7/7+7/7+7/7+7. The refrain corresponds to the last line of each stanza and changes for every stanza, so that it is more apt to call it a final acclamation. See Beck 1961a, VI.

Valgash, so that these poems must follow CN 13–16 by a number of years. But their internal chronology is far from clear: one would imagine that whoever assembled the collection with such care must have preserved the same chronological criterion employed for broader sections also in these smaller ones; however, CN 17 seems written for Abraham's inauguration, and CN 19, 3, 1–2 and 20, 3, 1–2 refer to the flock as waiting for Abraham's tenure or newly experiencing it<sup>56</sup>, while CN 18, 5 alludes to the death of Julian the Apostate during Abraham's tenure and CN 21, 14–23 to the accession of a new emperor (Jovian)<sup>57</sup>. However, no poem suggests that Ephrem knew of Nisibis's cession to the Persians (as he does in the *hymn. c. Julian.*). Considering that Valgash died probably between 361 and 362 and Julian's death and Jovian's accession were both in the summer of 363, we may date the poems after 361 and before the autumn of the year 363<sup>58</sup>.

Fiey's suggestion that the last poems were written as letters from Amida or Edessa, after Ephrem had left Nisibis, is highly unlikely, above all because Fiey himself admits that Ephrem tarried in Nisibis for a while after its cession to the Persians<sup>59</sup>. Indeed, while CN 17–21 must have been written *before* the cession of Nisibis, in the *hymn. c. Julian.* Ephrem speaks of the Persian treatment of the city and depicts himself clearly as present in the city as the Persians entered it and the corpse of Julian passed through it<sup>60</sup>. Therefore, it is impossible that CN 17–21 were written outside Nisibis. Papoutsakis<sup>61</sup> dates the poems on Julian after 365/366, claiming that they show an intimate knowledge of Gregory's *or.* 4 and 5. The only argument given for this dependence is that at *hymn. c. Julian.* 3, 14, Ephrem presents Julian's death by disembowelment as a *contrappasso* for his practice of divination through the entrails of sacrificed victims, an idea present also in Gregory's *or.* 5, 13, 21–25. According to Papoutsakis, Ephrem should have connected Gregory's passage to the Greek text of Act. 1:18 and then should have translated it into Syriac with the same verb as the Syriac of Act. 1:18 for the disembowelment (*prat*) and

56 “Allow, Lord, my smallness, too, / to cast into your treasury her mite, // like that merchant of our flock, / who multiplied the talent of your doctrine, // then parted and went to your haven: / I will speak of his musterer, // who became head of the flock: / disciple was of three, // he was the fourth chief.” (CN 17, 1); “Here is your flock, o blessed, / rise and tend it, o diligent!” (CN 19, 3, 1–2); “It is meet for a new shepherd (*rā'yā hē(d)tā*) / to inspect the flock anew (*hā(d)tā'īt*)” (CN 20, 3, 1–2).

57 “’Twas not enough this, namely / to suppress heathenism [*hanpūtā*] through an old man, // but in its wisdom old age died / and in its time infancy triumphed, // for a young athlete dared / the heinous contest, when violence // attacked, perfecting heathenism, / which like smoke overpowered and passed, // with its beginning found its end.” (CN 18, 5); “Here, the news of a new king / goes thundering through the lands” (CN 21, 14, 1–2).

58 Abraham must have been already bishop at least for a short time during Julian's reign (CN 18, 5; §4.1.2), meaning that Valgash died after Julian's accession but before the Emperor's demise; Fiey 1973, 131; Fiey 1977, 33. For Julian's death and Jovian's accession, see Amm. Marc. 25, 5, 1–4.

59 Fiey 1973, 131 against 133–134 and Fiey 1977, 34–36.

60 On the Persian administration of the city: *hymn. c. Julian.* 2, 22; 27. Ephrem's presence before Julian's corpse and the walls displaying the new banners of the conquerors are an important detail of *hymn. c. Julian.*, as highlighted by Griffith 1987, 248–250.

61 Papoutsakis 2017, 135–137 and 2018.

with *b-gaw kars-eh* instead of *ba-gway-eh* of Acts for the Greek σπλάγχνα, in order to emphasise Gregory's idea of *contrappasso*. If the link with Act 1:18 seems convincing, the one with Gregory is not: this passage alone is insufficient to prove not only the late date of the texts but also Ephrem's much debated knowledge of Greek. Ephrem's deviation from the text of Acts with *kars-eh* may not be a deviation at all, if he read a different text than ours, and even if it is, and even if it is intended as an emphasis on the entrail divination, this need not mean that Ephrem was inspired directly by Gregory, as divination by entrails was practiced throughout the Mediterranean region and as far as Mesopotamia<sup>62</sup>. Ephrem may have come to the idea independently from Gregory; Papoutsakis himself posits that Ephrem knew of one oracle used in Julian's propaganda independently from Gregory<sup>63</sup>, so that he may well have known of Julian's haruspicy by himself. This applies also to *hymn. c. Iulian.* 3, 15, 3–4 and Gregory's *or.* 5, 25, 15–16: Julian's gloating remark may come directly from imperial propaganda. Furthermore, as recognised by Papoutsakis himself<sup>64</sup>, even though both Gregory and Ephrem employ 2 Thess. 2 to characterise Julian, Ephrem fails to adopt the most resonant element of Gregory's characterisation, derived from 2 Thess. 2, the moniker ἀποστάτης/*mārōdā*, which would be not conclusive but still very strange, if Ephrem really was reading Gregory.

On this basis, we could tentatively trace a chronology of Ephrem's poems in relationship with contemporary history: after the crisis surrounding Valgash and the raids of 359, prompting the composition of *CN* 13–16, Ephrem composed the [*De ecclesia*] poem when Julian's reign was a known reality<sup>65</sup>. During Julian's reign, Valgash died, and Abraham became the new bishop of Nisibis. Then there are two possibilities: either we take *CN* 17–21 to have been composed at different times and then rearranged in the order known to us, or we suppose that the poems were all composed in the same period. If the poems were composed at different times, then *CN* 17 and *CN* 19–20 were composed for the accession of Abraham shortly after Valgash's death, whereas *CN* 18 and *CN* 21 were composed in the summer of 363, after Julian's death and before the news of the peace treaty and the *hymn. c. Iulian.* If, however, we allow for some time to pass between Valgash's death and Abraham's ordination and we suppose that Ephrem may have written inaugural poems for some months after the ordination proper, then we may consider the poems as a unit, and so Ephrem's performances would have coincided with Julian's death<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> Maul 2005, 69.

<sup>63</sup> Papoutsakis 2018, 399.

<sup>64</sup> Papoutsakis 2017, 34.

<sup>65</sup> Beck 1957, 67–70; Griffith 1987, 240–243.

<sup>66</sup> In the fourth century, having a serving bishop in a city after the demise of a predecessor could take quite a time: even beside the cases of vacant seats, cities whose bishop was exiled (as Meletius' Antioch), or contested (Constantinople torn between Demophilus, Maximus, Gregory and then Nectarius), or had fled (the case of Gregory and Sasima, then Nazianzus after his father's death and finally Nazianzus after his return from Constantinople), dioceses had to do without their prelate for long stretches of time. According to McGuckin 2001a, 171, 177, Basil of Caesarea was elected at the beginning of 371, even if his

CN 17 is set at the inauguration of Abraham's tenure. It has two clear literary thresholds: the first stanza states the intention of the poem, and the last stanza echoes the first, neatly closing the piece. The two stanzas have a clear extratextual hook, the word "too" (*'āp*), with which the poem describes itself as part of a wider context of praises to the new bishop<sup>67</sup>. This context of generalised praise, which involved the whole diocese and comprised the remembering of the previous bishop, must have been the inauguration of his tenure<sup>68</sup>. On these thresholds, the poet speaks with his own voice: he styles himself as the old woman of Lc. 21:2 in the first stanza, and as the "dregs of the flock" in the last, yet describing his poetry as painting, himself as an "eloquent lamb" and even God's harp<sup>69</sup>. The presence of first-person plural in two stanzas sets the prominent character of the poet in a larger group of people, likely the congregation of Nisibis<sup>70</sup>. The addressee of the communication is shifting: in the first stanza, the poet appeals directly to God, but the acclamation in the last line has God in the third person; at stanza 3, God is again in the third person, and in the third person God remains throughout the poem, and notably in the acclamations closing each stanza, until the last, where the poet addresses God directly in the second person<sup>71</sup>. Bishop Abraham, conversely, is in

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predecessor, Eusebius, died in September 370. However, the traditional date for Basil's accession is the 14th of June 370; see Meredith 1995, 23. And yet Gregory relates of the difficulties of the election and the presence of illustrious men from distant places – a circumstance that must have slowed down the proceedings (Greg. Naz. or. 43, 37).

67 "Allow, Lord, my smallness, too [*'āp*], / to cast into your treasury her mite" (CN 17, 1, 1–2); "me too [*'āp*], the dregs of the flock, / I did not skimp on what was due" (CN 17, 12, 1–2).

68 The image of the flock to describe the diocese is pervasive, so that, when Ephrem defines himself "the dregs of the flock" (CN 17, 12, 1), the underlying idea is that, beside his praise, other manifestations of devotion for the bishop were held by other members of the flock. Another recurrent theme is the continuity between the bishops, to the point that the old dead bishop is seen as living anew in his successor (CN 17, 11). This gives the impression that the poem is also meant as a commemoration of the predecessor, which would have been most purposeful if his demise was recent or, if not actually recent, at least meaningful to the occasion. The remembrance of the predecessor and the continuity of his successor would have been meaningful at the inauguration (on continuity see §4.1). Moreover, the image of the "horn of election" alludes to the anointing of the leader, and so to his consecration (CN 17, 2, 7–9).

69 "Me too, the dregs of the flock, / I did not skimp on what was due, // I painted [*šāret*] an image of both, / with the dyes of both, // that the fold may see their ornaments, / and the flock their beauties; // and since I am an eloquent lamb, [*emrā mallālā*] / you, God of Abraham, // in Abraham's tenure I praise you. / **Blessed is he who made me his harp!** [*kennār-eh*]" (CN 17, 12). On *mallālā*, see §4.3 nn. 119–120.

70 "may your fasting be an armour to our land [*l'-atr-an*], / your prayer a shield for our city [*la-mdi(n)t-an*]" (CN 17, 4, 7–8); "He parted from us [*menn-an*], while he's with us [*'amm-an*]: / in you we see [*nehzē*] all three of them // glorious, who parted from us [*menn-an*]; / be for us [*l-an*] a wall as was Jacob" (CN 17, 11, 4–6).

71 Second person: "Allow, Lord [*mār(y)*], my smallness, too, / to cast into your treasury [*b-gazz-āk*] her mite, // like that merchant of our flock / who multiplied the talent of your doctrine [*yulpān-āk*]" (CN 17, 1, 1–4); third person: "**Blessed he** [*brīk-u*] **who made him our comfort!**" (CN 17, 1, 10); "He lifted and fixed [*šqal qab'-eh*] him as the mind / inside the large body of the church" (CN 17, 3, 5–6); second person again: "You, God of Abraham [*l-āk 'allāh-eh d-'abrāhām*], // in Abraham's tenure I praise You [*'awde l-āk*]" (CN 17, 12, 8–9).

the third person until stanza 4, where he is addressed in the second person, and the rest of the poem, until the last stanza, speaks of the new bishop with second-person forms<sup>72</sup>. So, all in all there are five characters in the poem: the poet, the congregation, the new bishop, the old bishop, God. If this set of characters reflects a real-life occasion, then it is surely a religious service: the beginning and end of the piece hint at this setting with their hymnic address from the poet to the Godhead, and the frequent mentions of the community imply its presence. The new bishop, too, is addressed as present, whereas the old bishop, mentioned only in the third person, is clearly absent. It is perhaps not haphazard that the poet uses the first-person singular when addressing God, and the first-person plural when addressing the bishop. Thus, he highlights the relationship of the prelate and his community, presenting himself as their mouthpiece; on the other side, his role is legitimised by his one-to-one relationship with God, as “His harp” (CN 17, 12, 10). From a structural point of view, the poem can be divided into two halves: CN 17, 1–6 defend the new bishop’s election, stressing continuity with his predecessor and the new bishop’s outstanding qualities; the remaining stanzas (CN 7–12) are an exhortation to the new bishop, full of ideal behaviours and advice.

CN 18, like the three following poems, is much less clear about its setting than CN 17. There is no direct intervention of the poet at the beginning, nor at the end, that helps situate the enunciation. In general, these poems present us with the same dynamic as the central stanzas of CN 17: the poet speaks at the first-person plural, as mouthpiece of the community, and the bishop is directly addressed with second-person forms<sup>73</sup>. The poem is clearly divided into three parts of equal length: stanzas 1–4 defend the legitimacy of the new bishop, comparing him to his predecessor; stanzas 5–8 narrate his resistance against Julian; stanzas 9–12 are composed of advice given to the new bishop. The two main themes of this poem are the fight against heathenism, which, however, seems a thing of the past (stanzas 5–8), and the envy against the bishop for his election. Since this theme is a recurrent one in these poems, the fact that Ephrem denies so flatly

72 Third person: “he was [hwā l-eh] the fourth chief” (CN 17, 1, 9) and *passim*; second person: “may your fasting [šawm-āk] be an armour to our land, / your prayer [šlōt-āk] a shield for our city // your thurible [pīrm-āk] may obtain reconciliation” (CN 17, 4, 7–9) and then *passim*; third person again: “I painted an image of both [la-tray-hōn], / with the dyes of both [da-tray-hōn], // that the fold may see their ornaments [šeḇtay-hōn], / and the flock their beauties [šupray-hōn]; // ... in Abraham’s tenure ...” (CN 17, 12, 3–6.9).

73 Examples of second person for the bishop and first plural for the community: “your master didn’t leave you [rabb-āk menn-āk lā šanni], / in the living we see [hzen] the departed” (CN 18, 1, 5–6); “May we be the field of your will, / may we be the vine of your labour, // may we be the flock in your fold, / and healthy stock under your crook; // may you be a great leader, / and we the gems embedded in your crown, // may we be fair for you and you for us, / that we may fit, one with another, // people and priest, in harmony. / **Blessed is he who sow harmony among us!**” (CN 19, 12); “O virgin that was bridegroom, / stir up a bit your understanding [re’yān-āk] // towards the wife of your youth [talyūt-āk]” (CN 20, 1, 1–3 and see also the expression “my brothers”, ‘aḥay, at 6, 1); “In your tenure [b-qawm-āk] may Mammon be ashamed, / who was master of our freedom [l-ḥērūt-an]” (CN 21, 7, 1–2).

the presence of envious people in the community must reflect an actual uneasiness in the choice of the new bishop (see §2.1.2.2; §3.1.1.1; §3.1.4.3).

CN 19 is a long moral paraenesis to the bishop, based on typology: it starts, quite aptly, with Abraham and Sarah (stanza 1), then moves on to David (2), Jacob (3), David again (5), Joshua (6), Moses (7), and Elisha (8); after some stanzas, the words of Paul are brought in (13), and finally the three predecessors are the last model of behaviour given to Abraham (15–16). Interspersed in this intensifying progression, moving from Old to New Testament times and then church history, there are stanzas devoted to the metaphor of the shepherd after the manner of Ezekiel's chapter 34 (4, 10) and another jab on envy (9). Compared to CN 18, this poem gives us one more clue of a setting: at CN 19, 3, 1 the community seems to be present, as Ephrem uses, in front position, an exclamation similar to English “here”<sup>74</sup>. The line gives the impression of the poet presenting the community to its bishop, but the effect is of no further import in the rest of the poem.

CN 20 is the shortest piece of the collection and stands out for its theme and language. The poem is addressed to the bishop, in particular to his intellectual side (*re'ṣyānā*, CN 20, 1, 2), in order to make known to the prelate his doctrinal duties. In short, he must fight against heresies in the community: this general theme carries with it a language and some arguments similar to those in the larger collection called *Against the Heretics* (*hymn. haer.*)<sup>75</sup>. Moreover, this piece describes the flock as “new”, hinting at the fresh consecration of the bishop, and uses the apostrophe “my brothers”, setting its enunciation in a public context.

The long CN 21 is divided into two parts. From the first stanza to stanza 13, the poem resumes many themes already mentioned in the collection. It is another moral exhortation against the vices, in particular lust, greed, and gluttony. The poem opens with the example of John the Forerunner and his earnestness against lustful people (stanza 1), and then there is a reference to Elijah and Elisha's poverty (stanza 2)<sup>76</sup>. However, since

74 “Here is your flock [*hā mar'it-āk*], o blessed, / rise and tend it, o diligent!” (CN 19, 3, 1–2). For the use of the exclamation *hā*, see Payne Smith 1879–1901, 959–960, s.v. 𐤇𐤁.

75 In particular, the theme of the name of the community, originating in Paul (1Cor 1:12–13), is extensively developed in *hymn. haer.* 22–24, in the same metre as CN 17–21. Were the *hymn. haer.* 22–24 written in Nisibis at the same time as CN 17–21? If we add that, according to the *Chronicle of Edessa* 18, 23, the bishop of Edessa until the year 361 was called Abraham, this idea seems less absurd. Now, *hymn. haer.* 22–24 cannot have been written for Nisibis, for they mention Palut as the founder of the addressed Christian community. In Nisibis, Ephrem would have mentioned Jacob; the *Doctrine of Addai*, however, gives Palut as the first bishop of Edessa. Therefore, *hymn. haer.* 22–24 must have been composed for the Edessan community (Hartung 2018, 320). However, CN 20, 2, 7 mentions “three farmers” (*'akkārā tlātā*) as the predecessors of the incumbent bishop. Since the idea of the three predecessors is a key motif in the poems dedicated to Nisibene bishops, it is highly likely that also this poem was written for Abraham of Nisibis, and not for Abraham of Edessa. Therefore, CN 20 and *hymn. haer.* 22–24 were not written in an unitarian endeavour. Anyway, it is possible (but cannot be proved) that the two groups were written in a time span of few years, maybe two (363 to 365).

76 “John was a lamp / that exposed and rebuked the perverse, // they hurried and quenched the lamp / that the whim of their appetites refused.” (CN 21, 1, 1–4); “A great bliss was concealed / in Elijah's poverty; // Elisha served him and claimed / a double reward for his service,” (CN 21, 2, 1–4).

stanza 3 sums up the three vices of gluttony, lust, and greed with biblical characters who have notably overcome them, it is possible that a stanza about gluttony is missing from our witnesses<sup>77</sup>. Now, the examples of chastity and poverty given in stanza 3 differ from the ones in stanzas 1 and 2: instead of John the Baptist, the chaste Joseph, and instead of Elijah and Elisha, Peter (see Act. 8:20). Thence we can surmise that the example of our hypothetical lost stanza was not Daniel, mentioned in stanza 3. Another example of Old Testament fasting could have been Esther (see Esth. 4:16), whose fasting is mentioned by Ephrem in *hymn. ieiun.* 4, 7–8 and in the second poem of the appendix to that same collection (*app.* 2, 5). Yet if we want to preserve the alternation between Old and New Testament paradigms shown by the other two stanzas (John and Joseph, Elijah and Peter), then we should choose a New Testament character to pair with Daniel. In this case, there is little doubt that the paradigm would have been Christ himself, as is often the case in the poems on the Lenten Fast. Finally, if the summary in the first six verses of stanza 3 preserves the order of the previous stanzas, then our lost stanza on Esther or Christ fasting would have been first, before the one on John.

The second part of the poem begins suddenly at stanza 14 with an exclamation (*hā*)<sup>78</sup>. In this part of the poem, Ephrem reflects upon the end of Julian's persecution, rejoicing at the turn of fates that Jovian's accession caused but also warning against the misbehaviours Christians may commit when the pressure of persecution is lifted (stanzas 14–18). After these considerations and some well-wishes to the new bishop, the last three stanzas compare the roles of bishop and king, drawing a parallel between the Constantinian dynasty with the latest emperor and the succession of bishops in Nisibis: Jacob and Constantine as founders, Valgash and Constantius II as sons, Abraham and Jovian. Now, both the beginning of this section, with the use of the exclamation, and the end of the poem, with its heartfelt prayer for peace and the extra line after the acclamation, make for a perfect beginning and end of an autonomous poem<sup>79</sup>. After all, the two parts of *CN* 21 seem very tenuously linked, so that two poems may conceivably have been confused in this one, with the loss of a little rubric<sup>80</sup>. If this was the case, then *CN* 21a (stanzas 1–13) was very similar to the previous poems of the collection, and it had no clear ending or beginning, whereas *CN* 21b (stanzas 14–23), the last piece of the collection, had a clear beginning and an ending fitting the whole collection.

77 “May gluttony succumb to your fasting, / as with the fasting of Daniel; // may lust be ashamed before your body, / as when it was ashamed before Joseph; // may greed succumb to you, / as when succumbed before Simon;” (*CN* 21, 3, 1–6).

78 “Here [*hā*], the news of a new king / goes thundering through the lands:” (*CN* 21, 14, 1–2).

79 The exclamation *hā* can be found at the beginning of a stanza many times (see, for example, *hymn. parad.* 9, 12; 12, 8; 13, 6; 15, 15), and they are particularly significant in *Resurr.* 2, 2.3.8, because the poem has the same metre as *CN* 17–21. Another poem with the same metre, *Crucif.* 2, begins with another exclamation (‘*ō*). *hymn. fid.* 73, 75 and 76 begin with our exclamation ‘*ā*. However, this kind of beginning is not widespread.

80 *CN* 19–21 are introduced by the brief rubric “from the same, in the same melody” (*menn-eh bar qāl-eh*), and *CN* 18 even omits the “from the same” (*menn-eh*).



As has been already said, the different texts in the collection of *CN* 13–21 were written at different times, and chronologically some of them may be nearer to the first part of the *CN* (1–12), while others may have been written at the same time as the *hymn. c. Iulian.* Were they later collected by the author himself, or is this grouping the result of a later editorial work? We don't have material witnesses to support one of these conclusions or the other, because our knowledge stops at the great fifth-to-sixth-century manuscripts. However, no one can deny the care with which these groupings have been compiled. The order of the first half of the *CN* is neither rigidly thematic nor rigidly chronological: *CN* 1–12 share the theme of the sieges and the raids, but they are also written between the third siege, in 350, and shortly after or during the raids in 359; *CN* 13–21 share the theme of bishops, but are also written between the accession of Valgash and Ephrem's departure from Nisibis (after 363). Moreover, the *hymn. c. Iulian.*, which share roughly the same date as *CN* 17–21, form a separate group. Smaller subsets of poems sharing the same metre are not ordered in a rigidly chronological sequence. Another sign of the care and skill with which the collection has been compiled is the uniformity of themes in different poems: there are literary and lexical motives returning from poem to poem, creating a sense of uniformity in the whole group of *CN* 13–21. We see these themes repeated, adapted to different occasions, elaborated, and combined with each other. It is difficult to attach these structuring themes to a particular moment of the poems' tradition: stanzas containing the themes might have been taken from other poems by an editor to give cohesion to the groups he was creating out of poems written around the same time, or the editor might have written some of them himself; or they could be the result of a later work of revision by Ephrem himself, who collected his poems on bishops and gave them internal consistency in view of a written publication; otherwise they could belong to the first composition and performance of the pieces, and their consistency can be explained by recurring themes and problems in Ephrem's preaching. Of these possibilities, I deem the last the most likely, as we don't possess proofs of a later revision by Ephrem himself, and it seems to me very hard to conclude that a later editor would have interspersed Ephrem's poems with his own creations or with patches from other poems in order to create an artificial cohesion. In any case, whoever worked to build the collection, even if he wasn't Ephrem himself, worked very well, so much so that we are drawn to think he preserved some kind of Ephremian lore to guide him in his operation: in other words, if the collection doesn't go back to Ephrem, it must be the work of Ephrem's "school" in Edessa<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> This is certain as regards smaller cycles of poems, as in this case the poems on bishops. It is doubtful whether the whole collection of *CN* or even its first half, is the work of an Ephremic school, though the very early evidence in this direction may suggest so. Hartung 2018 is way too pessimist as regards these collections: it is true that Ephrem worked probably on small sets of metrically and thematically related poems, and that the collections are likely more recent. Yet it is hard to believe that complex and personal poems such as the *CN* contain much spurious works, and that the collection are as preposterous as, say, the *Gedichtgruppe* in Gregory's tradition, when as early as a century after Ephrem's death the collections seem already well-established.

The first position in each of the two subsets of poems is given to a poem with a clear beginning and a clear ending, set on a clear occasion (CN 13 and 17), perhaps an occasion intended to be the setting of the following pieces as well. In contrast to Gregory's poem, CN 13 and 17 give no clear hints that these settings are fictional: first, because as we will see in the next part, the internal settings of the poems fit well with external sources on their delivery, whereas in the case of Gregory it is clear that he could not have recited (e.g.) a long iambic poem at the Council of Constantinople; second, because it is difficult to spot in Ephrem's pieces the same chronological discrepancies Gregory purposefully put in his poems. For example, in Gregory's II, 1, 12 the text is set before Nectarius's election, and yet it alludes unceasingly to Nectarius's credentials, so that the text clearly shows the fictionality of its setting. Yet, if we take, for example, CN 21, where a parallelism is drawn between the bishop Abraham and the new emperor Jovian, we could imagine that Ephrem has fictionally conflated the two elections of bishop and emperor so as to present them as a providential coincidence: nevertheless many other explications can be given, beginning with the fact that there is no clear hint that CN 21 is set at the inauguration of Abraham; inauguration rhetoric, such as the best wishes given to the bishop, could well have been used for some months after the inauguration, which could have taken place in the same year as Jovian's election; or maybe the part on the new emperor is in reality another poem. As we have seen, CN 14 contains a long digression, which gives a sense of orality. If the poem was never performed orally, then this would be a case of fictional setting. However, there are no certain grounds to exclude an oral delivery of CN 14, nor is there a clear motivation on the part of Ephrem to feign orality in a written poem. In any case, chronological fictions—even if present—are not thematised in Ephrem's texts as in Gregory's.

Finally, there is another poem concerned with a bishop, namely CN 31. The poem dates back to the last years of Ephrem's life, spent in Edessa. It is a rebuke of the community in Harran (Latin *Carrhae*), near the metropolitan see of Edessa, because they refused to comply with their Catholic bishop, Vitus. From the context of the other poems of rebuke against Harran (CN 32–34), we can infer that the problem with the city was the persistence of paganism and perhaps a schism between the community of Harran and the bishop of Edessa (CN 33, 7–9). However, the poem won't be studied in this work, because of Ephrem's different setting in space and time, his different themes and the different bishops to which it is addressed, and because it would be more earnestly studied with the other poems on Harran, which would broaden too much the scope of the work.

## 1.2 The audience

In the previous section, I presented the texts with particular attention to the internal setting—that is, the time, place, occasion, and audience the poems suggest. As regards Gregory, his poems are fictively set during true incidents, whereas Ephrem does not seem to imply such a fiction. His poems, though, suggest real-life occasions. In this

chapter, I will compare internal data with external witnesses, both from the same poets and from other writers, in order to delineate the real audience and performance context of the texts.

Traditional scholarship assigned to Gregory and Ephrem two completely different contexts: Gregory's poems would have had a private, almost solipsistic, function and only a written life, while Ephrem composed for performance, and his poems were sung during liturgies in front of the congregation. So, tradition presents us with a series of antitheses between Gregory and Ephrem: written versus oral, private versus public, poetry as part of liturgy and poetry independent of it<sup>82</sup>. However, recent research has revised these stereotypes, showing a more nuanced situation for both Gregory's and Ephrem's poems. This is partly because past syntheses treated the huge poetic outputs of the authors as homogeneous in terms of audience and performance. Recent scholarship acknowledges internal differences in the corpora. A consequence of this nuancing is that Ephrem and Gregory seem less different; one can acknowledge more readily their belonging to similar contexts and their geographic and chronological proximity.

### 1.2.1 Ephrem between altar and aisle

As has been noted, scholarship has always attributed to Ephrem's poetry a sung performance in the context of Christian liturgy. This stance goes back to the earliest external sources on Ephrem's activity: Jerome (ca. 345–420) and Jacob of Serugh (ca. 452–521). In his *De viris illustribus*, Jerome writes: "Ephrem, deacon of the church in Edessa, wrote much in the Syriac language, and came to such a fame, that his writings are publicly recited after the reading of Scriptures in some churches"<sup>83</sup>. This witness is very significant because it dates back to twenty years after Ephrem's death, and if Jerome observed Ephrem's recitations while he was in Syria in 373–379 (and not in Palestine, where he wrote the *De viris illustribus*), then these recitations spread as far as Antioch shortly after Ephrem's death<sup>84</sup>. Moreover, Jerome's account refers explicitly to Ephrem's Syriac, and therefore genuine, production, for he says, "in the Syriac language" (*Syro sermone*). Scholars quote this passage correctly as a witness of the employment of Ephrem's poetry

<sup>82</sup> For Ephrem see: Wickes 2018, 27n6; for Gregory: McGuckin 2001a, 376; Tuilier/Bady/Bernardi 2004, XL-XLI; McLynn 1997, 299.

<sup>83</sup> *Ephraem, Edessenae Ecclesiae diaconus, multa Syro sermone composuit, et ad tantam venit claritudinem, ut post lectionem Scripturarum publice in quibusdam ecclesiis ejus scripta recitentur* (Hieron. *vir. ill.* 115).

<sup>84</sup> The *De viris illustribus* is dated by its author at the beginning and at the end to the fourteenth year of Theodosius' reign, which is 394 (Hieron. *vir. ill. praef.* and 135). In those passages, Jerome declares to be in Bethlehem, however we know he travelled to the East before, in 373 (the year in which, according to the *Chronicle of Edessa*, Ephrem died). Jerome stopped in Antioch until 375, when he went to the Syrian Chalcis (some 250 Km west of Edessa on the important commercial road connecting the city to Beroea, modern-day Aleppo) to practise an anchoritic life. He went back to Antioch between 378 and 379. See Maraval 1995, 35–40.

in a liturgical context and in public: in fact, Jerome says that Ephrem's works were recited publicly (*publice . . . recitentur*), and he sets them in churches (*in quibusdam ecclesiis*) right after the readings (*post lectionem Scripturarum*), in the place reserved for the homily<sup>85</sup>. The scepticism towards Jerome's witness shown by recent scholars is ill-founded. First, the twenty-year gap between Ephrem and Jerome's writing is small in comparison to the corresponding gap that characterises much of the biographical information we possess on ancient authors. Moreover, Jerome's information is detailed, and there seems to have been no reason to forge it or exaggerate it. Finally, it agrees with inner clues in Ephrem's poetry.

Much later (fifth to sixth century), Jacob of Serugh presents an image similar to that of Jerome. Writing a poetic homily in honour of Ephrem, he comments on the characteristics of Ephrem's ministry, adding two more elements to the image given by Jerome: first, that Ephrem's poems were sung, and second, that the poet instructed a choir of women to sing them in the church<sup>86</sup>. Jerome and Jacob together give us the traditional setting of Ephrem's *madrāšē*: stanzaic poems that were sung during church services in place of homilies and whose performance was entrusted to a choir of women. However, the concrete modes of performance are far from clear; in other words, we can't assign precisely different parts of the poems—and in particular, the alternating stanzas and refrains—to different performers. Are we to think that the choir of women sang the stanzas and the congregation answered with the refrains? Or that the poet himself, as a deacon, sang the stanzas, and the choir the refrains? Or some mix of these two configurations? It is also possible that different poems or cycles of poems featured different performers or performance practices. Secondary sources give no further hint in this direction.

The very poems suggest the same setting as later witnesses. Frequent references to harps, singing, and music suggest that the poems were set to music; there are many examples among the corpus, but let these lines from *hymn. eccl. 30, 10* suffice:

ܡܫܥܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܡܫܥܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܡܫܥܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܡܫܥܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܡܫܥܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܡܫܥܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

(Ephrem, *hymn. eccl. 30, 10*)<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> The rite of ordination contained in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (*Const apost.* 8, 5) requires the bishop to preach after the readings. This is not only the oldest completely extant liturgy of Christianity, but also dated to the fourth century and thought to come from Antioch or the area thereof. It is worth noting that, if Ephrem's poems took the place usually reserved for the bishop's sermon, then they were meant as equivalent to the bishop's inspired teaching: a clear clue to whose agenda Ephrem's poetry represented.

<sup>86</sup> "Our sisters also were strengthened by you to give praise; / for women [*l-nešē*] were not allowed to speak in church [*b-ēdtā*]. // Your instruction opened the closed mouths of the daughters of Eve; / and behold, the gatherings of the glorious (church) resound with their melodies [*b-qālay-hēn*]." (Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on Saint Ephrem* 40–41; transl. Amar 1995, 35). See also lines 96–114 of the same poem.

<sup>87</sup> "My harp is poor: / let Your gift sing! // Enrich it with the sweet sounds [*qālē*] / of a praising speech // and from my harp I'll offer / You an offering of words // I'll sing [*ezammar*] what's Yours to You!"

Some form of participation by a group of virgin women is implied by many passages. Take, for example, two verses from *Nat.* 4, where Herod is contrasted to God, and the dance of Salome to “the voice [*qālā*] of virgins”<sup>88</sup>: here, the word *qālā* can be understood in its generic meaning of “voice”, but it is perhaps significant that the same word means also “tune”, “sound,” and “song”. One of the clearest clues to the involvement of virgins in the performance of *madrāšē* comes from two stanzas of *Resurr.* 2. Ephrem describes the festivities of Easter, stressing the contributions of “children” (*šabrē* at *Resurr.* 2, 7, 8 and *yallūdē* at 2, 8, 2) and of “virgin women” (*nakpātā*, 2, 8, 4). Yet while children contribute only with acclamations of “Hallelujah” (*qālē*, 2, 8, 2; *hullālē*, 2, 7, 9), the virgins provide “songs” (*qīnātā*, 2, 8, 4). Then, from the description Ephrem passes on to prescription: every rank of the community is called to add his contribution to the festivity. In this context, from every rank is requested something peculiar to that rank, as is made clear by the metaphor of flowers that everyone should collect “from his own piece of land” (*men dīl-eh*, 2, 8, 6; *habbābē d-ī’aw b-’ar-eh*, 2, 8, 7). The bishop, for example, should provide his sermons, and the deacons their reading, according to contemporary liturgical habits. Here again virgin women (*nakpātā*) are mentioned, and their proper contribution is “their *madrāšē*”<sup>89</sup>. This passage shows that *madrāšē*, the poetic genre most practiced by Ephrem and the genre of the poems on bishops, were assumed to be the province of virgin women, in the same way as the *munus docendi* and the homilies were the bishop’s province. In fact, external witnesses agree with this idea: fifth-century canonical documents, such as the *Canons of Rabbula* and the *Canons of Marutha of Maipherkat*, assign to the “Daughters of the Covenant” (*bnāt qyāmā*) catechetical tasks, and the twentieth canon of *Canons of Rabbula*, in particular, reserves the task of singing *madrāšē* to the daughters<sup>90</sup>. The canons, as well as their reference to the “Daughters of the Covenant”, mirrored by Ephrem’s use of the word *nakpātā*, “virgins”, hint at an organised institution, recognised by the community. This is important because it can widen the scope of Ephrem’s activities, as we shall presently see.

88 “the dance of impurity / pleased the tyrant; // You, o Lord, may please You / the voice [*qālā*] of virgins. // You, o Lord, may appease / the voice of virgins // You who kept their bodies / in holy chastity” (*Nat.* 4, 62–63).

89 “Now too at this festival / does the crowd of children scatter for You, Lord, // halleluiahs like blossoms. / Blessed is He who was acclaimed by young children. // It is as though our hearing [has embraced] / an armful of children’s voices, // while songs coming from chaste women, Lord, / fill the bosoms of our ears. // Let each of us gather up a posy of such flowers, / and with these let each intersperse // blossoms from his own piece of land, / so that, for this great feast, // we may plait a great garland. / Blessed is He who invited us to plait it! // Let the chief pastor weave together / his homilies like flowers, // let the priests make a garland of their ministry / the deacons of their reading // strong young men of their jubilant shouts / children of their psalms // chaste women of their songs / chief citizens of their benefactions // ordinary folk of their manner of life. / Blessed is He who gave us many opportunities for good!” (*Resurr.* 2, 7, 7–9, 10, transl. Brock/Kiraz 2006, 175–177).

90 On these themes, see Harvey 2005 (in particular 129–130) and McVey 2007.

The last element of the traditional frame, the liturgical setting, is more difficult to pinpoint in Ephrem's own words, partly because of our ignorance of fourth-century Syriac liturgy. As noted by Wickes, only the *Poems on Nativity*, *Poems on Easter*, and *Poems on the Unleavened Bread* refer clearly to a fourth-century festivity and to its celebration: the *Poems on Easter*, in particular, have been thoroughly studied in relation to liturgy by Rouwhorst<sup>91</sup>. However, it would be wrong to extend this setting aprioristically to all Ephrem's poems. The presence of a refrain in the structure of the *madrāšā* may suggest a liturgical employment, because through the refrain the congregation could be involved in the meditation. This could enhance the assent of the community to the doctrinal proposals put forth by the poems. Perhaps it is to such a dynamic between preacher and people that a passage of the *Homilies on Nicomedia* by Ephrem points: the tribune (the βῆμα) at the centre of the church is described as a spring, whence the ears of the community can drink life in the form of doctrine; then, Ephrem switches to a financial metaphor, saying that the ear got into debt and that the mouth must settle it, so that praise from the mouth corresponds to the doctrine coming from the tribune and feeding the ears<sup>92</sup>. Palmer interprets this passage as a reference to the performance of *madrāšē*, with a leading voice exposing doctrinal contents and the assembly answering with the refrains, often in the form of acclamations and praise<sup>93</sup>. Admittedly, this is not the only interpretation possible: the passage could also describe the ordinary dialectic of liturgy, with the homily coming from the *bema* and the congregation singing and praying. What this passage basically conveys is that doctrine and teaching can come only from a *bema*, whereas the congregation is supposed to praise and pray. Furthermore, the refrains, as such, cannot be seen as a sure hint of a liturgical context, especially since in many cases (such as CN 17–21), the wording of the refrain changes for every repetition. It would be inconceivable that the congregation could chant the refrain unless instructed beforehand or, even more unlikely, provided with a written copy of the refrains. In conclusion, some *madrāšē* certainly had a liturgical use; many more could have had it; but we cannot be sure that *all* poems were performed during the liturgy.

In fact, recent scholarship has questioned the liturgical setting of many of Ephrem's *madrāšē*. Wickes criticises the traditional division of Ephrem's works into poetic ones, aimed at the larger audience of a congregation during its liturgy, and prose treatises, written for a few advanced students, probably ascetics<sup>94</sup>. He questions the tendency to compare Ephrem's poems to John Chrysostom's sermons, as two corpora set in the

<sup>91</sup> Wickes 2018, 38; Rouwhorst 1989.

<sup>92</sup> “Le bēma que l'on avait construit au milieu / était une source au milieu. // Des oreilles avides accoururent près de lui, / et y burent la vie // Ils y burent l'enseignement, / ils en reçurent et lui rendirent. // La bouche paya à la place des oreilles, / la louange en échange de l'homélie.” (*Homily on Nicomedia* 8, 619–626; transl. in Renoux 1975).

<sup>93</sup> Palmer 1998, 128–130.

<sup>94</sup> Wickes 2018.

liturgy and with a similar function of education of urban masses. In particular, Wickes says that, since Ephrem was not a bishop, his function in the community cannot be assimilated to that of so important a bishop as Chrysostom. No doubt, Ephrem could not muster the same authority as Chrysostom in Antioch. However, he may not have been so far from the authority of a bishop as Wickes assumes he was: Ephrem remained a deacon throughout his life, and deacons had great importance in many early Christian communities, often greater than that of priests. One need only remember the examples of Saint Lawrence and Damasus in Rome and Athanasius in Alexandria, or of Gregory the Great later, to notice the great power of some deacons. This power usually sprang from two sources: first, deacons were entrusted with the finances of the congregation, and hence they were responsible for the almsgiving and could command the support of urban masses; second, a deacon often served as a sort of secretary for the bishop, and in this capacity, he could develop a preferential channel to the bishop and his authority<sup>95</sup>. If we keep this in mind, we see that Ephrem's praises for his bishops and his defence of Valgash *against* the community in CN 15–16 (see §4.2) demonstrate the poet's strong link with the episcopal see in Nisibis and suggest that he acted as a kind of mouthpiece for the bishop's agenda. His poetry stood in an ambiguous position: it was not the voice of the bishop himself, as it purportedly spoke for the congregation, the women, or the poet; however, it was clearly linked with the bishop's agenda. Thus, Ephrem's poetry represented itself as a spontaneous reaction by the laity, while channeling that reaction in a way suited to the bishop's requirements. Therefore, it is true—as Wickes says—that this poetry cannot be put side by side with Chrysostom's episcopal sermons; however, this is not enough to exclude its appeal to the masses or its link with the bishop's authority.

Indeed, there are other reasons to doubt of the uniformity of Ephrem's poetic corpus. As Wickes has clearly demonstrated, the *hymn. fid.* stand out from the rest of the corpus for their theological sophistication and their lack of liturgical references. Moreover, these poems often refer to the theme of teaching and doctrine, and in some cases, they seem to be addressed to someone who will in turn teach other people. As such, *hymn. fid.* (and maybe other poems scattered throughout the corpus) would find their setting not in the aisle, but in the classroom. Since there isn't any witness in the fourth century on a formalised Syriac education, in which Ephrem's poems could be of use, the setting cannot be a literal classroom, such as the ones in which late antique children learnt to read Homer and Hesiod<sup>96</sup>. Ephrem's poems point to an educational

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<sup>95</sup> On deacons in general: Symonds 1955; Koet/Murphy/Ryökäs 2018; Smeets/Koet 2021. Admittedly, there is not much on the topic coming specifically from Ephrem's time and space. A useful document may be the *Didascalia apostolorum*, describing the relationship of deacon and bishop as that of the Father to the Son. For the tendency of the bishop in the Syriac church of the time to delegate teaching, see §3.1.3.2.

<sup>96</sup> Barhadbshabba, in his *Reason of the Foundation of the Schools*, 63.67, dated to the sixth century, reports that Ephrem was made head of the school of Nisibis by the bishop Jacob and that, after his

institution with peculiar characteristics: it was prevalently Syriac-speaking; its students were meant to teach other; the curriculum was advanced, comprising biblical exegesis and theology; and, last but not least, the community had ascetic leanings. Wickes identifies such a community with the *bnay qyāmā*, the early Syrian ascetics, through a comparison of Ephrem's ascetic ideals and those expressed by Aphrahat in his *Demonstrations*, together with other earlier Syriac witnesses<sup>97</sup>. Perhaps the link witnessed by the sources between *madrāšē* and women, and in particular with the female ascetics of the *qyāmā*, can be brought up in this respect: Ephrem's teaching, conveyed by the *madrāšē*, was aimed at the *bnāt qyāmā* in particular. As Harvey has noted, these ascetics had forms of organisation even before the arrival of Egyptian monasticism. The women had catechetical responsibilities towards other women and helped to keep communities alive in villages and peripheral centres, where ordinary clergy could not always be present. Moreover, the canonical documents of the fifth century require a minimal hierarchy for these women, with a female teacher and supervisor, who was made deaconess<sup>98</sup>. Perhaps *madrāšē* particularly concerned with education and treating difficult subjects of theology and exegesis could have been aimed at educating the deaconesses, who were in turn to educate their sisters and the women in the community. After all, groups of ascetic women interested in theology who were united around a prominent thinker are found not only in Syriac Christianity but in many other places and times of the early church: Eusebius relates that Origen had to castrate himself because of the many women attending his teachings<sup>99</sup>; Jerome and Rufinus made a living off of Roman women of senatorial rank, like Paula and Melania; maybe they learnt their business from Damasus, who was maliciously known as *auriscalpius matronarum*<sup>100</sup>; the deacon Glycerius gathered a group of virgins around him as their "patriarch"; so relates Basil.<sup>101</sup> Assuming this educational context, it is still difficult to define the concrete circumstances of poetic performance: it is likely that such groups are responsible for collecting and organising Ephrem's works in the form known from fifth- and sixth-century

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move to Edessa, he kept teaching there, forming a school. Sozomen (3, 1, 16) witnesses that Ephrem had pupils. However, Barhadbshabba could be projecting the scholastic reality of his days onto Ephrem, and Sozomen doesn't mention any formal educational institution. These data are interesting, because they demonstrate a perception of the educational value of Ephrem's writings and as a historical figure; nonetheless, to argue a fully functioning school from these passages would be too long a stretch.

<sup>97</sup> Wickes 2018, 44–51. Palmer 1998, 133–134 recognises a didactic use in the inner circle of the Children of the Covenant to Ephrem's poetry, but he divides the oral performance (aimed at the congregation at large) from the written collection and organisation of poems for the ascetics.

<sup>98</sup> Harvey 2005, 129–130. For a more general assessment of the role of women in the Syriac world, Harvey 1993.

<sup>99</sup> διὰ τὸ νέον τὴν ἡλικίαν ὄντα μὴ ἀνδράσι μόνον, καὶ γυναῖδι δὲ τὰ θεῖα προσομιλεῖν, ὥς ἂν πᾶσαν τὴν παρὰ τοῖς ἀπίστοις αἰσχροῦς διαβολῆς ὑπόνοιαν ἀποκλείσειεν, τὴν σωτήριον φωνὴν ἔργοις ἐπιτελέσαι ὠρμήθη (Eus. *h. e.* 6, 8, 2).

<sup>100</sup> *Coll. Avell.* 1, 10, 4–5; Fontaine 1988; Rapp 2005, 216; see also: Amm. Marc. 27, 3, 14.

<sup>101</sup> Rapp 2005, 202; Basil, *ep.* 169–171.



manuscripts, but there isn't any clue on the poems' oral performance. One can surmise that short cycles, like the *Poems on Paradise*, or the "Poems on the Pearl" now at the end of the *Poems on Faith*, were delivered as a series of lectures on a given theme, each lecture being something between a show and a theology lesson. Though aimed at an inner circle, performances on hot topics could attract a wider public, even of adversaries, giving rise to controversies. Such, for example, were the conditions under which Gregory's *or.* 27–31 were given, according to McGuckin<sup>102</sup>.

To sum up, ancient sources and modern scholarship propose two extreme models of delivery for Ephrem's poems: on one side, the liturgical pieces, whose chief examples are the *Poems on Nativity* and *Poems on Easter*, were addressed to the whole community and were correspondingly easier, performed during the liturgy after Bible readings, likely with the involvement of a choir of women and the participation of the assembly; on the other side, the educational pieces, many of which are among the *Poems on Faith*, aimed at instructing an inner circle of lay ascetics, and in particular the deaconesses leading the *bnāt qyāmā*, in order to prepare them for their tasks in the community. For both occasions, the concrete modes of performance are not clear, maybe because they could change from piece to piece: Palmer, for example, imagines that some pieces required a male soloist for the stanzas and a trained choir for the refrains; or the congregation, guided by the choir, sang the refrains; or the choir delivered the stanzas and the congregation the refrains; sometimes a female soloist could be used, or the soloist could change from stanza to stanza, enhancing the dramatic and dialogic structure of some poems<sup>103</sup>. The question is, To which model do the poems on the bishops belong? Are they meant for the aisle or for the classroom?

The poems on bishops contained in the *CN* are very different from the *Poems on Faith* that Wickes set in an educative context. In particular, *CN* 13–21 lack almost completely the concerns for right teaching and for the right use of words that are so apparent in the *Poems on Faith*. They never treat philosophical themes and only rarely theological ones: the notable exception is *CN* 20, a short guide to orthodoxy clearly addressed to Bishop Abraham. Even here, however, the approach is more polemical than educational. The poems dedicated to Bishop Abraham (*CN* 17–21) are particularly clear in their setting: they purport to be the voice of the community; hence their systematic use of the first-person plural, entreating and praising the community's bishop in the second-person singular. Many passages imply this setting, as when in *CN* 19, 1 and 3 Ephrem presents "his flock" to the bishop, in a way that suggests both the bishop and the flock are present<sup>104</sup>. That this flock is not limited to ascetics is made clear in stanza 3, where different ranks in the church are listed, and in stanza 6, where it is said

<sup>102</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 277–278.

<sup>103</sup> Palmer 1998, 128–130.

<sup>104</sup> "Aptly your name is Abraham, / for you are father of many; // yet, since you had no spouse / like was Sarah for Abraham, // here, your spouse is your flock!" (*CN* 19, 1, 1–5); "Here is your flock, o blessed, / rise and tend it, o diligent!" (*CN* 19, 3, 1–2).

that “the third and fourth part” of the flock is consecrated<sup>105</sup>. Then, in stanzas 12–14, the concern for the whole community is even more apparent, because, after having associated “people [*ammā*] and priest in harmony” (CN 19, 12, 9), the poet quotes Paul’s declaration of love for the church in Corinth (CN 19, 13 and 2 Cor. 11:2) and finally explicitly speaks of “church” (*‘ēdtā*, CN 19, 14, 4) and of “priest” and “flock” (CN 19, 14, 8). CN 20 has a similar presentation of the flock to the bishop (CN 20, 3), and the flock certainly comprises the whole congregation, because it is defined by the redemption accomplished by Christ’s blood<sup>106</sup>. After all, in stanza 4, it is clear that this flock is the church (CN 20, 4, 4)<sup>107</sup>. It is safe to interpret the word “church” as meaning the whole congregation, because at CN 21, 5, Ephrem lists again the ranks of a Christian community (the bishop, priests, deacons, infants and elderly people, the virgins), and the ascetics are mentioned as “the covenant” (*qyāmā*, CN 21, 5, 8), while the last line, clearly summarising the preceding lines, speaks of “church” (*‘ēdtā*, CN 21, 5, 9)<sup>108</sup>. Of these poems, only CN 17 departs from the scheme, because its perspective shifts between the “us” of the community and the “you” of the bishop, and the “I” of the poet becomes prominent. Anyway, in the light of CN 18–21, frequent mentions of the flock and the use of the first-person plural hint at a public occasion where the whole community was present. One could suggest that the lyrical “I” was not meant to be the poet but a deaconess of the *bnāt qyāmā*, but the self-effacing in stanzas 1 and 12, coupled with the self-attribution of the title of “Harp of God” (*kēnnār-eh*, CN 17, 12, 10), are so much Ephreman that it is inconceivable to attribute them to another poetic persona. Furthermore, this title of “Harp of God” gives a hint on the delivery of these poems, since it is in a refrain. In these poems, the refrain coincides with the last line of each stanza, and every refrain is different. Given the personal title employed at CN 17, 12, 10 and the lack of repetition in the refrains, it is more likely that they were recited or sung by the soloist, or by a rehearsed choir, than by the whole assembly. Regarding the nature of the gathering, there are no

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**105** “Here is your flock, o blessed, / rise and tend it, o diligent! // Jacob ordered the sheepfolds, / you order this rational stock, // make the chaste shine purely, / the virgins modestly, // lead the priests purely, / the suffragan bishops modestly, // and the people righteously. (CN 19, 3); “Moses committed to Joshua // a sheepfold whose half was wolves, / whereas to you a flock was entrusted // whose third and fourth part is consecrated.” (CN 19, 6, 6–9).

**106** “It is meet for a new shepherd / to inspect the flock anew, // to know how great is its number / and to see which is its need. // This is the flock redeemed by the blood / of Him, Who is Master of the shepherds.” (CN 20, 3, 1–6).

**107** “Here’s the betrothed of your Lord, / keep her from all harms, // and from any man violating her, calling / the churches by their own names.” (CN 20, 4, 1–4).

**108** “Be thou a crown for priesthood/ and through you be glorified the worship, // be thou a brother for the priests, / a chief for the deacons, too, // be thou a master for the infancy, / a staff and help for old age, // be thou a bulwark for the virgins, / may the covenant in your tenure be splendid, // and the church by your beauty adorned” (CN 21, 5). In the same way, CN 19, 3 listed the different components of the community, ending with the “people” (*ammā*) as a summary: “make the chaste shine purely, / the virgins modestly, // lead the priests purely, / the suffragan bishops modestly, // and the people righteously.” (6–9).

straightforward clues pointing at a liturgical context. One could surmise such a context by the hymnic nature of some stanzas in *CN* 17 and the contents treated (§1.1.2). The image of the bishop's praise as the offering of a garland recalls similar images in *Resurr.* 2 and could point to a liturgical context. Moreover, the frequent enumerations of the ranks of the community (priests, deacons, ascetics, old and young, rich and poor) presuppose their presence, as the direct addresses presuppose the presence of the bishop: where could the bishop meet the whole congregation outside liturgy? Certainly not in a classroom. Given our information in ancient sources on Ephrem's delivery, these poems could have been delivered only during a liturgy.

*CN* 15–16 present us with a similar situation: here again there is an “us”, but the bishop is addressed in the third-person singular most of the time. Significantly, the only exception is the refrain of *CN* 15, “Blessed is he who chose you, pride of our people [*‘amm-an*]!”. A more straightforward expression of the relationship between community and bishop could not have been found. In this case, as for the refrain of *CN* 16, it is likely that the assembly took part in the singing. That the situation is similar to that of *CN* 17–21 is shown also by the vocative “my brethren” (*‘aḥay*), appearing both at *CN* 15, 10, 1 and at *CN* 16, 9, 2: the same vocative was used at *CN* 20, 6, 1, and since there it referred to the whole congregation, it is safe to assume that here, too, refers not to a limited group of ascetics, and certainly not to female ascetics, but to the whole congregation. Furthermore, Ephrem's poems here seem to expand beyond the Christian community to take even a civic scope: in fact, at *CN* 15, 20, 4, he mentions the behaviour of “citizens” or, more literally, “those inside” (*gawwāyē*) as opposed to “those outside” (*barrāyē*)<sup>109</sup>. In the poems on the sieges, the situation to which these lines refer, these two substantivated adjectives represented the besieged, who are “inside” the wall, and the besiegers, who are “outside” it. However, these two terms have also a cultural and a religious meaning, because Ephrem tends to conflate the political identity of the community—that is, Nisibis as a city of the Roman Empire defending itself against a Persian attack—with its cultural and religious identity—namely, as a Roman culture and ethnicity opposed to an alien Persian one and as a form of Nicene Christianity opposed to heathenism. Needless to say, these three groupings were by no means coextensive in reality. In any case, the opposition *gawwāyē/barrāyē* is a clear sign that the whole community of Nisibis is meant. The prevalent use of the third person to speak of the bishop in these poems is grounded in their topic. Since these poems are a rebuke to the people and a defence of Bishop Valgash, Ephrem speaks directly to the community, including himself in it<sup>110</sup>. In order for this to be effective, the community had to attend; and to make it even more effective, the same community that questioned the bishop probably

<sup>109</sup> “It's because the citizens (*gawwāyē*) neglected each other, // that the foreigners (*barrāyē*) too trod them down.” (*CN* 15, 20, 4–5). See §4.3 n. 109 for this antithesis.

<sup>110</sup> See §1.1.2. On the inside/outside antithesis: §4.3 n. 109; on the crisis of Valgash's episcopate §4.2.

acclaimed him with the refrain. But, since the refrain is directed to the bishop, he too should have been there.

In *CN* 16, at stanza 14 and until stanza 21, the first person shifts from the plural to the singular. This peculiarity ushers us into *CN* 13–14, the most problematic grouping regarding delivery. The first-person singular speaker of *CN* 16, 14–21 speaks of herself as a developing subject, passing through different ages and stages, each of which is directed and instructed by one of the bishops. The same rhetorical device is employed at *CN* 14, 17–24—here, however, with the third-person singular feminine. It is used also at *CN* 13, 3–4 and 15, 15–17—here, however, in the first-person plural. Hence, when Ephrem speaks in the first person at *CN* 16, 14–21, he is speaking in the person of the church of Nisibis, as demonstrated by the use of the feminine third person in *CN* 14, 17–24, since *ʿēdtā*—the Syriac word for “church”—is a feminine, and the church is ordinarily represented as a woman<sup>111</sup>. Therefore, as in *CN* 15 and 16 the whole community was meant to be present, so in *CN* 13 and 14 the first-person plural and the third-person singular feminine seem to point to a presence of the community. However, there are also clues in *CN* 13–14 that go in the opposite direction. For example, Ephrem never speaks to the bishop in the second person, nor are the refrains addressed directly to the prelates. Neither does he speak directly to the community, except maybe at *CN* 13, 11–12. He does employ direct address, but the addressees are the “eloquent daughters of Nisibis” (*mallālātā bnāt-nṣībīn*). Given the attribute “eloquent” and the indirect reference to the choir of women in the Song of Songs, i.e. the “daughters of Sion” or “daughters of Jerusalem”, it is probable that these Nisibene women are in fact the *bnāt qyāma*<sup>112</sup>. The attribute “eloquent” could be a clue to a group of ascetics particularly focused on literacy and study. Such a group of ascetics, as demonstrated by Wickes, could be the target of Ephrem’s didactic poems, as were similar groups in late antique Mediterranean<sup>113</sup>. Ephrem speaks clearly in his own persona, because at the end of *CN* 14 there is the stock self-effacing prayer: therefore, he cannot represent the whole community in this case. Finally, the long digression in *CN* 14 is perhaps the most theologising section of the poems on bishops, and its complexity could work well in a more advanced context. How can one make sense of these conflicting hints? A key to the understanding of the context of these poems can be found in *CN* 13, 10–11:

<sup>111</sup> At *CN* 14, 20, 1 the word is *marʿtā*, literally “flock”, but the word is regularly used to mean “diocese” (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3948, s.v. ܡܪܬܐ); this too is a feminine (more on this at §2.2.1.3). Murray 2004, 131–158 explains the complex feminine imagery used to describe the church in early Syriac literature. On the contrary, Wickes 2015, 8–9n30 interprets the first-person singular of *CN* 16 as referring to Ephrem himself, therefore pointing at his personal development – from child to man – under the three bishops of Nisibis. Reading *CN* 16 in the context of the other poems on bishops clearly refutes this interpretation.

<sup>112</sup> Cant. 3:10–11. More on these allusions at §4.3.

<sup>113</sup> Wickes 2018, 44–51. On *mallālātā* see §4.3 nn. 119–120.

ܠܗܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ	ܠܗܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ 10
ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ	ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ	ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܠܗܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ	ܠܗܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ 11
ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ	ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
<sup>114</sup> ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ	ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

(CN 13, 10–11)

Here, Ephrem refers to a “daughter born of vows” (*bartā ba(r)t-nedrē*), an expression which seems to single out the ascetics in the community: a *bar/ba(r)t-nedrē* is the child of sterile parents who have vowed that if God would give them a child, they would give the child to God; a *bar/ba(r)t-nedrē* is destined to take the vows<sup>115</sup>. However, the reference to different “ranks”, to “generations,” and to the “teachers”—namely, the bishops—applies to the whole community in Nisibis. The rhetoric of the fit ornament and the apt help is used to talk about the different bishops and their different approaches to the community. Furthermore, the comparison with the “daughter of Abraham” is decisive: the “daughter of Abraham” must be a periphrasis to mean the synagogue, and therefore Judaism; but if the “daughter born of vows” is compared to the synagogue, she cannot be only the ascetic community, but must be the church at large. This is demonstrated later, when at stanza 18 Ephrem mentions Nisibis by name. Both the name “daughter born of vows” and the *peroratio* to women ascetics at the end of CN 13 highlight the presence of the “daughters of the covenant” in the performance, but this does not exclude that the community at large attended, too. In fact, CN 13 and maybe also CN 14 must have been set during a liturgy in which the community and the bishop were present, but the *bnāt qyāmā* had a prominent role, as I have argued in the previous section.

In conclusion, even if it must be acknowledged that the liturgical setting was not the only context of performance of Ephrem’s poems, as recent scholarship has shown, nevertheless, the poems on bishops in the CN show strong signs of such a setting. This comes as no surprise: their very content has strong ties with the community at large, and it mattered to all Christians in Nisibis. In these poems, Ephrem has a mediating function between the bishop’s agenda and the community. He poses either as a third party between the two or as part of the community, while at the same time he promotes the bishop’s agenda. Thanks to his intermediate position, he could present episcopal proposals as spontaneous requests from the community, in fact manipulating

<sup>114</sup> “Who is she, daughter born of vows, / enviable by all females, // whose generation flowed thus / and whose ranks increased thus // and whose progress rose thus, / and whose teachers shone thus? /// Is it to the daughter of Abraham alone / that these images are applied, // or even unto you, daughter born of vows? / For her ornament corresponds to her beauty, // because her help is like her time, / and her servant is like her help.”

<sup>115</sup> This sense of the expression is listed at Payne-Smith 1879–1901, 2293 s.v. ܠܗܝܬܐ. After all, *bar-/ba(r)t-* at the constructed state does not express only origin from, but also membership in something, as in the expression *bnay-qyāmā*.

communal response to the bishops. He achieved this in part by proposing sung refrains to the community, as exemplified in CN 15–16.

### 1.2.2 Gregory's theatre of words

As regards Gregory's production, the scholar can rely on contemporary Greek and Latin literary practices, which are much more documented than Syriac ones. This allows for a clearer picture of Gregory's audience and modes of performance and publication. Such information is useful not only for his letters and speeches but also for his poetry. Clearly, different groups of poems had different targets and aims; nonetheless, some general remarks can be made, before we concentrate on the poems on bishops.

Late antique literature was disseminated in written form. Authors prepared copies of their works (or of a collection of works) and spread them through their social network, at times accompanying the work with a letter to the first reader, which could be the dedicatee or commissioner of the work. An author could lend his own copy of the work to one or more friends, who copied it and perhaps spread it to their friends. This was what Gertz, in his analysis of Gregory's tradition, called the "snowball" system of publication: the single exemplar, like a snowball, replicated through the social network of the author, becoming an avalanche of copies in the case of a successful work<sup>116</sup>. For example, Origen, Jerome, and Rufinus wrote on commission: they dictated to stenographers, probably making several copies of the same work simultaneously, then sent the finished product to the commissioner with a dedicatory letter, many of which are still extant<sup>117</sup>. On the other side, we know from two of Synesius's letters that he lent his own copy of some of his poems to a friend who had the booklet copied (but failed to give it back)<sup>118</sup>. One might guess that the first mode of publication concerned writers coming from a lower background who, more or less, wrote for a living. After all, Eusebius explicitly links Origen's productivity with Ambrosius's commissions<sup>119</sup>. Better-off authors, such as Synesius (a landowner), circulated their works among acquaintances

<sup>116</sup> Gertz 1986, 172–173.

<sup>117</sup> For Origen, see Orig. in *Joh. comm.* 5, 1; 6, 2, 6; c. *Cels. praef.* and the first sections of books 3–7 and 8, 76. For Jerome, the prefaces to his translations are emblematic. For Rufinus: Orig. *princ. praef. Ruf.* 2.

<sup>118</sup> αἰτῶ γὰρ τὸ ἐν ἰάμβοις ἐκεῖνο συνταγμάτων, δι' οὗ πρὸς τὴν ψυχὴν ὁ γεγραφὼς διαλέγεται. ... Ἀντίγραφον οὖν τῆς τετραδὸς ἀπόσπειλον, πρὸς αὐτῆς τῆς ψυχῆς, ἣν κοσμεῖν βούλεται τὸ βιβλίον (Synes. *ep.* 141, 5; 14); ἐν τῷ τετραδίῳ τῶν ἱαμβείων εὔρον... (143, 52).

<sup>119</sup> Ἐξ ἐκείνου δὲ καὶ Ὡριγένει τῶν εἰς τὰς θείας γραφὰς ὑπομνημάτων ἐγίνετο ἀρχή, Ἀμβροσίου παρορμῶντος αὐτὸν μυρίαὶ ὅσαι οὐ προτροπαῖς ταῖς διὰ λόγων καὶ κατακλήσεσιν αὐτὸ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀφθονωτάταις τῶν ἐπιτηδείων χορηγίαις. ταχυγράφοι τε γὰρ αὐτῷ πλείους ἢ ἑπτὰ τὸν ἀριθμὸν παρήσαν ὑπαγορεύοντι, χρόνοις τεταγμένοις ἀλλήλους ἀμείβοντες, βιβλιογράφοι τε οὐχ ἥττους ἅμα καὶ κόραις ἐπὶ τὸ καλλιγραφεῖν ἡσκημέναις ὧν ἀπάντων τὴν δέουσιν τῶν ἐπιτηδείων ἀφθονον περιουσίαν ὁ Ἀμβρόσιος παρεστήσατο· ναὶ μὴν καὶ ἐν τῇ περὶ τὰ θεῖα λόγια ἀσκήσει τε καὶ σπουδῇ προθυμίαν ἄφατον αὐτῷ συνεισέφερεν, ἥ καὶ μάλιστα αὐτὸν προύτρεπεν ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν ὑπομνημάτων σύνταξιν. (Eus. *h. e.* 6, 23,

or groups of peers sharing the same preoccupations: in the case of Synesius, he sent his works to people in Hypatia's circle—that is, other landowners with an interest in Neoplatonic philosophy<sup>120</sup>. Gregory's situation was more similar to that of Synesius: he was no middle-class professional like Jerome, Rufinus, or Augustine, but rather a wealthy landowner. As such, he did not depend on a commissioner for his literary activity and could rely on a wide and strong network of like-minded peers to spread his products, as his letters show<sup>121</sup>. These acquaintances could appreciate the intricacies of Gregory's rhetoric at its best, thanks to their classical education and, in many cases, to their Christian upbringing: hence, it is only appropriate that Gregory addresses his readers in the programmatic II, 1, 39 as “experts” (σοφοί, lines 52, 58, and 78).

For all its relevance, especially as regards the beginnings of the manuscript tradition, the writing and circulating of copies were just one way that late antique texts became known. For, while book reading in modern times seems a chiefly private and silent activity, the sources give clear indications that in late antiquity it was not so. The texts, though written, were enjoyed through an oral performance. Actually, the relationship between orality and writing was much more complex: the two mediums interacted not only in the final steps of publication and transmission, but also in the initial one of

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1–2). Though likely well-born, Origen had to rely on teaching and a patroness to sustain his family after his father's martyrdom and the confiscation of the family's properties: 6, 1, 12–14.

**120** The addressee of Synesius' *ep.* 141 and 143 is Herculianus, a fellow-disciple of Hypatia (see *ep.* 137, 7–9: αὐτόπται γάρ τοι καὶ αὐτήκοοι γεγόναμεν τῆς γνησίας καθηγεμόνος τῶν φιλοσοφίας ὀργίων, a clear reference to Hypatia). *ep.* 154, addressed to Hypatia herself, seems the accompanying letter to a copy of the *De insomniis* and the *Dion*: Τῆτες ἐξήνεγκα δύο βιβλία, τὸ μὲν ὑπὸ θεοῦ κινηθεῖς, τὸ δὲ ὑπὸ λοιδορίας ἀνθρώπων. (154, 1–2). After having recalled the circumstances under which he wrote the *Dion*, Synesius explicitly entrusts the work to Hypatia, in order that she may judge it and then he could proceed to a wider (but equally exclusive) publication: ὑπὲρ δὴ τούτων ἀπάντων σε κρίνουσαν περιμενοῦμεν. κἂν μὲν ψηφίση προοιστέον εἶναι, ῥήτορσιν ἅμα καὶ φιλοσόφοις ἐκκείσεται· τοὺς μὲν γὰρ ἥσει, τοὺς δὲ ὀνήσει, πάντως γε, εἰ μὴ παρὰ σοῦ τῆς δυναμένης κρίνειν διαγεγράψεται. εἰ δὲ μὴ φανεῖται σοι τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀκοῆς ἄξιον, καὶ σὺ δὲ δῆπου μετ' Ἀριστοτέλους πρὸ τοῦ φίλου τὴν ἀλήθειαν θήσῃ, πυκνὸν καὶ βαθὺ σκότος ἐπηλυγάζεται, καὶ λήσεται τοὺς ἀνθρώπους λεγόμενον. (90–98). And, ending the letter, he says: σὺ γὰρ δὴ μετ' ἐμὲ πρώτη τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐντεύξῃ. ταῦτα τῶν τέως ἀνεκδότων ἀπέστειλα. καὶ ἵνα τέλειος ὁ ἀριθμὸς ᾗ, προσέθηκα τὸν περὶ τοῦ Δώρου, πάλαι γεγόμενον ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς πρεσβείας πρὸς ἄνδρα παρὰ βασιλεῖ παραδυναστεύοντα· καὶ τι τοῦ λόγου τε καὶ τοῦ δώρου Πεντάπολις ὦνατο. (113–118). Another kind of publication mentioned in this letter was theft (or the claim of a theft): not only Synesius claims that someone stole and spread some of his works, prompting criticism (11–18), but a similar story is told by Jerome in his famous *ep.* 57, 2–4. There, he retorted to criticisms against his translation of a letter of Epiphanius of Salamis (Jerome's *ep.* 51) accusing his critics of having stolen the text. The “stolen manuscript” trope can clearly be a self-defensive commonplace, but it bears witness to the difficulty of authors to keep track of the readership of their works, a difficulty largely due to the “snowball” system of publication in late antiquity.

**121** On Gregory's social network as shown by his letters see McLynn 2001; 2006 and 2012a. More recently, Störin 2017b. Gregory's versified letters give us a glimpse of the kind of readership he intended, as says Demoen 1996, 67–69. These Cappadocians social networks, and the complex language they employed to communicate and negotiate are analysed in Van Dam 2002, 71–156; Van Dam 2003a, 131–154.

composition, because dictation played a strong role in it, and we know of texts—mostly homilies—written down by stenographers during their oral delivery, thus passing from written notes to oral performance to written record and transmission to renewed oral performances<sup>122</sup>. Oral performance was the expected publication context of rhetorical and literary texts, much more than it was for technical treatises such as pagan and Christian running commentaries. Letters, poems, and speeches were meant to be showcased in front of an audience. Oral performance of late antique poetry has been thoroughly demonstrated by Agosti, who highlights the survival even of forms of poetic competition<sup>123</sup>. As regards homilies and orations, public performance was intrinsic to the genre, even if not all orations composed in late antiquity were meant for a performance. An eccentric prose work by Synesius, the *On Providence*, was certainly read in instalments among literary circles of Constantinople<sup>124</sup>. Even letters were sometimes read in front of an audience: this is clear from *ep.* 101 by Synesius, a message addressed to Pylemenes, a lawyer in Constantinople. Synesius praises the addressee for his eloquence, as displayed in his last letter: in fact, the letter has become a matter of widespread admiration, after Synesius gathered a “Hellenic theatre” (θέατρον Ἑλληνικόν) of literary enthusiasts to hear it<sup>125</sup>. At the end of the letter, Synesius explains why he renounced sending a letter

**122** See, for example, Eusebius’ remark on Origen’s homilies: ὑπὲρ τὰ ἐξήκοντά φασιν ἔτη τὸν Ὀριγένην γενόμενον, ἅτε δὴ μεγίστην ἡδὴ συλλεξάμενον ἐκ τῆς μακρᾶς παρασκευῆς ἔξιν, τὰς ἐπὶ τοῦ κοινοῦ λεγομένας αὐτῷ διαλέξεις ταχυγράφοις μεταλαβεῖν ἐπιτρέψαι, οὐ πρότερόν ποτε τοῦτο γενέσθαι συγκεχωρηκότα (Eus. *h. e.* 6, 36, 1). Gaudentius of Brescia’s sermons survive because a wealthy member of the congregation requested them in written and re-worked form after their delivery by the bishop around the time of Easter: Lizzi 1998, 100. On recitations and dictation see Cavallo 1992, 44–47 (the pages refer to the Early Empire, but with the exclusion of the role of private writing workshops – as explained at 113–118 –, they aptly describe the late antique situation) and Cavallo 2019, 101–103. Cavallo distinguishes between the composition of prose and poetry, saying that dictation was employed mostly for prose, whereas poetry was more commonly written by its author. In the poems on his vow of silence, Gregory highlights the paradox of producing a discourse while keeping silence, and of the hand as substitute of the mouth: Ἵσχεο, γλώσσα φίλη· σὺ δέ μοι, γραφίς, ἔγγραφε σιγῆς / ῥήματα, καὶ φθέγγου ὁμᾶσι τὰ κραδίας (II, 1, 34, 1–2). Storin 2011, 246 believes the importance of this theme lies in the fact that normally Gregory would have dictated his compositions, whether letters or poems. Renouncing dictation by way of a vow of silence meant renouncing to the elite status of a wealthy landowner, embracing the middle- or lower-class task of a secretary, a form of ascetic humiliation. This could mean that Gregory, contrarily to the praxis as represented by Cavallo, normally dictated even his poems, or that Gregory chose poetry to communicate because the genre in itself entailed renouncing to dictation.

**123** Agosti 2006.

**124** Γέγραπται μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς Ταύρου παισὶ, καὶ τό γε πρῶτον μέρος, τὸ μέχρι τοῦ κατὰ τὸν λύκον αἰνίγματος, ἀνεγνώσθη καθ’ ὃν μάλιστα καιρὸν ὁ χεῖρων ἐκράτει τῇ στάσει περιγενόμενος προσυφάνθη δὲ τὸ ἐπόμενον μετὰ τὴν κάθοδον τῶν ἀρίστων ἀνδρῶν αἰτησάντων, μὴ κολοβὸν ἐπὶ τῶν ἀτυχημάτων μέναι τὸ σύγγραμμα (Synes. *provid. praef.* 1–7); see also the whole *provid.* 1, 18.

**125** Φυκοῦντιος ἄνθρωπος (Κυρηναῖον δ’ ἐπίνειον ὁ Φυκοῦς) ἐπέδωκέ μοι φέρων ἐπιστολὴν τὸ σὸν ἐπιγεγραμμένην ὄνομα. ταύτην ἀνέγνων ἡδέως τε ἅμα καὶ ἀγαμένως· ὠφείλετο γὰρ τὸ μὲν τῇ διαθέσει τῆς ψυχῆς, τὸ δὲ τῷ κάλλει τῆς γλώττης. καὶ δῆτα παρεσκεύασά σοι θέατρον ἐπὶ Λιβύης Ἑλληνικόν, ἀπαγγείλας ἡκεῖν ἀκροασμένους ἐλλογίμων γραμμάτων. καὶ νῦν ἐν ταῖς παρ’ ἡμῖν πόλεσιν ὁ Πυλαίμενης



directly to Marcianus, a common acquaintance of his and Pylemenes's, saying that he feared the letter could be read in the "Panhellenium" (Πανελλήνιον), a place where literates met to hear and read ancient and new texts<sup>126</sup>. Moreover, Jerome witnesses a case of public performance for a Christian polemical work: in his *De viris illustribus*, he says that Gregory of Nyssa read the *Contra Eunomium* to him and Gregory of Nazianzus<sup>127</sup>. Speaking of Gregory of Nyssa, his *ep.* 14 is worth mentioning, as it witnesses to a public reading of a letter from Libanius (in much the same way as Synesius's congratulations to Pylemenes) and at the same time to the close relationship between written and oral publication: after the reading, Gregory lent the letter to many other aficionados so that they might copy from it sentences and expressions<sup>128</sup>. In sum, we can assume that many texts had an oral performance besides their written circulation.

Synesius's letter is particularly interesting because it gives us a glimpse of the real-life situation in which these performances took place. In fact, Synesius writes of a "theatre" of educated people he gathered for the reading. The fact that this theatre is labeled "Hellenic" (Ελληνικόν) links it to the "Panhellenium" mentioned at the end of the letter. In both cases, educated people convene to a place, literally a theatre or

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πολύς, ὁ δημιουργὸς τῆς θεσπεσίας ἐπιστολῆς. ... γράφε οὖν ὁσάκις ἂν ἐγχαρῇ, καὶ ἐστία Κυρηναίους τῷ λόγῳ· ὥς οὐδὲν ἂν αὐτοῖς ἥδιον ἀνάγνωσμα γένοιτο τῶν Πυλαιμένων γραμμάτων, ἡδὴ κατεσχημένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ δείγματος. (Synes. *ep.* 101, 1–9; 20–24). This passage is analysed by Hose 2003 as a clue to an authorial edition of Synesius' letters. Other examples of public reading of letters in theatres: δῆλωσον δέ μοι καὶ ὅπως ὑμῖν ἔχει τὸ φροντιστήριον, καὶ εἰ πλῆθος ὁμιλητῶν σοι περιφράττει τὸ θέατρον (Procop. *Gaz. ep.* 89); μὰ γὰρ τὸν σὸν Νεῖλον καὶ τὰς παρούσας σοι Χάριτας, θέατρον λογικὸν τὴν σὴν παρέσχον ἐπιστολήν, κὰν τῇ Γάζῃ μέση πρὸς πάντας ἐλέγετο. κἀγὼ μὲν ἀλαζῶν ἡδούμην ὑπὸ τῶν σῶν γραμμάτων καλούμενος, ἐγέλα δὲ τὸ θέατρον ἐπ' ἐμοί· σὺ δὲ τῶν λόγων εὐδαίμων ἐδόκεις. (91, 50); Ἐλαβόν σου καὶ αὐτὸς τὴν πλείστου ἀξίαν ἐπιστολήν καὶ ἀνέγνων οὐ μόνος, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον μόνος, θαυμάσας δὲ καὶ θέατρον καθίζω τοῖς γράμμασι τὴν βουλήν. πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ τῶν οὐ βουλευόντων ἐπέρρεον γνόντες, ἐφ' ὅτῳ γε συγκαθίζοιμεθα (Liban. *ep.* 1259).

**126** ἐπιστολήν δὲ ἐξ εὐθείας πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐπιθεῖναι καίτοι προθυμηθεὶς ἐνάρκησα, ἵνα μὴ εὐθύνας ὑπόσχω τοῖς πανδέκταις τοῖς ἀποσμιλεύουσι τὰ ὀνόματα· οὐ γὰρ μικρὸς ὁ κίνδυνος ἐν τῷ Πανελληνίῳ τὴν ἐπιστολήν ἀναγνωσθῆναι. καλῶ γὰρ οὕτω τὸν τόπον, ἐν ᾧ πολλάκις ἐφρόντισα τὰς βαρεῖας φροντίδας, τῶν ἀπανταχόθεν ἐλλογίμων συνιόντων ἐφ' ᾧ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἀκοῦσαι τοῦ πρεσβύτου φωνῆς, παλαιὰ καὶ νέα καταμαστεύουσης διηγήματα. (Synes. *ep.* 101, 66–78). The reference to ancient texts is interesting, because it is early evidence of a practice widespread in Byzantine times and witnessed notably by Photius' *Bibliotheca*: circles of literary enthusiasts met to read works of past authors. See Cavallo 2019, 248–249; Cavallo 2007.

**127** *Gregorius Nyssenus episcopus, frater Basilii Caesariensis, ante paucos annos mihi et Gregorio Nazianzeno contra Eunomium legit libros, qui et multa alia scripsisse et scribere dicitur* (Hieron. *vir. ill.* 128); McGuckin 2001a, 349–350.

**128** οὕτω γὰρ συνέβη κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην ἐπιφοιτήσαντά με τῇ μητροπόλει τῶν Καππαδοκῶν ἐντυχεῖν τινι τῶν ἐπιτηδεῶν, ὃς μοι τὸ δῶρον τοῦτο, τὴν ἐπιστολήν, οἷόν τι σύμβολον ἑορτῆς προετεινάτο. ἐγὼ δὲ περιχαρὴς τῇ συντυχίᾳ γενόμενος κοινὸν προὔθηκα τοῖς παροῦσι τὸ κέρδος, καὶ πάντες μετεῖχον τὸ ὅλον ἕκαστος ἔχειν φιλονεικοῦντες, καὶ οὐκ ἡλαττούμην ἐγὼ· διεξιοῦσα γὰρ τὰς πάντων χεῖρας ἡ ἐπιστολὴ ἴδιος ἑκάστου πλοῦτος ἐγίνετο, τῶν μὲν τῇ μνήμῃ διὰ τῆς συνεχοῦς ἀναγνώσεως τῶν δὲ δέλτοις ἐναπομαζαμένων τὰ ῥήματα (Greg. *Nyss. ep.* 14).

auditorium, or a βουλευτήριον adapted to the aim, to hear a literary work being read<sup>129</sup>. The author could be present; perhaps he himself could be the reader, as in the case of Gregory of Nyssa reading the *Contra Eunomium* to Jerome and Gregory of Nazianzus in Constantinople, or Synesius reading the *On Providence* to his circle in the city; but the author could also be far away, as is the case of letters read by the addressee to local circles. In fact, the abundant evidence of letter-reading in front of an audience in comparison with other genres can be explained by the fact that in the case of letters the author could not be present and hence the addressee felt the need to inform him of the reading, whereas other genres, such as homilies and speeches, presuppose and don't address the context of the performance. These literary circles and their activities have been studied by Guglielmo Cavallo: on the subject of readings, he stresses the performative aspect, stating that reading was an outright recitation meant as a kind of show. The practice went back to Second Sophistic *recitationes* in the imperial age and continued in Byzantine times with circles such as that of Photius<sup>130</sup>. The exclusive milieu of the participants to these recitations, as witnessed by Synesius, meant that the audience of an oral performance—especially in the case of letters or other elaborate writings—did not differ substantially from the target of a written publication of the same kind of works. Declamations, poetry, and skilfully crafted letters circulated orally and in written form through social networks of educated and competent acquaintances of the author.

There are traces of such practices in Gregory's works. An interesting example is in the poem against Maximus, II, 1, 41:

Λέγειν, γράφειν, θέατρα συλλέγειν, σύγε  
 Κρότους ἐγείρειν μηδὲν εὐλαβούμενος.  
 Βραχεῖς μὲν εἰσι τῶν ἀκουόντων σοφοί·  
 Πολλοὶ δὲ Μάξιμοι τε καὶ παράφοροι.  
 Τοῦτοις ἀρέσκειν, τοὺς δὲ σοφοὺς χαίρειν ἔῃν,  
 Τοὺς ἐσμилευμένους τε καὶ συνηγμένους  
 (II, 1, 41, 24–29)<sup>131</sup>

declaiming, writing, gathering theatres,  
 to arouse applauses you clearly had no reserve:  
 few are the experts in the audience,  
 but many the Maximuses and the deranged;  
 agreeable to these, and goodbye to the experts,  
 those thoroughly polished and frowning.

<sup>129</sup> Particularly relevant for Synesius' case are the *auditoria* found at Kom el-Dikka (Alexandria; see Derda/Markiewicz/Wipszycka 2007), as well as the *Odeion* in Tolemais and the theatre attested in Cyrene (see Kreikenbom 2012, 23). These spaces are good candidates for the oral performance of learned works of rhetoric and poetry, and may well have been present outside of Egypt and Lybia.

<sup>130</sup> Cavallo 2007, 73–86; Cavallo 2010.

<sup>131</sup> See also Prudhomme 2006, 199.

The passage, referring to Maximus's literary activity, is full of terms familiar from Synesius's letters: the verbs of literary activity are “declaiming” (λέγειν) and “writing” (γράφειν), stressing the double channel, oral and written, of literature; the gathered audience of public performances is called θέατρον; and, contrarily to what was clearly the norm, Maximus's theatres are poorly supplied with true experts (σοφοί), those whom Gregory describes as “thoroughly polished” (ἐσμιλευμένοι), with the same verb Synesius used for the audience of the Constantinopolitan Panhellenium (ἀποσμιλεύοντες). The rarity of the verb and the shared context of recitations in Constantinople lead one to suspect that this is not a coincidence, but that this substantival participle was something of a nickname for a concrete circle in Constantinople<sup>132</sup>. Anyway, these common traits between Synesius and Gregory clearly suggest that Gregory knew the reality of declamations for educated circles. This can be confirmed with more references. Another interesting passage is in Gregory's *or.* 4, a speech that scholars think Gregory never delivered, but only circulated in written form<sup>133</sup>. Almost at the beginning of the speech, Gregory asks the rhetorical question of “who shall install a theatre worthy of the thanksgiving” represented by his speech<sup>134</sup>. As noted by Elm, the theme of theatre is a red thread of this oration, and it has the function of criticising Julian's religious practices<sup>135</sup>. However, in this case, given its position at the beginning of the discourse and its phatic function, the reference to a theatre could point to the expected audience of a declamation, whether or not this was in fact recited in front of a “theatre”. There are other passages in which Gregory employs the word “theatre” (θέατρον), and in some

<sup>132</sup> The root is most common in the composite διασμιλεύω, a verb used to express refinement and subtlety since its first attestation, a fragment of Alexis on the Pythagoreans transmitted by Athenaeus (πυθαγορισμοὶ καὶ λόγοι / λεπτοὶ διεσμιλευμένοι τε φροντίδες, Athen. *dipnos.* 4, 52, 20–21). With the same meaning, the verb is employed frequently by Cyril, to signify a clear-cut, articulated or subtle line of argument (Συνιέμεν δὲ ἡμεῖς λεπτῶς τε καὶ διεσμιλευμένως, Cyrill. Alex. *De trinitate* 622; ὁρθῶς ἔχοντά τε καὶ διεσμιλευμένως, *De incarnatione* 678; λεπτῶν τε καὶ διεσμιλευμένων ἐννοιῶν, *De adoratione et cultu* 17; λεπτῶς τε καὶ διεσμιλευμένως δοκιμάζειν, *AConcOec.* 1, 1, 6, 13). The verb is employed on one of Cometas' epigrams on his edition of Homer, to signify the correct division he introduced in the exemplars: στίξας διεσμίλευσα ταύτας ἐντέχνως (*Anth. Gr.* 15, 38, 3). In two of Dioscorus' poems, the term is a title of prestige: πανταρίστου καὶ διεσμιλεγμένου (*frg.* 10, 4; 11, 4). The form employed by Synesius, ἀποσμιλεύω, is rarer but attested in contemporary literature: it occurs in another letter by him (ἵνα ἡμῶν τι τοῦ βαρβάρου μέρους ἐντεῦθεν τυχὸν ἀποσμιλευθείη, Synes. *ep.* 159) and in the *Dion* (τὸ λέξιν καθῆραι τε καὶ ἀποσμιλεῦσαι, 8, 29) always in the sense of linguistic purity; and both Julian and Themistius use it with the same meaning (Εργάτης γάρ ἐστι καὶ τούτων ἀγαθός, οὐκ ἀποσμιλεύων οὐδὲ ἀπονυχίζων τὰ ῥήματα οὐδὲ ἀποτορνεύων τὰς περιόδους καθάπερ οἱ κομπῶι ῥήτορες, Julian. *Imp. or.* 2, 77A; ἐκμελετᾶν διὰ βίου συγκοπὰς τε ὀνομάτων καὶ ἀποθλίψεις καὶ ῥήματα ἀποσμιλεῦειν, Themist. *or.* 21, 251B). The simple form σμιλεύω employed by Gregory is a *hapax*: using the simple instead of the composite is a known poetic gesture, which proves Gregory's care for poetic language even when writing iambs (Prudhomme 2006, 104–120).

<sup>133</sup> Demoen 1996, 69.

<sup>134</sup> Ἔμοι δὲ θύονται θυσίαν αἰνέσεως σήμερον, καὶ τὴν ἀναίμακτον τῶν λόγων τιμὴν ἀνάπτοντι, τίς θέατρον περιστήσῃ τῇ χάριτι παρισούμενον; (*or.* 4, 3)

<sup>135</sup> Elm 2012, 348–253.

he means the audience of a speech: this is often the case in passages with a phatic function—that is, where Gregory addresses his audience<sup>136</sup>. In two cases, the word is used for the audience of someone teaching or declaiming, as an emblem of ambition<sup>137</sup>. All the passages referred to here prove that Gregory knew the practice of θέατρα, recitations of literary works in front of a selected audience of connoisseurs. Furthermore, McLynn has demonstrated that one of Gregory's poems, II, 2, 1, was recited during such an occasion and then prepared in written form as a gift to the addressee, who was present at the performance<sup>138</sup>. Here again, oral and written publication cross, as the two different mediums, the target of which was, however, the same. Finally, *ep.* 176 proves clearly that in at least one instance Gregory's poetry was orally performed by other people: writing to the rhetor Eudoxius, Gregory mentions some outrageous iambs written by himself and recited to his addressee by a third person, Valentinus<sup>139</sup>. It is likely that Gregory had spread a poetic invective among his acquaintances and then one of those, Valentinus, read it to other people of his circle, to which Eudoxius also belonged.

Once we have assessed the methods and occasions of literary publication, it is necessary to identify some concrete traits of Gregory's audience, in particular the audience of his poems on bishops. To do so, we have to adopt the distinction between an implied or inner audience and a real-life or intended audience—that is, between the characters addressed in the poems, to whom the poems are purported to be aimed, and the people who, in the mind of the author, should have read the poems<sup>140</sup>. The inner audience and purported occasion of the poems have been already analysed at §1.1.1. Even though the four poems that are the subject of the present book's discussion of Gregory treat the same subject and share many themes and images, each has a different implied audience: II, 1, 10 is aimed at the congregation in Constantinople, II, 1, 13 to the bishops of the council, II, 1, 12 moves between the bishops and the congregation, sometimes addressing a single counterpart, and II, 1, 17 seems to be a soliloquy. A clue to the context of these poems comes from the beginning of II, 1, 11, *On His Own Life*, a work scholars have frequently linked both thematically and chronologically to II, 1, 12,

**136** ἐμοὶ δὲ λύει τὴν γλῶσσαν, καὶ ὑψοῖ τὴν φωνὴν, ὡς σάλπιγγος, ἡ παροῦσα εὐεργεσία, καὶ τὸ κάλλιστον τοῦτο θέατρον, τὰ τέκνα τοῦ Θεοῦ διεσκορπισμένα, συνηγμένα εἰς ἓν (*or.* 6, 7); Βούλεσθε δάκρυα τῷ θεάτρῳ κινήσω, καὶ αὐτῷ γε ἴσως τῷ καρτερικωτάτῳ, καὶ τῶν παθῶν κρείσσονι, ἐνὸς τῶν τότε γενομένων ἐπιμνησθεῖς; (25, 10); Ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀνεκαθήραμεν τῷ λόγῳ τὸ θέατρον, φέρε τι περὶ τῆς ἑορτῆς ἥδη φιλοσοφῶμεν, καὶ συνεορτάσωμεν ταῖς φιλεόρτοις καὶ φιλοθέοις ψυχαῖς (39, 11).

**137** πᾶσιν βοῶμεν· “ὅς θέλει, δεῦρ' εἰσὶτω, / κἂν δίστροφός τις ἢ πολύστροφος τύχη. / θεατράν ἐστι πᾶσιν ἡνεωγμένον, / πανήγυρις ἔσθηκεν” (referring to bad bishops, II, 1, 11, 1725–1728); Θέλεις λόγοις βοᾶσθαι, / Καὶ συλλέγειν θέατρα; / Ποθεῖς νόμους πιπράσκειν / Οὐκ ἐνδίοις παλαιμοῖς, / Φέρειν τε καὶ φέρεσθαι / Πρὸ βημάτων ἀθέσμων; (referring to the usual ambitions of a rhetor, II, 1, 88, 41–46).

**138** McLynn 2012a, 187–188.

**139** Ἦ που τῶν ἱάμβων ἡμῖν μνησικακεῖς, ὧν ὁ κακῶς ἀπολούμενος Οὐαλεντίνος προσέπτυσσε, καὶ ταῦτα σοῦ θέλοντος (*ep.* 176, 2). McLynn 1997, 300.

**140** Demoen 1996, 64–65; Elm 2012, 465.

*On Bishops*, and which presents a shorter version of the speech Gregory revisited in II, 1, 13<sup>141</sup>. Since II, 1, 13 is tightly linked to II, 1, 10, it is not wrong to say that the *On His Own Life* is at the centre of our texts, with the exception of II, 1, 17, which, both for its genre and its less polemical style, can be considered the group's outlier. Now, the *On His Own Life* is clearly aimed at the congregation in Constantinople:

Πρὸς δ' ὑμᾶς λόγος,  
 τοὺς ἦν δθ' ἡμῶν, ἀλλὰ νῦν ἀλλοτρίους,  
 ὅσοι τε ὁμοδοξοῦντες, εἴτε τις νόθος 10  
 πάντες γὰρ ἡμῖν εὐμενεῖς μεμυκόσιν.  
 ἄνδρες, τὸ κλεινὸν ὄμμα τῆς οἰκουμένης,  
 οἱ κόσμον οἰκεῖθ', ὡς ὁρῶ, τὸν δεῦτερον,  
 γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης κάλλος ἡμφιεσμένοι,  
 Ῥώμη νεουργῆς, εὐγενῶν ἄλλων ἔδος, 15  
 Κωνσταντίνου πόλις τε καὶ στήλη κράτους,  
 ἀκούσατ', ἄνδρες, ἀνδρὸς ἀψευδεστάτου  
 καὶ πολλὰ μοχθήσαντος ἐν πολλαῖς στροφαῖς,  
 ἐξ ὧν ὑπάρχει καὶ τὸ γινώσκειν πλέον.  
 (II, 1, 11, 8–19)

For you are these words,  
 those once mine but now estranged,  
 those of the same faith and the bastard, if any,  
 for all are benevolent towards us, now that we shut up.  
 Oh men, glorious renown of the world,  
 you who seem to inhabit the second universe,  
 wrapped in the beauty of land and sea,  
 Oh, newly built Rome, seat of the other nobles,  
 city of Constantine and pillar of the empire,  
 hark, o men, a most truthful man,  
 and a much suffering one, through many tides,  
 whence comes more understanding.

One could not ask for a clearer definition of the congregation of Constantinople and its role as addressee of Gregory's apology. These lines even contain the name of the city, Κωνσταντίνου πόλις (16). Hence, it is no surprise that scholars have been consistent in defining Gregory's intended audience: both his autobiographical poem and the anti-bishop polemic of II, 1, 10; 12 and 13 are aimed at Gregory's supporters and contacts in Constantinople, whom, we know from his letters, he kept entertaining<sup>142</sup>. These poems, as recognised by McLynn, offer talking points to Gregory's loyalists to counter differing narrations of the events in 379–381<sup>143</sup>. Gregory had to defend his legacy in a context of competing interpretations of the council, among which the Antiochian line defended

<sup>141</sup> McLynn 1997, 299–301; Elm 1999, 9; McGuckin 2001a, 371–385; McGuckin 2001b, 160. On the common themes of II, 1, 11 and II, 1, 13 see §1.1.1 n. 34.

<sup>142</sup> Demoen 1996, 66; McLynn 1997.

<sup>143</sup> McLynn 1997, 302.

Nectarius and Flavian and the Western and Alexandrian one supported Maximus and Paulinus<sup>144</sup>. In the first years after the council, matters were far from settled, and it made sense for Gregory to try to influence the outcome and interpretation of the council. His poems were instrumental in making his influence felt in the capital and, possibly, even at court. Since poems underwent the double process of publication already described, they could be sent in written form to the city from afar and at the same time spread to Gregory's nearer acquaintances in Cappadocia, in order to both build a local consensus and exert an influence on the capital. In the city, they were not only a suitable and convincing résumé of the main arguments of Gregory's polemic, as McGuckin says<sup>145</sup>. Their oral performance could nourish the life of local circles of Gregorian supporters or respond to similar pieces of polemic from other parties. Furthermore, the choice of poetry tells us something of Gregory's room for manoeuvring in Constantinople: because poetry could hardly be directed to the great majority of Christians in the city, but was usually performed for the special few, we can suppose that Gregory could not claim the attention of the whole community, but only of small groups of supporters. Even some formal features of these poems find a justification in their aim: the repetition of themes and arguments from one poem to another, for example, even though it is a feature of the whole of Gregory's works, here could have the function of hammering on the same concepts for the sake of persuasion. At the same time, the variations that these concepts undergo in metre, context, and choice of words, which have led scholars to doubt Gregory's command of the difference between genres, could be explained as virtuosic "variations on a theme" by a skilful rhetor for his educated audience. The selected few in Constantinople surely could appreciate Callimachean versatility.

### 1.2.3 Conclusion

Concerning the audience and the modes of publication of Ephrem and Gregory's poetry, many differences remain, but the overall frame is more similar than it appeared at the beginning. Of the antitheses mentioned at the beginning, only the one regarding liturgy is really relevant. We now know that both Ephrem's and Gregory's poetry developed in an environment where writing and orality were by no means strictly distinguished: poems were composed with the prospect of an oral performance, and orality could play a role in their composition; and yet writing allowed for a wider circulation of the product and for its survival after the performance. In this environment, no private poetry could exist, because there was always a community around the poet, whether a social network of Christian landowners or a group of ascetically minded pupils. These

<sup>144</sup> See §5.1.2; for Maximus in particular: §3.1.1.3 n. 57.

<sup>145</sup> On Gregory's hijacking of the conciliar formulas and his literary and political moves after the Council: McGuckin 2001a, 371–385.

people not only attended to the written dissemination of the poets' works in space (circulation) and time (transmission), but they were also the texts' preferred audience. Both Gregory and Ephrem could count on an inner circle of connoisseurs and supporters. The difference lies in the relationship between the inner circle and the community at large. Ephrem's liturgical poetry passed *through* the inner circle of the *bnay qyāmā* to the whole congregation, and therefore it had more popular features. The foundational moment of such a poetry was liturgy, the moment in which the selected few, the *bnay qyāmā*, brought to God their own offering in the form of song, thus displaying it to the whole community. However, at least in the case of the poems on bishops, the social width of Ephrem's audience was balanced by its geographic limitations: these poems are concerned with the relationship between bishop and community; therefore, they have no clear bearing on disputes affecting the church at large: they are not, in other words, ecumenic. On the contrary, Gregory's poems rarely address his relationship with the larger congregation in Constantinople, a theme he could address in the homilies preached in the city. The selected few in Cappadocia and in Constantinople, and even the community at large when it is mentioned, are the centres from which Gregory's poetry should radiate to the whole ecumene. Gregory is concerned with the battles fought in the church at large and which involve opposite arrays of bishops, and not with the relationship between bishop and community.

On the one hand, the different perspectives through which Ephrem and Gregory consider the figure of the bishop are due to their different geographic contexts: Ephrem is at the extreme border of the empire, whereas Gregory is trying to defend his tenure as the bishop of the most central see of the church of his days. On the other hand, the different foci influence the choices of publication and performance methods, which, as we have seen, were flexible enough to accommodate different needs both in the Syriac and in the Greek context. For we are not to assume that the foregoing considerations can be indiscriminately extended to the whole of Gregory's or Ephrem's corpora. It is likely that, if we compared different works—as, for example, the *Poemata arcana* of Gregory with Ephrem's *Poems on Faith*—we would have found many more similarities. However, the differences highlighted in the case of the poems on bishops show clearly the different perspectives through which the two poets, due to their different environment, treated the same subject.

### 1.3 Why poetry?

In the third part of this chapter, I will try to answer a fundamental question: Why poetry? Specifically, why did Ephrem and Gregory choose to comment on such a prosaic theme as bishops through the medium of poetry? In doing so, I will take as a starting point the four reasons given by Gregory to write poetry in his II, 1, 39 (33–57), but will also expand on them with reference to contemporary sources in order to contextualise the speech act of poetry in the cultural codes of their time. For this reason, the four

sections of my treatment do not coincide with (but do cover completely) Gregory's four motivations. In the first section, I will show the peculiar aesthetic value poetry had for Gregory, Ephrem, and their contemporaries, relating that value to the domain of rhetoric (in the case of Gregory), the domain of theology (for Ephrem), and the contexts of publication the genre required. In the second section, I will analyse the less studied motivations given by Gregory, those that connect poetry with the poet's own spiritual welfare, thereby recovering the complex strategy of self-presentation he deploys in the poems on bishops to acquire legitimacy and to delegitimise his opponents. Such a self-presentation would have been impossible outside the genre of poetry, which becomes for this reason an essential facet of these texts. Less can be said of Ephrem in this respect. In the third section, beginning with the expression ξένοι of II, 1, 39, 48–50, I will discuss the relationship between poetry and heresy witnessed by ancient sources, especially fifth-century ecclesiastical histories. This relationship is not wholly absent from Gregory's and Ephrem's poetry, but it needs to be downsized in favour of a more generically public role of poetry in conducting polemics and politics. Both our authors are easily read in this context. Finally, I will examine the didactic import of poetry in late antiquity, demonstrating how both Ephrem and Gregory did not write only to affect current events and people, but to exert a lasting influence on Christian education. At the end of this discussion, it should appear clearly what complex of motivations—partly similar, partly different—brought Gregory and Ephrem to choose poetry, of all genres, to talk about bishops. This will also justify my proposal to study these texts together with the methods of literary analysis.

### 1.3.1 Aesthetic value of poetry

From our modern perspective, the author's choice of a genre tends to be motivated by aesthetic reasons. If an author chooses to express himself through poetry, it is because he believes poetry has a peculiar aesthetic value—because, for example, the metre or the imagery adds something to his expression—that could not have been achieved by other means. However, this stance is by no means obvious, especially when we speak of ancient authors. The matter is all the more worthy of discussion because we treat poems concerned with themes remote from our notion of lyricism: Ephrem's poems praise and defend different bishops, while at the same time presenting them as models of behaviour; Gregory criticises bishops through a fictive reconstruction of real acts of expression (speeches and letters), which, however, did not occur in poetic form, nor in the same manner as that in which they are presented in their poetic reconstruction. In both cases, we face a content that, according to our standards, is more suited for a prose elaboration than a poetic one.



In the case of Gregory, we even have an osmosis between prose and poetry, by way of common themes and even literal reprises between speeches and poems<sup>146</sup>. This has been noticed by scholars throughout Gregory's oeuvre, with reprises of words and themes occurring not only in poems and speeches, but also in poems in different metres and different genres. This circumstance has led many scholars to doubt that Gregory had a clear perception of the boundaries between genres or that he appreciated poetry as in any way different from rhetoric: it goes without saying that this stance is usually coupled with a harsh, when not outright scornful, judgement on the value of Gregory's poetry<sup>147</sup>. For Milovanovic-Barham, Gregory is concerned only with the content of his works and pays little attention to the various forms he uses<sup>148</sup>. Her claim leans on a passage from Gregory himself (II, 1, 12, 267–287), in which the poet stresses the independence of content and form and the greater importance of content compared to form<sup>149</sup>. As a confirmation, one could quote also the acknowledgement at II, 1, 39, 47–51, that θεωρία—that is, “the inner meaning” of a text—is much more important for Christians than the outward appearance of style<sup>150</sup>. Moreover, Gregory's tendency to blur the boundaries between prose and poetry originates in the classroom practice of the paraphrase and in contemporary rhetorical thought, where poetry is subsumed under rhetorical categories—for example, panegyric<sup>151</sup>. Hose echoes Milovanovic-Barham's judgement in the context of a wider consideration of late antique Greek poetry, in which he stresses the restraining power exercised on it by educational systems: in his view, Greek poetry in late antiquity fails to emancipate itself from the classroom exercises, and it can be reduced to those exercises and nothing more<sup>152</sup>. Besides the fact that Gregory's poetry fails to be independent from prose, Milovanovic-Barham, in keeping with Keydell's results, highlights also Gregory's lack of command of poetic language

<sup>146</sup> The phenomenon is attested throughout Gregory's oeuvre. The specific cases occurring in our poems will be considered when commenting singular themes present in the poems.

<sup>147</sup> Fundamental in this line of studies are Keydell 1953 (especially 137–139 and 142) and Jungck 1974, 22–24.

<sup>148</sup> Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 498.

<sup>149</sup> Ἐχει γὰρ οὕτω διττὸς ἡμῖν πᾶς λόγος, / Λέξεις τε καὶ νοῦς· αἱ μὲν, οἷον ἔκτοθεν / Ἑσθημ', ὁ δ' ἐνδον σῶμα ἡμψισμένον. / Καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἄμφω καλὰ, τοῖς δὲ θάτερον, / Ἦ αἰσχρὸν αὖθις – ὡς μάθησις ἢ φύσις. / Ἡμῖν δὲ τοῦ μὲν ἐκτὸς οὐ πολλὸς λόγος, / Ὅπως ποθ' ἔξει, τοῦ δ' ἔσω λίαν πολὺς. / Ἐν νῶ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡμῖν ἡ σωτηρία, / Πλὴν ἐκλαλουμένῳ τε καὶ δηλουμένῳ / Πηγῆς τί κέρδος ἐστὶν ἐμπεπραγμένης; / Τί δ' ἡλιακῆς ἀκτίνος, ἣν κρύπτει νέφος; / Τοιοῦτόν ἐστι νοῦς σοφὸς σιγώμενος, / Οἷον ῥόδου τὸ κάλλος, εἰ κάλυξ σκέπει / Οὐκ εὐπρεπὴς· τὸ τερπνὸν ἐκφαίνει δ', ὅταν / Αὔραις ῥαγεῖσα τὸν τόκον θεατρίσῃ. / Εἰ δ' ἦν αἰεὶ τὸ κάλλος ἐσκεπασμένον, / Οὐδ' ἂν τις ἦρος ἦν χάρις τοῦ τιμίου (II, 1, 12, 267–287).

<sup>150</sup> Τοῦτοῖς λέγω δὴ τοῖς κεχωρσμένοις λόγοις / Εἰ καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἡμῖν ἐν θεωρίᾳ (II, 1, 39, 50–51).

<sup>151</sup> Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 499. See: πανηγυρικὸν γὰρ πρᾶγμα δῆπουθεν ἐστὶ ποιήσις ἅπανα καὶ πάντων γε λόγων πανηγυρικώτατον ... ὅπερ γὰρ ἦν ὁ Δημοσθένης ἡμῖν κατὰ τὸν πολιτικὸν λόγον ἐν τε τῷ συμβουλευτικῷ καὶ δικανικῷ καὶ ὁ Πλάτων ἐν τῷ πεζῷ πανηγυρικῷ, τοῦτ' ἂν Ὅμηρος εἴη κατὰ τὴν ποίησιν, ἣν δὴ πανηγυρικὸν λόγον ἐν μέτρῳ λέγων εἶναι τις οὐκ οἶμαι εἰ διαμαρτήσεται. (Hermogenes *De ideis* 2, 10). Cf. the oratorical structure of the longer poems II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13 (§1.1.1).

<sup>152</sup> Hose 2004, on Gregory especially 21–24; Hose 2006.

proper, especially in regard to the distinctions of metres and styles in relation to different contents: it appears that Gregory can express the same theme in the same manner using iambs and hexameters and in dramatic, elegiac, and Homeric language<sup>153</sup>. Given these premises, the motivations Milovanovic-Barham attributes to Gregory for his choice of poetry are unrelated to the genre itself and its structural characters: in Milovanovic-Barham's view, the value of poetry for Gregory is neither expressive (that is, the form is not chosen to suit the content) nor practical, because poetic diction could not reach (in Milovanovic-Barham's view) a wide public. It is more of a pragmatic value, like a gesture accompanying the words proper: Gregory wrote poetry to appropriate the prestige associated with classical models and to claim back those models for Christianity after Julian's effort to bind them to pagan religion<sup>154</sup>. While there is more than a parcel of truth in this view, it still needs much nuancing, especially in light of more recent research.

Prudhomme, with a detailed analysis of a wider corpus of Gregory's poems, has concluded that, despite the apparent equivalence of metres and genres, there is in fact a general trend towards assigning the same themes to the same metres in Gregory: apologetic and polemic poems are overwhelmingly written in iambs, laments are written in the elegiac metre, and biblical and theological subjects tend to be cast in hexameters<sup>155</sup>. Gregory diversifies not only the epic and elegiac lexicon from the palette of iambic poetry, but he consciously looks for more poetic solutions in iambs than in prose. This demonstrates that his poetry is no mere versification of prose works, but an authentic literary effort<sup>156</sup>. His tendency to blur the boundaries of genres must be understood, according to Prudhomme, as an adherence to the experimental poetic of Callimachus.

Gregory's appreciation of the peculiar aesthetic value of poetry is apparent also from his explicit statements. Poetry, it is often repeated, has a peculiar sweetness, the ability to entertain, give pleasure, or enchant the audience, independently from its contents. This theme is prominent in Gregory's II, 1, 39, where he adopts the commonplace image of honey poured on the brims of a cup containing a bitter medicine in order to make a child drink the medicine: the medicine is stern content; the honey is the sweetness of poetic form<sup>157</sup>. But this idea keeps coming up in the poem: pagan poetry is

153 Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 502.

154 Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 503.

155 Prudhomme 2006, 78–106.

156 Prudhomme 2006, 106–120.

157 II, 1, 39, 37–41; Prudhomme 2006, 211; the *topos* is most famously found in Lucretius, 1, 936–942. Prudhomme points out that Clement of Alexandria used it to justify the presence of poetry in the Bible, whereas the passage she adduces seems more of an allegorisation of music (note the key-word of allegory, ἀληθινόν), with no reference to concrete songs: Αἶδει δέ γε ὁ Εὐνομος ὁ ἐμός οὐ τὸν Τερπάνδρου νόμον οὐδὲ τὸν Κηπίωνος, οὐδὲ μὴν Φρύγιον ἢ Λύδιον ἢ Δώριον, ἀλλὰ τῆς καινῆς ἁρμονίας τὸν αἰδίων νόμον, τὸν φερώνυμον τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸ ἅσμα τὸ καινόν, τὸ Δευιτικόν, «νηπενθές τ' ἀχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπίληθες ἀπάντων»· γλυκύ τι καὶ ἀληθινὸν φάρμακον πειθοῦς ἐγκέκρται τῷ ᾄσματι (Clem. Alex. *protr.* 1, 2, 4). Gregory uses the same language of sweetness, pleasure and persuasion, but turns it concrete. Hermo-

“ornate” (κεχωρωσμένοι λόγοι), and so also Christian speaking can have “leonine grace” (χάρις λεόντιος); Old Testament hagiographers used the pleasure (τὸ τέρπνον) of poetry as a vehicle for its good content (ὄχημα τοῦ καλοῦ); in the same way, Gregory mixes a bit of pleasure in the hard contents of Christianity to allow younger people to progress gradually in Christian education, like those who spice up their meals<sup>158</sup>. The pleasure of poetry is linked to that of games and playing, which in one sense belittles it, but at the same time acknowledges a peculiar place and value to poetry<sup>159</sup>. The very same passage of II, 1, 12, 267–287 used by Milovanovic-Barham to argue for Gregory’s lack of interest in poetry can be brought up in connection to II, 1, 39 to argue the opposite: it is true that Gregory sharply distinguishes form and content of language and that he adopts a utilitarian view, stressing the value of content as a κέρδος, a gain; yet, at the same time, he underlines that this content must be expressed and that, even if any expression is good enough, an effective expression is much better. For, says Gregory, if an ugly cup covers the petals of the rose, then its beauty has no use and spring has no pleasure, whereas if the cup “pushes” the flower “on stage” (θεατρίση, 281), then the beauty becomes apparent. Language must “put” content “on stage”<sup>160</sup>.

Admittedly, Gregory conceives form and content as each having much more autonomy than they do in the system of genres of classical antiquity: this autonomy is due both to rhetorical education, as pointed out by Milovanovic-Barham, and to Christian exegesis, especially that of Origen, which carefully distinguished more layers of meaning for single forms in the Bible and stressed apologetically the contrast between the lack of refinement of biblical Greek and the deep truth of its content<sup>161</sup>. This contrast goes back ultimately to Paul<sup>162</sup>. However, in the frame of the autonomy of form and content, Gregory holds poetry as a decoration of form, capable of creating pleasure in the audience and, in this way, enhancing persuasion. Poetry has also the character of a game,

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genes, too, stresses pleasure as one of the aims of poetry: καὶ κατ’αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν ποίησιν φύσει οὔσαν γλυκεῖαν παρὰ τὸν ἄλλον λόγον ἐκφαίνεται τὰ ἐπίθετα καὶ γλυκύτερά πως ὄντα καὶ πλεονα ποιούντα τὴν ἡδονήν. ... Σχήματα δὲ γλυκύτητος, ἅπερ καὶ ἀφελείας ἐλέγομεν εἶναι καὶ ἔτι καθαρότητος, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις καὶ τὰ τοῦ κάλλους καὶ τοῦ λόγου τοῦ κεκαλωπισμένου (Hermogenes *De ideis* 2, 4).

**158** II, 1, 39, 50.53.86–87.90–98.

**159** II, 1, 39, 42–46.52; Prudhomme 2006, 212–213 for the connotations of this reduction of poetry to game.

**160** Same interpretation of these lines as mine in Gautier 2002, 121, who rightly points to Sir. 20:30 (= 41:14–15) as a biblical precedent.

**161** Prudhomme 2006, 476–478. See: ...τῇ κεκρυμμένῃ λαμπρότητι τῶν δογμάτων ἐν εὐτελεῖ καὶ εὐκαταφρονήτῳ λείξει ἀποκειμένη. ἔχομεν γὰρ θησαυρόν ἐν ὅσπρακίνοις σκεύεσιν, ἵνα λάμψῃ ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ μὴ νομισθῇ εἶναι ἑξ ἡμῶν τῶν ἀνθρώπων. εἰ γὰρ αἱ κατημαξευμένοι τῶν ἀποδείξεων ὁδοὶ παρὰ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐναποκείμεναι τοῖς βιβλίοις κατίσχυσαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν ἂν εὐλόγως ὑπελαμβάνετο ἑν σοφίᾳ ἀνθρώπων καὶ οὐκ ἑν δυνάμει θεοῦ· νῦν δὲ τῷ ἐπάραντι τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς σαφὲς ὅτι ὁ λόγος καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα παρὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς δεδύνηται οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως (Orig. *princ.* 4, 1, 7, a passage contained in the *Philocalia* excerpted by Basil and Gregory, from which see also the fourth excerpt, in *Joh. comm.* 4).

**162** 1Cor. 2:1–5; 2Cor. 4:7; 1Thess. 1:5. See the poignant considerations on the aesthetic of formlessness brought about by Christianity in Averincev 1988, 91–94.

something futile but also suitable in certain moments of life. Therefore, Gregory's take on the value of poetry per se is very ambiguous, in that he belittles it and at the same time acknowledges its value as a mean of pleasure and persuasion. Maybe monastic criticisms of classical poetry, growing in the last part of the fourth century, account for Gregory's defensive and belittling attitude<sup>163</sup>. One could object that Gregory's notions of poetry were commonplace and therefore not very significant for ascertaining his attitude. However, the fact that Gregory repeats traditional views on poetry need not mean that he is employing them as simple arguments of defence, without any sincere adherence to them. If such claims were to be effectively persuasive, then they had to be perceived as true despite all their triteness: therefore, if in defending his poetry Gregory says that he employs this medium to draw young people near God's commandments with its pleasantness, we have to think that for Gregory and his readers poetry was, at least in theory, characterised by a pleasantness that could not be achieved with any other means. Saying, as does Hose, that the motivations Gregory gives for writing his poetry are false because the poetry doesn't meet our taste or is not of the same aesthetic value as that of classical poets is a *non sequitur*<sup>164</sup>.

We can find this "decorative" conception of poetry in Ephrem, too. In particular, when criticising Bardaisan, Ephrem stresses the duplicity of his poetry, which conceals through sweet forms and music a dangerous content<sup>165</sup>. Here, as in Gregory's case, there is an element of cultural appropriation, in that Bardaisan is said to have written poetry only to usurp David's prestige, thus lending credibility to his own inventions<sup>166</sup>.

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**163** Prudhomme 2006, 26 and below, §1.2.3: in Sozomen, for example, admiration for *paideia* and the notion that poetry is above all a mean for propaganda, mostly employed by heretics, coexist. A similar ambiguity is found in Athanasius' *Letter to Marcellinus*: against the "pure and simple" (ἀκεραίοι), he defends the use of psalm-singing saying that it is not because of the pleasure of music, but for the beneficial effects on the souls that poetry and music were included in Scripture. Mentioning, though only to refuse it, the pleasure inherent to poetry and music, he confirms the idea that poetry was seen as pleasurable: Διὰ τί δὲ μετὰ μέλους καὶ ᾠδῆς ψάλλονται οἱ τοιοῦτοι λόγοι, ἀναγκαῖον μὴδὲ τοῦτο παρελθεῖν. Τινὲς μὲν γὰρ τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν ἀκεραίων, καίτοι πιστευόντων εἶναι θεόπνευστα τὰ ῥήματα, ὁμως νομίζουσι διὰ τὸ εὐφωνον καὶ τέρψεως ἕνεκεν τῆς ἀκοῆς μελωδεῖσθαι τοὺς ψαλμούς. Οὐκ ἔστι δὲ οὕτως· οὐ γὰρ τὸ ἡδὺ καὶ πιθανὸν ἐζήτησεν ἡ Γραφή· ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο ὡφελείας ἕνεκεν τῆς ψυχῆς τετύπεται (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 27, PG 27, 37); Τὸ ἄρα μετὰ μέλους λέγεσθαι τοὺς ψαλμούς οὐκ ἔστιν εὐφωνίας σπουδὴ, ἀλλὰ τεκμήριον τῆς ἀρμονίας τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ λογισμῶν. Καὶ ἡ ἐμμελὴς δὲ ἀνάγνωσις σύμβολόν ἐστι τῆς εὐρύθμου καὶ ἀχειμάρστου καταστάσεως τῆς διανοίας (29, PG 27, 41).

**164** Hose 2004, 24.

**165** "With garments and beryls / he [Satan] adorned Bardaisan // on Marcion he put sackcloth / to blacken the children of Light" (*hymn. haer.* 1, 12, 1–4, where the adornment is a metaphor of the language); "In the dens of Bardaisan / tunes and songs // for he saw that youth / longs for sweetness // chanting its psalms / adolescence becomes wanton" (17, 1–6); "He distributed to the innocent / bitterness with sweetness" (53, 5, 7–8). Here, too, poetry is linked to young people.

**166** "To David he wanted to look / to adorn himself with his beauty // to be lauded like him" (*hymn. haer.* 53, 6). In the case of Gregory, Milovanovic-Barham claimed that his employ of poetry was motivated by the desire to appropriate the prestige of Greek culture.

However, it is clear that Ephrem's conception of poetry is not limited to an imitation of David but has aesthetic values, for the forms of Syriac poetry, which Ephrem clearly mentions when speaking of Bardaisan's operation, are different from those of the Psalms. Therefore, the usurpation of David is linked to the choice of expression through poetry and music in general, while the idea of "edulcorating" heretic content is ascribed to poetry *per se*.

Except for the criticisms of Bardaisan, Ephrem is not very eager to distinguish content from form, even though we can read numerous passages stressing the pleasantness of poetry and singing and hence its aesthetic value<sup>167</sup>. In the case of our poems on the bishops, stanzas 2 and 12 of *CN* 17 are a good example of this idea: the poem is compared first to a garland offered to the bishops of Nisibis, and then to a picture of their virtue<sup>168</sup>. In the first image, Ephrem stresses the ability of poetry to order reality (the characters of the bishops) and to reproduce it in a pleasant form. Comparing poetry to a faithful painting, he underlines the capacity of the poem to represent faithfully and effectively the inner characteristics of people, in a manner similar to how the younger bishop was able to imitate his predecessor in his manners. Yet this is not clearly linked with Ephrem's choice to express himself in poetry: passages explaining the value of the pleasure conveyed by poetry in educating or persuading, as found in Gregory, are absent from Ephrem. This may hint that poetry was more favourably received in the Syriac-speaking area than in the Greek one and that Ephrem therefore felt less pressure to defend his choice of form than did Gregory. If this deduction is safe, then the idea that the ambiguous standing of poetry in contemporary Greek culture was due to Plato's criticism on the pagan side and to Egyptian monasticism and Origen's legacy on the Christian side gains credibility<sup>169</sup>.

Among Ephrem scholars there is a widespread notion that the medium of poetry gave a peculiar character to Ephrem's thought, differentiating it from Greek and Latin theology, which was expressed mostly in prose. A similar claim has been put forward about Gregory, but it met scarce success precisely because the distinction of prose and poetry in this author is less marked than in Ephrem<sup>170</sup>. In the latter's case, scholars claim that poetry allowed for a more symbolic and less philosophical approach to theol-

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<sup>167</sup> For example, *Resurr.* 2 is all concerned with the offering of the chant as a garland, thereby emphasising its pleasant nature and its dignity (because it can be offered to God), its ability to express joy and its liturgical value.

<sup>168</sup> "In one love I will mix them / and a garland I'll weave them, // their flowers bright, / their blossoms sweet, // of him who was chief, and of his disciple" (*CN* 17, 2, 1–5); "Me too, the dregs of the flock, / I did not skimp on what was due, // I painted an image of both, / with the dyes of both, // that the fold may see their ornaments, / and the flock their beauties; // and since I am a speaking lamb / for You, God of Abraham, // in Abraham's tenure I praise You." (12).

<sup>169</sup> Proudhomme 2006, 20–26, 476–478.

<sup>170</sup> Špidlík 1985. A similar claim regarding Ambrose's poetry is put forward in Dunkle 2016.

ogy<sup>171</sup>. Ephrem's poems lack precise dogmatic definitions and the dialectic pace of their Greek and Latin counterparts. Instead, they employ typology, personifications, metaphors, striking antitheses, and parallels to convey a theological or exegetical message. Ephrem avoids giving a straightforward and abstract treatment of his subject and tends to weave together different passages or images from Scripture in an original way. That this attitude was purposeful is clear from many passages of the *hymn. fid.*, where the poet warns against an overly rationalistic approach to God, resulting in limited definitions and ultimately in heresy. After all, the Syriac theologians of the fifth century and onwards testify to this peculiarity of Ephrem's stance: in the midst of the christological controversies, they found their countryman increasingly unsatisfying and began to translate and lean on Greek writers to defend their positions. Ephrem's texts were accordingly purged of their more ambiguous statements<sup>172</sup>. For all this consensus, it is difficult to prove beyond doubt that poetry was an integral part of Ephrem's theological approach as opposed to prose, because Ephrem never draws such a distinction between prose and poetry, nor does he comment on his choice of the one or the other. There is a risk of superimposing (as some interpreters have consciously done) our postsymbolistic or phenomenological notion of poetry and symbol on Ephrem's choices. Nonetheless, at the beginning of his *Commentary on Genesis* (*comm. in Gen.*), a prose work, Ephrem says that he began the work unwillingly, at the insistence of friends, because he thought he had already explained everything in the homilies (*mēmre*) and in the *madrāšē* (probably a reference to the *hymn. parad.*)<sup>173</sup>. Here, the difference between poetry and prose is that in poetry Ephrem expresses himself abundantly (*b-saggi'ātā*)—that is, exhaustively—while in prose he writes briefly (*b-karyātā*), explaining only the problematic passages of the biblical text<sup>174</sup>. Given Ephrem's clear preference for the poetic medium, as testified by the quantity and importance of his poetic works compared to prose, one can interpret the beginning of the *comm. in Gen.* as referring not to an accidental preference for poetic treatment over prose on this occasion, but to a more general trend of the author towards treating theological themes extensively in poetry and using prose for more circumstantial occasions and aims. This can corroborate my view that Ephrem used poetry as an integral part of his theological approach, even though the author does not explicitly say so or offer a precise definition of the features of poetry that commend its use to the theologian.

171 I find the following works exemplar of this line of thought: Murray 1975; El-Khoury 1985; Brock 1992; Den Biesen 2006; Narinskaya 2013; the studies of T. Bou Mansour. See Mathews/Amar/McVey 1994, 45–47 (with notes), for a similar approach and more bibliography.

172 Butts 2017.

173 "I had not wanted to write a commentary on the first book of creation, lest we should now repeat what we had set down in the metrical homilies (*mēmre*) and hymns (*madrāšē*). Nevertheless, compelled by the love of friends, we have written briefly of those things of which we wrote at length in the metrical homilies and in the hymns" (*comm. in Gen.*, translation at Mathews/Amar/McVey 1994, 67).

174 Mathews/Amar-McVey 1994, 60.

Until this point, the discourse has been rather general: we have determined that both Ephrem and Gregory acknowledge a peculiar aesthetic value to poetry, but we still have to understand why they chose to apply this value (or others still to be ascertained) to the theme of bishops. Ephrem's image of the garland suggests that the reason he chose poetry to praise the bishops was that he perceived poetry as more valuable than prose. The beauty of poetry embellishes its content, and a genre that embellishes is the most suitable for praise. However, one must not overemphasise aesthetic reasons in the choice of poetry: considering what we know about the performance conditions of Ephrem's *madrāšē*, this was also the genre that allowed the most direct connection of the poet with the congregation. In the case of Ephrem, genre still defines an occasion and an exclusive channel of communication. The possibility of addressing the congregation directly on the topic of its bishop during the liturgy was a powerful means for sending messages about the bishop and defending his legitimacy.

Gregory, in the four poems against bishops, does not state why he chose to express himself in poetry. As we will see, aesthetic considerations were not the only reasons to choose a genre, even in the case of Greek literature, where rhetoric and educational practice had considerably liberated the ancient genres from their original contexts and constraints. The long iambic poem II, 1, 12 is a poetic rendition of the real discourse, whose edited version is preserved as *or.* 42. In general, we can say that iambic poetry was traditionally divided into two strands, one of harsh invective and the other of moralising poems<sup>175</sup>. Therefore, it is only right that Gregory should choose iambic metre as the mode in which to launch his full-fledged attack against the bishops while at the same time moralising on the state of contemporary church. Furthermore, what he had written in iambs he could transpose into other genres without losing face: this is demonstrated by the already mentioned *ep.* 176, where Gregory asks the rhetor Eudoxius for a favour after admitting that he wrote denigratory iambs against him and downplaying the importance of this kind of attack<sup>176</sup>. Similarly, Gregory managed to open a cool but courteous exchange of letters and favours with his successor Nectarius, notwithstanding his clear and violent verbal attacks on Nectarius's person<sup>177</sup>.

Gregory's last speech before he resigned at the council was never edited in prose, but only in the dramatised forms of hexametric poetry (II, 1, 13) and in a section of the iambic *On His Own Life* (II, 1, 11, 1828–1855). The epic version of the discourse is considerably expanded and focalised on the worthlessness of bishops, a theme the

175 Agosti 2001, 231–233.

176 Ἡ που τῶν ἰάμβων ἡμῖν μνησικακεῖς, ὣν ὁ κακῶς ἀπολούμενος Οὐαλεντῖνος προσέπτυσσε, καὶ ταῦτα σοῦ θέλοντος. Οὐ γὰρ ἦν ῥήτορος ἀνδρὸς καὶ δεινοῦ ἀνδρ' ἐπαμύνασθαι, ὅποτε τις πρότερον ἰαμβοποιεῖν τοιαῦτα κατετόλμησεν. Ἀλλ', Ἀχιλεῦ, δάμασον θυμὸν μέγαν καὶ κίνησον αὐθις ἡμῖν τὴν γραφίδα, τὴν σὴν μελίαν· μὴ δόξης, μικρὰ πεπονθῶς ... Ἡ μὲν οὖν παιδιὰ τοσαύτη καὶ ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον. Ὁ δὲ οὐκέτι παιζόντων ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ καὶ λίαν σπουδαζόντων, τὸν γλυκύτατον υἱὸν ἡμῶν Νικόβουλον αὐθις ἐγγχειρίζομέν σοι. ἀπαντᾷν εἰς μεῖζω, τὸν ἐπισκοπικὸν τρόπον (*ep.* 176, 2–3; 5).

177 McLynn 1997; McGuckin 2001a, 375–377; McGuckin 2001b, 163–164, 167.

iambic version doesn't even touch. The retellings of biblical episodes are abundant, which may account for the choice of Homeric poetry for this discourse: it mythologises the actual incident, which becomes a groundbreaking and epic moment, linking it to the epic Greek past and the biblical sacred history. The choice of hexameter for an invective is not without parallels: Claudian's two invectives, *In Rufinum* and *In Eutropium*, are framed as epic poems, except for the first book of *In Eutropium*, which is an inverted panegyric, a ψόγος. In the case of Claudian, however, the model of Roman satire is at work, too, so that occasional use of low language and aggressive "iambic" content feels more appropriate than in Gregory's Homeric diction<sup>178</sup>. II, 1, 10 and 17, with their elegiac form and content, are part of a larger constellation of poems, in which Gregory reflects on his past through the form of lament. Lament allows for a vaguer grasp on reality and for a representation of Gregory's own situation as a moral example relevant for anyone. In other words, these poems are not concerned with the exact narration of historical episodes, but with the communication of a certain image of their author. Through these frames, one can understand the choice of poetry to talk about bishops.

### 1.3.2 Poetry as spiritual exercise and the poet as ascetic

In this longer section, I will examine the first and fourth motivations for writing poetry that Gregory gives in *On His Verses* (II, 1, 39). The first motivation, in particular, can be brought into relation with the ancient practice of spiritual exercise, which in that period was being appropriated and adapted also by Christian authors. This idea, however, does not explain well Gregory's own presentation of our poems. Here, the fourth motive given at II, 1, 39 is much more interesting. I will then show how contemporary interpretations of the Psalms and classical poetry provided Gregory with the justification and form to vent his negative passions. His aim in this venting is not so much personal therapy, but to project a certain image of himself to the reader; to demonstrate that this is the case, I will analyse Gregory's treatment of two negative feelings, pain and rage. Pain, vented thanks to the elegiac and erotic tradition, allows Gregory to present himself as a martyr of public life, and therefore a legitimate public actor. Rage, on the other hand, seems more problematic for its deeply negative connotations in late antiquity, but the tradition of iamb, comedy, and Socratic enquiry allows for a justified expression of this socially destructive feeling. Gregory can thereby present himself as an outsider and the chastiser of bad bishops. Taking all these elements together, I will delineate the complex strategy of self-presentation that Gregory developed in the poems on bishops, which was possible only through the medium of classicising poetry. On the other side, Ephrem appears as a much more traditional Christian writer, anticipating trends of the subse-

<sup>178</sup> Long 1996, 65–106; see also Fo 1982, 70; Koster 1980, 298–351; Cameron 1970, 83–84. More on this at §5.2.



quent hagiography but without departing from Christian models of self-presentation. The cause of this difference between the two writers may be that, while Gregory speaks as a bishop to bishops in the second person, Ephrem praises bishops in the third person.

Of the four reasons Gregory gives for his writing poetry in the poem *On His Verses* (II, 1, 39), the first and the last are the ones less examined by scholarship<sup>179</sup>. Maybe this has to do with their prevalent psychological import and their apparent lack of cultural interest: Gregory says he writes in metre (μέτρα) to give a measure (μέτρα) to his logorrhoea and as a means of relief in his illness<sup>180</sup>. Yet there is something striking about the first reason, for Gregory explains that the constraint of metre should slow down his writing, thereby limiting the quantity of his output, whereas we know from the massive quantity thereof that he had no particular difficulty in writing metrically. How can we explain such a contradiction between statements and facts? Cues in this regard come from studies by McGuckin and Storin<sup>181</sup>: the whole poem should be read as an attempt by Gregory to recover the authority lost at the Council of Constantinople, and this idea of metre limiting excess in talking is no exception. In fact, the ambivalence of the word “measure” (μέτρον) and its derivatives is the common theme of the whole poem, where remarks about style and genre are conflated with moral critiques<sup>182</sup>: writing without metre is also writing without measure; a stylistic failure reflects a moral failure in controlling one’s own expressions.

As was noted by Storin, this theme features prominently in the so-called *Poems on Silence* (II, 1, 34–38), a series of poems written during Lent 382, when Gregory took a temporary vow of silence, until Easter<sup>183</sup>. Gregory’s vow didn’t exclude writing, but instead encouraged it, so that Gregory wrote, with his own hand, a number of letters and poems during that Lent. The aim of this practice was to withdraw for a while from

179 Some scholars did not even address them: Demoen 1993; Milovanonvic-Barham 1997; Hose 2004, 24; Simelidis 2009. McGuckin 2006, 209 takes into account the first motive. Proudhomme 2006, 205 quotes a passage of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, which however is irrelevant, because it refers to the difference between stichic poetry and other genres, where the poet could vary the measure of the lines.

180 Πρῶτον μὲν ἡθέλησα, τοῖς ἄλλοις καμῶν, / Οὕτω πεδῆσαι τὴν ἐμὴν ἀμετρίαν· / Ὡς ἂν γράφων γε, ἀλλὰ μὴ πολλὰ γράφω, / Καμῶν τὸ μέτρον ... Τέταρτον εὖρον τῇ νόσω πονούμενος / Παρηγόρημα τοῦτο, κύκνος ὡς γέρων, / Λαλεῖν ἐμαυτῷ τὰ πτερῶν συρίγματα, / Οὐ θρήνον, ἀλλ’ ὕμνον τιν’ ἐξιτήριον (II, 1, 39, 34–37.54–57).

181 McGuckin 2006; Storin 2011.

182 Πολλοὺς ὁρῶν γράφοντας ἐν τῷ νῦν βίω / Λόγους ἀμέτρους, καὶ ῥέοντας εὐκόλως, / Καὶ πλείστον ἐκτρίβοντας ἐν πόντοις χρόνον, / Ὡν κέρδος οὐδὲν ἢ κενὴ γλωσσαλγία· (II, 1, 39, 1–4); οἱ γὰρ πλείονες / Τοῖς σφῶν μέτροις μετροῦσι καὶ τὰ τῶν πέλας, (29–30); Μέτρον κακίζεις· εἰκότως, ἄμετρος ὢν, / Ταμποιοῖς, συγγράφων ἀμβλώματα. / Τίς γὰρ βλέποντα, μὴ βλέπων, ἐγνώρισεν; / Ἦ τίς τρέχοντι, μὴ τρέχων, συνέδραμε; / Πλὴν οὐ λέληθας, ὃ ψέγεις, ὠνούμενος. / Ὅ γὰρ κακίζεις, τοῦτο σοι σπουδάζεται, / Καὶ σφόδρ’ ἀμέτρως, τὸ γράφειν ποιήματα. (69–77); Πλὴν ἴσθι πολλὰ καὶ Γραφαῖς μετρούμενα, / Ὡς οἱ σοφοὶ λέγουσιν Ἑβραίων γένους. / Εἰ μὴ μέτρον σοι καὶ τὰ νεύρων κρούματα, ... (82–84); Τί οὖν κακίζεις τὴν ἐμὴν εὐμετρίαν, / Τοῖς σοῖς μέτροις σταθμώμενος τὰ τῶν πέλας (101–102).

183 Storin 2011, 243; Χεῖλεσι θῆκα θύρετρα. / Τὸ δ’ αἴτιον, ὥς κε μάθοιμι / μύθων μέτρα φέρειν, παντὸς ἐπικρατέων (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 34, 11–12).

the public arena, eventually to come back with renewed authority<sup>184</sup>. After the council, Gregory had not resumed his role in Nazianzus, probably exploiting the ambiguity of his canonical position to spread his writings as the words of the bishop of Constantinople<sup>185</sup>. In that early phase, he battled rather directly his adversaries both in Cappadocia and in Constantinople through personal poems, letters, and the edition of some of his homilies. However, beginning from Lent 382, he changed his strategy and self-styling. To do so successfully, he had to withdraw from the political arena and restore an authoritative image. Hence, the choice of silence, accompanied by the rhetoric of measure in speaking: Gregory refused to become embroiled in violent and sterile polemics and presented himself as the detached ascetic, talking only with God. This way, the writings that issued from his silence purported to be devoid of any passion and personal interest, because they were not hasty reactions to the polemic of the day, but an exercise in detachment and *apatheia*. At the same time, Gregory's silence and his "measured" expression indicted his talkative enemies. We can interpret the first motivation for writing poetry in II, 1, 39 in a similar way. Indeed, II, 1, 39 may even belong to the same writing campaign as the poems written for Lent 382. In any case, Gregory presents his choice of writing poetry as an ascetic exercise in control and limitation of speech. This way, he invites us to see his poetry as impartial and disinterested, while he presents himself as an ascetic.

Gregory's first motivation implies the idea that the activity of writing poetry can exert a psychological effect on the agent. In particular, the constraint of metre should favour economy of words and thoroughly thinking through one's expressions. In this way, the product will be measured not only in terms of poetic metre but also as regards the passions expressed. Given this description, one can easily connect this notion of poetry to that of "moral" or "spiritual exercise": an act or proceeding which consciously influences itself, in order to produce a moral effect, to modify the self of its agent<sup>186</sup>. The association between writing and spiritual exercise is by no means new: the practice of a written examination of conscience, in particular, has both pagan and Christian precedents. In an often-quoted passage of the *Vita Antonii*, Athanasius has Anthony advise his fellow monks to write down their actions and the movements of their souls. In Anthony's words, the act of writing should serve as a substitute for the sight of other people, thereby enhancing shame for one's own falls and increasing awareness of the sins<sup>187</sup>. It is not at random that this exercise is introduced as a παρατήρησις, a word meaning

184 Storin 2011, 242, 251, 253, 256–257.

185 McLynn 1997, 302.

186 See the definition of "moral exercise" quoted in Hadot 2005, 70.

187 Ἐστω δὲ καὶ αὕτη πρὸς ἀσφάλειαν τοῦ μὴ ἁμαρτάνειν παρατήρησις· Ἐκαστος τὰς πράξεις καὶ τὰ κινήματα τῆς ψυχῆς, ὡς μέλλοντες ἀλλήλοις ἀπαγγέλλειν, σημειώμεθα καὶ γράφωμεν· καὶ θαρρεῖτε, ὅτι, πάντως αἰσχυνόμενοι γνωσθῆναι, παυσόμεθα τοῦ ἁμαρτάνειν, καὶ ὅλως τοῦ ἐνθυμεῖσθαι τι φαῦλον. Τίς γὰρ ἁμαρτάνων θέλει βλέπεσθαι; ἢ τίς ἁμαρτήσας, οὐ μᾶλλον ψεύδεται, λανθάνειν θέλων; Ὡσπερ οὖν βλέποντες ἀλλήλους, οὐκ ἂν πορνεύσαιμεν, οὕτως, ἐὰν ὡς ἀπαγγέλλοντες ἀλλήλοις τοὺς λογισμοὺς γράφωμεν, μᾶλλον τηρήσομεν ἑαυτοὺς ἀπὸ λογισμῶν ῥυπαρῶν, αἰσχυνόμενοι γνωσθῆναι. Ἐστω οὖν ἡμῖν τὸ γράμμα ἀντὶ ὀφθαλμῶν τῶν συνασκητῶν ἵνα, ἐρυθριῶντες γράφειν ὡς τὸ βλέπεσθαι, μήθ' ὅλως

“surveillance” and “observation”, but also “taking note” and “taking notice” and even “observance”. It is, to speak plainly, an exercise, a praxis to conform to (an “observance”), consisting of “surveillance” and “observation” of oneself, aimed, through the practical act of “taking notes”, at “noticing” our shortcomings. As such, it is perfectly ascribed in the category of the traditional spiritual exercises, whose aim—as explained by Hadot—was raising one’s own awareness (προσοχή) of his inner phenomena<sup>188</sup>. In a similar way, Gregory’s resolve to write in metre is aimed at limiting the extension of his output to enhance its quality: the difficulty of metre should raise his awareness in choosing every single word, so that he avoids rashness and unsophistication of expression, thus mastering his words as the monk masters his passions<sup>189</sup>. In the interpreting of poetry as a spiritual exercise, another important element is the traditional use of rhetoric to move the imagination and to meditate, which is all the more important given the rhetorical character of Gregory’s poetry. This use, like the use of writing in general, is nothing new, being attested in pagan philosophy<sup>190</sup>. Dating not much after Gregory, in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* there is transmitted an evocative description of the *novissima* by Evagrius, explicitly meant to be long meditated upon and to enhance a moral response<sup>191</sup>. Therefore, in employing what in his time amounted to a rhetorical means—poetry—Gregory is subscribing to (and perhaps even influencing) a habitual practice in pagan philosophical contexts, but a rather recent addition to Christian asceticism. However, for all these parallels with contemporary Christian practice and historically attested pagan traditions, one must reckon with the novelty of Gregory’s claim. Actually, in the Greek tradition there are no precedents for such an overt use of poetry as a spiritual exercise, and, in particular, the idea that the metre qua metre could have a moral effect on the poet is unparalleled<sup>192</sup>. Hence, the first motive Gregory adduces

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ἐνθυμηθῶμεν τὰ φαῦλα· οὕτω δὲ τυποῦντες ἑαυτοὺς, δυνησόμεθα δουλαγωγεῖν τὸ σῶμα, καὶ ἀρέσκειν μὲν τῷ Κυρίῳ, πατεῖν δὲ τὰς τοῦ ἔχθρου μεθοδείας (Athan. *vit. Anton.* 55).

<sup>188</sup> Hadot 2005, 74–75.

<sup>189</sup> On mastery of the passions and spiritual exercise: Hadot 2005, 81–84.

<sup>190</sup> Hadot 2005, 78.

<sup>191</sup> *Apophth. patr.* 31, PG 65, 173.

<sup>192</sup> The case of Gregory cannot be linked to the abundant descriptions of the moral effects of poetry on its hearers, nor to the widespread idea in Antiquity that the life of a poet mirrored the genre or the work for which he was most renowned. For in the first case, we are talking of effects on others, and not of the idea of poetry as care of the *self*, while in the second case, even though the ancient biographer shaped the *Vita* on the works, the perceived causation was the opposite: *because* he has lived such a life, he wrote such works. A third idea akin but not identical with Gregory’s is that of the influence of music on morality, the so-called doctrine of *ethos*. A Christian example of the doctrine is in Athanasius’ *Letter to Marcellinus*: Τῆς δὲ τοιαύτης τῶν λογισμῶν ἀταραξίας καὶ ἀκύμονος καταστάσεως εἰκὼν καὶ τύπος ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν Ψαλμῶν ἐμμελὴς ἀνάγνωσις. Ὡς περ γὰρ τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς νοήματα γνωρίζομεν καὶ σημαίνομεν δι’ ὧν προφέρομεν λόγων, οὕτως, τῆς πνευματικῆς ἐν ψυχῇ ἁρμονίας τὴν ἐκ τῶν λόγων μελωδίαν σύμβολον εἶναι θέλων ὁ Κύριος, τετύπωκεν ἐμμελῶς τὰς ψάλλεσθαι, καὶ τοὺς ψαλμοὺς μετ’ ὥδης ἀναγινώσκεισθαι (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 28, PG 27, 40); and on rhythm in particular: Οὕτως γὰρ καὶ καλῶς ψάλλων ῥυθμίζει τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὥς περ ἐξ ἀνισότητος εἰς ἰσότητα ἄγει (29, PG 27,

for writing poetry must have sounded unusual to his audience. This is not a problem, because Gregory was not concerned about the novelty of his ascetic claims, as his vow of silence demonstrates, and also because the idea is made understandable by the larger context of puns on the ambivalence of “measure”/“metre”<sup>193</sup>.

Gregory’s fourth aim in writing poetry is like the first, because both are a form of self-care, whereas the second and third are more focused on the audience. It is not at random that Gregory at line 56 describes poetry as “speaking to myself” (λαλεῖν ἑμαυτῷ). As the fourth motivation, Gregory adduces the comfort (παρηγόρημα) that poetry brings in his illness. He compares himself to a swan because the comfort of poetry comes in the last part of his life, when, after much disappointment, he has had to withdraw from church politics: this is shown by his use of the adjective ἐξιτήριος to describe his poetry<sup>194</sup>. Poetry is a swan song, a farewell to life in general and to ecclesiastical life in particular. In this sombre context, however, Gregory sees poetry as a hymn (ὕμνος), a thankful expression, which brings relief<sup>195</sup>. As we will see, the idea of poetry as a relief has a long tradition in Greek culture; however, through this idea Gregory is latching on to the contemporary “psalmodic movement” in Christianity. As noted by scholars, Christian writers and advocates of the monastic life in the fourth century strongly recommend the singing of the biblical Psalms, often as a kind of “care of the self”<sup>196</sup>. In time, this movement led to the canonisation of the Liturgy of the Hours. The standard work in defence of psalm singing in the fourth century is Athanasius’s *Letter to Marcellinus*. Among other themes in this work, there is a long treatment of the effect of psalm singing on human passions and how, as Athanasius says, one can correct oneself (ἑαυτὸν διορθοῦσθαι) by reciting the psalm corresponding to one’s passion<sup>197</sup>. In

41). The difference with Gregory is that the doctrine of *ethos* concerns music, which is poetry but also melodic, harmonic and rhythmic structures, musical instruments, singing and dance, whereas Gregory speaks only of metre, which is just a component in the traditional doctrine of *ethos*. Moreover, the focus in the traditional doctrine is on the differences between genres of music, while for Gregory it is metre *as such* that exerts a moral effect.

193 On the novelty of the vow of silence: Storin 2011, 246–251.

194 This attribute, and his equivalents, appear in other places of Gregory’s poetic oeuvre: the acrostich of I, 2, 31 describes the poem as χάρις ἐξοδίου; II, 1, 12, 812 introducing his last speech to the other bishops (see §5).

195 Τέταρτον εὖρον τῇ νόσῳ πονούμενος / Παρηγόρημα τοῦτο, κύκνος ὡς γέρων, / Λαλεῖν ἑμαυτῷ τὰ περῶν συρίγματα, / Οὐ θρήνον, ἀλλ’ ὕμνον τιν’ ἐξιτήριον (II, 1, 39, 54–57). For the image of the swan and the refusal to sing a dirge (οὐ θρήνον) in favour of a hymn, Prudhomme 2006, 219–220: common lore wanted the swan to sing a dirge before dying, as witnessed by Aeschyl. *Ag.* 1444–1446; however, in Eur. *Herc.* 691–695, the chorus compares themselves to an old swan singing a hymn to Heracles; Plato employed the image in the *Phaedo* and criticised the traditional view of the swan singing in sadness for its death.

196 Dunkle 2016, 21–24; Prudhomme 2006, 221–223 on Christian and pagan precedents of the idea of poetry as consolation.

197 Τοιαύτης οὖν τῆς διατάξεως οὐσης τῶν Ψαλμῶν, ἔστι λοιπὸν δυνατόν τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας εὖρεῖν ἐν ἐκάστῳ, καθὰ προεῖπον, τὰ κινήματα καὶ τὴν κατάστασιν τῆς ἰδίας ψυχῆς, οὕτως τε περὶ ἐκάστου

fact, Athanasius combines the traditional practice of singing the Psalms with the philosophical tradition of spiritual exercises. There are some similarities between Athanasius's treatment and Gregory's aims. First, even though Athanasius rules out pleasure as a legitimate cause for singing psalms, he nevertheless admits that music and poetry are in fact pleasurable, an attitude which Gregory shared (§1.3.1). Second, among the passions healed by the Psalms, Athanasius mentions grief, in keeping with Gregory's fourth aim and with other declarations<sup>198</sup>. But perhaps the most striking resemblance is their use of the biblical episode of Saul's healing by way of David's music. Athanasius uses it to demonstrate that singing the Psalms correctly benefits other people as well as the singer; Gregory, similarly, employs the example to defend his choice of poetry as useful<sup>199</sup>. The example as such is nothing extraordinary; the striking thing is that Gregory employs the stock scriptural argument in defence of psalm singing to defend his own poetry: here the similarities between Athanasius and Gregory end, and the differences begin. For Gregory is indeed latching on to the psalmodic movement, but only to defend his choice of writing poetry in classicising metre, an endeavour much more problematic than psalm singing in church. When Gregory brings the example of David, he is putting his poetry in the tradition of biblical and hence inspired poetry<sup>200</sup>.

Another major difference between Gregory's and Athanasius's views on poetry and its therapeutic effects is in the way this effect is accomplished. For Athanasius, singing

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τὸν τύπον καὶ τὴν διδασκαλίαν· καὶ τίνα μὲν λέγων ἀρέσκειν δύναται τῷ Κυρίῳ, διὰ ποίων δὲ ῥημάτων ἑαυτὸν διορθοῦσθαι δύναται, καὶ εὐχαριστεῖν τῷ Κυρίῳ, ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ εἰς ἀσέβειαν ἐκπίπτειν τὸν παρὰ τοιαῦτα λέγοντα (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 15, PG 27, 28). After this passage, there is a long list of passions and situations of human life, with the numbers of the psalms corresponding to them. Then, at paragraphs 27–29 there is a long and detailed treatment of the correspondence between inner harmony of the soul and outer harmony of the music.

**198** Οὕτως τὸ μὲν ἐν αὐτῇ παραχωδὲς καὶ τραχὺ καὶ ἄτακτον ἐξομαλίζεται· τὸ δὲ λυποῦν θεραπεύεται, ψαλλόντων ἡμῶν (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 28, PG 27, 40).

**199** ψάλλοντες δὲ καὶ τῷ νοῖ, οὐ μόνον ἑαυτοὺς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς θέλοντας ἀκοῦειν αὐτῶν μεγάλως ὠφελοῦσιν. Ὁ γοῦν μακάριος Δαβὶδ, οὕτως καταψάλλων τοῦ Σαοῦλ, αὐτὸς εὐηρέσκει τῷ Θεῷ, καὶ τὸν τάραχον καὶ τὸ μανικὸν πάθος τοῦ Σαοῦλ ἀπήλαυσε, καὶ γαληνίαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ παρεσκεύαζεν (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 29, PG 27, 41); Σαοῦλ σε τοῦτο πεισάτω, καὶ πνεύματος / ἐλευθερωθεὶς τοῖς τρόποις τῆς κινύρας (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 39, 88–89) with reference to 1Sam. 16:14–23.

**200** This is confirmed by the first lines of II, 1, 39, where Gregory sets high standards for new works, requiring them to be on the same level as inspired Scripture. His adversaries would do well, if they stopped writing and gave themselves to reading Scripture. Yet Gregory himself feels authorised to write: Πάντων μὲν ἂν ἤδιστα καὶ γνῶμην μίαν / Ταύτην ἔδωκα, πάντα ρίψαντας λόγον, / Αὐτῶν ἔχεσθαι τῶν θεοπνεύστων μόνον, / Ὡς τοὺς ἁγίαν φεύγοντας ὁρμῶν εὐδίων. / Εἰ γὰρ τοσαύτας αἱ Γραφαὶ δεδώκασιν / Λαβὰς, τὸ, Πνεῦμα, τουτί σοι σοφώτερον, / Ὡς καὶ τόδ' εἶναι παντὸς ὁρμητήριον / Λόγου ματαίου τοῖς κακῶς ὁρμωμένοις. / Πότ' ἂν γράφων σὺ, τοῖς κάτω νοήμασιν / Ἀναμφιλέκτους, ὧς τὰν, ἐκτείναις λόγους; / Ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῦτο παντελῶς ἀμήχανον, / Κόσμου βαγέντος εἰς τόσας διαστάσεις, / Πάντων τ' ἔρεισμα τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἐκτροπῆς / Τούτους ἔχόντων τοὺς λόγους συμπροστάτας; / Ἄλλην μετήλθον τῶν λόγων ταύτην ὁδὸν, / Εἰ μὲν καλὴν γε, εἰ δὲ μή γ', ἔμοι φίλην; / Μέτροις τι δοῦναι τῶν ἐμῶν πονημάτων (II, 1, 39, 8–24). On Gregory as inspired poet and in the same line of David: McGuckin 2006, 206–207; Prudhomme 2006, 246–247.

heals the passion, because the outer harmony of music restores the inner harmony of the soul's faculties<sup>201</sup>. Athanasius's defence is in line with the Greek philosophical tradition, both because it is based on the doctrine of musical ἡθος and because it sees music as a way of mastering, or outright eradicating, passions. Gregory, on the contrary, sees poetry as a means of venting passions, in order to gain relief from them. This isn't apparent from II, 1, 39, but it can be read in other poems, and specifically in the poems examined in the present work<sup>202</sup>. Introducing his long autobiography, Gregory echoes some of the aims exposed in II, 1, 39: "The metre plays, a medicine for the grief [τῆς ἀνίης φάρμακον], / education and pleasure, too, for the youth, / a pleasant relief [τερπνὸν παρηγόρημα]"<sup>203</sup>. The long iambic poem against the bishops explains more clearly why poetry should be a relief, when, responding to a fictive critic of his bitter tone against bishops, Gregory justifies himself: "It's usual for those who suffer to throw up [ἐξερεύγεσθαι] their misery / to God, to friends, to parents, to neighbours, to guests, / or to the time and life of posterity"<sup>204</sup>. But the most explicit treatment of the theme can be found in II, 1, 13:

Ἀλλ' ἔμψης τὰ με θυμὸς ἐποτρύνει καὶ ἀνώγει,  
 Φθέγγομαι, οὐκ ἐθέλων μὲν, ἀτὰρ λόγον ἔκτοθε ρήξω  
 Ψυχῆς, ὥς ὅτε κύμα βιώμενον ἐνδοθὶ λάβρω  
 Πνεύματι, καὶ σήραγγας ὑποτρέχον, οὐκ ἐπίοπτα  
 Καγχλάζει, καὶ πού τι διεκκίπτει δαπέδοιο,  
 Ῥηγνυμένης ὠδίνος ἀνὰ στόμα. Τοῖα πέπονθα.  
 Οὐ δύναμαι χαδέειν ἐντὸς χόλον· ἀλλὰ δέχεσθε,  
 Εἴ τινα καὶ δακέθυμον ἐρῶ λόγον, υἱὸν ἀνίης.  
 Φάρμακον ἄλγεός ἐστι καὶ ἥερι μῦθον ἐνισπεῖν.  
 (II, 1, 13, 18–26)

however, what my heart stirs and urges,  
 I will say, yet not willfully, but I'll burst forth speech  
 from my soul, as when a swell, forced from within  
 by a mighty wind and running under a rock, invisibly

**201** For example: Τὸ ἄρα μετὰ μέλους λέγεσθαι τοὺς ψαλμοὺς οὐκ ἔστιν εὐφωνίας σπουδὴ, ἀλλὰ τεκμήριον τῆς ἁρμονίας τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ λογισμῶν. Καὶ ἡ ἑμμελὴς δὲ ἀνάγνωσις σύμβολόν ἐστι τῆς εὐρύθμου καὶ ἀχειμάστου καταστάσεως τῆς διανοίας ... τῇ γὰρ τῶν ῥημάτων μελωδία συνδιατιθεμένη ἐπιλανθάνεται τῶν παθῶν, καὶ χαίρουσα βλέπει πρὸς τὸν νοῦν τὸν ἐν Χριστῷ, λογιζομένη τὰ βέλτιστα (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 29, PG 27, 41); see the passage in n. 192.

**202** Something similar, though not explicitly linked with poetry, can be read in the famous *On human nature*: καὶ γὰρ πῶς φύλεω τότε φάρμακον ἐν παθέεσσι / αὐτὸς ἐμῷ θυμῷ προσλαέειν ἀκέων (Greg. Naz. I, 2, 14, 3–4). On this poem and its employ of the elegiac tradition, Nicastrì 1981.

**203** Παίζει δὲ μέτρον τῆς ἀνίας φάρμακον / παίδευμα καὶ γλύκασμα τοῖς νέοις ἅμα / τερπνὸν παρηγόρημα (II, 1, 11, 6–8).

**204** Πῶς ταῦτα; καὶ τί ταῦτα; πῶς λόγους ἀεὶ / Κινῶν ἀμείνους οὐχὶ καὶ νῦν εὐστομεῖς; / Ἀλγοῦντός ἐστιν ἐξερεύγεσθαι πάθος / Θεῷ, φίλοις, γονεῦσι, γείτοσι, ξένοις, / Εἰ δ' οὖν, χρόνῳ τε καὶ βίῳ τοῖς ὕστερον (II, 1, 12, 43–47).

bellows, and then blasts out of the ground,  
 from the rim of the crack in throes.  
 I cannot hold my gall within, so bear it,  
 if I should say some heart-biting word, too, born of grief.  
 Talking is a remedy for sorrow, if only to the wind

In this theme, we can detect two main problems: on one side, the idea that venting a passion through words can bring relief is problematic; on the other, Gregory's indulgence towards rage (here *χόλος*, "gall") is in contrast with contemporary society and its widespread moral notions.

In these texts, Gregory presents his poetic utterances as unwilling acts: in the passage of II, 1, 12 quoted above, he uses the verb *ἐξερεύεσθαι*, whose etymological meaning is "throwing up". It is true that the verb came to be used of a generic utterance and even in a positive sense, notably in the Septuagint version of Psalm 44<sup>205</sup>. However, as Kuhn demonstrated, the verb is used in Gregory's poetry to refer to language with a negative connotation, and there its medical meaning is preserved: the "throwing up" of words is a symptom of the lack of control over one's own tongue, a veritable moral illness described with medical terms<sup>206</sup>. The simile of the swell in II, 1, 13 has a comparable value, in that it compares Gregory's yielding to anger to a mechanical process, thus highlighting its necessary character, as explicitly stated at line 19. This treatment of passion is totally at odds with ancient philosophical notions. Furthermore, Gregory describes the almost unwilling outburst of passion in words as a remedy for those same passions. As obvious as it may seem to our post-Freudian sensibilities, the notion that emotions must in one way or another express themselves and that, therefore, venting them is a legitimate remedy, whereas repressing them can cause suffering and problems, was foreign to ancient philosophy, particularly late antique morals. In fact, Gregory's remedy against sorrow and anger, as described in II, 1, 12 and 13 and hinted at at II, 1, 11 and 39, is the opposite of contemporary philosophical remedies to passions: as shown by Hadot, moral philosophy in the Imperial Age aimed at mastery or repression of passions, and no ancient school advised venting as a remedy<sup>207</sup>. If we want to make

<sup>205</sup> Ἐξερεύεσθαι ἡ καρδία μου λόγον ἀγαθόν, / λέγω ἐγὼ τὰ ἔργα μου τῷ βασιλεῖ, / ἡ γλῶσσά μου κάλαμος γραμματέως ὀξυγράφου (Ps. 44:2).

<sup>206</sup> Kuhn 2014, 49–51. For the Callimachean background of these recurring expressions in Gregory's poetic corpus: Nicastrì 1981, 452–453.

<sup>207</sup> Hadot 2005, 32, 50–52, 80–84. Schwab 2009, 26–27 interprets Gregory's first and fourth motives in relation to the spiritual exercises. In fact, many poems can be linked to the spiritual exercise as described by Hadot, in particular the many poems titled *To His Soul*. II, 1, 78 is taken by Schwab as an example of the language and themes of these poems: the similarities with the practice of spiritual exercises as described by Hadot are so striking that we can assume these poems were veritable spiritual exercises like Marcus Aurelius' meditations. Cf. Ἔργον ἔχεις, ψυχὴ, καὶ μέγα (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 78, 1; 5; 9; 13; 17) with the definition of "spiritual exercise" as work on oneself; Ἐρεῦνα σαυτὴν ἥτις ἦ, καὶ πῇ στρέφῃ, / Ὅθεν προῆλθες, καὶ ὅπῃ στήναι σὲ δεῖ / Εἰ ζῆν ὅπερ ζῆς τοῦτο, ἥ τι καὶ πλέον (2–4) with the theme of "Know thyself" and the meditation upon death; Θεὸν νόει μοι καὶ Θεοῦ μυστήρια. / Τί ἦν πρὸ παντὸς, καὶ τί

sense of Gregory's stance, we should not look to philosophy, but to Greek poetic tradition. Here, the idea of poetry as giving relief is widespread and takes on different forms in the different authors. However, as explained by Cozzoli in an article, it is not until the Hellenistic period that poetry consciously expressed the cathartic value of poetry for the poet: the theme, explicitly stated by Theocritus and then imitated by Callimachus and Bion among others, has many implicit precedents, which Cozzoli thoroughly examined<sup>208</sup>. In her view, the efficiency of poetry—in particular, erotic poetry—as a remedy relies on its “confessional” character: referring to Pettazzoni's works, she underlines the therapeutic effect of confessions against suffering determined by emotions<sup>209</sup>. This tradition is traced in the genre of elegy by Nicastri thanks to Gregory's use of it<sup>210</sup>. It is possible that Gregory's poetry played a role in his personal elaboration of the grief and anger resulting from his resignation. Yet we cannot fathom whether this proceeding had any actual therapeutical effect. It is more interesting to ask why Gregory chose this poetic therapy and not a philosophical one, and why he published his therapy: in other words, what image of himself was Gregory choosing to project through his defence of his poetic activity?

This presentation of his poetry enhances two components of his literary character. The first component is asceticism: Gregory's insistence on suffering and disillusion, together with the manifested need to cure them, is always linked to features of his public experience. In this way, the public experience is always given a negative connotation, while resignation and withdrawal monopolise the positive side of the poems. A clear example of this dynamic is II, 1, 10, where the public side of Gregory's life is depicted in terms of labour, hardship, and pain: his mission in Constantinople is “struggling” (ἀεθλεύσας, 9), “toil and throes” (μόχθος καὶ δεῖμα, 11 and 13), “a loathsome bane” (νόσος στυγερή, 16), “envy” (φθόνος, 8 and 31), and “a violent storm” (μέγα χεῖμα, 31–32), while the strife between bishops is called “gloomy contest” (δῆρις στονόεσσα, 17); on the con-

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σοι τὸ πᾶν τόδε: / Ὅθεν προῆλθε, καὶ ὅποι προβήσεται. / Ἔργον ἔχεις, ψυχὴ, τοῖσδε κάθαιρε βίον. / Πῶς οἰακίζει καὶ στρέφει τὸ πᾶν Θεός; / Ἡ πῶς τὰ μὲν πέπηγε, τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἐκρέει (6–11) and the effectiveness of the “perspective from above” in restraining passions; τί μοι κλέος τὸ πρόσθε, τίς δ' ἡ νῦν ὕβρις; / τί μου τὸ πλέγμα, καὶ τί μοι βίου τέλος. / Ταῦτ' ἐννέει μοι, καὶ νοὸς στήσεις πλάνην (14–16), on the examination of conscience and the curbing of passions. Our poems, however, go in the opposite direction.

**208** Cozzoli 1994; οὐδὲν πὸτ τὸν ἔρωτα πεφύκει φάρμακον ἄλλο / Νικία οὐτ' ἐγχριστον, ἐμὴν δοκεῖ, οὐτ' ἐπίπαστον, / ἢ ταῖ Πιερίδες; κοῦφον δέ τι τοῦτο καὶ ἀδὺ / γίνετ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώποις, εὐρεῖν δ' οὐ ῥάδιόν ἐστι ... οὕτω τοι Πολύφαμος ἐποίμαινε τὸν ἔρωτα / μουσίσδων, ῥᾶν δὲ διὰ γ' ἡ εἰ χρυσὸν ἔδωκεν. (Theocr. *id.* 11, 1–4.80–81); ὥς ἀγαθὰν Πολύφαμος ἀνεύρετο τὰν ἐπαιδάν / τῶρα μὲν ψ: ναὶ Γᾶν, οὐκ ἀμαθὴς ὁ Κύκλωψ: / αἱ Μοῦσαι τὸν ἔρωτα κατισχαίνοντι Φίλιππε: / ἢ πανακὲς πάντων φάρμακον ἂ σοφία. (Call. *epigr.* 46); κουφοτέρως τότε φῶτα διαθλίβουσιν ἀνταῖα, / ἐκ δὲ τριηκόντων μοῖραν ἀφείλε μίαν, / ἢ φίλον ἢ ὄτ' ἐς ἄνδρα συνέμπορον ἢ ὅτε κωφαῖς / ἄλγεα μαψαύραις ἔσχατον ἐξερύγη (*frg.* 741); Μοῖσας Ἐρωσ καλέοι, Μοῖσαι τὸν Ἐρωτα φέροισιν. / μολπὰν ταῖ Μοῖσαι μοι αἰεὶ ποθέοντι διδοῖεν, / τὰν γλυκερὰν μολπὰν, τὰς φάρμακον ἄδιον οὐδὲν (Bion of Smyrna *frg.* 14). See also Hawkins 2014, 53–54.

**209** Cozzoli 1994, 104.

**210** Nicastri 1981 (esp. 451–456).



trary, withdrawal and an ascetic life are described as a “steady haven” (σταθερός λιμὴν, 32). Similar terms are employed in the brief description of Gregory’s career at II, 1, 17, 41–58, where contemporary church politics is “godless behaviours and troublesome mischief” (αἰσυλα ἔργα, κακορραφίη ἀλεγεινή, 43), and Gregory’s activity only “toiling” (μογεῖν, 45). The connotation is even clearer in the long *Priamel* of lines 59–96, with its contrast between the humble but healthy withdrawal and the unpleasant routine of a bishop’s life. The connotations of public life in II, 1, 12 are similar to those of II, 1, 10 and 17. When Gregory narrates the beginning of his adventure in Constantinople, he highlights his unwillingness to take on the task and presents it as a kind of atonement<sup>211</sup>. Obviously, the situation he found in the city was utterly disastrous and his work a veritable toil<sup>212</sup>. Furthermore, at the end of the poem (792–810), when Gregory is resigning, he employs the simile of the storm (ζάλη) in the same way as in II, 1, 10: public life is a raging storm, while withdrawal is “a good end” (καλὸν τέλος, 796). Such a dynamic is even clearer in the address to Christ of II, 1, 13, 139–148, where the disgraces of the public behaviour of bishops seem to affect directly Gregory’s physical well-being. He is “wearied”, he lost heart, his limbs are crooked, and he has difficulty breathing<sup>213</sup>. Negative remarks on church politics are interspersed through the rest of the poem. Here we find a deep motivation in the choice of poetry. As we will examine in detail at §5.1.2, one of Gregory’s rhetorical points was his refusal of office, a key argument in the defence of his tenure and of his authoritative image as an ascetic. In order to make this point convincing, he builds this system of connotations, in which public life is always negative and withdrawal positive. The literary environment in which such polar opposition can be developed and sustained is poetry, because it is the tradition of poetry—and not that of, say, philosophy or Christian genres—that allowed for open complaining about one’s own misfortunes. It is through poetry that one can vent and heal one’s passions—thereby, however, demonstrating one’s philosophical stance: What can upset the balance even of an ascetic philosopher? Public life, answers Gregory; and this is the most powerful demonstration of the spiritual authority of that philosopher, because only a true philosopher knows and loathes the perils public life entails for his

**211** Παρ’ ἐλπίδας τις τῶν καλῶν ἀποσπάσας / Ἐκδημον ἡγάγ’. ὅστις, οὐκ ἔχω λέγειν. / Εἴτ’ οὖν τὸ θεῖον Πνεῦμα, εἶθ’ ἀμαρτάδες, / Ὡς ἂν δίκας τίσαιμι τῆς ἐπάρσεως’ ... Οὕτω μὲν οὖν ἐπῆλθον εὐσεβῆς ξένος, / Ὅρκους τε καμφθεῖς καὶ λιταῖς πολυτρόποις, / Αἶς ἀντιβῆναι τῶν λίαν κακοφρόνων (II, 1, 12, 77–80.90–92). More on this at §5.1.2.1.

**212** Μικρόν τ’ ἀναπνεύσῃσι τῶν κύκλῳ κακῶν, / Λαλῶν τε γλωσσῶν καὶ πολυσχιδοῦς πλάνης, / Ὑφ’ ὧν ἔκαμνον οὐκ ἔχοντές τι σκέπης, / Οἷόν τι τερπνὸν ἐν μέσῳ βάτων ῥόδον / Ἥ τις μέλαινα ῥὰξ ἐν ᾠῳ βότρυι, ... Ὑμεῖς γάρ ἐστε μάρτυρες μόχθων ἐμῶν (II, 1, 12, 85–89.99). More on this at §5.1.2.2–3.

**213** Χριστὲ ἄναξ, μὴ μοί τις ἀπαντήσῃεν ἀνίη / Χαζομένῳ. Κέκμηκα λύκοις δηλήμοσι ποίμνης, / Ποιμέσι μαρνάμενος δηρὸν χρόνον. Ἐκ μελέων δὲ / Ῥικνῶν ἑπτατο θυμὸς, ἀναπνεῖω δ’ ὀλίγον τι / Τειρόμενος καμᾶτοις, καὶ αἰσχεσιν ἡμετέροιςιν. Ὡν, οἱ μὲν θώκων ἱερῶν πέρι δῆριν ἔχοντες, / Ἀντία κυμαίνοντες, ἐπασσύτεροις κακοῖσι / Βαλλόμενοι, βάλλοντες, ἀτειρέες εἰσὶ μαχηταί, Εἰρήνην βοόωντες, ἐφ’ αἵμασι κυδιώοντες (II, 1, 13, 139–148).

spiritual progress. Hence, Gregory chose poetry as a genre through which his authoritative image could be convincingly restored.

Statements of unbearable grief, justified with the therapeutic value of poetry, not only say something on public life but contribute to outlining an image of the poet. Gregory's portrait, as given by his poetry, is that of a "suffering self". The expression, coined by Judith Perkins, describes the ideology of suffering promoted by early Christian literature—above all, martyrological literature—but whose presuppositions were already developing independently from Christianity<sup>214</sup>. Christians defined themselves as a community of suffering people, and their role models were accordingly subjected to every manner of torture and misfortune. The emphasis on suffering, remarks Perkin, amounted to a frontal attack against dominant values and institutions of the Graeco-Roman world, while at the same time it founded and reinforced the power of the church<sup>215</sup>. As noted by Perkins, there is a continuity between the martyrological literature of the second and third centuries and later hagiography: in both genres, suffering takes centre stage, and the protagonist is defined by his suffering<sup>216</sup>. Both genres aimed explicitly at influencing their audiences' worldview and at creating in their addressees that same "suffering self" that the literary portraits represented<sup>217</sup>. As Kelley has shown, hagiographies and martyrological texts shared many features of the spiritual exercises, being forms of "technologies of the self"<sup>218</sup>. Since, then, the fashioning of this "suffering self" was still ongoing at Gregory's time, his frequent description of his pain and misery can be understood in this wider context. After all, in ideologically oriented texts, repetitions are an important clue to the implied message of the text<sup>219</sup>. Gregory's rehearsal of his pain and misery aims at portraying him as a suffering hero in the moulds of the martyrs of old and of contemporary ascetics. To use a word coined by B. Storin, Gregory's autobiographical writings are an "autohagiobiography".

How does poetry factor in this portrayal? Traditionally, martyrs were celebrated through panegyrics or *Vitae* and *Passiones* or remembered in *Acta*. Hagiography was at its beginnings during Gregory's life, so much so that both Athanasius's *Life of Anthony* and Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*, two of the earliest specimens of the genre, were still, formally, long letters. The lives of ascetics recorded by Jerome a little later were letters, too. The life of Origen was narrated by Eusebius of Caesarea in the context of his *Ecclesiastical History*. All these genres entailed a third-person narration. Therefore, in order to present a first-person narration of the life of a martyr, Gregory attempted a synthesis with Greek culture, drawing on the poetic tradition of lamenting one's own misfortunes. Thus he presented the narration of his toils as springing forth from an

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<sup>214</sup> Perkins 1995.

<sup>215</sup> Perkins 1995, 115 and 123.

<sup>216</sup> Perkins 1995, 202.

<sup>217</sup> Perkins 1995, 201.

<sup>218</sup> Kelley 2006.

<sup>219</sup> Perkins 1995, 125–126.

inner need from consolation, eschewing traditional Christian motivations, such as giving glory to God or remembering the sacrifice of the martyr and the life of the ascetic in order to draw people to the faith: these motivations were aptly used in third-person narrations, but in a first-person account they would have contradicted the ascetic image of the character and narrator, since humility was considered one of the chief ascetic virtues. In fact, authors of hagiography always display humility, exalting God and their subject rather than themselves<sup>220</sup>. With remarkable originality in the Christian literary landscape, Gregory adopted the image of the martyr and ascetic, through suffering and divestment from the public; but to adopt this image for his own person and not for another, he chose genres of classical poetry such as elegy or iamb, which allowed him to express things that genres peculiar to Christianity didn't allow.

There is a passage that clearly demonstrates Gregory's adoption of a suffering persona in the tradition of martyrs. Obviously, every martyrological work had its prototype in the passion narrations of the Gospels, and the model of every martyr was Jesus. Gregory's autobiographical poetry shares this feature with martyrological literature, since, as Hofer demonstrated, Gregory consistently portrays himself through the model of Jesus Christ<sup>221</sup>. This is particularly evident in his frequent mentioning of his stoning in Constantinople: the episode has an emblematic value, because it is the most similar to real occasions in the life of Jesus<sup>222</sup>. Yet the sufferings caused by the bishops at the council are used to draw a parallel between Gregory and Christ, too. The parallel is explicitly stated at the beginning of II, 1, 12:

Ἴσως μὲν ἐχρῆν, ὡς κακούμενον φέρειν  
 Ταῖς τοῦ παθόντος ἐντολαῖς τυπούμενον,  
 Οὕτω παθόντα καρτερεῖν καὶ τὸν λόγον,  
 Ὡς, ἂν τελείως ὤμεν ἡγωνισμένοι  
 Καὶ μισθὸν ἐλπίζωμεν ἐντελέστερον.  
 Ὡν γὰρ τέλειος μόχθος, ἐντελέστερος·  
 Ὡν δ' οὐ τέλειος, καὶ τὸ ἄθλον ἐλλιπές.  
 (II, 1, 12, 1–7)

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Maybe, as I bore slander on the model  
 of the One who suffered and commanded thus,  
 so, once I had suffered, I should have curbed my words too,  
 and thereby, by way of a full contest,  
 hoped for a fuller reward.  
 Yea, to full toil, fuller reward,  
 but to the wanting, also the prize is lacking.

<sup>220</sup> Krueger 2004, 104.

<sup>221</sup> Hofer 2013, 178, 209.

<sup>222</sup> An eloquent example: Πλὴν ἔν γε τοῦτο, τῶν κακῶν ἐφεισάμην, / Ὅφ' ὧν λιθασθεῖς εἰσόδου προοίμιον / Ἐκαρτέρησα. Καὶ γὰρ εὐσεβέστερον / Παθόντα τὰ Χριστοῦ με οὕτω καὶ φέρειν (II, 1, 12, 102–106).

Here, what Gregory and the One on whom Gregory is modeled (τυπούμενος, 2) share is suffering; they are both παθών. Nonetheless Gregory is not wholly similar to his model, for Christ was known to have borne his passion (πάθος) in silence, fulfilling Old Testament oracles, whereas Gregory is going to retort against his persecutors with words<sup>223</sup>. The question is, How can Gregory justify his departure from his chief model. He employs two lines of argument: the second has already been examined—that is, the idea of venting his sufferings through words in order to appease them; the first one has to do with the emotion of rage.

In the lines of II, 1, 13 quoted above, Gregory described the words of his poem as an outburst almost mechanically induced by rage. If we compare this stance with contemporary sources, it seems even more problematic than the idea of venting grief to heal it. Both pagan philosophy and Christian doctrine prescribed utter repression of rage: among the pagans, Stoics condemned rage the most severely, and among Christian Scriptures, the Gospel of Matthew condemns anger the most clearly<sup>224</sup>. Gregory himself subscribed to both traditions, writing a long poem *Against Anger* (I, 2, 25), where he depicts this emotion as the worst vice and proposes “remedies” (φάρμακον, 166) to restrain the emotion. These remedies are meditations in the style of philosophical spiritual exercises: short sentences and visual examples designed to curb anger or to spur shame before this emotion. Among the sentences, there is Jesus’s hardest saying on anger<sup>225</sup>. Gregory calls such sentences from Scripture “enchantments” (ἐπωδαί, 183 and 410), using a term that originally referred to spells and to the magical formulas that ancient physicians joined to other treatments. Plato was the first to apply the word to philosophy as a spiritual exercise<sup>226</sup>. These religious and philosophical stances responded to a real concern: as demonstrated by Peter Brown, in late antiquity anger was seen as the most socially disruptive emotion and was therefore repressed by the educational institutions of the time, the *paideia*. This was due to the ubiquitous violence in late antique life, a violence perpetrated by those in power on their subjects without clear restraints. The subordinate was always liable to suffer violence, and nothing restrained those in charge besides *paideia*. Therefore, rage was socially disrupt-

<sup>223</sup> Jesus’ silence during the passion: Mt. 26:62–63; 27:13–14; Mc. 14:60–61; 15:4–5; Lc. 23:9; Joh. 19:9; 1Petr. 2:23. The classical passage fulfilled by Jesus’ silence is Jes. 53:7, as in Act. 8:32. Another passage is Jer. 11:19.

<sup>224</sup> The Stoics forbade anger: Cic. *Tusc.* 3, 18–19; Lact. *ira* 17; Sen. *ira* 3, 42; rage is also strictly forbidden in the Gospel of Matthew: Mt. 5:21–22.

<sup>225</sup> “Οὐ γὰρ φονεύσεις, τοῖς πάλοι τεταγμένον / Σοὶ μὴδὲ χολοῦσθαί ἐστιν ἐντεταγμένον (Greg. Naz. I, 2, 25, 307–308).

<sup>226</sup> Lain-Entralgo 1958; Cozzoli 1994, 104 on the precedent of Gorgias. The same dynamic is at work in Greg. Naz. I, 1, 6, 107–109: after a series of single-line maxims and a paraphrase of Hebr. 12:5–8, Gregory advises the reader to repeat the preceding lines as an enchantment (ἐπωδή) and as a consolation (παρηγόρημα) amidst misfortunes. Here, as in I, 2, 25, Gregory is giving a Christian clothing to the spiritual exercise of *meditatio*: Ἐπαδε σαυτῷ ταῦτα, καὶ ῥάων ἔση, / Παρηγόρημα τοῦ πονεῖν ποιούμενος, / Τῷ δ’ εὐχαρίστω κτώμενος τὴν ἐλπίδα.

tive and carefully avoided<sup>227</sup>. Hence, presenting his final harangue as an outburst of rage might not seem a smart move by Gregory. There is, however, another side of anger. First, not all ancient philosophical schools were as strict as the Stoics on it, and even Christian Scriptures showed some leniency towards this emotion. Epicureans believed rage to be a natural emotion and justified it in some cases<sup>228</sup>. St. Paul, writing to the church of Ephesus, allowed for anger to arise but forbade his readers to act on it: “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Eph. 4:26). Gregory recognises both these allowances in his *Against anger*: right after quoting Jesus’s strong words against anger, he adds Paul’s statement; later on in the same poem, he introduces an objection against his argument—namely, that anger is part of human nature. His answer to the objection is that yes, anger is natural and, as part of nature, a gift of God, but one must employ it in the correct way, according to its proper aim. The aim of anger is to be “a weapon of zeal” (ὄπλον ζήλου, 363). Furthermore, he reads biblical stories from this perspective, mentioning some characters as exemplars for their angry zeal. For example, at II, 1, 15, 19–26, Gregory, lamenting his removal from the important see of Constantinople, mentions Phineas and Moses as examples of zeal for their actions against harlots and Egyptians<sup>229</sup>.

The question is then how to present anger as inevitable and therefore justifying expression, and expression as measured and therefore justifying anger. In the Greek system of literary genres, the genre allowed to give expression to rage was iambus. In his account of the long iambic tradition of antiquity, Hawkins has noted that whenever a later author latched himself on to the iambic tradition represented chiefly by Archilochus and Hipponax, he also wanted to resurrect the basic script of these poets’ lives: the poet is attacked unjustly and without provocation and responds with his iambs, and in consequence of his fierce attack, his enemy is punished or, even better, punishes himself<sup>230</sup>. Gregory is no exception: in II, 1, 12, he is the one unjustly offended, and his retort is, therefore, justified. And there is more than this in his iambic mask: in Greek tradition, the old comedy poets and Socrates wore the same iambic mask, giving it new connotations. Thus, the iambist became also the outsider, one who spurns societal norms in his pursuit of sincerity. Furthermore, this pursuit was presented as something beneficial for the community: the comic poet and then Socrates and the philosophers became the watchdogs of society. All these connotations of the iambic persona are consciously present in Gregory’s poetic character<sup>231</sup>. The repeated theme of envy

227 Brown 1992, 48–58.

228 Epicureans on anger: Procopé 1998; Philodemus on anger: Asmis 2011.

229 Ἡ δ’ ἄρ’ ἐμὴ Τριάς αὖθις ἀπὸ στομάτων ἀθεμίστων / Τέμνεται, ἐν τ’ ἀγοραῖς, ἐν τε χοροστασίαις, / Καὶ πόρνοι κραταίους λόγοι. Τὸ δὲ φάσανον, αἱ αἱ! / Τίς πῆξει Φινεὲς πορνοφόνῳ παλάμῃ / Ζηλήμων ψυχὴν τε καὶ οὐνομα, ἢ τίς ἀρήξει / Δόγμασιν Ἑβραίοις πληροσμένοις ἀδίκως / Μωσῆς, ἐκ δ’ ὀλέσας Αἰγύπτῳ αὐτίκα μῦθον, / Λαῶν παρ’ μεγάλῳ κῦδος ἔχῃσι μέγα (II, 1, 15, 19–26); Prudhomme 2006, 418–419.

230 Hawkins 2014, 2.

231 Hawkins 2014, 169–170, 175, 179. See §5.1.2.1.

(φθόνος) provides the unprovoked offense that spurs the iambic response<sup>232</sup>. Over and over again, Gregory remarks his unfamiliarity with politics, his ascetic background, and his exclusively spiritual priorities, contrasting these features with the worldliness and ambition of the other bishops in order to cut for himself the niche of the outsider<sup>233</sup>. Finally, he believes his words to be beneficial to the church as a whole, like a comic poet who castigates his polis only to see it improve<sup>234</sup>. All these iambic themes are summarised and Christianised in the justification for writing provided at the beginning of II, 1, 12:

Ὡς ἂν δὲ μὴ δόξαιεν οἱ κακοὶ κρατεῖν  
 Τὰ πάντα, μηδ' ἢ λείους αὐτοῖς ὁ δρόμος,  
 Ἀντιστατοῦντος οὐδενός, τὸ μὲν πέρας  
 Τούτων παρήσω τῷ τελευταίῳ πυρὶ,  
 Ὅτι πάντ' ἐλέγχει καὶ καθαίρει σὺν δίκῃ,  
 Κἂν λανθάνωμεν ἐνθάδε πλοκαῖς τισιν.  
 Αὐτὸς δὲ μικρῷ τοὺς ἐμοὺς πλήξω λόγῳ  
 Φονεῖς· φονεῖς γὰρ οἱ κρίνοντες ἔκτοπα  
 Ψυχῶν τ' ἁθῶν ἐκχέοντες αἵματα,  
 Πάντων, ὅσους ἐπληττον, οἷς ὥκονόμουν.  
 Ἐρῶ δ' ἂ λέξω, μηδὲν εὐλαβοῦμενος  
 Τὸ λοιδορεῖσθαι, πρᾶγμ' ἀπηγορευμένον  
 Πᾶσιν μὲν, ἐμοὶ δὲ καὶ πλέον μισούμενον·  
 Οὐ γὰρ ὀνομαστὶ τοὺς λόγους ποιήσομαι,  
 Τοῦ μὴ δοκεῖν ἐλέγχειν ἃ κρύπτειν χρεῶν.  
 Ἀλλ' οὐδὲ πάντων ἐξ ἴσης μεμνήσομαι,  
 – Μὴ μοι τοσοῦτον εὐδρομήσειε στόμα –,  
 Πολλοὺς γὰρ οἶδα καὶ λόγου τοῦ κρείσσονος·  
 Ἀλλ' ὅστις ἐν κακοῖς τε καὶ κακῶν πέρα,  
 Οὗτος κρατεῖσθω, καὶ δαμαζέσθω τὰ νῦν.  
 Τεμεῖ τὸ χεῖρον ἢ μάχαιρα τοῦ λόγου.

232 See, for example: II, 1, 10, 7–8.31; II, 1, 12, 97.136–137.836; II, 1, 17, 51. Beside the four poems against the bishops, the theme is explored in the many poems *Against the Envious* (εἰς τοὺς φθονοῦντας).

233 The comparison is developed at II, 1, 12, 54–69. Gregory's ascetic self-portrait at 70–75. Gregory contrasts again the ascetic and the worldly bishop at 575–633 (see §3.2.2). Lines 709–791 of the same poem are devoted to the worldliness of church politics. Gregory's ascetic self-portrait features briefly at II, 1, 13, 107–111, while the other bishops are scornfully addressed at 1–17 and then again criticised at 139–163 and pinned against Gregory's sufferings. Then, at the end of the poem, Gregory explicitly cuts himself off of the college of bishops, escaping in ascetic contemplation. This moral chasm between Gregory and the other bishops is the subject of II, 1, 17 as a whole. More on Gregory's asceticism at §3.2.2; on his self-portrait and his alienation from politics at §5.1.2. In his autobiography, he reverses the criticisms about the Maximus-affair, attributing his failure in recognising Maximus' true nature to his own moral naïveté and his inexperience of political matters (II, 1, 11, 784–806.954–968).

234 Ταῦτα πρὸς ὑμᾶς τοὺς κακοὺς ὑπὲρ καλῶν, / Οἷς εἴ τις ἄχθεθ', εὖρεν ὄν ζητεῖ λόγος. / Τὰ δ' ἄλλα ἐκεῖθεν, ὧ φίλοι, λελέξεσθαι / Πλὴν ἐξιτήριόν τιν', εἰ δοκεῖ, λόγον / Βραχὺν μὲν, ἀλλὰ χρησίμῳ, δέξασθέ μου (II, 1, 12, 809–813); Εἰ μὲν δὴ πεπίθοιμεν, ὀνησόμεθ' (II, 1, 13, 198).

Τί τοῦτο; δείξεις· ἂν μάχῃ πρὸς τὸν λόγον,  
 σαντοῦ προδήλως ἐκφανῇ κατήγορος. (30)  
 Τὸ δ' οὖν ἐμὸν τοιοῦτο· βαλλέτω με πᾶς·  
 Πόρρωθέν εἰμι τοῖς λίθοις ἡρμοσμένος.  
 (II, 1, 12, 8–32)

Yet, that the evil may not suppose themselves to prevail  
 totally, nor have an easy ride,  
 as no one resists them, while I'm leaving (10)  
 their end to the Last Fire,  
 to the All-Questioning and the justly purging,  
 even what by some plot goes unnoticed here,  
 I myself will smite with a brief speech  
 my murderers; because they are murderers, who pervert judgement (15)  
 and shed the blood of all those innocent souls  
 that they smote with their dispensations.  
 I'll speak what I'll say, without being wary  
 of slander, which is forbidden  
 to anyone, but to me even very hateful. (20)  
 Therefore, I won't name names in my speech,  
 that I may not seem to be shaming what ought to be hidden;  
 nor shall I mention everyone regardless,  
 —may not my mouth exceed so much!—  
 because I know also many deserving a better speech. (25)  
 But whoever is among the evil and beyond them,  
 be conquered and be tamed now:  
 the sword of speech will cut the worse.  
 So what? If you should oppose the speech,  
 you'll prove clearly and plainly your own accuser. (30)  
 Such, then, is my stance, and let anyone smite me:  
 for a long time I have been suited to the stones.

In this passage, the unprovoked attack is Gregory's "murder" (φόνος; here φονεῖς, "murderers", 15)—that is, his removal from the congregation in Constantinople, which, without its pastor, could lose salvation, yielding again to the Arian heresy (or so Gregory wants us to believe). His poem is clearly the iambic answer to the attack and seems to exact punishment from his enemies, because it is always presented through military metaphors ("I will smite", πλήξω at line 14, responding to the ἐπληττον of his enemies at line 17; "be conquered and tamed", κρατείσθω καὶ δαμαζέσθω, 27; "the sword of speech will cut", τεμεῖ ἢ μάχαιρα τοῦ λόγου, 28). Gregory's position of outsider from societal trends is expressed by his readiness to accept stoning, showcasing his superior spirituality. Finally, his beneficial role is highlighted at the beginning, when he presents his speech as a due resistance against evil people: in a way, he is sacrificing his spiritual benefit for the community, for he chose to speak to hinder evil people, whereas if he had been silent, he would have been more similar to Christ, and his sufferings would have

been more valuable<sup>235</sup>. However, he gives these classical themes a Christian turn. First, in order to preserve the consistency of his ascetic profile with his characterisation as an iambic outsider, Gregory tempers the abusiveness of iambic speech by omitting names (18–20). This, says Gregory, conforms not only to a legal limitation on libel but also to his own Christian sensibility. A second element of Christianisation is the mention of the last judgement. Gregory leaves the actual punishment of his offenders to God. Thus, he trades the traditional ability of iambic poets to exact punishment on their enemies in exchange for the connotation of his speech as a sort of preview of the last judgement. Even if once, referring to Maximus, Gregory alludes to the suicide the ancient iambists induced in their enemies<sup>236</sup>, normally he is consistent in his refusal to exact punishment through his words. In fact, some of his poems against the bishops end on a conciliatory note: the last two lines of II, 1, 12 explicitly call for a reconciliation with some of the other bishops, while the last lines of II, 1, 17 are a wish for bad bishop to be converted<sup>237</sup>. In II, 1, 13 Gregory clearly replaces the traditional iambic revenge with the last judgement and completely opts out of the college of bishops<sup>238</sup>. In sum, the rhetoric of anger bursting out in poetry allowed Gregory to conjure on himself the identity of the iambic poet. This mask fitted his aims very well, since the iambic poet, with his refusal to comply with societal norms and his unflinching sincerity, could express in a form legitimised by *paideia* the harsh criticisms of the ascetic, a newer outsider to the norms of society. In his similarity with Socrates, the iambographer had the same function as the philosopher, as described by Brown<sup>239</sup>; however, unlike the philosopher, the iambographer must not restrain his language. Combining philosophical disdain for earthly matters and the authoritative impartiality that follows with carelessness for the conventions of etiquette, the iambographer gave proper poetic voice to the attitude of the go-getting Christian ascetics.

Between the first and fourth motives given by Gregory at II, 1, 39 there is a contradiction. For, while the first motive intends poetry as a mean to restrain speech, the fourth motive hints at a notion of poetry as unrestrained expression. However, if one

235 This is a short version of one of Gregory's preferred themes, the conflict between being beneficial to others and attend to one's own spiritual life: Otis 1961, 161; McGuckin 2001, Elm 2000a; Elm 2000b; Elm 2012, 147–181.

236 δράσεις δὲ δὴ τί τὴν καλὴν κόμην; πάλιν / θρέψεις φιλεργῶν; ἢ μενεῖς τοῖος γέλως; / ἄμφω γὰρ αἰσχρά, καὶ τι τοῖν δυοῖν μέσον / οὐκ ἔστιν εὐρεῖν οὐδὲ ἔν – πλὴν ἀγχόνης (II, 1, 11, 929–938); Hawkins 2014, 166.

237 Οὕτω τάχ' ἂν μοι τῶν φίλων σπείσαιτό τις / Πάλης θανούσης, ἧ φθόνος συνέρχεται (II, 1, 12, 835–836); Εὐχομαι, ὥς κεν ἅπαντα Θεῷ φίλα τοῖσδε μεμῆλοι, / Εἰ δὲ χεριώτερα, τηλόθεν οὐατ' ἔχειν (II, 1, 17, 107–108).

238 Μαρτύρομ' ἀθανάτοιο Θεοῦ χέρα, καὶ τὸ κελαινὸν / Ἥμαρ, ὃ τὴν κούφην πυρὶ βόσκεται ὕστατον ὕλην, / Οὐ μὲν ἐγὼ κείνοισιν ὁμόθρονος, οὐχ ὁμοεργός, / Οὐδέ τι συμφράδμων, οὐ σύμπλοος, οὐ συνοδίτης. / Ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν περόφεν ἔην ὁδόν· αὐτὰρ ἐγωγε / Ζητῶ Νῶε κιβωτόν, ὅπως μόρον αἰνὸν ἀλύξω (II, 1, 13, 201–206).

239 Brown 1992, 62–64.



examines the texts, it stands out that the two ideas are never found in the same poem. The first one, poetry as a mean in a wider striving towards measured language, is prominent in the poems on silence, but a similar attitude is also found at the end of II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 17. In II, 1, 10 Gregory refuses to deal with the topic “bishops” any longer (25) and declares he will offer God silence instead of speeches, one of the themes typical of the poems on silence<sup>240</sup>. Similarly, at II, 1, 17, 102, Gregory leaves power to his enemies, devoting himself to Christ “in stillness” (ἀτρεμέων). The idea of poetry as a function of emotions and free speech, on the contrary, is found at II, 1, 11, 12, and 13. The poems II, 1, 12 and 13 are, together with parts of II, 1, 11, the ones fictionalising an actual speech that took place in Constantinople, whereas II, 1, 10 and 17 are clearly set some time after Gregory’s departure from the city. Given this fictive chronology, it is clear that Gregory frames a progress in his stance: from his role of outsider and watchdog of the bishops, when he was still bishop of Constantinople and in a sense still immature because subject to his emotions, to his withdrawal from public life, with a more mature and ascetic attitude, marked by restraint and measure. Therefore, II, 1, 12 and 13, still features Gregory as politically active, then come II, 1, 10 and 17 with their refusal of public life, and lastly the poems on silence set in the Lent of the year 382, with Gregory in his renewed status of old pillar of the church. In all these transformations, he remains a suffering ascetic and a martyr, reluctant before the duties of public life.

Such an explicit and elaborate posture on the spiritual and psychological peculiarity of poetry cannot be retrieved in Ephrem’s works. There are common themes with Gregory, but they are never explicitly linked with the poetic form of Ephrem’s works. This is not to say that Ephrem did not develop an articulate point of view on his writing of poetry: however, we cannot read Ephrem’s predecessors, so that we are deaf to the possible allusions to them, which would clarify his stance on poetry. All in all, the image of himself he projects in all his poems is more similar to the image of later hagiographers than to Gregory’s self-portrait. In the poems on bishops, in particular, this could be due to the third-person language used to talk of the bishops and to the praising tone of the poems. While Gregory presents himself as the only saint in a world of bad bishops, Ephrem portrays all bishops as saintly and himself as a miserable sinner.

An example is CN 17, whose first and last stanzas are concerned with the poem itself: here, Ephrem attributes the poem to his “smallness” (*z’ōrūtā*, 1, 1) and presents himself as “the dregs of the flock” (*šehlē d-mar’itā*, 12, 1). The image structuring the first stanza is that of the old widow from the Gospels: like the widow, Ephrem’s smallness (a feminine in Syriac) throws her dime in the treasury. Thus, she gives an offering, which was due, as said in the last stanza<sup>241</sup>. The last two stanzas of CN 14 are equally important:

<sup>240</sup> Ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν λήθης κεύθοι βυθός (II, 1, 10, 25); Θύσω καὶ σιγὴν, ὡς τοπάροιθε λόγον (II, 1, 10, 34).

<sup>241</sup> “Me too, the dregs of the flock, / I did not skimp on what was due [*wālītā*]” (CN 17, 12, 1–2).



image of the poet and his motivations, Ephrem doesn't seem to reflect on the medium of poetry as such in this connection. Nonetheless, this lack of concern could be only apparent, due to our insufficient understanding of the Syriac poetic tradition prior to Ephrem.

### 1.3.3 Heresy and poetry

When Gregory in the poem *On His Verses* (II, 1, 39, 48–50) laments the prominence of “outsiders” (ξένοι) in the field of literature, we are immediately drawn to think that these outsiders are the pagan authors<sup>246</sup>. Yet one could conceive of a less obvious identification: Simelidis, for example, thinks that the label “outsiders” includes not only pagans but also heretics<sup>247</sup>. In this, he echoes Prudhomme's idea that the main targets of the poem are poets and heretics, substantiated by the interpretation of lines 18–21 as referring to heretics using literature to foster their cause and thereby creating schisms and divisions<sup>248</sup>. Indeed, this interpretation presents a closeness between poetry and heresy already attested in ancient sources and directly linked with the poetic activity of both Ephrem and Gregory. Besides the cases of poetic corpora associated with communities whose orthodoxy was called into question<sup>249</sup>, ancient heresiologists and church historians witness theological polemics pursued through poetry. The earliest mention is in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1, 15, 6, where the author quotes an iambic invective of some “divine old man and herald of truth” against the gnostic Mark<sup>250</sup>. But this dynamic becomes really prominent in the fourth century. Arius composed a poem, the *Thalia*, which, in the words of his opponents, took advantage of popular melodies to spread his controversial theses<sup>251</sup>. Hilarius's poetic endeavours can be seen as a response to Arius's

<sup>246</sup> Demoen 1993, 239; Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 502; Hose 2004, 24; Hose 2006, 87–88; McGuckin 2006, 195; Prudhomme 2006, 123; Simelidis 2009, 27.

<sup>247</sup> Simelidis 2009, 27.

<sup>248</sup> Ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῦτο παντελῶς ἀμήχανον, / Κόσμου ραγέντος εἰς τόσας διαστάσεις, / Πάντων τ' ἔρεισμα τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἐκτροπῆς / Τοῦτους ἐχόντων τοὺς λόγους συμπροστάτας (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 39, 18–21); Prudhomme 2006, 108–109.

<sup>249</sup> Examples are: Marcion's *Psalms*, the hymns of the Montanists, the *Odes* by Basilides and the *Psalms* by Valentinus, the extant *Hymn of the Pearl* in the *Acts of Thomas*: see Prudhomme 2006, 6. On the *Odes of Solomon*, see Lattke 2007. On the community of the “Justs” as represented in the *Codex visionum* and the poet “Dorotheus”, see Agosti 2017.

<sup>250</sup> Διὸ καὶ δικαίως καὶ ἀρμυζόντως τῇ τοιαύτῃ σου τόλμῃ ὁ θεῖος πρεσβύτερος καὶ κήρυξ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐμμέτρως ἐπιβεβόηκε σοι, εἰπὼν οὕτως· Εἰδωλοποιεῖ, Μάρκε, καὶ τερατοσκοπέ, κτλ. (Iren. *haer.* 1, 15, 6). The invective is said to be ἐμμέτρως, and the same term is used by Gregory to define his poetry in II, 1, 39.

<sup>251</sup> Ὅτι τὸν Ἀρειὸν ἀποπηδήσαντα τῆς ἐκκλησίας φησὶ ᾠματὰ τε ναυτικά καὶ ἐπιμύλια καὶ ὁδοιπορικά γράψαι, καὶ τοιαῦθ' ἕτερα θσυντιθέντα, εἰς μελωδίας ἐντεῖναι ἃς ἐνόμιζεν ἐκάστοις ἀρμόζειν, διὰ τῆς ἐν ταῖς μελωδίαις ἡδονῆς ἐκκλέπτων πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν ἀσέβειαν τοὺς ἀμαθεστέρους τῶν ἀνθρώπων. (Philostorg. *h. e.* 2, 2); Ἀντὶ γὰρ Χριστοῦ παρ' αὐτοῖς Ἀρειος, ὡς παρὰ Μανιχαίοις Μανιχαῖος, ἀντὶ δὲ Μωϋσέως καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἁγίων Σωτάδης τις ἐξεύρηται παρ' αὐτοῖς ὁ καὶ παρ' Ἑλλήσι γελώμενος, καὶ ἡ θυγάτηρ

*Thalia*<sup>252</sup>. Again, in the Latin West, one could mention Ambrose's *Hymns*, which were clearly used as anti-Arian propaganda, and Augustine's *Psalm against the Donatists*<sup>253</sup>. In all these cases, poetic activity is directly linked to a situation of theological conflict in the urban community, so that poetry must have a direct impact on the Christian congregation and a clear target. These poems were written to be sung by the many and thus to define the boundaries of the community, excluding those seen as heretics and reinforcing group spirit<sup>254</sup>.

The church historians of the fifth century ascribed analogous motives to Ephrem. Sozomen relates the origin of poetry among the Syrians and how Ephrem came to write "three million verses"<sup>255</sup>. Harmonius, the son of the heretic Bardaisan, would have profited from his Greek education by learning to give measure and melody to the Syriac language, thereby creating its first pieces of poetry. The endeavour met with success, as the Syrians "were charmed by the beauty of the words and the rhythm of the melodies"; however, Harmonius, influenced by his father, inserted heretical doctrines into his compositions. And here comes Ephrem, who, concerned for the orthodoxy of his fellow countrymen, gave himself to the composition of perfectly Catholic words for Harmonius's melodies<sup>256</sup>. A similar account can be read in Theodoret's *Church History*,

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Ἡρωδιάδος. Τοῦ μὲν γὰρ τὸ κεκλασμένον καὶ θηλυκὸν ἦθος μεμίμηται γράφων Ἄρειος καὶ αὐτὸς Θαλία· τῆς δὲ τὴν ὀρχησιν ἐξήλωσεν ἐξορχούμενος καὶ παίζων ἐν ταῖς κατὰ τοῦ Σωτῆρος δυσφημίαις, ὥστε τοὺς ἐμπύπτοντας εἰς τὴν αἵρεσιν διαστρέφεσθαι μὲν τὸν νοῦν καὶ ἀφρονεῖν,... (Athan. *or. adv. Arian.* 1, PG 26, 16); Ἄρειος παρὰ τῶν περὶ Εὐσέβιον συνέθηκεν ἑαυτοῦ τὴν αἵρεσιν ἐν χάρτῃ καὶ ὡς ἐν 'Θαλίᾳ' ζηλώσας οὐδένα τῶν φρονιμῶν, ἀλλὰ τὸν Αἰγύπτιον Σωσάτην ἐν τῷ ἦθει καὶ τῇ ἐκλύσει τοῦ μέλους γράφει μὲν πολλὰ, ἀπὸ μέρους δὲ ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ ταῦτα... (Athan. *synod.* 15, 2). See also Stead 1978; Palumbo-Stracca 1990; Williams 2001, 98–116.

252 Hieron. *vir. ill.* 100; Fontaine 1985; Prudhomme 2006, 23; Dunkle 2016, 32–36.

253 On Ambrose's hymns: *Hymnorum quoque meorum carminibus deceptum populum ferunt. Plane nec hoc abnuo. Grande carmen istud est, quo nihil potentius. Quid enim potentius quam confessio Trinitatis, quae quotidie totius populi ore celebratur? Certatim omnes student fidem fateri, Patrem et Filium et Spiritum sanctum norunt versibus praedicare. Facti sunt igitur omnes magistri, qui vix poterant esse discipuli* (Ambr. *c. Aux.* 34); Aug. *conf.* 9, 7, 15; Paulin. *Med. vit. Ambr.* 3, 13; Simonetti 1952; Dunkle 2016, especially 44–51; on Augustine's *Psalmus: Volens etiam causam Donatistarum ad ipsius humillimi vulgi et omnino imperitorum atque idiotarum notitiam pervenire, et eorum quantum fieri per nos posset inhaerere memoriae, Psalmum qui eis cantaretur per Latinas litteras feci, sed usque ad V litteram. Tales autem abecedarios appellant. Tres vero ultimas omisi; sed pro eis novissimum quasi epilogum adiunxi, tamquam eos mater alloqueretur Ecclesia. Hypopsalma etiam, quod responderetur; et prooemium causae, quod nihilo minus cantaretur; non sunt in ordine litterarum; earum quippe ordo incipit post prooemium. Ideo autem non aliquo carminis genere id fieri volui, ne me necessitas metrica ad aliqua verba quae vulgo minus sunt usitata compelleret. Iste Psalmus sic incipit: Omnes qui gaudetis de pace, modo verum iudicate, quod eius hypopsalma est* (Aug. *retract.* 1, 20 (19)); Dunkle 2016, 36–39 with bibliography.

254 Shepardson 2008, especially 35–46, 56–62, 111–117, for Ephrem.

255 Λέγεται δὲ τὰς πάσας ἀμφὶ τὰς τριακοσίας μυριάδας ἐπῶν συγγράψαι (Soz. 3, 16, 4).

256 Οὐκ ἀγνοῶ δὲ ὡς καὶ πάλαι ἐλλογμώτατοι τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον παρὰ Ὀσροηνοῖς ἐγένοντο Βαρδισάνης τε, ὃς τὴν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ καλουμένην αἵρεσιν συνεστήσατο, καὶ Ἀρμόνιος ὁ Βαρδισάνου παῖς, ὃν φασὶ διὰ τῶν παρ' Ἑλλήσι λόγων ἀχθέντα πρῶτον μέτροις καὶ νόμοις μουσικοῖς τὴν πάτριον φωνὴν ὑπαγαγεῖν

undoubtedly derived from Sozomen<sup>257</sup>. As has been rightly pointed out, both accounts are tainted by some bias: Sozomen's story stresses that Syriac religious poetry derives from the Greek education of its most prominent author, to the point that he invents the fictional Harmonius, with his meaningful name<sup>258</sup>; Theodoret, on the contrary, even if forced to rely on Sozomen's version, tries to separate Ephrem from Greek learning as much as possible<sup>259</sup>. Yet, apart from these different distortions, the two accounts share the notion that Ephrem started to write poetry lest a heretic have the monopoly of that medium. Without the mention of Bardaisan and his mythical son Harmonius, the same antiheretical purpose is ascribed to Ephrem by Jacob of Serugh, who must not have been unaware of the existence of Aramaic poetry before Bardaisan and its independence from Greek culture<sup>260</sup>: in fact, what is emphasised of Ephrem's activity is not the writing of poetry per se, but rather his use of a choir of women to deliver this poetry<sup>261</sup>. In his *Homily on Saint Ephrem*, Jacob highlights mostly two functions of Ephrem's poetry: worship and polemics. In this respect, Jacob describes Ephrem's literary endeavours

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καὶ χοροῖς παραδοῦναι, καθάπερ καὶ νῦν πολλάκις οἱ Σύροι ψάλλουσιν, οὐ τοῖς Ἀρμονίου συγγράμμασιν ἀλλὰ τοῖς μέλεσι χρώμενοι. ἐπεὶ γὰρ οὐ παντάπασιν ἐκτὸς ἦν τῆς πατρώας αἱρέσεως καὶ ὧν περὶ ψυχῆς, γενέσῃς τε καὶ φθορᾶς σώματος καὶ παλιγγενεσίας οἱ παρ' Ἑλληνιστῶν φιλοσοφούντες δοξάζουσιν, οἷά γε ὑπὸ λύραν ἃ συνεγράψατο συνθεῖς ταυτασί τὰς δόξας τοῖς οἰκείοις προσέμιξε συγγράμμασιν. ἰδὼν δὲ Ἐφραίμ κηλουμένους τοὺς Σύρους τῷ κάλλει τῶν ὀνομάτων καὶ τῷ ῥυθμῷ τῆς μελωδίας, καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο προσεπιζομένους ὁμοίως αὐτῷ δοξάζειν, καίπερ Ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας ἄμοιρος, ἐπέστη τῇ καταλήψει τῶν Ἀρμονίου μέτρων· καὶ πρὸς τὰ μέλη τῶν ἐκείνου γραμμάτων ἐτέρας γραφὰς συναδούσας τοῖς ἐκκλησιαστικοῖς δόγμασι συνέθηκεν, ὅποια αὐτῷ πεπόνηται ἐν θείοις ὕμνοις καὶ ἐγκωμίοις ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν. ἐξ ἐκείνου τε Σύροι κατὰ τὸν νόμον τῆς Ἀρμονίου ὥδης τὰ τοῦ Ἐφραίμ ψάλλουσιν (Soz. 3, 16, 5–7).  
**257** Κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον ἐν Ἑδέσῃ μὲν Ἐφραίμ ὁ θαυμάσιος, ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ δὲ διέπρεπε Δίδυμος, κατὰ τῶν ἀντιπάλων τῆς ἀληθείας δογμάτων συγγράφοντες. καὶ οὗτος μὲν τῇ Σύρων κεκρημένος φωνῇ τῆς πνευματικῆς χάριτος τὰς ἀκτῖνας ἤφει· παιδείας γὰρ οὐ γεγευμένος Ἑλληνικῆς, τοὺς τε πολυσχιδεῖς τῶν Ἑλλήνων διήλεγξε πλάνους καὶ πάσης αἱρετικῆς κακοτεχνίας ἐγύμνωσε τὴν ἀσθένειαν. καὶ ἐπειδὴ Ἀρμόνιος ὁ Βαρδισάνου ὥδας τινὰς συνετεθείκει πάλαι καὶ τῇ τοῦ μέλους ἡδονῇ τὴν ἀσέβειαν κεράσας κατεκλήλει τοὺς ἀκούοντας καὶ πρὸς ὀλεθρον ἤγρευε, τὴν Ἀρμονίαν τοῦ μέλους ἐκείθεν λαβὼν ἀνέμιξε τὴν εὐσέβειαν καὶ προσενήνοχε τοῖς ἀκούουσιν ἡδιστον ὁμοῦ καὶ ὀνησιφόρον φάρμακον. ταῦτα καὶ νῦν τὰ ἄσματα φαιδρτέρας τῶν νικηφόρων μαρτύρων τὰς πανηγύρεις ποιεῖ (Theodrt. *h. e.* 4, 29). On Theodoret's derivation from Sozomen, see Brock 1985, 80. The trope reaches even into the sixth century, where the Nestorian author Barhadbshabba Arbaya attributes Narsai's poetic activity to the menace brought about by the poems of the heretic (Miaphysite) Jacob of Serugh (Nau 1913, 612).

**258** Brock 1985, 80.

**259** McVey 2007, 245.

**260** That Aramaic poetry should have had a long history before Ephrem and Bardaisan is suggested by the relative complexity of the forms adopted by Ephrem and by scarce but significant witnesses: Brock 1985, 79.

**261** "Your instruction opened the closed mouths of the daughters of Eve; / and behold, the gatherings of the glorious (church) resound with their melodies." (Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on Saint Ephrem* 41; transl. Amar 1995, 35); "This discerning man composed hymns (*madrāṣē*), and gave them to the virgins (*la-btūlātā*) ... (Words) such as these were spoken by Ephrem / to the pure (*dakyātā*) as he taught them a new song of praise: // 'O daughters of the nations (*bnāt 'ammē*), approach and learn to praise / the One who delivered you from the error of your fathers'" (102–103; transl. Amar 1995, 49, 51). On this subject, McVey 2007.

in terms of forging weapons and striking or throwing darts, explicitly identifying the targets by name as renowned heretics<sup>262</sup>. He also praises Ephrem's adherence to "truth", which can be safely interpreted as orthodoxy as opposed to heresy<sup>263</sup>.

A polemical purpose is apparent from Ephrem's poetry itself, and not only implicitly—with whole groups of poems, single pieces, and widespread allusions aimed at prominent heresies of the day—but also explicitly. In the *hymn. haer.*, Ephrem repeatedly addresses the writings of his enemies, calling them *madrāšē*, the same name he uses for his own poems<sup>264</sup>. As noted by McVey, Bardaisan is strongly linked with music, whereas other heretics, such as Mani and Marcion, are said to have written poetry, but they don't seem to have employed music<sup>265</sup>. Moreover, Ephrem witnesses the effectiveness of Bardaisan's musical poetry when he says that the heretic has successfully concealed the bitterness of his doctrines with the sweetness of his poetry<sup>266</sup>. In the last hymn of the collection, the poet presents his works as protecting the church against heresies<sup>267</sup>. The fact that heretical poetry was circulating at Ephrem's time and that he conceived of his work as a protection against heresy partially confirms the account of the church historians and lends credibility to Jacob's image of Ephrem.

262 "Valiant one who humbled all heresies with your courage" (Jacob of Sarug, *Homily on Saint Ephrem* 7a; transl. Amar 1995, 27); "This man introduced women to doctrinal disputes [*darrā*]; / with (their) soft tones he was victorious in the battle [*ba-qrābā*] against all heresies. // This man's mouth was a bow [*qušt-ēh*], and his words were arrows [*gērē*]; / he forged [*hšal*] songs like spearheads [*lōlyātā*] for the weapon [*zaynā*] which he fashioned. // This man hurled wonderful melodies against the evil; / with his instruction, he eliminated stumbling blocks which had multiplied. // ... This man overcame the apostasy of the Marcionites [*zkā l-kāpōrutā d-bēt Marqyōn*] ... This man humbled with the straightforwardness of his teaching / the logic of the cunning followers of Bardaisan [*d-guddā šnī'tā d-bēt Bardaysān*]." (152–154.160a.161; transl. Amar 1995, 65, 67). Interestingly, the word for "troop" [*guddā*] can also mean "choir": this could be a reference to the use of poetic songs in the Bardesanite community.

263 For example: "Advocate of truth [*snēgārā d-quštā*], that was a mouth for faith [*l-haymānutā*], through which plain truth [*šrārā gālyā*] spoke with loud voice". The three terms for "truth" and "faith" (*quštā*, *haymānutā*, *šrārā*) have overlapping meanings, all three oscillating between "truth", "sincerity" and "faith" or "trust". *Šrārā* and *haymānutā* are used for the Christian faith and doctrine, sometimes even as antonomasia (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 238, 3773, 4304, s.vv. ܫܪܐܪܐ .ܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ .ܫܠܡܝܬܐ).

264 "Mani in his poems[*(madrāšā-w)*]" (*hymn. haer.* 1, 16, 9–10); "I heard his poems (*madrāšā-w*)" (54, 1, 1); "I came across a book of Bardaisan" (51, 2, 1).

265 "In the dens of Bardaisan / tunes and songs // for he saw that youth / longs for sweetness // chanting its psalms / adolescence becomes wanton" (*hymn. haer.* 1, 17, 1–6); "For he [Bardaisan] fashioned poems [*madrāšē*] / and mixed them with melodies // and he composed psalms/ and added metres // with weights and measures / he ordered words ... for David did not sing // the song of apostates/ whose lyre is deceit" (53, 5, 1–6.6, 8–10; for an analysis of these lines see Beck 1983); McVey 2007.

266 "In the dens of Bardaisan/ tunes and songs // for he saw that youth / longs for sweetness [*halyutā*] // chanting its psalms / adolescence becomes wanton" (*hymn. haer.* 1, 17, 1–6) "He distributed to the innocent bitterness with sweetness [*mrārā b-halyutā*], // the sick, who did not choose/ the healthy provision." (53, 5, 7–10).

267 See *hymn. haer.* 56, 10.

If in the traditional view Ephrem began to write poetry as a reaction against Bardaisan, Gregory wrote in reaction to Julian or, maybe, in reaction to Apollinaris's reaction to Julian. Fifth-century church historians Socrates and Sozomen, echoed by Zonaras in the twelfth century, relate that Apollinaris of Laodicea wrote a paraphrase of the Bible as a response to Julian's famous edict forbidding Christians to teach the traditional *paideia*. As the prohibition was motivated by the pagan imprinting of the mandatory authors of this *paideia*, the work of Apollinaris sought—according to the historians—to preserve the technical and formal aspects of Greek tradition and to join it with Scripture, so that Christian teachers could in fact elude the ban. Sozomen's account is very favourable to Apollinaris, and it underlines his poetic prowess<sup>268</sup>. Socrates's version is considerably expanded, as it uses the Apollinaris's incident as an introduction to a longer discussion on the relationship between Christianity and classical culture. What is striking in Socrates's account is the doubling of Apollinaris: Socrates uses Apollinaris's father, of the same name, to duplicate the enterprise. According to Socrates, then, there were two Apollinarises, father and son, working jointly on the biblical paraphrases. Strangely, this piece of information is not frequently doubted by scholars, even though there is good evidence in favour of ruling out the double translation (and perhaps the whole story) as an invention<sup>269</sup>: the father, says Socrates, was a γραμματικός, an elementary teacher, and the son a σοφιστής, an advanced teacher; the father cast the Old Testament into Homeric and dramatic poetry, in such a way that no Greek metre was left unexplored; the son cast the New Testament as Platonic dialogues<sup>270</sup>. Now, the first

**268** ἦν ἰκα δὴ Ἀπολινάριος οὗτος εἰς καιρὸν τῇ πολυμαθείᾳ καὶ τῇ φύσει χρησάμενος, ἀντὶ μὲν τῆς Ὀμήρου ποιήσεως ἐν ἔπεσιν ἡρώεις τὴν Ἑβραϊκὴν ἀρχαιολογίαν συνεγράψατο μέχρι τῆς Σαοῦλ βασιλείας καὶ εἰς εἰκοσιτέσσαρα μέρη τὴν πᾶσαν πραγματείαν διεῖλεν, ἐκάστῳ τόμῳ προσηγορίαν θέμενος ὁμώνυμον τοῖς παρ' Ἑλλήσι στοιχείοις κατὰ τὸν τούτων ἀριθμὸν καὶ τάξιν. ἐπραγματεύσατο δὲ καὶ τοῖς Μενάνδρου δράμασιν εἰκασμένας κωμωδίας, καὶ τὴν Εὐριπίδου τραγωδίαν καὶ τὴν Πινδάρου λυρὰν ἐμμήσατο. καὶ ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν ἐκ τῶν θείων γραφῶν τὰς ὑποθέσεις λαβὼν τῶν ἐγκυκλίων καλουμένων μαθημάτων, ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ ἐπόνεσεν ἰσαριθμούς καὶ ἰσοδυνάμους πραγματείας ἤθει τε καὶ φράσει καὶ χαρακτῆρι καὶ οἰκονομίᾳ ὁμοίας τοῖς παρ' Ἑλλήσιν ἐν τούτοις εὐδοκμήσασιν· ὥστε εἰ μὴ τὴν ἀρχαιότητα ἐτίμων οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ τὰ συνήθη φίλα ἐνόμιζον, ἐπίσης, οἶμαι, τοῖς παλαιοῖς τὴν Ἀπολινάριου σπουδὴν ἐπῆνον καὶ ἐδιδάσκοντο, ταύτῃ πλέον αὐτοῦ τὴν εὐφυΐαν θαυμάζοντες, ὅσῳ γε τῶν μὲν ἀρχαίων ἕκαστος περὶ ἐν μόνον ἐσπούδασεν, ὁ δὲ τὰ πάντων ἐπιτηδεύσας ἐν κατεπειγούσῃ χρειᾷ τὴν ἐκάστου ἀρετὴν ἀπεμάξατο. (Soz. 5, 18).

**269** Wilson 1983, 10; Prudhomme 2006, 21; Simelidis 2009, 25–26 don't doubt the information. Hose 2004, 22 doubts that Apollinaris had even written any poetry; Speck 2003, 166–169 doubts the whole story of the Apollinari, and so does Agosti 2001a, 70–71; Kaster 1988, 243–244 doubts the participation of Apollinaris the Elder to the enterprise.

**270** Ὁ μὲντοι τοῦ βασιλέως νόμος, ὃς τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς Ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας μετέχειν ἐκώλυε, τοὺς Ἀπολινάριους, ὧν καὶ πρότερον ἐμνημονεύσαμεν, φανερωτέρους ἀπέδειξεν. Ὡς γὰρ ἄμφω ἦσθην ἐπιστήμονες λόγων, ὁ μὲν πατὴρ γραμματικῶν, σοφιστικῶν δὲ ὁ υἱός, χρειώδεις ἑαυτοὺς πρὸς τὸν παρόντα καιρὸν τοῖς Χριστιανοῖς ἀπεδείκνυν. Ὁ μὲν γὰρ εὐθὺς γραμματικὸς ἄτε, τὴν τέχνην γραμματικὴν Χριστιανικῶς τύπῳ συνέταττε· τὰ τε Μωϋσέως βιβλία διὰ τοῦ ἡρωϊκοῦ λεγομένου μέτρου μετέβαλε, καὶ ὅσα κατὰ τὴν παλαιὰν διαθήκην ἐν ἱστορίας τύπῳ συγγέγραπται. Καὶ τοῦτο μὲν τῷ δακτυλικῷ μέτρῳ συνέταττε, τοῦτο δὲ καὶ τῷ τῆς τραγωδίας τύπῳ δραματικῶς ἐξεργάζετο· καὶ παντὶ

levels of *paideia*, imparted by the γραμματικός, consisted precisely in extensive reading of Homer, complemented with the great tragediographers and a few lyric and elegiac poems; Plato, on the other side, was studied with the ῥήτωρ in the more advanced courses, because his style was seen as the epitome of Atticism. Plato's dialogues, moreover, were the summit of philosophical education, which in turn was the summit of education as such<sup>271</sup>. However, neither Sozomen nor Zonaras mentions paraphrases from the New Testament, nor any prose paraphrase. Socrates himself admits later on that the works of the Apollinaris "are considered as if never written"<sup>272</sup>, which raises the doubt on how he knows them so well. Hence, there is more than a reasonable suspicion that in fact this is all a scheme to adapt the endeavour of one Apollinaris, who paraphrased Old Testament material in various classical Greek poetic genres, to the layout of contemporary *paideia*, with its division between γραμματικός and ῥήτωρ, the study of poetry (mostly Homer) in the first courses and of prose (mostly Plato) in the following. This scheme provided also for a very convenient parallelism between the relationship of Old and New Testament in Christian thought and the role of poetry (viz., Homer) and rhetoric or philosophy (viz., Plato) in classical tradition. Such a parallelism contributes to the overall thesis of the chapter, that classical culture is useful to the Christians and not completely alien to Christian truth. Finally, we have the witness of Zonaras, who tries to harmonise previous historical accounts with the Christian poetic texts he can read. He connects Gregory's poetry, renowned in Byzantine times, and the *Metaphrasis of the Psalms*, a Homeric rewriting of the Psalms, to Julian's edict, attributing the *Metaphrasis* to Apollinaris<sup>273</sup>. Zonaras's account is the only one mentioning Gregory's poetry, but, given the fact that he mentions only the paraphrase of the Psalter by Apollinaris and nothing more, as did the other historians, it is likely that he is simply projecting the contemporary textual situation onto the historical incident. However, an earlier source, Gregory the Presbyter's *Life of Gregory* (sixth to seventh century), draws a connection between Gregory and Apollinaris. The biographer attributes to Gregory's poetry a double aim: on one side, it served to counter Julian's pretensions that Greek culture had to be necessarily linked with pagan religion, and on the other, Gregory's poetry defied Apollinaris's monopoly of the medium. The heretic managed to win over

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μέτρῳ ῥυθμικῶ ἔχρητο, ὅπως ἂν μηδεὶς τρόπος τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γλώττης τοῖς Χριστιανοῖς ἀνῆκοος ᾗ. Ὁ δὲ νεώτερος Ἀπολινάριος, εὐ πρὸς τὸ λέγειν παρεσκευασμένος, τὰ εὐαγγέλια καὶ τὰ ἀποστολικά δόγματα ἐν τύπῳ διαλόγων ἐξέθετο, καθὰ καὶ Πλάτων παρ' Ἑλλήσιν. (Socr. *h. e.* 3, 16, 1–17).

271 Kaster 1983; Marrou 1964, 161–162, 243–248, 293–307, 309–311.

272 τῶν δὲ οἱ πόνοι ἐν ἴσῳ τοῦ μὴ γραφῆναι λογίζονται (Socr. *h. e.* 3, 16, 22–23).

273 οὕτω γὰρ ἐξεμάνη κατὰ χριστιανῶν ὡς καὶ κωλύειν αὐτοὺς μαθημάτων μετέχειν Ἑλληνικῶν, μὴ δεῖν λέγων μῦθους αὐτὰ ὀνομάζοντάς τε καὶ διαβάλλοντάς τῆς ἐξ αὐτῶν ὠφελείας ἀπολαύειν καὶ δι' αὐτῶν ὀπλίζεσθαι κατ' αὐτῶν. ὅθεν τῶν παιδῶν τῶν χριστωνύμων εἰργομένων μετιέναι τοὺς ποιητὰς ὁ Ἀπολινάριος λέγεται εἰς τὴν τοῦ Ψαλτηρίου ὁρμηθῆναι παράφρασιν καὶ ὁ μέγας ἐν θεολογίᾳ Γρηγόριος εἰς τὴν ποίησιν τῶν ἐπῶν, ἵν' ἀντὶ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν μαθημάτων ταῦτα οἱ νέοι μανθάνοντες τὴν τε γλῶσσαν ἐξελληνίζονται καὶ τὰ μέτρα διδάσκονται (Zonar. *hist.* p. 61, 13–62, 4). The attribution of the *Metaphrasis* to Apollinaris was ruled out by Golega 1960.



people to his doctrine by way of his masterful poetry; therefore, Gregory, even though he was enjoying an ascetic retirement, wrote and published his own poetry<sup>274</sup>. The story is very similar to that of Ephrem: a retired ascetic writing poetry only to contrast a successful and skilful heretic.

We could dismiss the story of Gregory the Presbyter as a free invention if we did not have firsthand evidence that Gregory wrote to counter Apollinaris's poetry. He did so in the last part of his life, when he probably wrote the greater part of his poetry and when the relationship with Apollinaris was already embittered<sup>275</sup>. At the end of an letter devoted to Apollinaris's christological errors, Gregory says:

Εἰ δὲ οἱ μακροὶ λόγοι καὶ τὰ νέα ψαλτήρια καὶ ἀντίφθογγα τῷ Δαυὶδ καὶ ἡ τῶν μέτρων χάρις ἡ τρίτη Διαθήκη νομίζεται, καὶ ἡμεῖς ψαλμολογήσομεν καὶ πολλὰ γράψομεν καὶ μετρήσομεν. Ἐπειδὴ δοκοῦμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς Πνεῦμα Θεοῦ ἔχειν· εἴπερ Πνεύματος χάρις τοῦτο ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀνθρωπίνῃ καινοτομία (Greg. Naz. *ep.* 101, 73)<sup>276</sup>.

These lines can be read as an announcement by Gregory that he is going to write poetry to counter Apollinaris's works. Against this view, Hose believes that these lines can't be linked with Apollinaris's poetry, because the comparison with David that they contain could only point to poetry in the genre of the Psalms, but since we know the *Metaphrasis* to be of a different author, and since ancient historians (excluding Zonaras, for obvious reasons) do not attribute paraphrases of the Psalms to Apollinaris, the idea of Gregory responding to Apollinaris's poetry with poetry loses its central point. This is a misrepresentation of these lines. First of all, Gregory mentions three elements of Apollinaris's communication—namely, “long discussions” (μακροὶ λόγοι), “psalm-imitation” (νέα ψαλτήρια), and “the elegance of metre” (ἡ τῶν μέτρων χάρις): this means that, even granted that νέα ψαλτήρια cannot refer to poetry, we still have the unambiguous “elegance of metre” to deal with. This expression must refer to poetry in traditional Greek forms. Second, Hose's view is forced to read the comparison with David only in connection with a paraphrase of the Psalms. As shown by Gregory's *On His Verses* (II, 1, 39, 88–89)<sup>277</sup>, our author sees David as the paradigm of every Christian poet; hence, ref-

274 περὶ δὲ τῶν ἐμμέτρων, ὧν ἐμνήσθην καὶ πρῶν, διττὸς αὐτῷ γέγονεν ὁ σκοπός· πρῶτος μὲν, ὅπως τὴν ἄθεσμον Ἰουλιανοῦ τοῦ τυράννου νομοθεσίαν μεираκιώδη καὶ ἀνίσχυρον ἀπελέγξῃ, κελεύουσιν μὴ μετεῖναι Χριστιανοῖς τῆς Ἑλλήνων παιδείας· δεύτερος δέ, ἐπεὶ ἑώρα Ἀπολλινάριον ῥάψαντα πολυστίχους βίβλους ἐκ διαφόρων μέτρων, καὶ τούτοις κλέψαντα τοὺς πολλοὺς εἰς τὴν αἵρεσιν, ὡς ἐλλόγιμον δῆθεν, ἀναγκαῖον ᾧ ἦθ, ἐν Ἀριανοῖς ἡσυχάζων μετὰ τὴν ὑποστροφὴν καὶ σχολὴν ἄγων, οἷα πραγμάτων ἀπηλλαγμένος, τῆνικαῦτα γράψαι τὰ ἔμμετρα, ὅθεν μοι εὐρηται ἡ πλείστη ὕλη τῆσδε τῆς ὑποθέσεως (Gregory the Presbyter, *Life of Gregory* PG 35, 304 A-C).

275 McGuckin 2001a, 384–396.

276 “If, however, long discussions and new psalters, dissonant from David, and the elegance of metre are held as the Third Testament, we too will speak through psalms and write long and in metre. Because we too believe to have the Spirit of God, if only these things are a gift of the Spirit, and not human innovations”.

277 Σαοὺλ σε τοῦτο πεισάτω, καὶ πνεύματος / ἐλευθερωθεῖς τοῖς τρόποις τῆς κινύρας (II, 1, 39, 88–89) with reference to 1Sam. 16:14–23.

erences to David can be interpreted also as general references to poetry and not always and only as referring to the biblical book of Psalms. Moreover, Apollinaris's psalter is described as "dissonant" (ἀντίφθογγα) to David's. Such a description isn't apt for a paraphrastic psalter, which should be consonant to its original. Since the issue here is not style, but content, the word ἀντίφθογγα must mean that Apollinaris's poems contradict David's teachings, and, given Gregory's main concern with Apollinaris's Christology, they must have contradicted David's messianic prophecies specifically and all those passages in the Psalms where Gregory saw christological statements. Finally, allowing for the sake of argument that Gregory refers to a paraphrase of the Psalms, why would have he found fault with it? Among the many oeuvres by Apollinaris, Gregory had no reason to attack specifically the biblical paraphrase, a genre that he himself practiced. If then *ep.* 101 doesn't refer to a paraphrase of the Psalms in the first place, the fact that our *Metaphrasis* is not by Apollinaris or that the historians don't mention a paraphrase of the Psalms is of no relevance in excluding that Apollinaris did in fact write poetry and Gregory reacted to it. After all, there is another passage in Sozomen that seems to point in the same direction as these lines by Gregory. Sozomen, at *h. e.* 6, 25, 5, writes that the Apollinarist communities used different rites and sang (ψάλλοντες) "some metrical ditties composed by Apollinaris himself". These works are linked to Apollinaris's poetic prowess, which allowed him, thanks to his education, to employ every metre of the Greek tradition, a detail that Sozomen had already mentioned when speaking of Apollinaris's biblical paraphrases. Apollinaris's poems were a hit, and they spread also outside of liturgy, with pieces composed for every situation of day-to-day life<sup>278</sup>. It is likely that Gregory's remarks in *ep.* 101 are aimed at these poems and not at the biblical paraphrases: while the latter would date back to Julian's reign, when Apollinaris was still a prominent figure of the Nicene ranks, and their aim was antipagan, the poems mentioned by Sozomen fall under the category of heretical propaganda, as seen in the cases of Arius or Bardaisan, with the typical remark that everyone in his daily life sang the works of the heretic. It is conceivable, then, that Gregory wrote poetry in reaction to Apollinaris's works. Some of Gregory's poems can be traced back to the Apollinarist controversy (for example, I, 1, 10), and maybe others, even though they are not directly discussing Apollinaris's theories, were in fact conceived and composed to compete with analogous ones by Apollinaris.

It appears that the two major poets of Eastern Christianity in the fourth century began to write only after heretics had already employed that medium, and only to

278 ἐκ τούτου δὲ καὶ ἐν ἄλλαις πόλεσι χωρὶς ἐκκλησιαζόντων ὑπὸ ἐπισκόποις ἰδίους, καὶ θεσμοῖς ἐχρῶντο ἄλλοτριῶν τῆς καθόλου ἐκκλησίας, παρὰ τὰς νενομισμένας ἱερὰς ὡδὰς ἔμμετρά τινα μελῦδρια ψάλλοντες παρ' αὐτοῦ Ἀπολινარიῶν ἡρρημένα. πρὸς γὰρ τῇ ἄλλῃ παιδεύσει καὶ ποιητικὸς ὢν καὶ παντοδαπῶν μέτρων εἰδήμων καὶ τοῖς ἐντεῦθεν ἡδύσμασι τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐπειθεν αὐτῷ προσέχειν· ἄνδρες τε γὰρ παρὰ τοὺς πότους καὶ ἐν ἔργοις καὶ γυναῖκες παρὰ τοὺς ἰστούς τὰ αὐτοῦ μέλη ἐψάλλον. σπουδῆς γὰρ καὶ ἀνέσεως καὶ ἑορτῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πρὸς τὸν ἐκάστου καιρὸν εἰδύλλια αὐτῷ πεπνῆγτο, πάντα εἰς εὐλογίαν θεοῦ τείνοντα (Soz. 6, 25, 5).

counter the poetic monopoly of those heretics. Yet when one skims the works of these Christian poets, only a part of their poetry can be meaningfully linked with antiheretical polemics. There is much more that must be traced to other aims and occasions. In the case of Gregory, he himself gives his motivations, and countering Apollinaris is only one of the many he mentions. This contrasts with his ancient biographer's explanation, that poetry was essentially a response to Julian and Apollinaris. In the case of Ephrem, there is a stark contrast between his various and huge corpus and the limited purposes that fifth-century sources (Sozomen, Theodoret, Jacob) attribute to it. These same sources seem to reserve poetry as a mean of expression to heretics only, and only exceptionally to orthodox figures. Was poetry really a "heretical" genre? First, we can explain the attention paid by our sources to doctrinal controversies by reference to the situation of the church in fifth century: authors like Sozomen, Theodoret, Socrates, and Jacob of Serugh write in the context of the christological controversies, arguably the most heated debate inside the ancient church. In this context, it is only normal that they would read a continuous struggle of Orthodoxy and heresy also in the past incidents of ecclesiastical history. For example, Jacob's reduction of Ephrem's aims to the rebuttal of heresies and the praise of God is understandable in terms of Jacob's own concerns in writing poetry<sup>279</sup>. But there is more, for we perceive in the sources an ambivalent attitude towards poetry. Jacob, for whom Christian poetry is a given, uses the antiheretical purpose of Ephrem's poetry to justify his use of women choirs<sup>280</sup>. Theodoret receives Sozomen's account on the beginnings of Syriac poetry but, as much as possible, disconnects the authoritative Ephrem from the supposed Greek roots of Syriac poetry, stressing the saint's lack of *paideia*. A similar, albeit more ambiguous, image of poetry is found in Sozomen's accounts. He too denies any link between Ephrem and Greek *paideia*, even if he witnesses to a Syriac *paideia* developed among Ephrem's pupils<sup>281</sup>. However, among these pupils some are praised only for their eloquence, because they were not orthodox. Otherwise, we saw Greek poetry always linked with heretics, Bardaisan (by the proxy of his fictitious son Harmonius) and Apollinaris. Even though Sozomen, in his account of Julian's edict, praises Apollinaris' skill, Sozomen's take on later—and more original—literary efforts of Apollinaris seems less generous, at least judging from his dismissive tone: he calls the "new psalms" composed by Apollinaris "ditties" (μελύδρια). Among the incidents relating to Julian's edict—which, according to Sozomen, would have been

279 See McVey 2007, 245–246.

280 However, as noted by McVey 2007, 246, Jacob is something of an exception, because his attitude is much more sympathetic towards Ephrem than that of his contemporary and correspondent Philoxenus of Mabbug. The latter drifted apart from Ephrem's legacy in the course of his life, most of all because of the latter's insufficient Christology (Butts 2017).

281 καίπερ Ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας ἄμοιρος (Soz. 3, 16, 7); καὶ μαθητὰς ἐσχηκέναι πολλοὺς σπουδῇ τὴν αὐτοῦ παιδευσιν ζηλώσαντας, ἐπισημοτάτους δὲ Ἀββᾶν καὶ Ζηνόβιον, Ἀβραάμ τε καὶ Μαρᾶν καὶ Συμεῶνα, ἐφ' οἷς μεγαλυνοῦσιν οἱ Σύρων παῖδες καὶ ὅσοι τὴν παρ' αὐτοῖς παιδείαν ἠκρίβωσαν. ἐπίσης δὲ Παυλωνᾶν καὶ Ἀρανὰ ἐπαινοῦσιν ἐπὶ εὐγλωττίᾳ· φασὶ δὲ τῶν ὑγιῶν δογμάτων διαμαρτεῖν αὐτοὺς (4).

motivated by envy of the *paideia* acquired by Apollinaris, Basil, and Gregory—nothing is said of Gregory, and Basil is cautiously credited with a witty answer to a jeer by the emperor, showing his educated background and, even more, his courage<sup>282</sup>. Sozomen shows no sign of interest for Gregory’s poetry. Socrates has the most favourable presentation of Greek *paideia* we have seen. He frames the account of Apollinaris’s paraphrases with his duplication of the character and the parallelisms between γραμματική and ῥητορική on one side and Old and New Testament on the other in order to defend the value of classical culture. However, Socrates’s judgement on the paraphrases per se is not as approving as it appears at first. In fact, he praises them as an astounding achievement, but he also says that their later disappearance is providential<sup>283</sup>. If the Apollinarian paraphrases had wholly replaced classical authors in an educational context, argues Socrates, there would have been a cultural divide between Christians and pagans, a divide that would have made dialogue and conversion harder<sup>284</sup>. Therefore, in order to legitimise Greek *paideia*, Socrates must underplay the importance of Christian classicising poetry. Moreover, the fact that he has to defend Greek *paideia* at all means that someone could attack it. These might have been monks: an increasing influence of monasticism and monastic values in fifth-century Greek Christianity might have made our witnesses more wary about Christian poetry. A remark on poetry by a leading figure of monasticism between the fourth and fifth century, Nilus of Ancyra, again connects this genre with Apollinaris and shows a very poor appreciation for it: writing a letter (2, 49) to a grammarian turned monk, Nilus launches into a tirade against pagan culture, especially poetry, “the hexameters and the iambs”<sup>285</sup>. The emphasis on poetry as the summary of vain pagan εὐεπία and σοφία (eloquence and learning) may be due to the addressee’s the profession as a γραμματικός. In fact, when Nilus underlines the absurdity of turning back to pagan learning after having embraced monasticism, he may be

282 τάδε γὰρ ἐπιτωθάζων ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῖς τότε διαπρέπουσιν ἐπισκόποις ἐπέστειλεν· «ἀνέγνω, ἔγνω, κατέγνω», τοὺς δὲ πρὸς ταῦτα ἀντιγράψαι· «ἀνέγνω, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔγνω· εἰ γὰρ ἔγνω, οὐκ ἂν κατέγνω.» εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ Βασιλείῳ τῷ προστάντι τῶν ἐν Καππαδοκίᾳ ἐκκλησιῶν ταύτην τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἀνατιθέας, καὶ οὐκ ἀπεικός· ἀλλ’ εἴτε αὐτοῦ εἴτε ἄλλου ταῦτά ἐστι, δίκαιον ἀνδρείας καὶ παιδεύσεως ἄγασθαι τὸν γράψαντα (Soz. 5, 18, 8).

283 Ἀλλ’ ἡ πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ κρείσσω ἐγένετο καὶ τῆς τούτων σπουδῆς καὶ τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως ὁρμῆς· ὁ μὲν γὰρ νόμος οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν ἀπέσβη τῷ βασιλεῖ, ὡς προϊόντες δηλώσομεν, τῶν δὲ οἱ πόνοι ἐν ἴσῳ τοῦ μὴ γραφῆναι λογίζονται (Socr. h. e. 3, 16).

284 Σφόδρα δὲ καταπολεμοῦνται οἱ πολέμιοι, ὅταν τοῖς αὐτῶν ὅπλοις χρώμεθα κατ’ αὐτῶν· τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ ἐνῆν ὑπάρξειν τοῖς Χριστιανίζουσι, δι’ ὧν οἱ Ἀπολινάριοι ἔγραψαν (Socr. h. e. 3, 16).

285 Τῶν ἀτοποτάτων τοῖνυν ἂν εἴη, προβάνας ἡμᾶς τῷ ὄρει τῆς κατὰ Χριστὸν ὑψηλῆς φιλοσοφίας, μετὰ τὸ διαπτῦσαι τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν τερθρείαν, καὶ ἀτιμάσαι τὴν κομπωιδίαν αὐτῶν, πάλιν εἰς τὴν τῆς κουφοδοξίας καὶ τῆς ματαιοπονίας καταφέρεισθαι σκοτεινотάτην φάραγγα, καὶ τοὺς τελείους τὴν φρένα πάλιν παιδαριεύεσθαι, καὶ δίκην μειρακίων περὶ πολλοῦ ποιεῖσθαι τὰ ἔπη καὶ τοὺς ἰάμβους, ὧν χρεῖαν οὐδεὶς ἔσχεν (Nil. Anc. ep. 2, 49, PG 79, 220C). The passage is really interesting: beside the obvious themes of regression from the previous conversion to Christ (in keeping with the addressee’s renewed profession) and the aggressive anti-Hellenistic polemic, the regression is aptly described as a return to childhood. This hints at the fact that the grammarian’s students were adolescents (μειράκια, παιδάρια).

trying to persuade his addressee not to resume his former profession<sup>286</sup>. However, this firm condemnation of poetry by an authoritative figure of the monastic movement had to represent a shared feeling, or at least to influence it. Concerning this influence, it is very interesting that the person brought forward by Nilus as an example of the damages of mixing pagan and Christian culture is Apollinaris of Laodicea<sup>287</sup>.

Hence, in evaluating our fifth-century (and later) sources, we have to take into account two fundamental biases: their tendency to read previous church history as a history of dogmatic disputes and a suspicious attitude towards poetry conveyed by (specifically Egyptian) monasticism. For these reasons, later sources fail to account for the abundant and varied corpora of poetry produced by Ephrem and Gregory, which comprise different genres and contents, and therefore different aims and targets. This is not to say that polemical and specifically antiheretical themes are absent. On the contrary, these are an important part of Ephrem's and Gregory's poetry, but, besides theological polemics, the texts on bishops—to take a relevant example—present us with intraecclesial and, with Ephrem, even intracongregational polemics, which have almost nothing theological and are very political. Therefore, the image of the withdrawn ascetic—Ephrem or the old Gregory—undertaking the childish exercise of poetry unwillingly, only to counter the spread of heretical psalms and songs, is largely a fifth-century invention<sup>288</sup>. Rather, in the fourth century, poetry was seen by every strand of Christianity and pagans alike as a legitimate and effective means to carry out a polemic or create group identity. Besides, polemic and, in a more general way, poetry enjoyed an increasing prestige from the third century until the sixth, above all among the elites, but also in the eyes of the general populace: the flourishing of metrical epigraphy in late antiquity is a witness to this success<sup>289</sup>. The prestige of poetry could recommend it to an author who aimed at gaining or restoring relevance in a communal context.

<sup>286</sup> The boundary between rhetor or grammarian and monk or bishop was often very porous: Brown 1992, 75. Two cases are emblematic: Gregory of Nazianzus exercised the profession of rhetor upon his return from Athens, his protestations of ascetic desires notwithstanding (McLynn 2006). Gregory of Nyssa, though the scion of a family already most influential in contemporary ecclesiastical life, had to be rebuked by Gregory of Nazianzus to leave beside the pagan books and pursue an ecclesiastical career (Greg. Naz. *ep.* 11; McGuckin 2001a, 42–43; see also Socr. *h. e.* 4, 26).

<sup>287</sup> Εἰ δὲ θαυμάζεις τοὺς γράφοντας τὰ ἔπη, ὥρα σοι καὶ Ἀπολλινάριον τὸν δυσσεβῆ καὶ καινοτόμον θαυμάζειν, πολλὰ λίαν μετρήσαντα καὶ ἐποποιήσαντα καὶ ματαιοπονήσαντα καὶ παντὶ καιρῷ ἐν λόγοις ἀνοήτοις κατατριβέντα, οἰδήσαντα δὲ τοῖς ἀκερδέσι τῶν ἐπῶν, καὶ φλεγμῆναντα καὶ ὑδεριάσαντα τοῖς λογισμοῖς «καὶ ἡ γλώσσα αὐτοῦ διήλθεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς», ὡς Δαυῖδ ἔλεγεν (Nil. Anc. *ep.* 2, 49, PG 79, 221B–C).

<sup>288</sup> On the creation of a monastic identity for Gregory: Storin 2017a; and for Ephrem: Taylor 1998; Wickes 2018, 26–27, 35–36.

<sup>289</sup> On epigraphic poetry and the light it can throw on late antique attitudes towards poetry, especially in larger strata of population: Agosti 2010, especially 163–165, 180.

### 1.3.4 Poetry as education

Gregory's second and third reasons for writing poetry spurred the most interest among the scholars. The second reason, its intricacies notwithstanding, can be summed up as follows<sup>290</sup>: Gregory writes poetry because poetry is part of the educational syllabus of the youth, and he wants to introduce some Christian content in it; moreover, since young people often appreciate poetry and song, a Christian offer of these genres could enhance the youth's moral growth or at least avoid the nasty influence of pagan poetry on their habits<sup>291</sup>. The importance of this aim is witnessed by the genres of poetry listed in the following lines, all of which have an educational bearing<sup>292</sup>. Gregory's fourth motive, already mentioned, is his painful awareness that, at the time, pagan works excel in aesthetic value over Christian ones<sup>293</sup>. In other words, Gregory desires to occupy with Christian content ideal spaces formerly dominated by pagan culture<sup>294</sup>.

These two motives have a clear common ground: both involve an opposition to pagan literature. In the second argument, the opposition is played in the didactic field, whilst in the third, aesthetics is the bone of contention. However, this different focus is actually a link between the two motives. For, as Hose has clearly shown, late antique Greek poetry was a genre strongly dependent on schools<sup>295</sup>. Indeed, literary excellence and being part of the school syllabus were synonymous: the syllabus was assembled from works perceived as excellent, and excellence was predicated on the adherence to school models. It was one and the same space Gregory was trying to claim for Christianity from his pagan predecessors. In this ambition, the modern scholar can read the lasting effect of Julian's reign; not because, as some have assumed, Gregory was always responding directly to

<sup>290</sup> Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 504–506.

<sup>291</sup> Δεύτερον δὲ τοῖς νέοις, / Καὶ τῶν ὅσοι μάλιστα χαίρουσι λόγοις, / Ὡςπερ τι τερπνὸν τοῦτο δοῦναι φάρμακον, / Πειθοῦς ἀγωγὸν εἰς τὰ χρησιμώτερα, / Τέχνη γλυκάζων τὸ πικρὸν τῶν ἐντολῶν. / Φιλεῖ δ' ἀνίσταί τε καὶ νευρᾶς τόνος, / Εἰ πως θέλεις καὶ τοῦτο· εἰ μὴ τι πλέον, / Ἄντ' ἁσμάτων σοι ταῦτα καὶ λυρισμάτων. / Παίζειν δέδωκα, εἴ τι καὶ παίζειν θέλεις, / Μὴ τις βλάβη σοι πρὸς τὸ καλὸν συλωμένῳ (II, 1, 39, 37–46); Τίς οὖν βλάβη σοι, τοὺς νέους δι' ἡδονῆς / Σεμνῆς ἄγεσθαι πρὸς Θεοῦ κοινωνίαν; / Οὐ γὰρ φέρουσιν ἀθρόαν μετὰστασιν. / Νῦν μὲν τις ἔστω μίξις εὐγενεστέρα. / Πῆξιν δ' ὅταν τὸ καλὸν ἐν χρόνῳ λάβῃ, / Ὑποσπᾶσαντες, ὡς ἐρείσματ' ἀψίδων, / Τὸ κομπῶν, αὐτὸ τάγαθὸν φυλάξομεν. / Τοῦτου τί ἂν γένοιτο χρησιμώτερον; (90–97). Analysis of this motive can be found in Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 504–506; Prudhomme 2006, 191–193, 21–23; Simelidis 2009, 25–27; Schwab 2012.

<sup>292</sup> Χωρεῖτε· μακρὸν δ' οὐδὲν οὐδ' ὑπὲρ κόρον, / Ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἄχρηστον, ὡς ἐγῶμαι παντελῶς. / Αὐτοὶ διδάξουσ' οἱ λόγοι θέλοντά σε. / Τὰ μὲν γάρ ἐστι τῶν ἐμῶν, τὰ δ' ἔκτοθεν. / Ἦ τῶν καλῶν ἔπαινος, ἢ κακῶν ψόγος, / Ἦ δόγματ', ἢ γνώμη τις, ἢ τομαὶ λόγων, / Μνήμην ἔχουσαι τῇ δέσει τοῦ γράμματος (II, 1, 39, 61–67). On the relationship between the genres here listed and Gregory's extant poems: Demoen 1996, 64–65; Prudhomme 2006, 60–65.

<sup>293</sup> Τρίτον πεπονθὼς οἶδα· πρᾶγμα μὲν τυχὸν / Μικροπρεπὲς τι, πλὴν πέπονθ'· οὐδ' ἐν λόγοις / Πλέον δίδωμι τοὺς ξένους ἡμῶν ἔχειν· / Τοῦτοις λέγω δὴ τοῖς κεχωρσμένοις λόγοις / Εἰ καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἡμῖν ἐν θεωρίᾳ. / Ὑμῖν μὲν οὖν δὴ τοῖς σοφοῖς ἐπαίξαμεν. / Ἔστω τις ἡμῖν καὶ χάρις λεόντιος (II, 1, 39, 47–53).

<sup>294</sup> Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 502–503.

<sup>295</sup> Hose 2004.

Julian's edict on Christian teachers, but rather because the whole of Julian's figure, from his appearances to his writings and his imperial acts, posed a challenge to Christianity<sup>296</sup>. There was an ongoing discussion during the fourth century on the relationship between pagan and Christian culture, and Gregory's poetry can be explained, at least partly, by reference to these concerns: other works testifying to this discussion are Eusebius's *Praeparatio* and *Demonstratio evangelica*, Basil's *Address to Young Men on Greek Literature*, and Jerome's *ep. 22*, from the Christian side<sup>297</sup>. Pagans, too, had something to say about Christian appropriation of classicising forms: it is probable that a group of poetic texts formed around Julian and his teacher Maximus of Ephesus with the explicit aim of reasserting pagan ownership of cultural goods such as hexametric poetry<sup>298</sup>.

Gregory's ambition to become part of the school curriculum and at the same time to challenge the classics' literary authority is apparent from his literary production. Among the reasons pushing him to publish some of his letters, one was admittedly to help students learn the epistolary style: this amounts to declaring his letter collection a literary model worthy of the ancient writers<sup>299</sup>. Gregory likely edited other parts of his oeuvre similarly. The speeches, for example, were probably edited at least in cycles, with *or. 27–31* as the prominent example<sup>300</sup>. The biblical poems edited in the *Patrologia Graeca* among the "Theologica" were clearly crafted for didactic use and formed a self-contained work<sup>301</sup>. The *Poemata arcana*, for example, both thanks to their internal consistency and to their stand in manuscript tradition, were certainly published as a single book, an attempt, according to Keydell, to write a Christian didactic poem modelled on Hesiod and Hellenistic poetry<sup>302</sup>. A recent contribution convincingly proposes to read even the eighth book of the *Palatine Anthology*, Gregory's funeral epigrams, as one consistent book<sup>303</sup>. With it, Gregory could challenge the pagan discourse of death in the workshop of the stonecutters and on tombstones, too<sup>304</sup>. When one queues up these editions, McGuckin's idea that Gregory aimed at producing a complete Christian

<sup>296</sup> Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 503; Prudhomme 2006, 193; Simelidis 2009, 25–27; the formative impact of Julian's figure on Gregory's literary and ecclesiastical activity is amply demonstrated by Elm 2012.

<sup>297</sup> On Eusebius as responding to Porphyry and being answered by Julian: Elm 2012, 307–312. A comparison between Basil's and Gregory's approaches to classical culture in Milovanovic-Barham 1997, 506; McGuckin 2001a, 96–97; Schwab 2012.

<sup>298</sup> The best example among these texts is the *Lithica orphica*; see Livrea 1992; Zito 2012. On the continuation of this polemic in the fifth century, see Agosti 2008.

<sup>299</sup> Greg. Naz. *ep.* 52–53.

<sup>300</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 376; Gallay 1978, 8–10.

<sup>301</sup> Demoen 1996, 61; the biblical poems are Greg. Naz. I, 1, 12–28 in Migne's edition, and they all belong to Werhahn's *Gedichtgruppe III*; see Höllger/Sicherl/Werhahn 1985, 26–27.

<sup>302</sup> They are Greg. Naz. I, 1, 1–5; 7–9; see Keydell 1953, 137–138; Demoen 1996, 61; Moreschini/Sykes 1997, 55–57. The *Poemata arcana* form an autonomous *Gedichtgruppe* in the manuscript tradition: Höllger/Sicherl/Werhahn 1985, 28; Moreschini/Sykes 1997, ix.

<sup>303</sup> Goldhill/Greensmith 2020.

<sup>304</sup> McGuckin 2006, 204–205; Agosti 2016, 132–133, shows that Gregory's poems were frequently engraved, also in provincial contexts, witnessing to a wide circulation of his poetry.

curriculum seems not unwarranted<sup>305</sup>. Anyway, what stands out even to the most sceptical scholar is that Gregory always practiced genres with a long pagan tradition and shunned those habitually practiced by Christians: he wrote letters, orations, and poems, but not one biblical commentary, nor a paschal letter nor an *Apology* of Christianity. While the other Cappadocians were innovative—Gregory of Nyssa wrote one of the first hagiographies (his *Life of St. Macrina*), and Basil an influential monastic rule—Gregory of Nazianzus seems remarkably conservative in his choice of genres. Moreover, as his poems show, he tried to cover the whole range of ancient genres: among his many poems, there is no kind of Greek poetry that Gregory doesn't appropriate and turn to Christian use. Here a pattern that probably reflected a personal predilection of his proved useful: Gregory's passion for Callimachus provided him with a model for hybrid poems, for mixing up genres or reproducing the content of some genres in the metre reserved for other<sup>306</sup>.

The four poems on bishops lack any clear indication that they were part of a comprehensive and revised edition. As has been already said, the long poem II, 1, 12 is closely linked with the autobiographical II, 1, 11, and some scholars surmise that they were part of a larger collection sent to Constantinople, whose preface was the poem *On His Verses*, II, 1, 39<sup>307</sup>. This is difficult to prove. Among the poems on bishops, II, 1, 10 and 13, linked by their first line, were likely published together by Gregory, but there is no reason to see them inside a larger collection. The elegiac II, 1, 17 is similar to many other poems of the same genre, whose overall publication state is hardly recognizable. Therefore, these polemical poems cannot be readily ascribed to Gregory's project of building a complete curriculum. This could be due to their occasional character or to lack of time on Gregory's part. Nonetheless, the poems can be linked with Gregory's attitude towards education and classical culture. First of all, because they complete the number of Greek genres represented in his works: II, 1, 12 (together with II, 1, 40 and 41) are the only specimens of iambic invective in the collection; II, 1, 13 is a recasting of the same theme in hexameters, thus latching on to contemporary hexametric invectives, exemplified by Claudian; II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 17 belong in the larger group of elegiac and plaintive poems, contaminating it with political invective. In the wider context of his oeuvre, these poems show different ways a Christian could treat invective and the iambic tradition, much in the same sense as the *Poemata arcana* show how a Christian could treat didactic poetry. Moreover, the content of the poems confronts education from a Christian perspective. Through the attacks against his underqualified fellow bishops, Gregory's poems frame not only a moral model for the Christian leader and his community but also an intellectual curriculum. These poems were meant to reach those who taught the Christian people and to enhance those teachers' attention to doctrinal

305 McGuckin 2001a, 117–118; McGuckin 2006, 195, 211–212.

306 On Gregory's Callimacheanism: Demoen 1993, 243; Prudhomme 2006, 78, 265–266; Faulkner 2010, 81–82; MacDougall 2016; Theris Poulos 2019.

307 McGuckin 2006, 208.



and didactic facets of their ministry. Poetry, with its circulation among elite circles of readers, could influence the leaders, and if it was adopted in a school context, it could influence future elites and church leaders (more on this at §1.2.1.3).

Teaching those who in turn will teach the people: this is what Wickes says Ephrem's *Poems on Faith* were meant to do<sup>308</sup>. That collection shows a deep and ubiquitous concern for correct education, such as is rarely found in other works. Moreover, Ephrem's framing of the Trinitarian debate puts in the spotlight the influence of Greek culture on theology, because, much more than singling out positions and persons, Ephrem condemns the whole approach to theology developed in the fourth century, connecting it with Greek culture<sup>309</sup>. The poems on bishops, however, seem distant from these issues, so that they cannot easily be linked with an educational context. Yet if we broaden our definition of education, then its relevance to these poems will be apparent: recited or sung as part of the liturgy, Ephrem's *madrāšē* reached the whole congregation and connected it with its bishop, so that the poems' praise, blame, and advice influenced their audience. After all, at least one of the meanings of the root \**d-r-š*, whence the word *madrāšā* comes, is "to teach". The congregation was presented with models of behaviour and a teaching on the model bishop. The bishop, praised before his community, learned what standards he would be held accountable to. Finally, the female ascetics directly addressed in CN 13 received spiritual guidance and were taught their place in the community. Even the instruction they likely received from Ephrem to stage the performances of his poems connects these works in yet another way to an educational context. Nonetheless, all of these educational aims prescind from an established scholastic tradition, thus differing from Gregory's grappling with Greek *paideia*. In Ephrem's context, poetry serves as an educational means because it is part of liturgy, in the same way as Christian homilies have an educational aspect to them.

In the last stanza of CN 13, Ephrem urges his audience to imitate the city of Nisibis, putting the living body of Christ into themselves as the city has put the corpse of bishop Jacob within itself, in order to gain the same protection as Nisibis enjoyed during the Persian sieges during their life<sup>310</sup>. This is a common pattern in the first part of the CN: historical incidents, the sieges in particular, but also the succession of the bishops, are analysed from a theological and moral point of view, showing either God's providential nature or praiseworthy and blameworthy behaviours for the congregation<sup>311</sup>. Since

308 Wickes 2018, 42–49; Harvey 2005, 129–130.

309 Wickes 2015a, 41–46; Bruns 1990.

310 "Imitate Nisibis, / O eloquent daughters of Nisibis, // which placed the body inside her, / and it was a wall outside her: // put in yourselves a living body, / which may be a wall for your life." (CN 13, 21).

311 See §4.1.2. There is a strong pedagogical strand running through these poems, which is best summed up in this stanza: "Let your anguishes be / books for your remembrance [*seprē l'-uhdānay-k(y)*]: // for the three sieges / are capable to be for you // books whose histories/ you should meditate every hour: // Since you had despised/ the Two Testaments, // in which you could read your life / therefore He had you written // three grievous books / in which you should read your chastisements." (CN 3, 11). In the poems on bishops, as we shall see, the same pedagogical reading of history is employed to justify the different

the poems were written during a period of many years and are clearly divisible into smaller, more consistent cycles, one could guess they were selected and ordered in the *CN* to prove these very points: that history is providentially guided and that Christian communities should comply with certain moral laws, or else bad situations will result. In this theological and pedagogical perspective, the historical matter of these poems finds its justification and its link with the rest of the collection. Therefore, I contend that whoever edited the collection known as *CN*, be it Ephrem himself or one of his pupils, did it so as to create a book on various theological themes, the first being the relationship between God and community throughout history and the providential character of historical events. It is true that the second part of the *CN* is totally unrelated to these historical poems, and yet it has a clear theological character, as opposed to more “liturgical” collections, such as the *Poems on Nativity*, and it is concerned with eschatological themes (death, afterlife, and bodily resurrection). I find it remarkable that, notwithstanding their clear liturgical destination, the historical poems have been coupled with the theological ones. One can surmise that, differently from liturgical cycles such as the *Poems on Nativity* and *Poems on Easter*, and similarly to more scholastic ones such as the *Poems on Faith* or the *Against the Heretics*, the historical poems were collected with a view to teaching. Since such an operation should have been done shortly after Ephrem’s death, it is not absurd to think that the poet himself wanted to rise above occasional matters to a more general reflection on history and the church, meant to be theologically educational. In this case, the *CN* would have been used and edited in connection with a more formal educational institution, the community of literate ascetics gathered around Ephrem, especially in Edessa in the last years of his life<sup>312</sup>. Thus, Ephrem’s poetry, as well as Gregory’s, became a textbook of Christian education, and this could have been not far removed from its author’s intentions. In the ancient witness on Ephrem’s pupils and in the careful edition of his poems we can glimpse the dawning reality of educational institutions collateral to liturgy. In this perspective, Gregory’s and Ephrem’s poetry share the same importance in moulding education in an age of change, from the ancient institution of imperial schools and the liturgy for Christians to episcopal or parochial schools and monastic institutions.

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characters of the bishops in Nisibis, as different educational approaches (§4.1.1). The poems written in Edessa are less concerned with this theme, which however is present in a few passages (*CN* 26, 5–6; *CN* 27, 6; *CN* 28, 2). However, the vicissitudes of the communities in Edessa and Ḥarran undergo the same process of typology as those of Nisibis, being paralleled with biblical episodes, so that they become the New Testament-reality prefigured by the Old Testament image. A similar view of history emerges from the four *hymn. c. Julian.* and the poem edited by Beck as [*De ecclesia*] preceding them in the manuscript. This could impair the idea of *CN* as a collection of poems on the meaning of history, because five of the most significant poems on the theme were not comprised in it.

<sup>312</sup> Wickes 2018, 44–48.

### 1.3.5 Conclusion

Ephrem and Gregory approached poetry from very different grounds. For Ephrem, poetry is a language suited to his modes of thought: the rhetorical, symbolic, and musical armoury of poetry fitted perfectly with a theology that refuses to define and to rationalise. It is a language open to biblical words and to natural similes, but impatient of abstractions and technical terms, where reflection, prayer, and praise are hardly distinguishable. For Ephrem, poetry is an expressive choice (see §1.3.1). Gregory is totally different: he wrote the greater part of his poetry late in his life, after an accomplished career as orator. Yet, for all his linguistic skills, he has lost his platform, and in the most traumatic way. In this context, poetry is the form adopted in the service of a complex strategy of self-promotion and apology, comprising also the edition of previous works and the ongoing relationship with prominent characters testified by the letters: invective poems allowed for a quick recantation, avoiding diplomatic accidents; the poet could lament his misfortunes without losing face, thereby presenting himself as a true philosopher, dismayed by public life, and as a true martyr, ready to suffer for the greater good of the church; claiming the mask of the iambographer, Gregory was able to justify his attacks as retaliation for a gratuitous outrage, and his rage as pious zeal aiming at correction, coming from a social outcast, with no conflicting interests (see §1.3.2).

Given these differences, why comparing Gregory and Ephrem? And if the theme is late antique bishops, then why choose only poetic texts among the many sources from the fourth century? The choice of distinguishing between prose and poetry corresponds to the literary consciousness of the authors, since, as we have seen (§1.3.1), they both recognise that poetry has a peculiar value in contrast to that of prose. Because this peculiar value is aesthetic, the scholar should approach poems with the methods peculiar to literature, even when he wants to simply extract historical data from them, but all the more so if he wants to appreciate the texts on their own account.

Furthermore, apart from their different personal approaches to poetry, Ephrem and Gregory operated in comparable contexts, which could commend the use of poetry for similar reasons to both. The major difference in this respect is that Ephrem wrote for the liturgy and Gregory did not. This, however, doesn't negate all the similarities between the two. They both lived in a world where poetry was seen as an authoritative medium and hence was employed to enhance one's message. In this world, poetry was often the medium of polemics, even inside the church, and our poets were no exception. This accounts for the prosaic (at least to our eyes) material treated in verse (see §1.3.3).

Ephrem's and Gregory's poems were similarly amphibious, passing from written to oral form or vice versa: these passages often amounted to shifts of audience, shifts that were probably known to the authors, thereby prompting a versatile approach to the medium. This way, Gregory's poems could pass from the written form directed to the few supporters to the oral form of recitations, which entailed confrontation with a wider and perhaps less favourable public; Ephrem's *madrašē* were published as oral

performance before the whole congregation, but then (or at the same time) they were treasured in written form by his pupils, a more intimate and proficient audience (§1.2).

This double life of poetry roughly matches its double aim. The oral performance, in churches for Ephrem and in “theatres” for Gregory, projected poems concerning the questions of the day, as the powerful tools for polemics they were. Through poetry, especially in its oral and public form, both Gregory and Ephrem tried to exert an influence on contemporary church life. However, they also shared the ambition to transcend day-to-day questions to make generally valid points. This is apparent not only from the approach to questions inside their poetry but also from their shared concern about education. Poetry in its written (and edited and spread) form could shape the Christians to come: even though concrete scholastic institutions differed, with Gregory appealing to the Greek γραμματικός and Ephrem to the group of literate urban ascetics, the educational value of poetry was similar, so that writing poetry meant also trying to reform education. Hence the strong pedagogical and paraenetic tone in the poems of both authors (§1.3.4).

With these considerations, I hope to have justified and clarified the scope and significance of my analysis of these texts.

## 2 Images and Words for the Bishop

The first problem in analysing poetry about bishops is to assess whether it is about bishops at all, and if so, in which terms it identifies its subject. For our poems to be about bishops, they must come from a time when the notion of bishop was sufficiently developed to be at the centre of such a treatment, a question that may not have a straightforward answer, for although the notion of episcopate may well be already developed, the difference between it and other notions (patronage, priesthood) might still not be as clear as that difference is to our modern eyes. And even if a developed and specialised notion of bishop is already in use, nothing assures us that it will be reflected in the language of the poems. As regards contemporary notions of the episcopate, I will pass on taking for granted the results of historians, and I will concentrate on the way and why this concrete reality is reflected in the language of our poets.

As far as we know, both Ephrem and Gregory were moving in uncharted territory when they composed poems on bishops. Furthermore, prose language for bishops, though much more developed, was still fluid enough to allow variations and further change. Therefore, the first theme treated in this section will be the poets' relationship with contemporary language on the episcopate, beginning with the more specialised terms and moving towards the generic: first, I will trace the terms that later became customary for referring to a bishop in our authors (ἐπίσκοπος and similar at §2.1.1); then, I will examine other names and titles, divided according to the functions of the episcopate that they denote—namely, leadership or guidance (§2.1.2) and priesthood (§2.1.3).

Moreover, when new words are needed (and the early church surely needed many new words and expressions), one useful resource is metaphor. In the realm of ecclesiastical hierarchy, some metaphors had developed to such an extent that in the fourth century they were almost institutionalised as titles: the best example is perhaps the word that may be translated “shepherd” or “pastor” (§2.2.1). The second part of this section will treat the metaphors employed by Ephrem and Gregory, beginning with the more fixed ones, which they inherited from contemporary church life, and then analysing the more occasional and fluctuating ones. In general, both titles and metaphors are strongly Bible-driven, in that they can be traced back to Bible passages or interpretations thereof. One important metaphor is exceptional in this regard, and it is worth anticipating it here: the bishop is often compared to a work of art or a mirror—in any case, an image. This metaphor will be analysed in its diversified development and aims (§2.2.3).

## 2.1 Names

In the Syriac tradition, as well as in the Greek and the Latin ones, the names of ministries in the church became, with time, titles and thus standardised<sup>1</sup>. In all these traditions, the clergy is divided in three hierarchical classes: the bishop, the priests, and the deacons. From the third century, documents witness to a further development of hierarchy among bishops, giving rise later to the titles of chorepiscopus, archbishop, metropolitan and patriarch. These finer distinctions among bishops gain force of law by the time of Justinian, as the *Codex Iustinianus* testifies<sup>2</sup>. However, at the time of Ephrem and Gregory the lower echelon of ecclesiastical hierarchy (deacons, priests, monarchical bishop) is already a reality, and canonical documents present distinctions between bishops<sup>3</sup>. Before taking on the individual usage of Ephrem and Gregory, it is sensible to present here the titles of deacon, priest, and bishop in the three languages (Latin, Greek, and Syriac) as they were established in the traditions of the churches:

English	Latin	Greek	Syriac
Bishop	<i>episcopus</i>	ἐπίσκοπος	ʿepīsqōpā/ḥasyā (“saint”)
Priest	<i>presbyterus</i>	πρεσβύτερος	qaššīšā (“elder”)
Deacon	<i>diaconus</i>	διάκονος	mšammšānā (“servant”)

As is clear from the table, Latin borrowed its terminology from Greek. A similar feature of the two languages is that the term *sacerdos*/ιερεύς is used in ancient texts without distinction for priests and bishops, but later it becomes a specialised term referring only to a priest, as modern Greek ιερέας and Italian *sacerdote* demonstrate<sup>4</sup>. The situation is no different in the Syriac world: the three ranks of priesthood are named with two calques from the Greek titles and a loanword, and the word for *sacerdos* (*kāhnā*) is employed indifferently for priests and bishops in earlier times<sup>5</sup>. An interesting feature of Syriac

1 Guerra y Gomez 1962, 323, 334–337; Lizzi 1998, 87–88; Rapp 2000, 381; Rapp 2005, 25–26, 42.

2 Rapp 2005, 276–279; Di Berardino 1998, 40; Barone Adesi 1998, 54–55; Jerg 1970, 86–89, 103–104. In inscriptions, they are received only late: Feissel 1989, 803–812 (archbishop, metropolitan, patriarch); the chorepiskopoi as well as the periodeutes, subordinates of the urban bishop, are attested already from the third and fourth century respectively (Feissel 1989, 814–819).

3 See the *Canons of Nicaea* 4, 6, 7 for “metropolitan”; 8 for “chorepiscopus”; canon 18 for the distinction and hierarchy of bishop, presbyter and deacon, which is for the first time found in Ignatius of Antioch (Ign. *Trall.* 2, 3; 7, 2; *Magn.* 6, 1; *Smyrn.* 8, 1; 12, 2).

4 Jerg 1970, 103; Lampe 1961, 670, s.v. ιερεύς; Λεξικό της κοινής νεοελληνικής, s.v. ιερεας ([https://www.greek-language.gr/greekLang/modern\\_greek/tools/lexica/triantafyllides/search.html?start=140&lq=%CE%99\\*&dq=](https://www.greek-language.gr/greekLang/modern_greek/tools/lexica/triantafyllides/search.html?start=140&lq=%CE%99*&dq=), accessed 21.12.20, 12:06); *Vocabolario Treccani*, s.v. sacerdote (<https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/sacerdote>, accessed 21.12.20, 12:22).

5 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1683, s.v. ܐܡܝܢ; Bou Mansour 2019, 23–32. It is however possible that the term *qaššīšā* had already a religious sense for pagan Syrians, if it must be interpreted so in the inscription of Serrin; see Drijvers/Healey 1999, 195.

is that it preserves alternative names for the bishop. The later one is *ḥasyā*, literally meaning “pure”, “saint”, but it is used as a perfect equivalent of “bishop”—for example, in the *Chronicle* of Bar Hebraeus<sup>6</sup>. Another similar word is *mdabbrānā*, “leader”, an equivalent of such Greek terms as *προστάτης*, *προϊστάμενος*, *ἡγούμενος* or *ἀρχων* and of the Latin word *antistes*, all terms that are used interchangeably with *ἐπίσκοπος* and *πρεσβύτερος* in the New Testament but that did not become fixed titles<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, it is difficult to understand whether the writers employing such titles are using them in their generic sense of “leader” or “guide”, only occasionally applied to clergymen, or if they employ them as titles equivalent to the word *ἐπίσκοπος*/*epīsqōpā*/*episcopus*. For even though these writers may know of a generic use of these words in other contexts, this does not exclude the possibility that they intend a more specific sense when using these words to refer to a bishop. This is a problem in the case of Ephrem and Gregory, too.

### 2.1.1 ἐπίσκοπος/*epīsqōpā*

How much does the usage of Gregory and Ephrem reflect this situation? Ephrem knows the threefold structure of ecclesiastical authority and calls priests and deacons by their name: in more than one instance, Ephrem mentions *qaššīšē* and *šammāšē* (which is an alternative form of *mšammšānē*). As regards bishops, though the situation is much more confusing, one thing is certain: Ephrem never uses the loanword *’epīsqōpā*, except in the title of CN 17<sup>8</sup>. Such an instance, however, is to be discarded, since titles can be the result of later editorial work. The reasons for such an exclusion can be many: either Ephrem did not know the term, or it was not used in that sense, or he did not deem it proper to poetic language and we have lost prosaic instances of the term, or we have lost these instances altogether, both in prose and in poetry. However, it must be admitted that the avoidance of the term *’epīsqōpā* is entirely in keeping with Ephrem’s broader linguistic habits: Even if Aramaic in general, and Syriac in particular, had been in close contact with Greek for centuries at the time of Ephrem, and even if Syriac borrowed many words from Greek, Ephrem seems less fond of such borrowings: not only does he employ fewer Greek loanwords than later poets, as is to be expected given the growing contacts between Greek and Syriac; he also employs fewer loanwords than earlier texts<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1326, s.v. *ܡܚܝܝܐ*. Note however that this seems a very late (medieval) development: before being a title, the word was used as an honorific.

<sup>7</sup> Guerra y Gomez 1992, 323–337; *mdabbrānā*: Murray 2006, 192–193; Bou Mansour 2019, 446–455.

<sup>8</sup> Bou Mansour 2019, 24–26; Beck 1984, 95–96; for the three ranks of holy orders see, e.g., CN 21, 5.

<sup>9</sup> For Greek-Aramaic contacts: Butts 2016, 201–202. For the growth of Greek influence and loanwords in Syriac: Brock 1999–2000; Butts 2016, 205. For the number of Greek loanwords in Ephrem and in earlier texts: Butts 2016, 203.

It is worth noting that a Syriac author roughly contemporary to Ephrem, Aphrahat, employs *ʿepīsqōpā* twice; however, the instances are in the same page of a work whose authenticity was doubted on other grounds and in its letterhead: like any other kind of paratext, a letterhead is prone to editorial reworkings or to being treated separately from the rest of the text. Moreover, the two instances appear as part of an identical fixed expression, “bishops, priests, deacons [and the whole church of God] with her children” (*dem.* 14, 1). Furthermore, the Peshitta uses *ʿepīsqōpā* to translate only one of the five occurrences of the word ἐπίσκοπος in the New Testament. The three parallel texts of Phil. 1:1, 1Tim. 3:2 and Tit. 1:7, referring to the head of the community, are rendered with *qaššīšā*, the same word that translates πρεσβύτερος (see Tit. 1:5). The only occurrence of *ʿepīsqōpā* in the Syriac NT (here in the form *ʿepīsqōpā*) is at Act. 20:28, and here too the word, referring to the heads of the community in Ephesus, is equivalent to *qaššīšā*/πρεσβύτερος (see Act. 20:17). This hints that in earlier times the Syriac church did not know of any distinction between bishop and priest. The assumption is reinforced by the fact that at 1Petr. 2:25 the Greek ἐπίσκοπος, in reference to Jesus, is rendered with the calque *sāʾōrā*, meaning “inspector”. For, since the Syriac language had a calque for the Greek ἐπίσκοπος, as it had it for πρεσβύτερος and διάκονος, and the translators chose not to use it in the case of the title ἐπίσκοπος (as opposed to the generic sense of the word employed by 1Petr. 2:25), this could hint that the difference between πρεσβύτερος and ἐπίσκοπος was not felt by the translators<sup>10</sup>. Again, *ʿepīsqōpā* never appears in the Peshitta of the Old Testament, and the ἐπίσκοποι in the Greek translation are rendered variously in Syriac as *pāqōdā* (Num. 31:14; Iudc. 9:28; 2Reg. 11:18; 1Macc. 1:51), *sāʾōrā* (Sap. 1:6, referring to God’s wisdom), *rabbā* (2Reg. 11:15), *qāyōmā* (2Chron. 34:17), and so on, but never as *ʿepīsqōpā* or *qaššīšā*. Therefore, the Greek loanword *ʿepīsqōpā* was still fairly rare in Ephrem’s time, and the poet might well have ignored its usage as a title. Even though he knows the distinction between priest and bishop, Ephrem has not developed a specific title for the monarchical function and still relies on a wide variety of terms.

As one would expect, Gregory’s usage is much more similar to what would then become the standard use of titles in the church. In his prose works, especially in the *ep.*, Gregory frequently employs the word ἐπίσκοπος as an ecclesiastical title<sup>11</sup>. Not only does he know the difference between πρεσβύτερος and ἐπίσκοπος, but he also

<sup>10</sup> The term *sāʾōrā*, however, resurfaced later among the Syriac ecclesiastical titles, as an equivalent of the Greek περιδεύτης: Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2688, s.v. ܣܝܐܪܐ.

<sup>11</sup> Greg. Naz. *or.* 5, 29; 18, 33; 21, 14.21.33; 25, 9; 33, 4; 42, 23; 43, 48.50.58.59; *ep.* 7, 3–4; 19, 2; 40, 2.4; 41, 4; 42, 2; 50, 2–3; 87, 3; 120, 4; 125, 5; etc. A similar situation in Gregory of Nyssa: he distinguishes πρεσβύτερος from ἐπίσκοπος, especially in the paratext of the letters (Mann 2001, 443–444, s.v. ἐπίσκοπος; Mann 2009, 654, s.v. πρεσβύτερος; cf. Greg. Naz. *ep.* 43; 202.249 and *ep.* 101–102). However, as is the case for the Nazianzen’s prose, Nyssa prefers in general the word ἱερεύς (Mann 2002, 448, s.v. ἱερεύς; for Greg. Naz. ἱερεύς 108x and ἐπίσκοπος 65x in prose).



distinguishes between a simple bishop and a μητροπολίτης<sup>12</sup>. The situation is somewhat different in his poetic works. Here, he uses ἐπίσκοπος more rarely and with a clear distinction between iambs and hexameters. The word lends itself to both metres, though it is arguably more easily employed in iambs, because if the last syllable of a line is long, it contains a cretic, which is not permitted in hexameters. In the iambs, the word is used as a title in some instances, especially in the autobiographical poems<sup>13</sup>. I found one instance of generic usage in the sense of “protector”<sup>14</sup>. This meaning is the only one attested in hexameters: there, the word ἐπίσκοπος is never used for the heads of the church<sup>15</sup>. This is due to Homeric usage, where clearly the word ἐπίσκοπος was not used for the head of the church, but neither was it used as a title or to mean a position of authority, as in prosaic Greek. In fact, the ἐπίσκοπος for excellence in Homeric poetry is the god or the δαίμων that protects the hero, and Gregory employs the word precisely in this sense, thus demonstrating his adherence to correct Homeric usage and his command of παιδεία<sup>16</sup>.

As regards specifically our texts, the word ἐπίσκοπος is found only in three places of the same poem, II, 1, 12, if we do not count the occurrences in the titles. This makes sense if we remember that II, 1, 10 and 17 are in elegiac verse and II, 1, 13 is hexametric. At II, 1, 12, 35 Gregory exhorts the reader to avoid “bad bishops” (τοὺς κακοὺς ἐπισκόπους), asserting that they are worse than lions, leopards, and vipers<sup>17</sup>. At II, 1, 12, 503 and 508, the word is employed in connection with the consecration of a new bishop: at line 503 it refers to the imposition of hands (ἐπισκόπων χέρες), while at 508 it refers to the “judgement” (κρίσις) of bishops<sup>18</sup>. However, Gregory employs other, more generic terms for the majority of this poem. It is difficult to determine what moves Gregory to choose or reject the word ἐπίσκοπος on each occasion. As regards II, 1, 12, 35, the word may be used almost as a naturalistic label, as ἐπίσκοποι are compared with the λέων (lion), the πάρδαλις (leopard), and the ἄσπις (viper). Lines 503 and 508 allude to the role of bishops in consecrating a new bishop, a role that was their strict prerogative. Only bishops could impose hands; therefore, their very hands are used as a metonymy for the rite of ordination, and their judgement is called upon in the matter of the effects of this rite. Hence, Gregory seems to employ the word with a certain emphasis on its nature as a title, as an accurate label for the role. This is suggested also by his use of the

12 Πρεσβύτερος/ἐπίσκοπος: Greg. Naz. or. 2, 69; 37, 21; 43, 27; Μητροπολίτης: 40, 26. This distinction seems to be absent from Gregory of Nyssa, for example.

13 II, 1, 11, 538; 610; 1633; 1712; 1913; II, 1, 30, 116; II, 1, 41, 6.

14 I, 2, 8, 146.

15 I, 1, 27, 73; I, 2, 2, 39; II, 1, 45, 89.

16 Guerra y Gomez 1962, 377.

17 Θάρρει λέοντα· Πάρδαλις τῶν ἡμέρων· Ἀσπίς τάχ' ἂν σε καὶ φύγοι δεδοικότα· Ἐν ἐκτρέπου μοι, τοὺς κακοὺς ἐπισκόπους (II, 1, 12, 33–35).

18 Εἶποι τάχ' ἂν τις, ὡς ἐπισκόπων χέρες / Τό τ' ἐν μέσῳ κήρυγμα λουτροῦ τις χάρις / Ἄς τ' ἐκβοῶμεν, ὡς ἀνάξιοι, μέσας / Φωνὰς διδόντες τὴν κάθαρσιν τῇ κλίσει / Καὶ τῷ τυραννήσαντι δῆθεν Πνεύματι – / Κρίσει δικαίων καὶ σοφῶν ἐπισκόπων (II, 1, 12, 503–508).

word ἐπισκοπή (II, 1, 12, 176 and 180) in the sense of “episcopate”, which is its sense in 1Tim. 3:1 but is not the most widespread meaning of the word in the Greek Bible (Septuaginta and New Testament), where ἐπισκοπή usually refers to God and corresponds to the Latin *visitatio*<sup>19</sup>.

Interestingly, Gregory employs the word πατριαρχία at II, 1, 12, 799<sup>20</sup>. The vocabulary by Lampe gives the generic sense of “position of authority” to this occurrence, thus finding it to align, for example, with Basil’s *ep.* 169, 1<sup>21</sup>. Basil, however, is referring to a deacon who claims an illegitimate authority over a group of virgins, whereas Gregory employs the word for the positions of authority that were specifically available to the bishops and that they contended with each other for. It seems like Gregory intends πατριαρχία as a *terminus technicus*, meaning the most important episcopal seats, the patriarchates; yet the first known examples of this use of πατριάρχης/πατριαρχία come from the fifth century. The context suggests this might be the earliest attestation of the word used in this sense. Gregory reproaches the bishops at the Council of Constantinople for their ambition to “inherit patriarchates”, and canons 2 and 3 of the same council are concerned precisely with the establishment and confirmation of the privileges of what would be later known as “patriarchal sees”—Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch. The problem of the succession in Antioch was the cause of Gregory’s resigning, and the election of a new bishop for Constantinople was its effect, so that Gregory might well have been, and in fact was, disconcerted by this jostling with the major episcopal seats, the same that would be later called patriarchates. Moreover, in his report of the decisions of the council, Socrates refers to the establishment of bishoprics with regional jurisdiction by stating that πατριάρχας κατέστησαν, “they established patriarchs”<sup>22</sup>. Describing the appointments emerging from the synod, Socrates employs the expression πατριαρχίαν κληροῦσθαι, the same that employed Gregory at II, 1, 12, 799<sup>23</sup>. Among the names mentioned by Socrates, only Nectarius as bishop of Constantinople would be a patriarch in the later sense of the term, but these names correspond to some of those in a law by Theodosius dated July 30, 381 (*Cod. Theod.* 16, 1, 3), that establishes which bishops are to be considered bulwarks of the Nicene faith. This places them in a position

19 Guerra y Gomez 1962, 178–181; Ἀλλ’ οὐ κάκιστα ταῦτα, οὐδ’ ἐπισκοπῆς, / Ὡ λῶστε; μὴ τοσοῦτον ἀρχαίως φρονεῖν, / Ὡς τηλικούτο πρᾶγμα τιμᾶσθαι κακῶς, / Μηδ’ εἰ λίαν τὸ χθαμαλὸν σπουδάζεται· / Οὐ γὰρ κάκιστον ἢ ἐπισκοπή. (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 12, 176–180); Liddle-Scott-Jones 2011, 657 s.v. ἐπισκοπή.

20 Χαίροιτε, ὑβρίζοιτε, πατριαρχίας / Κληροῦσθε, Κόσμος ὑμῖν εἰκέτω μέγας (II, 1, 12, 799–800).

21 See Lampe 1961, 1052, s.v. πατριαρχία. Gregory of Nyssa employs πατριαρχία and πατριάρχης the majority of times in reference to biblical patriarchs and his only occurrence in reference to bishops makes explicit reference to biblical patriarchs (see Mann 2009, 261–262, s.v. πατριάρχης).

22 Ἐβεβαίωσάν τε αὐθις τὴν ἐν Νικαίᾳ πίστιν· καὶ πατριάρχας κατέστησαν διανεμόμενοι τὰς ἐπαρχίας, ὥστε τοὺς ὑπὲρ διοικήσιν ἐπισκόπους ταῖς ὑπερορίοις ἐκκλησίαις μὴ ἐπιβαίνειν (Socr. *h. e.* 5, 8, 37–40).

23 Καὶ κληροῦται Νεκτᾶριος μὲν τὴν μεγαλόπολιν καὶ τὴν Θράκην· τῆς δὲ Ποντικῆς διοικήσεως Ἑλλάδιος ὁ μετὰ Βασίλειον Καισαρείας τῆς Καππαδοκῶν ἐπίσκοπος, Γρηγόριος ὁ Νύσσης ὁ Βασιλείου ἀδελφός, (Καππαδοκίας δὲ καὶ ἦδε πόλις,) καὶ Ὀτρίχιος ὁ τῆς ἐν Ἀρμενίᾳ Μελιτηνῆς τὴν πατριαρχίαν ἐκληρώσατο (Socr. *h. e.* 5, 8, 41–45).

of special authority over any other bishop. Comparing Socrates and Gregory, we see a complex picture emerge: the concept of patriarchate as found in the fifth century is not clearly affirmed in the Council of Constantinople; however, a regional jurisdiction is already introduced, and particular honour is ascribed to Rome and Constantinople. It is possible that the council fathers used the term *πατριάρχης* as an honorific title for bishops of special authority, whether for their confession of faith or for the importance of their seat, rather than as a specific term defining a jurisdiction, and that, though in use, the term did not find its way into the canons. According to this sense, Gregory laments the bishops' ambition, because they try to obtain the most prestigious seats.

### 2.1.2 Terms of primacy

Both Gregory and Ephrem seem not exceedingly fond of the simple title *ἐπίσκοπος*, while making ample use of words expressing primacy, leading role, and authority. In this semantic field, too, Gregory shows different levels of style and a more specialised language. The word *προστάτης* is used only in iambs and is the most commonly employed word for “bishop” in II, 1, 12<sup>24</sup>; the word *προέδρος* is employed both in iambs and in hexameters (though more rarely).<sup>25</sup> In hexameters no single word imposes itself; rather, we find a wealth of different expressions, sometimes metaphorical, that identify the bishop as head or main administrator of the community.

#### 2.1.2.1 In Gregory

Of the five words that the New Testament uses to identify the heads of a church, Gregory employs *ἐπίσκοπος* and *ποιμήν* (on which §2.2.1); *πρεσβύτερος* has a different meaning in his times; *προϊστάμενος* and *ἡγούμενος* apparently are not found in our poems<sup>26</sup>. However, the word *προστάτης*, used by Gregory in both prose and iambic poetry, is clearly an equivalent of *προϊστάμενος*, as a passage of *or.* 4 demonstrates<sup>27</sup>. *Προϊστάμενος* in fact is never attested in Greek poetry, and Gregory conforms to this rule<sup>28</sup>. On the other hand, *προστάτης* is regularly found in iambic poetry, even in tragedy, but is avoided in hexametric poetry, because it is cretic: here, too, Gregory abides by traditional usage. Therefore, the *προϊστάμενος* of the New Testament becomes, in Gregory's poetry, a *προστάτης*.

<sup>24</sup> II, 1, 12, 357; 376; 540; 629; 646; 710; 734; 749.

<sup>25</sup> II, 1, 12, 393; 567; 721; II, 1, 13, 58; II, 1, 17, 75.

<sup>26</sup> Guerra y Gomez 1962, 323, 347, with a useful summary table at p. 333.

<sup>27</sup> τούτους τίς ἂν πείσειεν ἡμέρους εἶναι καὶ καθεκτοὺς, θεοῖς χρωμένου ὁδηγοῖς τῶν παθῶν καὶ προστάταις· ἔνθα τὸ κακὸν εἶναι καὶ τίμιον, ὡς θεῶν τινα προϊστάμενον, οὐδὲ τὸ πάθος ἐστὶ βωμοῖς τε καὶ θυσίαις τιμώμενον, καὶ παρῆρσιαν εὐληφὸς ἔννομον (*or.* 4, 120).

<sup>28</sup> Except for Eupolis *frag.* 301 K..

This word choice is also semantically significant because the word had political connotations. Προστάτης and the abstract noun προστασία are regularly employed to describe the role of a *patronus*<sup>29</sup>. The core meaning of this word-family unites authority over someone and guidance on one side and protection and providing for the subject on the other: the relationship is both mutual and asymmetrical. This double significance, of guidance and protection, is like that of ἐπίσκοπος in its literal sense, so much so that Gregory the Thaumaturge rewrites 1Petr. 2:25 (τὸν ποιμένα καὶ ἐπίσκοπον τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν) as τῷ προστάτῃ τῶν ἡμετέρων ψυχῶν καὶ σωτῆρι<sup>30</sup>. As noted by Brown, the relationship of patronage was one of the building blocks of late antique society: everyone was patron of many people or had many patrons, and even the relationship with the divine sphere could be thought of as a patronage<sup>31</sup>. Similar social institutions had existed in the Greek world—though not on the same terms as those of Roman patronage—well before the imperial age. This explains the wide variety of contexts in which the word προστάτης is employed from classical times onward. Just to limit the examples to poetic usages, the word προστάτης can mean a democratic magistrate (Aristoph. *pax* 684), a generic “ruler” on a land (Eur. *Herc.* 964; *Iph. Aul.* 373), one who is charged with supervision of something and is therefore its protector (Aeschyl. *sept.* 408.797–798), the protector of a suppliant in the context of a sacred social bond like patronage and hospitality (Aeschyl. *supplic.* 963–964; Sophocl. *Oed. rex* 302–304), and finally a god—a patron, protector, and ruler par excellence (Sophocl. *Oed. rex* 882; *Trach.* 210)<sup>32</sup>. In Christian literature, apart from God and Christ, saints and martyrs can be patrons and, hence, προστάται<sup>33</sup>. The Cappadocians and John Chrysostom employ the term abundantly in relation to the bishop, with Basil highlighting the social and economic protection the bishop can offer to the disenfranchised, whereas Gregory of Nazianzus and John privilege the spiritual and political guidance of the community<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, on Gregory’s

29 οἱ δ’ ἀπὸ τῆς πατρωνείας: οὕτω γὰρ ἐκάλουν τὴν προστασίαν (Plut. *vit. Rom.* 13, 2); τοὺς πάτρωνας οὕτως γάρ οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι τοὺς προστάτας καλοῦσι (*vit. Mar.* 5, 4); See Gautier 2002, 122 for bibliography.

30 Gregorius Thaumaturgus, *Oratio panegyrica* 4. The same attributes are given to Tiresias in Sophocl. *Oed. rex* 303. Earlier in the sentence, Gregory defines God as βασιλέα καὶ κηδεμόνα, with the same duplicity of authority and providing which defines the institution of patronage, in particular as described by Plutarch: τοὺς πρώτους καὶ δυνατωτάτους πατρικῇ κηδεμονίᾳ καὶ φροντίδι προσήκειν ἐπιμελεῖσθαι τῶν ταπεινοτέρων (Plut. *vit. Rom.* 13, 3).

31 Brown 1981, 64–66; Brown 1982, 115–120.

32 ἀποστρέφεται τὸν δῆμον ἀχθεσθεῖς ὅτι / αὐτῷ πονηρὸν προστάτην ἐπεγράψατο. (Aristoph. *pax* 683–684); τοῖς τῆσδε χώρας προστάταισιν οὐ δοκεῖ. (Eur. *Herc.* 964); μηδέν’ ἀνδρείας ἕκατι προστάτην θείμην χθονός (*Iph. Aul.* 373); τῶνδ’ ἀντιτάξω προστάτην πυλωμάτων (Aeschyl. *sept.* 408); καὶ πύλας φερεγγύοις / ἐφροζάμεσθα μονομάχοισι προστάταις (797–798); προστάτης δ’ ἐγὼ / ἄστοί τε πάντες (*supplic.* 963–964); πόλιν ... ἥς σὲ προστάτην σωτήρᾳ τ’, ὦναξ, μόνον ἐξευρίσκομεν (Sophocl. *Oed. rex* 302–304); θεὸν οὐ λήξω ποτὲ προστάταν ἰσῶων (882); Ἀπόλλω προστάταν (*Trach.* 210). The idea of προστάτης as the protector of a suppliant is present in Greg. Naz. *or.* 43, 56, where the protector is God.

33 Lampe 1961, 1182, s.v. Προστάτης, 1.e.

34 Lizzi 1998, 95n35, with abundant references to sources. See also the more restricted use of προστάτης by Gregory of Nyssa, which seems to prefer the abstract προστασία (Mann 2009, 787, s.vv. προστασία, προστάτης).

general use of *προστάτης* instead of *ἐπίσκοπος* it can be said that the word correctly maintains in its meaning the two key-features of the word *ἐπίσκοπος*, guidance and protection; that it is a faithful rewriting of New Testament terminology (*προϊστάμενος*) in a more dignified form; that it is used in accordance with the distinction of styles of classical Greek poetry (i.e., in iambs but not in hexameters); that it inherits a long tradition of poetic *προσάται*, but also represents the contemporary reality of patronage. It is hence presumable that the word expressed but also prescribed a certain social role for the bishop.

In particular instances in II, 1, 12, *προστάτης* oscillates between a more general sense of “leader” (even if ostensibly applied to bishops) and a more specific one of “bishop”: the specific sense is clearly visible at 747–749, where *προστάτης* is perfectly paralleled by *ποιμὴν* (and at 751 by *ιερεύς*) and the choice of a *προστάτης* is compared to that of “an accountant” (*λογιστής*)<sup>35</sup>; the general sense is seen at 709–711, where Gregory speaks of a bad candidate bishop as “a perfect leader/patron” (*ἐντελής προστάτης*)<sup>36</sup>. Between these two passages, Gregory develops a polemic on the nature of episcopal patronage, and thus the word *προστάτης* is in some way the bone of contention here, as shown by 732–735, where the question is “Who is the best and right leader [*προστάτης ἄριστος καὶ δεξιός*]?”<sup>37</sup>. What he is refusing is precisely the idea that civic patronage and episcopal patronage should be similar, so that the successful civic patron would be a viable or favourite candidate to the episcopate. Against a patronage understood as political leadership, manoeuvring, and economic administration, Gregory intends *προστασία* as a moral primacy and a responsibility towards Christian souls. This emerges clearly from other passages, such as when the poet notes that Christian doctrine prescribes moral perfection for the leader, in order that he may be an example to the congregation<sup>38</sup>; similarly, but on the negative side, Satan gives an immoral leader to a society as “a summary law of wickedness”, meaning that the wickedness of the leader will be imitated by the community. Notably, in this case no reference is made to church leaders; Gregory refers to leaders of people or cities<sup>39</sup>. This means that the idea

35 Τοῦτ’ οὖν ὁρῶν ἑκαμνες εὐρεῖν ποιμένα. / Ὡς μικρὸν ἐσπούδαζες Ἐγκαλύπτομαι. / Ὡσπερ λογιστὴν ἐσκόπεις τὸν προστάτην. / Κόπρων μέλει σοι, μειζόνων δ’ ἐμοὶ λόγος. / Ἐν ἔργον ἔστω τοῦ ιερέως, καὶ μόνον. . . (II, 1, 12, 747–751). This could be an indirect reference to the accusations of financial malpractice raised against Gregory at Constantinople (see II, 1, 11, 1475–1495; Gautier 2002, 124–125).

36 Ἀλλ’ εὐστροφός τις οὗτος ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν, / Ὅν οὐκ ἐπαινεῖς, ἐντελής τε προστάτης / Τρίβων παλαιῶν καὶ νέων κινήματων (II, 1, 12, 709–711).

37 Πῶς οὖν ἀχρηστον, εἰπέ μοι, τοῦτον καλεῖς, / Πρὸς ὃν βλέποντες βελτίους γενοίμεθ’ ἂν; / Ἡ πῶς ἄριστον προστάτην καὶ δεξιόν, / Πρὸς ὃν βλέπων σὺ, τοὺς ἐμοὺς διαπτύεις (II, 1, 12, 732–735).

38 Περιφρονεῖν γὰρ οὐδὲ τοῦτ’ ἐμὼν νόμων, / Οἱ πάντοθεν ξέουσιν, ὡς ἀγαλμά τι, / Τὸν προστάτην, ὡς μή τι τοῦ λαοῦ βλαβὴ (II, 1, 12, 538–540).

39 Οὕτω σοφίζετ’ εὐστόχοις πονηρίας, / Ὅταν δῆμόν τιν’, ἢ πόλιν πληξάι θέλῃ / Πρὸς οἷς ἐκάστου πειράται, καὶ σύντομον / Νόμον δίδωσι πονηρίας τὸν προστάτην (II, 1, 12, 643–646).

of the leader as an example-setter could be employed for any type of leadership, and Gregory employs it a fortiori for the bishop<sup>40</sup>.

The word πρόεδρος, which Gregory employs in prose, iambic poetry, and hexameters, is never attested in poetry before him, even though the abstract προεδρία is attested in some passages of Aristophanes: stylistically, both words are prosaic and day-to-day<sup>41</sup>. The abstract is more generic, in that it points to any primacy in a gathering, even the front seats at games or at a theatre. In case of civic assemblies with political power, the term has a political meaning, because the purely exterior honour of having front seats becomes in these instances a primacy of authority and often even a leading role. Therefore, the word πρόεδρος is frequently employed by Athenian authors, especially orators and historians, to describe political institutions of their democracy (in particular, the *prytaneis*) and of other cities. The fundamental meaning of the word is “one who presides, leads an assembly,” and it is not rare to find the term linked with ἐκκλησία, the ancient Athenian assembly. This may have suggested the Christian use of πρόεδρος to mean “bishop”, since no trace of this use can be detected in the New Testament. Moreover, the Christian use of the term begins in the fourth century, with Eusebius of Caesarea as the first author to use it consistently<sup>42</sup>: since Eusebius was well read, it is perfectly conceivable that the word comes completely from classical tradition.

Gregory is a great user of the word, as many occurrences listed in Lampe’s dictionary demonstrate. One of these occurrences is particularly interesting because it refers not, as is mostly the case, to bishops, but to Rome, the πρόεδρος among the cities (II, 1, 11, 571). In general, the word πρόεδρος fluctuates, like προστάτης, between a generic sense of “leader” and a more specific usage as a substitute for ἐπίσκοπος<sup>43</sup>. The usage in our poems is no exception: A general sense can be detected even at II, 1, 12, 721, where the theme is obviously the choice of the bishop, but the requirements listed can easily fit other kinds of leader<sup>44</sup>. In other words, it is always the context, not the word per se, that makes πρόεδρος and ἐπίσκοπος equivalent, either as the same title or as meaning the same person. The two hexametric occurrences deserve a mention. At II, 1, 13, 58 Gregory

<sup>40</sup> The occurrences of II, 1, 12, 357 and 376 are both referred to the bishop, but the word is employed as a general “leader”. In fact, 376 has λαοῦ προστάτας, where λαός is almost a technical term for the Christian community. Line 629 has προστάται, referred to bishops, determined by τέκων ἀσάρκων, a periphrasis for “Christians” or “ascetics” (on the bishop as leader of the ascetics in his community, see §3.2).

<sup>41</sup> Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1476 s.vv. πρόεδρος, προεδρία; note however that the word προεδρία can be found in Xenophanes of Colophon’s *frg.* 2, 7 D.-K. (Athen. *dipnos.* 10, 6, 9).

<sup>42</sup> Lampe 1961, 1144–1145 s.vv. Προεδρεύω, προεδρία, πρόεδρος. Gregory of Nyssa, on the other hand, uses it more rarely (Mann 2009, 684, s.v. πρόεδρος).

<sup>43</sup> For example, at II, 1, 11, 1586 the term clearly substitutes ἐπίσκοπος, in much the same way as the first occurrence of προεδρία at *or.* 26, 15 refers to Gregory’s episcopal charge, whereas a few lines later, in a very general remark on the misery of institutional hierarchy, the very same προεδρία has a much more general bearing.

<sup>44</sup> Εἰ δ’ οὗτος ἡμῖν καὶ πρόεδρος ὦν τύχῃ, / Εἰ μὲν κάκιστος καὶ πονηρίας πλέως, / Τοῦτ’ ἔστ’ ἐκείνῳ ῥάμνον ἄρχειν τῶν ξύλων (II, 1, 12, 721–723).

writes *λαοῖο πρόεδροι*, an expression similar to *λαοῦ προστάται*, found at II, 1, 12, 376, because in both cases the genitive *λαοῦ* (epic form *λαοῖο*) represents the church, so that the general sense of the words *προστάτης* and *πρόεδρος* is specified and the reference is clearly to bishops<sup>45</sup>. At II, 1, 17, 75, Gregory employs *πρόεδρος* in its concrete sense of “seating in the front row”, and he specifically applies it to a public event: *πρόεδρος ἐὼν ἱεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις*—that is, “being seated in the front row and presiding in the holy places”<sup>46</sup>. The reference is clearly to his role, as a bishop, of president of the liturgical assembly, but the expression has a strong concrete and spatial connotation, highlighted by the complement of state *ἱεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις*. Naturally, Gregory’s role in this situation does not end at his privileged physical position, but entails a task of presiding over the liturgy, as the following lines show, when they refer to his duty of preaching. The verb *προεδρεύω* is used with a similar connotation, as referring to bad bishops at *or.* 43, 26, where the prelates are identified as “those occupying the first places in the tribune” (*προεδρευόντων ἐν βήμασιν*)<sup>47</sup>. The equivalence is clear, if one recalls that the *βῆμα* is the part of a church from which the preacher would speak.

Finally, the last two occurrences of *πρόεδρος* in II, 1, 12 should be mentioned, because of their link with *or.* 43, 26:

Ἐπαινῶ τὸν νηίτην νόμον, ὃς τὴν κώπην πρότερον ἐγχειρίσας τῷ νῦν κυβερνήτῃ κάκειθεν ἐπὶ τὴν πρῶραν ἀγαγὼν καὶ πιστεύσας τὰ ἔμπροσθεν, οὕτως ἐπὶ τῶν οἰάκων καθίζει, μετὰ τὴν πολλὴν τυφθεῖσαν θάλασσαν καὶ τὴν τῶν ἀνέμων διάσκεψιν· ὥς δὲ κὰν τοῖς πολεμικοῖς ἔχει στρατιώτης, ταξίαρχος, στρατηγός. Αὕτη ἡ τάξις ἀρίστη καὶ λυσιτελεστάτη τοῖς ἀρχομένοις. Τὸ δ’ ἡμέτερον πολλοῦ ἂν ἦν ἀξίον, εἰ οὕτως εἴχε.

Οὐ γὰρ ἐξ ἀρετῆς μᾶλλον ἢ κακουργίας ἢ προεδρία, οὐδὲ τῶν ἀξιωτέρων ἀλλὰ τῶν δυνατωτέρων οἱ θρόνοι. Σαμουὴλ ἐν προφήταις, ὃ τὰ ἔμπροσθεν βλέπων· ἀλλὰ καὶ Σαοὺλ, ὃ ἀπόβλητος<sup>48</sup>. Ροβοὰμ ἐν βασιλεῦσι, ὃ Σολομώντος· ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἱεροβοὰμ, ὃ δοῦλος καὶ ἀποστάτης. **Καὶ ἱατρός μὲν οὐδεὶς οὐδὲ ζωγράφος, ὅστις οὐ φύσεις ἀρρωστημάτων ἐσκέψατο πρότερον, ἢ πολλὰ χρώματα συνεκέρασεν ἢ ἐμόρφωσεν· ὃ δὲ πρόεδρος εὐρίσκεται ῥαδίως μὴ πονηθείς, καὶ πρόσφατος τὴν ἀξίαν, ὁμοῦ τε σπαρεῖς καὶ ἀναδοθείς, ὥς ὁ μῦθος ποιεῖ τοὺς Γίγαντας. Πλάττομεν αὐθημερόν τοὺς ἁγίους, καὶ σοφοὺς εἶναι κελεύομεν, τοὺς οὐδὲν σοφισθέντας, οὐδὲ τοῦ βαθμοῦ προεισενεγκόντας τι, πλὴν τοῦ βούλεσθαι.** (*or.* 43, 26)<sup>49</sup>

45 Ἡμετέρην κακίην, ὅποσοι λαοῖο πρόεδροι. (II, 1, 13, 58); Ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντας ῥαδίως καθίζομεν, / Ἐὰν μόνον θέλωσι, λαοῦ προστάτας (II, 1, 12, 375–376).

46 Οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδὲ πρόεδρος ἐὼν ἱεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις, / Ἦ μόνος, ἢ πλεόνων εἰς ἓν ἀγειρομένων, / Φθέγγομαι οὐασι τερπνά, τὰ Πνεύματος ἔκτοθι ῥίψας. . . (II, 1, 17, 75–77).

47 Οὐκ ἐπαινῶ γὰρ ἐγὼ τὴν παρ’ ἡμῖν ἀταξίαν καὶ ἀκοσμίαν, ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ ἐφ’ ᾧ προεδρευόντων ἐν βήμασιν (*or.* 43, 26).

48 For the almost proverbial reference to Saul prophesising, see II, 1, 12, 401 and Meier 1989, 116, *ad loc.*

49 “For I do not praise the disorder and irregularity which sometimes exist among us, even in those who preside over the sanctuary. I do not venture, nor is it just, to accuse them all. I approve the nautical custom, which first gives the oar to the future steersman, and afterward leads him to the stern, and entrusts him with the command, and seats him at the helm, only after a long course of striking the sea

Καὶ εἰ τοσοῦτο τὴν ἐμὴν ἔργον μόνην (385)  
 Ψυχὴν κυβερνᾶν ἐν βίου τρικυμίαις,  
 Πῶς παντὶ δώσεις αὐχένας λαοῦ τόσου,  
 Πλὴν εἰ καταδῦσαι τὸ σκάφος σπουδὴν ἔχους;  
 Πόθεν λίθοι μὲν δυσπόριστοι τῶν καλῶν  
 Καὶ γῆς ἀρώματ' οὐ τόπου παντὸς φέρειν, (390)  
 Ἴππος δ' ὁ μὲν κάκιστος ἐν μέσῳ πολὺς,  
 Τὸν δ' εὐγενὴ τρέφουσιν οἴκοι πλουσίων,  
 Ὁ δὲ πρόεδρος ῥαδίως εὐρίσκεται  
 Μηδὲν πονηθεὶς πρόσφατος τὴν ἀξίαν;  
 (II, 1, 12, 385–394)<sup>50</sup>

Πύκτης μὲν οὐδεὶς, ὅστις οὐ τὸ πρὶν χέρα (555)  
 Προῦβαλλεν οὐδ' ἐσκέψατ' εὐκαιρον στάσιν,  
 Οὐδὲ σταδιεὺς μὴ τῷ πόδε προγυμνάσας.  
 Αὐλοὺς δὲ τίς ποτ' εὖ φρονῶν αὐθημερόν  
 Τέτμηκεν, ἐξήσκησεν, ἠγωνίσαστο;  
 Γραφεὺς δὲ τίς ποτ' ἄκρος ἠκούσθη ποτέ (560)  
 Μὴ πολλὰ μίξας χρωμάτων μορφώματα;  
 Ἐρρητόρευσεν δ' ἡ νόσους τίς ἤλασεν  
 Πρὸ πλειόνων λόγων τε καὶ νοσημάτων;  
 Μικροῦ γ' ἂν ἦσαν αἱ τέχνηαι τιμῆματος,  
 Εἰ τῷ θέλειν ὑπῆρχε τὸ κτᾶσθαι μόνον. (565)  
 Τὸν δὲ πρόεδρον δεῖ κελευσθῆναι μόνον  
 Εἶναι καλὸν τε κάγαθόν παραυτίκα.  
 Καὶ τοῦτ' ἐκεῖνο· Πρᾶξις ἐστὶν ἡ φάσις.  
 Χριστὸς κελεύει, καὶ κτίσις παρίσταται.  
 (II, 1, 12, 555–569)<sup>51</sup>

and observing the winds. As is the case again in military affairs: private, captain, general. This order is the best and most advantageous for their subordinates. And if it were so in our case, it would be of great service. But, as it is, there is a danger of the holiest of all offices being the most ridiculous among us. For promotion depends not upon virtue, but upon villainy; and the sacred thrones fall not to the worthiest, but to the most powerful. Samuel, the seer into futurity, is among the prophets: but Saul, the rejected one, is also there. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, is among the kings, but so also is Jeroboam, the slave and apostate. And there is not a physician or a painter who has not first studied the nature of diseases or mixed many colours or practised drawing: but a prelate is easily found, without laborious training, with a reputation of recent date, being sown and springing up in a moment, as the legend of the giants goes. We manufacture those who are holy in a day, and we bid those to be wise who have had no instruction and have contributed nothing before to their dignity, except the will" (Browne/Swallow 1894, 404).

50 "And if 'tis such a big deal to steer / only my own soul through the mighty swells of life, / how dare you give the reins of such a community to anyone, / except if you truly want to drown the ship? / How come when precious stones are difficult to find, / and spices are not grown on any place of earth, / many are the cheap nags on the market, / while the high bred are nurtured in the houses of the rich, / that the leader is easily found, / without training, ready and fresh for the office? / What quick reversal of ways and habits!"

51 "There is no boxer who hasn't begun by holding forth / his hand or by looking for the favourable position; / nor a runner not training his feet in advance; / which sane human, in just one day, / has ever



The three passages share the same theme—Gregory’s criticism of hasty or improper ordinations—and the same use of *πρόεδρος* and *προεδρία* to speak of the bishop. However, there are macroscopic differences of context. The prose passage, which unites all contents present in the other two passages, is part of a longer disclaimer on Basil’s career in his posthumous eulogy, highlighting the orderly course of Basil through the grades of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Basil’s respectful and gradual ascent from baptism to episcopate is favourably contrasted with a contemporary reality of ambition and hasty elections: Gregory’s favourite method of appointment is that exemplified by Basil, which rewards preparation and moral virtue. In the poem, Basil’s positive experience disappears to make room only for a bitter criticism of those who elect unworthy or unprepared people to the episcopate. Here, however, the argumentation is split into two different parts: lines 385–394 are part of a polemic analysis of the status quo, whereby the failures of bishops are explained by failures in their election process, in particular by the disregard for the personal qualities of the candidate and the haste of the choice; lines 555–569 actually argue in the reverse order that, if someone unqualified becomes bishop, he will end up being unworthy or incapable of leading his more advanced faithful.

Coming to the texts proper, the main difference is that the prose passage relates generally to church hierarchy, whereas the poem is clearly concerned with bishops. This is a clue of Gregory’s tendency to conflate his considerations of the clergy without much regard to the difference between priest and bishop. The prose passage presents Gregory’s model first—that is, the gradual ascent through the hierarchy—then describes through biblical examples the current situation, and closes by presenting the paradox of this situation, where people think through the election of clergymen less than they think through their choice of painters and physicians, as if they believed that simply telling someone unworthy to behave worthily made them worthy. Gregory employs both biblical and pagan examples<sup>52</sup>. The poetic passages, perhaps surprisingly, don’t retain these examples. The prose passage and II, 1, 12, 385–394 share the same reference to navigation, even though in prose the simile is much more developed, whereas in the iambs it is a metaphor to express the bad consequences of a bad leader. Instead of the painter and the physician, the rarities that lines 385–394 contrast with the bishop are precious stones, spices, and thoroughbred stallions: here, the point of view is not that of the candidate, who has to hone his craft before he is admitted to office, but of the bishops who have to

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cut, wrought, and played a flute in a contest? / Of which consummate painter has it ever been heard / that he did not mix many different qualities of colours? / Who harangued or healed a disease / before many pleas and many diseases? / Small indeed would be the renown of art / if the bare will sufficed to its acquisition. / Yet the prelate is required, and he alone, / to be admirable and excellent straightway. / But, as the saying goes, “No sooner said than done”: / Christ orders, and a creature forms.”

52 The biblical examples come from 1Reg. and 2Reg., and they are a good and a bad prophet, a good and a bad king. However, there is no reference to good and bad Ancient Testament priests: this hints at Gregory’s mainly doctrinal and political concerns, and his relative lack of interest to the liturgical function of bishops. See §2.1.3.1 and §3.1.2.

choose someone; hence, the candidate is compared to rare luxuries, which one has to search for. The concluding sentence, “The leader is easily found, without training, ready and fresh for the office”, is identical in the two passages, except for minor changes due to the metric. All in all, 385–394 is linguistically prosaic. In the second poetic passage, as well as in the prose speech, the point is not so much the rarity of good leaders, as at 385–394, but the hard work necessarily required to become one. The paradox of believing that the election is per se a title of merit is expressed in prose with the comparison to the Giants, who, being born already armed, resemble the newly baptised who are immediately made bishop<sup>53</sup>. By contrast, II, 1, 12, 555–569 compares the election to Christ’s creative act, in which speaking and being coincide; perhaps the word choice of the prosaic passage echoes this when Gregory says that the electing bishops “form” (πλάττομεν) the good bishops who are elected, because the verb πλάττω has been associated, since the Greek version of Gen. 2:7, with God’s creative activity<sup>54</sup>. Moreover, Gregory’s formulation of the similes of the physician and the painter adapts to the genre: the prosaic verb μορφώω/μορφάω (in verse only once, Arat. 1, 375) corresponds to the poetic μορφώματα, as the ζωγράφος is replaced by the γραφεύς, found at Eur. *Hec.* 807; the utterly pedestrian, almost technical, ἀρρώστημα becomes a tragic νόσημα; furthermore, the simple ιατρός is paraphrased as νόσους ἤλασε, a phrase coined by Gregory. In general, both of the verse renditions of the theme are less plain and explicit in their construction, but also richer in images and similes. Their lists are digressive, but also carefully constructed to create a climax and to refer back to classical models, as Meier rightly notes in his commentary<sup>55</sup>.

Other terms signifying primacy are employed only rarely. Among these, ἡγητήρ appears twice in the same sentence at II, 1, 13, 164–165: “Such are the leaders [ἡγητῆρες]. Then follows closely the people [λαὸς], / prone to wickedness, even without a leader [ἡγητῆρος]”<sup>56</sup>. The choice of words is very interesting: ἡγητήρ is employed only in hexameters and is a very rare word. Most occurrences before Gregory are found in Oppian’s *Halieutica*, to signify the pilot-fish, although two classical examples are known, one in Sophocles’s *Oedipus at Colonus* (1521) and one in Pindar’s first *Pythian* (69). Sophocles employs the word in the iambs for the guide of a blind man, while Pindar uses it in dactylo-epitrites in relation to Hiero of Syracuse. This word is a rarer and more precious variant of the word ἡγήτωρ, which is widely attested; as is often the case, later poets prefer the rarities of classical language to the standard forms. Gregory, however, employs both ἡγητήρ and ἡγήτωρ (and both only in hexameters), introducing a dis-

53 On the giants: Hesiod. *theog.* 185–186; see also Thebes’ σπαρτοί in Apollod. *bibl.* 3, 4, 1. The recipient of these criticisms is clearly Nectarius, who was chosen as bishop of Constantinople instead of Gregory even though at the time he was not even baptised. For a discussion of the relationship between competence, charisma and sacraments, see §3.3.2.1.

54 Lampe 1961, 1089, s.v. πλάσσω.

55 Meier 1989, 115, ad 389–394 and 133, ad 555–639.

56 Τοῖα μὲν ἡγητῆρες· ὁ δ’ ἔσπεται ἐγγύθι λαὸς, / Πρόφρονες ἐς κακίην, καὶ ἡγητῆρος ἀνευθεν (II, 1, 13, 164–165).

tion, for he uses ἡγήτωρ only for the Godhead, and ἡγητήρ for human leaders<sup>57</sup>. His usage of ἡγητήρ is very stereotyped, so much so that there are only two contexts in which the word appears<sup>58</sup>. The first is the quasi-proverbial idea that most people tend towards evil, even without evil leaders, an idea employed in a fortiori reasonings to condemn bad leadership: it is found in much the same terms as in II, 1, 13, 164–165 and at II, 2, 5, 153–155, with the difference that in II, 1, 13, a focus of the present study, the bad leadership is that of bishops, whereas at II, 2, 5 the pagan gods are bad leaders and example-setters<sup>59</sup>. Notably, while at II, 2, 5, 154 ἡγητήρ is used in relation to pagan gods, ten lines after, at 164, God is called ἡγήτωρ. The other stereotypical usage of ἡγητήρ is the military metaphor, whereby the devil is accused of trying to throw the church into confusion by eliminating or corrupting her leaders, hoping that, like an army without officials, she will be destroyed. One such usage appears in the same II, 1, 13, at 43–58. The passage is worthy of comparison with the other occurrence at I, 1, 9, 9–12:

Λυσσῆεις, κακοεργὸς, ἐπεὶ, μερόπεσσι μεγάϊρων,  
 Ἐξέτι τοῦ ὅτε πρῶτον Ἀδὰμ βάλεν ἐκ παραδείσου,  
 Ζωῆς τ' ἀθανάτου, κλέψας δηλήμονι καρπῷ, (45)  
 Καὶ πολλοῖς κρατεροῖς τε τινάγμασιν αἰὲν ἀτάζων,  
 Οὐ σθένεν, ὡς ποθέεσκεν, ὅλον γένος, οἷσι δῆλοιαι  
 Γυνὲ βαλέειν (σπινθὴρ δὲ λόγου, καὶ πυρσὸς ἀερθεῖς,  
 Πᾶσαν ἐπέδραμε γαῖαν αἰοιδίμος, οἱ δὲ διώκται  
 Καὶ πλέον ἐστήριζαν ἀεθλοφόροιαι παγέντας), (50)  
 Δεύτερον εὖρατο μῆχος ἐπὶ κλοπον. Ὡς στρατὸν ἔγνω  
 Καρτερὸν, ἡγητήρσιν ὀλοῖτον ἔμβαλεν ἔχθος.  
 Καὶ γὰρ, ἀγοῦ πίπτοντος, ὅλος στρατὸς ἐς χθόνα νεύει.  
 Ποντοπόρον δέ τε νῆα κακὸς πρήνιζεν ἀήτης, (55)  
 Ἥ σκοπέλοισιν ἔαζε, κυβερνητήρος ἀτερθεν.  
 Ὡς δὲ δόμους τε, πόλεις τε, χόρους, βόας, ἄρματα, πῶϋ  
 Βλάβεν αἰδρεῖν σημάντορος, Εἰδόσι μῦθος  
 Ἥμετέρην κακίην, ὅποσοι λαοῖο πρόεδροι.  
 (II, 1, 13, 43–58)<sup>60</sup>

57 For ἡγήτωρ, see II, 2, 5, 256; 6, 164.

58 Except for the occurrence at II, 2, 5, 238, where μύθων ἡγητῆρες are the professors of rhetoric.

59 Φράζέ μοι καὶ τοῦτον ἐπὶ φρονα μῦθον ἄριστον / Οἱ πλέονες κακίους, καὶ ἡγητῆρος ἀνευθεν / Πρόφρονες εἰς κακίην. (II, 2, 5, 153–155). Gregory then continues: Εἰ δὲ θεοὺς στήσεας ἀτασθαλίας μεδέοντας / Πρὶν μύθου δνοφεροῖο λῦσαι ζόφον ἔμφορνι μύθῳ, / Μυθόλατριν διέπερσας ἐπισπόμενον φαέεσσιν (157–159).

60 “Rabid, malevolent, grudging mankind / ever since he first cast Adam out of paradise / and immortal life, deceiving with the baneful fruit, / and always striking us with many and powerful disruptions, / because he managed not, even as he desired, to cast down / our whole race with his cunning (the spark of Word and lifted torch / spread all over the earth with fame, while the persecutors / confirmed even more those convinced by the martyrs), / he found another wily means. Recognising the power / of the army, he threw a deadly enmity between its leaders. / Thus, once the chief is fallen, the whole army declines, / a bad gale can capsize a seafaring ship, / or break it on the cliffs when it is without helmsman. / Thus households, cities, choruses, cattle, chariots, flocks / destroyed the ignorance of their guide. I speak to those who know / the vice of all of us, guiding the people.”

Λυσσῆεις ὅτε πρῶτον Ἀδάμ βάλεν ἐκ παραδείσου,  
 Κλέψας ἀνδροφόνιο φυτόῦ δηλήμονι καρπῷ, (10)  
 Ὡς στρατὸν ἡγητῆρος ὀλωλότος ἐγγεῖ τύπτων,  
 Δίξετο καὶ τεκέεσσι κακὸν καὶ κῆρα φυτεῦσαι  
 (I, 1, 9, 9–12)<sup>61</sup>

The idea of defeating an army by eliminating its commanders is found also elsewhere in Gregory's production, expressed with the same words<sup>62</sup>. For example, the expression ἡγητῆρος ὀλωλότος, found at I, 1, 9, 11 is divided and doubled in II, 1, 13 between ἡγητῆρσιν ὀλοῖον (52) and ἀγοῦ πίπτοντος (53). The first preserves the lexical material (ἡγητῆρ and the root ὀλ- of the verb ὀλλυμι and the adjective ὀλοῖός), while the second preserves the syntactic form (absolute genitive) and the general meaning of "once the general has fallen"<sup>63</sup>. Apart from identical expressions highlighted in the text, there are also meaningful differences: the ὥς in ὥς στρατὸν (II, 1, 13, 51; I, 1, 9, 11) has a temporal value in the poem against bishops and a comparative one in the theological poem, thus making the same image of the army a metaphor in II, 1, 13 and a simile in I, 1, 9; moreover, the situation described by the image is very different, and accordingly the tenors of the metaphor are different. In the theological poem, the general is Adam, and the army is mankind, whereas in II, 1, 13, the generals are the bishops and the army the church, so that ἡγητῆρ is plural at II, 1, 13 and singular at I, 1, 9. Thus, the same metaphor can be employed to conceptualise the doctrine of original sin and the current status of church politics. Anyway, it is clear that here ἡγητῆρ means "general", "military commander" and is applied to the bishops only through metaphor: the correlation with στρατός, which cannot be construed to mean "church" (as, for example, λαός at II, 1, 13, 58 might be), as well as the parallel metaphor of the ship and the helmsman (53–54), demonstrates it. Given these examples, the word ἡγητῆρ cannot be considered a poetic transcription of ἡγούμενος, a standard term in prose texts to signify Christian leaders, and especially bishops. When ἡγητῆρ does not

<sup>61</sup> "When his madly raging enemy first drove Adam from Paradise, cheating him by the destructive fruit of the tree which brought death to the human race, he acted as one who attempts to strike an army when its general has been killed by a spear, seeking to plant in Adam's descendants also evil and death" (from Sykes's translation, Moreschini/Sykes 1997, 43).

<sup>62</sup> For example, II, 1, 34, 135–137.

<sup>63</sup> Ἀγός is a poetic word for a commander in military contexts (for example, in many of the 22 occurrences in the *Iliad*) and for nobles or powerful people in a civic context (as the πόλεως ἀγοί of Aeschyl. *supplic.* 248.905, one in iambs the other in lyric metre), though the civic and military are often difficult to distinguish (see Pind. *Nem.* 1, 51). Among late poets, Eudocia seems particularly fond of it (four occurrences, only Homer has more). A Hesiodic fragment is particularly interesting: ὅ[τα δ'] Ὑπερμήστρη λαῶν ἀγὼν Ἀμφιάρηον / γε[ῖ]νατ' Ὀϊκλῆος θαλερὸν λέχος εἰσαναβάσσα / Ἀ[ρ]γεί ἐν ἱπποβότῳ πολέων ἡγήτορα λαῶν (Hes. *catalog. frag.* 25, 34–36). Here, ἀγός and ἡγητῆρ are employed as synonyms for the same person and with the same genitive specification (λαῶν).

refer very generally to a leader, its proper use entails a military metaphor, even when it is applied to bishops.

On the basis of II, 1, 13, 57, it is possible to analyse another leadership term, *σημάντωρ*. In the quoted text, *σημάντωρ*, without any qualification, is put in relation with the household (*δῶμος*), the city (*πόλις*), the chorus (*χόρος*), the cattle (*βόες*), the flock (*πῶς*), and the chariot-horses (*ἄρμα*). A more generic term would be hard to find: the word means here only “guide”, “leader,” with hardly any connotation. Its application to the bishops can be explained either as a metaphor, implying that the church is a family, a city, a chorus, a flock, a herd, and a chariot, which is possible, or as a proof by induction, whereby the bishop and the church are not mentioned but implied as just another case of the general rule exposed by the other examples. Yet at II, 1, 13, 100–102 Gregory employs the word *σημάντωρ* more specifically for the bishop, when he says: “Therefore, let no ploughman, no carpenter, no tanner, / no hunter of prey, no one running the blacksmith’s business / remain afar, nor let him have someone else as guide to God [*σημάντορα θεῖον*]”<sup>64</sup>. In later poetry (mainly Nonnus and his imitators), the word is used as an adjective, with the meaning of “signalling”, “which signals”, but Gregory sticks to classical usage, employing the word as a noun meaning “leader”. He shuns also previous Christian authors’ habit of employing the term in prose with the meaning of “signal”, “sentry,” or “messenger,” especially for the prophets<sup>65</sup>. Gregory’s usage mirrors perfectly the classical one: the word is employed only in hexameters, never in iambs, and it is a very generic term of leadership. It is equally well suited for the shepherd’s conduct towards his flock and the Godhead dominating over the universe and human life<sup>66</sup>. In two similar passages, Gregory employs the term for human authorities: he prescribes that a newly married woman ought to honour her husband right after God, and to virgins he says they must honour the priest (probably the bishop) right after God<sup>67</sup>. After all, Gregory himself, in the same way, obeyed his father and the mysterious person who ordered him to preach in Constantinople<sup>68</sup>. In sum, the term

64 Μὴ τέ τις οὖν ἀροτὴρ, μὴ τέκτων, μὴ σκυτοεργός, / Μὴ θήρην μεθέπων, μήτ’ ἔμπυρον ἔργον ἐλαύνων, / Τῆλε μένοι, μὴ δ’ ἄλλον ἔχοι σημάντορα θεῖον.

65 Clem. Alex. *strom.* 6, 18, 166, 5; [Athanasius] *haer.* PG 28, 513, 45; 520, 29; *occurs.* PG 28, 993, 25. But see also [Aristotle] *mund.* 399B, 9. A prose occurrence in the sense of leader is Herodt. 7, 81, 6.

66 Cf. οἱ δ’ ὥς τ’ ἤε βοῶν ἀγέλην ἢ πῶς μέγ’ οἰῶν / θῆρε δὺς κλονέωσι μελαίνης νυκτὸς ἀμοργῶ / ἐλθόντ’ ἐξαπίνης σημάντορος οὐ παρεόντος, / ὥς ἐφόβηθεν Ἀχαιοὶ ἀνάλκιδες (Hom. *Il.* 15, 323–326) with our *σημάντωρ* in relation to the βόας, ἄρματα, πῶς of II, 1, 13, 56–57; the formulaic Κρονίωνα θεῶν σημάντορα πάντων / Διὶ Κρονίωνι, θεῶν σημάντορι πάντων (*Hymn. Hom.* 4, 367; Hesiod. *scut.* 56; *frg.* 5, 3) with Οὐτ’ ἄλλον τιν’ εὐοικὸς ἔχειν σημάντορα παντὸς, / Ἡὲ τὸν ὃς μιν ἔτευξεν (referred to divine Providence, at I, 1, 5, 14–15).

67 Ἄζεο μὲν πρῶτιστα Θεόν, μετέπειτα δ’ ἀκοίτην, / Ὀφθαλμὸν βιότοιο, τεῆς σημάντορα βουλῆς (II, 2, 6, 12–13); Ἄζεό μοι πρῶτιστα Θεόν, μετέπειθ’ ἱερῆα Χριστὸν ἐπιχθόνιον, ζωῆς σημάντορα σείο (I, 2, 2, 346–347).

68 Αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ζωῆς σημάντορι καὶ τόδ’ ἔαδεν / Ἡμετέρης, ἄλλοις με Λόγον καὶ Πνεῦμ’ ἀναφῆναι, / Ξεῖνοις, τρηχαλέοισιν, ἀκανθοφόροισιν ἀρούραις (II, 1, 19, 57–59). The editor in the *Patrologia Graeca*

σημάντωρ is a very generic term of leadership, which can be employed in almost any context but has the advantage of being consecrated by Greek poetic tradition.

Since the frequent use of terms of primacy betrays that Gregory conceives of the episcopate as first of all an authority, it is only logical that bad bishops should be marked with the title of the bad leader—that is, τύραννος. The word appears three times in II, 1, 12: at line 439, it refers to the bishop's handling of sacraments and liturgy, at 481 to his moral conduct, and at 797 to the power and authority bishops contend for<sup>69</sup>. In the first two instances (439 and 481), the word connotes the usurpation of liturgical authority (of the Eucharist and of the baptism) caused by a morally unworthy bishop. Line 797 seems more generic, but given the context of denouncing of the episcopal “spoil system”, a negative connotation for the term in the sense of “usurped authority” is appropriate (see §5.2.2).

### 2.1.2.2 In Ephrem

Coming to the Syriac side of the question, the Syriac New Testament offers little choice of primacy terms: apart from the already studied *ʿepīsqōpā* and *qaššīšā*, the only noun employed is *mdabbrānā*, translating the Greek ἡγούμενοι at Hebr. 13:7.17.24, whereas προϊστάμενοι is rendered as a verb with *qāymīn* (“standing”, “supervising”) at 1Thess. 5:12. Even though *mdabbrānā* is a perfectly legitimate word for the bishop and can be found in this sense in many passages of texts contemporary to Ephrem, the poet not only avoided it but outright rejected it<sup>70</sup>. *Mdabbrānā* is a *nomen agentis* formed from the active participle of the verb and the suffix *-ānā*<sup>71</sup>; in this case, the verb is the second, intensive form of *dbar* (i.e., *dabbar*), meaning “to govern”, “to command”, “to lead,” and “to administer”. In his polemic against rigorism, Ephrem explicitly rejects a model of leadership—one that he expresses with the verb *dabbar*—based on coercion, fear,

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assumes it was Basil who advised Gregory to go to Constantinople. This mysterious character appears elsewhere in Gregory's poems, notably at II, 1, 11, 595–596.607–608 and II, 1, 12, 77–82; 90–92 (see also: *or.* 25, 19; 26, 15.17; 33, 13; 36, 3.6; 42, 19; 43, 2). The σημάντωρ ἡμετέρης ζωῆς may be Basil as well as Meletius, or the Holy Spirit, whom Gregory evokes in many of these passages. For a terminological analysis of different passages on this call to Constantinople, see §2.2.1.2; for an analysis of content in view of autobiographical elements in Gregory's poetry, see §5.1.2.1; for an evaluation of the episode in terms of the role of charisma in the selection of bishops, see §3.3.2.1; finally, for scholarly opinions on who called Gregory in the end, §5.1.2 n. 25.

69 Μετῆλθες εἰς τὸ βῆμα, καὶ κρατεῖς θρόνου, / Ἐπειτα πάντα συλλαβὼν ἔχεις βίαν, / Τέλος τυραννῶν καὶ Θεοῦ μυστήρια, / Οἷς οὐδὲ θαρρεῖν προσβλέπειν ἐχρῆν ἴσως / Τοὺς μὴ λίαν πόρρωθεν ἡγρετισμένους; (II, 1, 12, 437–441); Σαυτὸν καθαίροις, ἀλλὰ νυνὶ μὴ γελῶ, / Ἄλλους καθαιρῶν αὐτὸς ἐσπιλωμένος; / Εἰ μὴ μόνω σοι τοῦτο ἐκ Θεοῦ γέρας; (Ὡς ἂν γράφει χεὶρ βασιλέως πρὸς χάριν) / Τὸ καὶ προσεπαινέσθαι [sic] σε τῆς τυραννίδος; (II, 1, 12, 477–481); Θρόνους μὲν οὖν ἔχοιτε, καὶ τυραννίδας (II, 1, 12, 797).

70 Murray 2006, 187–193.

71 Nöldeke 1880, 73, §130; Duval 1881, 234, §250.c. The abstract feminine derived from this name, *mdabbrānūtā*, corresponds to Gr. οἰκονομία (e.g., at Eph. 1:10; 3:2.9; Col. 1:25), an important concept for the episcopal office.

and punishment: “And if one should say that people / are driven [*mdabber*] only with force and the stick, // well, even fear drives the thief, / and threat the plunderer, // and shame the fool” (CN 15, 18); “Never did a mirror compel [*dabbrat*] / with violence its observer” (CN 16, 6, 1–2)<sup>72</sup>. For this reason, he will not call his bishops *mdabbrānā*. This negative connotation of the word could come from its usage by some gnostics. For, in the *Book of the laws of the countries*, a product of the school of Bardaisan, we can read a refutation of astrologic fatalism, where some *mdabbrānē* are mentioned: “And the fate of the *mdabbrānē* does not force them [i.e., Christians] to conform to what is unclean for them”<sup>73</sup>. In the context of this refutation, where the customs of different nations are compared unfavourably to Christian morality, it is probable that the *mdabbrānē* here corresponds to the ἄρχοντες, the angels in charge of every nation, who, for some gnostic thinkers, could determine the fate of the people they controlled<sup>74</sup>. The evaluation of these ἄρχοντες oscillates in different sources between the role of mediators of providence and that of evil spirits alienating nations from God. Here, there seems to be a negative view of the *mdabbrānē*, and if Ephrem, being very well read in contemporary heretics, knew of this usage of the word, it is clearly understandable why he would have outright rejected it in talking of his bishops.

The lexical poverty of the Syriac New Testament notwithstanding, nearly half the words used for the bishops by Ephrem are terms of primacy and authority, and they all stem from two roots: one is *rabbā*, the root of “great” but also of “much”, and *rēšā*, etymologically meaning “head”, but similar in its many meanings to the Greek ἀρχή, joining the ideas of “first”, “most important”, “most high,” and “that which begins and causes something”. Both words are mostly employed in their primitive form, but Ephrem uses also derivatives, such as *mrabbyānā* from *rabbā* and *rēšāyā* or *rēšānā* from *rēšā*. *Rabbā*, when used as a noun and not as a modifier, has a wide spectrum of meanings: apart from its meaning of “firstborn” (which, notably, even the Greek πρεσβύτερος has), the word can identify any type of leadership, be it religious, military or political, or even eschatological, as in the Gospel sayings at Mt. 18:1 and 23:11. Among these meanings, a remarkable and specific one is that of “teacher” or “master”, clearly showcased in another Gospel saying, Mt. 10:24: “The disciple [*talmīdā*] is not above his master [*rabb-eh*]<sup>75</sup>. The contrast of *rabbā* with *talmīdā* reveals the “didactic” connotation built into

<sup>72</sup> On the role of coercion in Ephrem’s characterisation of the bishops, see §3.1.4.3; §4.2.

<sup>73</sup> Drijvers 1964, 60.

<sup>74</sup> Lampe 1961, 241, s.v. ἄρχων; Dibelius 1950.

<sup>75</sup> The reading is identical in the Peshitta and in the *Vetus syra* on the Sinaitic Palimpsest. Other notable Gospel passages are Joh. 1:38, where the Greek gloss interpreting ῥαββί as διδάσκαλε is not translated in any ancient version and ῥαββί is simply rendered as *rabb-an* (“our teacher” instead of “my teacher”, because the speaker is intended as a first-person plural); at Mt. 23:8 in Greek, Jesus says to the apostles not to let themselves be called ῥαββί, because only one is ὁ διδάσκαλος, “the teacher”, while in Syriac, both ῥαββί and διδάσκαλος are rendered as *rabbā*. Interestingly, at Joh. 20:16, the Peshitta renders Greek ῥαββουνί as *rabbulī*, an affectionate diminutive, and translates διδάσκαλε in the gloss as *mallpānā*,

the term. In our poems, Ephrem uses the term with four different meanings<sup>76</sup>: the main meaning, that of authority and command, is used of the bishop relative to the community and can be very generic (CN 13, 10, 6; CN 17, 2, 9; CN 19, 14, 1–2)<sup>77</sup>; the most employed sense is that of “teacher”, either as teaching the community (CN 13, 12, 4; CN 14, 17, 3; CN 17, 1, 9; CN 21, 5, 5)<sup>78</sup> or as teaching Ephrem himself (CN 14, 26, 3)<sup>79</sup> or, in reference to the predecessor of the bishop, as his “master” (CN 17, 2, 5; CN 19, 8, 6)<sup>80</sup>; the use of *rabbā* to mean the deceased bishop in relationship with his successor is widespread, and sometimes it seems that *rabbā*, more than teacher, means “senior”, “older brother,” or “elder”, and not only in relation to the chronological succession of the bishop but also for the authoritative role of the predecessor towards his successor (CN 17, 5, 5; 18, 1, 1.5)<sup>81</sup>; finally, there is an instance of *rabbā* employed as attribute of

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which means “teacher” more literally. However, the Old Syriac version in the Sinaitic Palimpsest omits the gloss, showing that *rabbulī* was perfectly understandable in its “didactic” overtones.

76 If one does not count CN 19, 10, 1, where *rabbā* refers to the prominent laymen in the community.

77 Both CN 13, 10, 6 and 19, 14, 1–2 associate *rabbā* with the community as “triumphing” or “triumphant” (*nṣaḥ(w)* and *naṣṣiḥā*, cf. Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2437–2438, s.v. *ܢܨܚܐ*). The context remains quite ambiguous and the meaning of *rabbā* could be very generic; however, the triumphal associations suggest that here the term should be interpreted as a military command. CN 17, 2, 9, on the other hand, parallels *rabbā* with *rēšā*, suggesting that the two must be taken as generic names of authority: “and he was confirmed and made head (*rēšā*), / and he was lifted and made chief (*rabbā*) (CN 17, 2, 8–9).

78 At CN 13, 12, the three bishops Jacob, Babu and Valgash are given different titles corresponding to the different needs of the community: “to her need [*sunqān-āh*] came fulfilment [*mullāy*]”. The need associated with the title of *rabbānē* at line 4 is *puršānē*, the plural of *puršānā*, “understanding”. Here, the plural means the different stages of development of the understanding and intellect of the community and the different bishops correspond to these stages of cognitive development. Given this intellectual background, *rabbānē* can easily be interpreted as “teachers”. The same idea of a progressive development is found at CN 14, 17, where Ephrem personifies the community as a growing girl (*bartā d-tarbitā*, 1) or as a child (*šabrā*, 4). In this context the bishops appear as *rabbān-ēh w-’abāh-ēh*: the second word means “her fathers”, so that, considering the community as a child, the first word can be interpreted as “teachers”. The same nexus of childhood (*šabrūtā*) and teaching (*rabbā*) appears at CN 21, 5, 5. At CN 17, 1, 9, the new bishop is the fourth *rabbā*, having been “disciple” (*talmidā*) of the three predecessors. It is not clear whether his teaching office is aimed here at the community or at a hypothetical successor, and probably Ephrem intended here the title of “master” or “teacher” in the absolute sense of one who has reached an excellent understanding and mastery, rather than as related to the pupils.

79 The three bishops as “three teachers” (*tlātā rabbānīn*) and the poet as their “disciple” (*talmidā*), with the same lexical contrast of Mt. 10:24.

80 At CN 17, 2, 5 the predecessor and successor are, respectively, *rabbā* and *talmid-eh*, “the teacher and his disciple”. At 19, 8 the relationship between the bishop and his successor is modelled after that of Elijah and Elisha. The new bishop has inherited his predecessor’s poverty—that is, he has learnt his ascetic practices, so that now he can teach as his “master” (*rabbā*) did. Admittedly, this occurrence is not too clear, it could well be that *rabbā* here has purely a meaning of primacy, authority and precedence.

81 At CN 17, 5, 5, the poet exhorts the new bishop to (lit.) “occupy the place of his master” (*tmallē dukkat rabb-āk*). Following Bou Mansour 2019, 444n204 against Beck 1961, 55n9, I take this expression as idiomatic for “represent”, “fill in for” and not literally, with *dukkat* meaning “bishop’s throne” (see Payne Smith 1879–1901, 835–836, s.v. *ܕܡܠܟܐ* for numerous examples of the idiom). This interpretation



*rēšā* (CN 19, 12, 5)<sup>82</sup>. From this overview of the usage of *rabbā* in our poems emerges a strong emphasis on the bishop's task of teaching and an attention to the relationship between a new bishop and his predecessor.

The didactic emphasis emerges in another passage, CN 16, 14, where Ephrem mentions the bishops in Nisibis as shepherds (*rā'awātā*), fathers (*'abāhē*), and teachers, this time using the term *mallpānā*, which has an unmistakably didactic meaning. When this didactic meaning of *rabbā* is referred to the community, and similarly for this one occurrence of *mallpānā*, the word is connected with the notion of a progressive growth of the community, made explicit by references to childhood (as at CN 14, 17 and CN 21, 5) or to the parental role of the bishop (at CN 13, 12, 3; 14, 7; and 16, 4). Hence, Ephrem ties the traditional idea of a *munus docendi* for the bishop to his personal argument for the orderly succession of bishops, an argument he advances by personifying the community, which progresses and develops (more on this at §2.2.4.1 and 4; §3.1.4.3; §4.1.2; §4.2).

The word *rēšā* largely corresponds in its semantic values to the Greek root of ἀρχή and ἄρχω, meaning the beginning, the first part, the extremity (ἄκρον), but also the cause and the commander of someone. In the New Testament, *rēšā* consistently translates Greek words from the roots of ἀρχή, ἄγω and πρῶτος, most of all the different names of civil and social authorities. In later ecclesiastical language the term is used especially for the heads of monasteries<sup>83</sup>. In Ephrem, the word is reserved to the bishop among ecclesiastical authorities, as demonstrated by his rendition of the stereotypical formula “bishops, priests, and deacons” as *rēšē, qaššišē w-šammāšē* at *hymn. haer* 22, 21, 1–2. He employs it accordingly in our poems<sup>84</sup>. On other occasions, however, he uses the word in a literal sense, meaning “head”, and sometimes it is difficult to discern clearly if the metaphor is dead or alive. One such example appears at CN 18, 10, 3: the phrase *ṭulšā l-rēšā lā yāyē* can be understood as a metaphor, “filth is not fitting for the head” or, as a dead metaphor, “impurity is not fitting for the bishop”. The end meaning is the

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is confirmed by the analogy with the expression *nāṭar dukktā* employed by Ephrem for worldly kings as vicarious of Christ's kingship (see Papoutsakis 2017, 73–78). Therefore, I find that the emphasis here is not on the previous bishop as teacher of homiletics for the following, but simply as predecessor. Similarly, at CN 18, 1, 1 and 5, there is no hint of a teacher-pupil relationship, but of a mere succession: the new bishop is “priest after his master” (*kāhen bātar rabb-eh*) and his master doesn't leave him alone (*rabb-āk menn-āk lā šannī*). These instances demonstrate that the relationship between a bishop and his predecessor expressed through the word *rabbā* need not entail a didactic connotation.

<sup>82</sup> “May you be a great leader” (*tehwē 'a(n)t rēšā rabbā*).

<sup>83</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3900, s.v. ܪܝܫܐ.

<sup>84</sup> CN 15, 7, 4; 12, 1; CN 19, 2, 5. The usage is apparent at CN 17, 1, 7.9 and 2, 7–8, where *rēšā* is paralleled by *rabbā*. At CN 17, 1, 7 *rēšā* is related to the word *mar'itā*, which originally means “flock”, but in Syriac is used also as “diocese”. The fact that here there is no hint of pastoral imagery suggests that here *mar'itā* has already its later sense. See §2.2.1.1 and 3.

same, but stylistically the two interpretations would be different; now, considering that the two preceding lines and the following contain living metaphors, it is likely that here too the expression is metaphorical. This passage stands out because Ephrem uses here a metaphor involving the head, which does not describe the relationship between the bishop (as head) and his community (as members). All other metaphorical instances of *rēšā* fall into the latter category.

These metaphorical usages of *rēšā* are found mostly in *CN* 15 and 18. In these instances, the bishop is spoken of as the “head” of the body of the church, whereas the faithful are the limbs. This metaphor, as Murray demonstrated, is widespread in Ephrem’s writings, with the place of the head occupied in turn by Christ, St. Peter, or the bishop<sup>85</sup>. The history of such a metaphor in the ancient world is remarkable in the variety of its witnesses: the most famous occurrence in classical literature is Menenius Agrippa’s speech to the Roman plebs as related by Livy (2, 32, 9–12), but similar fables can be found in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* (2, 3, 18), in Cicero’s *De officiis* (3, 22), and in various Aesopic collections (Perry 130). Most relevant, Paul applied the simile to the church (1Cor. 12:13–31), no doubt reaching back to the pagan tradition of the fable, but also developing clues on the corporate personality of the religious community available in biblical language and biblical exegesis. The function of this metaphor is particularly clear at *CN* 18, 3–4, two stanzas devoted to the circumstances of the election of the new bishop Abraham:

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<sup>86</sup> ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܪܥܝܐ ܕܪܥܝܐ  
(*CN* 18, 3–4)

<sup>85</sup> Murray 2006, 89–93.

<sup>86</sup> “The last musterer, who was lifted / and became head of his limbs [*rēšā l-haddām-aw(hī)*] // the little who took primogeniture, / not at a price like Jacob, // nor through jealousy like Aaron, / envied by his brothers, the Levites, // but through love [*b-ḥubbā*] took it, like Moses, / because he was older than Aaron: // your brothers rejoiced in you as Moses. / **Blessed is he who chose you through concord!** /// 4. There isn’t jealousy nor envy / among the limbs in the body [*bēt-haddāmē da-b-gušmā*], // for they obey it for love [*b-ḥubbā*], / they are ordered by it for affection [*b-raḥmē*]: // the head is the limbs’ watchman [*dawqa-(h)w rēšā l-haddāmē*], / for he can see all parts; // though exalted, he is humble for love [*ba- ḥnānā*], / he stoops even to the feet, // to take away their pain. / **Blessed is he who joined your love with us!**”.

The two stanzas are cleverly constructed as a unity, because the image of the head and the limbs introduced at the beginning of stanza 3 is not developed until stanza 4; instead, stanza 3 plays out a series of Old Testament types of accession to primacy. The theme is how the “last musterer”, the youngest brother, could become the chief of all: this probably ties into a real situation, whereby Abraham became bishop *in spite of* his young age. Ephrem justifies this unusual election by highlighting the concord surrounding it<sup>87</sup>. The metaphor of the head and the limbs is instrumentally right in this respect, because it presents the bishop as organic to the community because of the universal acclaim he received, and it frames resistance to his election as absurd, like a cancer. As he often does, Ephrem refrains from explicitly stating this negative consequence of the metaphor, though the consequence is implied by the first four lines of stanza 4. As regards the sources of this treatment of the metaphor, the idea of love (*ḥubbā*, *rahmē*, or *ḥnānā*) as the force which unites the limbs stands out. It may be a Christian interpretation of some philosophical or physiological concept of ἔρως or φιλία as ordering principle of the animal body. Something of this kind is present in Eryximachus’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium* (Plat. conv. 186D, 5–187C, 5). However, I could not find other traces of this conception in Greek medical writings. Paul, on the other hand, describes marriage, and consequently the relationship between the community and its head (here, Christ), as the love between different parts of the same body<sup>88</sup>.

The same metaphor, however, has another implication, which is developed at lines 5–9: the bishop, as head of the limbs, must have a loving and humble attitude and perform a series of tasks for the benefit of the limbs. It is always difficult to evaluate passages of this kind, because they are ostensibly descriptive, in that they simply state what the bishop *does*, and yet one feels that they could be also intended in a paraenetic way, suggesting what the bishop *should do*, or even polemically, denouncing what a bishop should do and the bishop *is not doing*. Here, our almost complete loss of the context in which the poems were delivered weighs strongly against the possibility of comprehending the tone of these lines. Among the tasks of the bishop, there is that of the “watchman”, expressed by the word *dawqā*. Payne Smith discusses in the corresponding entry on his lexicon whether the word *dawqā* may be translated also as ἐπίσκοπος (“supervisor” or “bishop”) and not only as σκοπός (“watchman”), as most occurrences suggest<sup>89</sup>. The word is closely associated with bishops, as its metaphorical use in Aphrahat suggests, and in fact texts like the “Doctrine of the Apostles”, appended to the *Doctrine of Addai* and edited in two different versions by Lagarde and Cureton

<sup>87</sup> On the likely critics of Abraham: §3.1.1.1; §3.1.4.4.

<sup>88</sup> The husband is the *rēšā* of the wife in the same way as Christ is the *rēšā* of the church (1Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23) and, since she is his own body (*pagrā*), in the same way as the Christians are *haddāmē* of Christ, the man must love her (verb *ḥabb*) (Eph. 5:28–30).

<sup>89</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 849, s.v. *דאוקא*.

and Wright, seem to use it as a title for the bishop<sup>90</sup>. Moreover, the term translates Greek ἐπίσκοπος in two verses of the Syro-Hexaplaric version of the Bible (Judc. 9:28; Symmachus's version of Jer. 29:26). However, the term did not take root so as to become a title, though it preserved its association with the figure of the bishop. Ephrem uses it only here, and though it admittedly shows a close link to the bishop and his essential tasks, he probably is not implying a relationship with Greek ἐπίσκοπος, a word he never uses (see §2.1.1). Moreover, the meaning of “watchman” in this case is perfectly apt to the metaphor, since the bishop is the head in the body and the head is spatially the highest organ of the body, the one endowed with the organs of vision and hearing, making it a very sensible candidate for the role of “watchman” of the whole body. Height, implies Ephrem, is functional to the whole and not to the part, and entails a task.

When it appears at CN 15, the metaphor of the head and the limbs is much more extended:

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90 “5. Moreover, the apostles established that there should be priests [*qaššišē*] and deacons [*mšam-mšānē*] as the Levites, and subdeacons [*hupdyaqānē*] as those who bore the vessels of the atrium of the temple of the Lord, and a watchman (*dawqā*) that he may be a leader [*mdabbrānā*] for all the people, as Aaron, head [*rēšā*] and chief [*rabbā*] of all the priests [*kāhnē*] and Levites of the whole city.” (Cureton/Wright 1864, ܬܕ). “Moreover, the apostles established that there should be priests [*qaššišē*] as the priests [*kāhnē*] sons of Aaron, and deacons [*mšammšānē*] as the Levites, and subdeacons [*hupdyaqānē*] as those who bore the vessels of the atrium of the shrine of the Lord, and a watchman [*dawqā*] that he may be a leader [*mdabbrānā*] for all the people, as Aaron, the High Priest [*rēš-kāhnā*], chief [*rēšā*] and leader [*mdabbrānā*] of all priests [*kāhnē*], Levites, and of the whole encampment.” (De Lagarde 1856, ܬܕ).

91 “If had not been the head straight, / perhaps would have murmured the limbs, // for from a crooked head / the course of limbs is disturbed, // and they’d find the cause in the head. /// If now, that he is totally righteous, / we ascribe him our vices, // how much more if he was vicious! / Even with God, though sweet, // the embittered found fault. /// O limbs, imitate the head: / acquire stillness in his serenity, // and kindness in his meekness, / in his holiness splendour, // and in his wisdom instruction.”.

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 ܠܠܬܬܐ ܠܠܬܬܐ ܠܠܬܬܐ  
 (CN 15, 1–3; 19–20)

Its extension notwithstanding, the metaphor here is employed with much less precision and development. Ephrem does not employ the biological function and anatomical position of the head as a metaphor for the bishop's tasks; nor does he define the relationship between head and limbs precisely. The situation portrayed in these stanzas is much more one-sided, because the poet mentions only the duties of the limbs towards the head, and not vice versa. In fact, all the imperatives address the limbs, which are also rebuked at the end for their rebelliousness. In this frame, the head projects its leadership, for bad or for good, onto the limbs, which should simply accept the leadership of the head. Certainly, there is the risk of a "crooked head", whose leadership may misguide the members, but Ephrem rejects this scenario in the second stanza, a scenario he evoked only to make the limbs' rebellion even worse, since they rebelled against a perfect head. The metaphor is so simplified here that its rationale seems to fail, as Ephrem exhorts the limbs to "imitate" (*dammaw*) their head, thus downplaying the idea of unity in difference of tasks expressed by the body metaphor. On the contrary, assimilation and unity among the members are greatly enhanced in this particular use of the metaphor. Even in the last two stanzas, where the difference in rank among the members is more obvious, Ephrem reaffirms that the proper aim of the limbs is to "run with" (*rhaṭ 'am*) the head, so that "the body as a whole" (*kull-eh gušmā*) may move. The stress placed on unity, even to the point of uniformity, should be seen as a conscious rhetorical strategy on the part of Ephrem: the poem addresses a breach in Bishop Valgash's authority, likely caused by his soft approach to leadership (§4.2). Through this interpretation of the metaphor, Ephrem plays down division in the community, totally exonerates the bishop, and lays guilt at the foot of the community, while at the same time inviting them to see themselves as less different from the bishop—and therefore freer—than they currently do. Ephrem employs the same traditional and well-known metaphor in two considerably different ways at CN 15 and 18, according to the pragmatic of his discourse<sup>93</sup>.

92 "If with the head as first / the limbs had run as second, // they would have lesd the third, / and all the whole body would have // followed them. /// But the second neglected the first, / and the third the second, // the rank were despised one by the other. / It's because the citizens neglected each other, // that the strangers too trod them down."

93 A similar, though not wholly the same, metaphor is found at CN 17, 3, 5–8: "He lifted and fixed him as the mind (*re'yānā*) / inside the large body [*gušmā rabbā*] of the church, // and his limbs [*haddām-aw(hī)*] surrounded him, / to be supplied from him with life". Here, though the role of the faithful as limbs and of the church as body is the same, the bishop is not the *rēšā* "head" but the *re'yānā* "mind". As *rēšā* may be taken both as a metaphorical body part and a title of authority, so *re'yānā* has a root similar to *rā'yā*, a typical title for the bishop. The value of the metaphor is roughly the same as CN 18, 3–4, because it expresses a reciprocal relationship between the mind, which leads the limbs, and the limbs, which in

Of the two derivatives of *rēšā* used in our poems, *rēšāyā* and *rēšānā*, the first, an adjective meaning “best”, “chief”, “finest”, is ascribed to the bishop at *CN* 17, 2, 10, corresponding to the *rēšā* of line 8. The latter, *rēšānā*, is more complicated. Normally, the word identifies the magnates of the community, or secular officers; only rarely is it used as an ecclesiastical title<sup>94</sup>. However, Beck gives a very idiosyncratic translation of the lines where the word appears (*CN* 19, 3, 7–9); the new bishop should be exhorted to “watch over [*ʿaqīm*] the priests [*kāhnē*] in purity, / in humility over the suffragan bishops [*rēšānē*] / in righteousness over the people”<sup>95</sup>. The verb in the causative form *ʿaqīm* is rendered in a meaning rarely attested<sup>96</sup>. It is true that the most natural meaning of the word—“to appoint”, “to consecrate”—cannot be adopted here, because, while it fits perfectly for the priests and the *rēšānē*, it doesn’t make sense in the case of the people. However, one can also avoid the rare meaning chosen by Beck and adopt a common one, “establish”, “make steadfast”—and all the more so, considering that the verb is accompanied by three adverbs, which can easily be translated as predicative of the object: “establish the priests in (their) purity, / in (their) humility the *rēšānē*, / in (its) righteousness the people”. Another strange translation by Beck is “suffragan bishop” for *rēšānē*. To be more precise, Beck translates the word as “leaders”, and it is only in the note that he identifies these leaders with the suffragan bishops, since the term *rēšanūtā* unambiguously means “episcopate” in other passages; but the bishop of Nisibis can be only one, so these leaders must be bishops of other cities; and since the line gives the bishop of Nisibis oversight over these bishops, they must be the suffragan bishops in relation to the metropolitan of Nisibis. The idea may well be historically accurate:

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turn benefit of the life the mind supplies them. This is due to the fact that *CN* 17 and 18 are addressed to the same bishop in much the same situation (his accession), whereas *CN* 15 has a totally different aim and context. The “life” supplied by the bishop is clarified by 9–10 of the same stanza, as Ephrem shifts metaphor and represents the bishop’s teaching as “a new bread” and the bishop as its “barn” (*ʿawšrā*). Teaching and obedience are thus represented as complementary and reciprocal benefits in the context of a natural and necessary relationship. A dubious instance is *CN* 19, 12, 5–6, where the bishop is *rēšā* and the people the jewels of his crown. Beck’s translation preserves the ambiguity, giving “das hohe Haupt” for *rēšā rabbā*. However, *rabbā* does not mean “high” (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3783–3784, s.v. ܪܒܐ) and, since “big head” in a literal sense cannot be the right translation, here *rēšā* must be taken in its sense of “leader”, even though the metaphor of the crown and the jewels may remind the reader of the anatomical sense of the word *rēšā*. And yet a “leader” may well be wearing a crown, so the meaning “head” here is by no means necessary.

94 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3909, s.v. ܪܫܐ.

95 Beck 1961, 61.

96 Beck 1961, 61 (the rarity of the meaning prompts the translator to justify his choice by appending a note referring to Payne Smith); Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3528, s.v. ܩܝܡ. Beck copies the example wrongly: it is not *mqīm l-āk* (“may God watch over you”) but *mqīm l-eh* (“may God watch over him”). The translation given by Assemani/Assemani 1758, 4, *custodiat eum Dominus Noster*, and accepted by Payne Smith and Beck, is not necessarily true, given the context: it is a colophon with dedication, and the phrase is the wishing well for the dedicatee. Here, too, as in the other occurrences listed by Payne Smith, nothing prevents us to take the verb *pace* Assemani as “may God comfort/establish firmly/confirm him”.

the concept of a metropolitan bishop with overview on the bishops of his region was affirmed in the Council of Nicaea, well before CN 19 was written. According to canonical sources and medieval chronicles, the first metropolitan of Nisibis had been Jacob<sup>97</sup>. Even in our poems, there is a passage which might hint at these suffragan bishops<sup>98</sup>.

And yet this translation can be called into question. First of all, in a secular context the most frequently employed sense of *rēšānā* is “leader” or “chief”, and its applications to church hierarchy are not at all prominent: at the very least, it must be admitted that *rēšānā* is a very generic term of leadership<sup>99</sup>. The abstract *rēšanutā* shares this wide spectrum, of meanings. Unambiguous mentions of the suffragan bishops are lacking in these poems, and the one possible allusion is in a completely different context: elsewhere, Ephrem never exhorts the bishop Abraham, or any other bishop, to care for suffragan bishops. This might be due to the fact that the *kāhnē* at line 7 probably already comprises bishops. Finally, if *rēšānē* were intended to refer to bishops, the *climax* of the passage (7–9) would be lost, because bishops are higher in rank than priests; but Ephrem orders other, similar exhortations carefully in descending or ascending order<sup>100</sup>. For these reasons, I propose taking *rēšānē* as a generic term for all secular authorities of the city, be it *curiales*, civil servants, or military. This way, not only would the *climax* be preserved (from the church hierarchy to powerful laymen, to the people at large), but the line would agree with a similar exhortation in this poem to promote humility for the elite and collaboration between the powerful and the weak in society (at CN 19, 10)<sup>101</sup>.

<sup>97</sup> Fiey 1977, 23n46.

<sup>98</sup> CN 14, 1, 1–4, more on the ‘*allānē*’ of this passage at §2.2.1.4.

<sup>99</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3909, s.v. ܪܫܐܢܐ.

<sup>100</sup> At CN 19, 4, 1–4 (the stanza immediately following ours) Ephrem orders the kind of sheep the bishop has to tend according to the severity of their situation, in ascending severity: the healthy, the sick, the wounded and the one utterly lost. At CN 21, 5, Ephrem exhorts the bishop to: honour the charge of bishop and the liturgy; be a brother for the priests; a chief for the deacons (1–4). Then, he passes to laypeople in rising order of importance: the young, then the old, the continent and the virgin, finally the church as a whole (5–9).

<sup>101</sup> “Do not overlook the great [*rabbā*], / do not despair of the weak, // soften and instruct [*raggē w-al-lep*] the rich [*attirā*], / entice and win the poor, // with the harsh couple the patient, / and the long-suffering to the wrathful, // chase the bad with the good, / and the greedy // with the giving, / and the impure by hand of the holy” (CN 19, 10, 1–9). The verb rendered as “soften” (*raggī*) means literally “to make wet”. The connotation of softness, meekness, and kindness that this word conjures up are easily relatable to the humbleness (*makkikā’it*) in the relationship between *rēšānē* and bishop at CN 19, 3, 8. Another parallel text is *Resurr.* 2, 9: “Let the chief pastor [*rā’yā rabbā*] weave together / his homilies like flowers // let the priests [*qaššišē*] make a garland of their ministry / the deacons of their reading // strong young men of their jubilant shouts, / children of their psalms, // chaste women [*nakpātā*] of their songs [*madrāšay-hēn*] / chief citizens [*rēšānē*] of their benefactions [*su’rānay-hōn*], // ordinary folk [*šhīmē*] of their manner of life [*dubbāray-hōn*]” (transl. Brock/Kiraz 2006, 177). The word *su’rānā* is ambiguous, in that it signifies “action”, “cure”, “visitation” but it also translates the gr. ἐπισκοπή (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2687, s.v. ܪܫܐܢܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 986–987, s.v. ܪܫܐܢܐ). However, *rēšānā* cannot mean “suffragan bishop” nor *su’rānā* can mean ἐπισκοπή, because the *rēšānē* come after bishop, priests, deacons, young ascetics, and virgins and right before “poor men” (*šhīmē*), and this collocation would hardly be appropriate for the

Only once does Ephrem employ the term *pāqōdā*. At CN 21, 5, Ephrem instructs and at the same time wishes his bishop to be apt to his different tasks in the community. Among these tasks, the bishop is asked “to be a brother [*’ahā*] for the priests [*qasšišē*] / and a chief [*pāqōdā*] for the deacons [*šammāšē*]” (3–4). The relationship of priests and bishop is more equal than that with deacons. In respect to the deacons, the bishop must be a *pāqōdā*. The word is a *nomen agentis* built from a verb<sup>102</sup>. Given that the verb *pqaḏ* means “to give orders”, “to command”, the noun is a perfect equivalent of ἡγητῆρ/ἡγήτωρ and σημάντωρ and a synonym of *mdabbrānā*, meaning “commander”. Biblical occurrences are particularly interesting, because *pāqōdā* appears as the standard Peshitta word corresponding to the Septuagint ἐπίσκοπος in the Old Testament<sup>103</sup>. This relationship between *pāqōdā* and ἐπίσκοπος is continued in later documents, as testified by Payne Smith’s occurrences<sup>104</sup>. Here too, however, as in the case of *dawqā*, Ephrem does not seem to know of the institutional development of the term and of its link with the Greek title. The poet employs it to describe the bishop in relation to his deacons, implying an asymmetrical relationship, whereby the bishop is in a position of power and command, while the deacons are subservient to him.

The title Ephrem employs to address directly, in the second person, a bishop, is *mār(y)*, literally “my lord”. Beck’s notes to his translation identify this usage both at CN 21, 7, 9 and at 21, 9, 9<sup>105</sup>. Beck’s interpretation is correct regarding 21, 7, 9, as is proved by the imperative of the verb “to be”, which requires a subject in the second person, who must be the bishop, since all other second persons in the stanza, from its first to the last line, refer to the bishop<sup>106</sup>. At 21, 9, 9, however, where the form is *mār-an*, “our lord”, the verb is in the third-person singular (*neskur*), not in the second person (if the meaning were as Beck translates—“verschliess, o Herr”—the form required would have been *skur* or *teskur*). Therefore, *mār-an* is not a vocative and does not refer to the bishop, but to Christ.

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bishops. Therefore, the *rēšānē* must be secular leaders (so also Rouwhorst 1989, 92: “les nobles leurs actions// les simples (fidèles) leurs vies”). In this context, the word *su’rānā* might be taken in its specialised meaning of “office”, “public charge”, attested at least from the fifth century (Payne Smith 1879-1901, 2687, s.v. ܪܫܐܢܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 987, s.v. ܪܫܐܢܐ).

<sup>102</sup> Of the type described at Nöldeke 1880, 64, §107; Duval 1881, 217, §232.

<sup>103</sup> Num. 31:14; 2Reg. 11:18; 1Macc. 1:51. At Jes 60:17, the Greek has τοὺς ἄρχοντας ... καὶ τοὺς ἐπισκόπους, which the Peshitta renders as *pāqōdē w-šallitē*, so that *pāqōdā* doesn’t exactly count as the translation of ἐπίσκοπος, though the similarity of concept between ἄρχων and ἐπίσκοπος, as well as between *pāqōdā* and *šallitā* blurs the distinctions and makes this an interesting passage. At Jer 20:1, *pāqōdā* translates ἡγούμενος, which is another word later used of Christian leaders.

<sup>104</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3216, s.v. ܪܫܐܢܐ.

<sup>105</sup> Beck 1961, 69n18.

<sup>106</sup> “In your tenure may Mammon be ashamed, / who was master of our freedom, // may fade from us the illness, / to which we were accustomed and consenting: // destroy the causes that preserve / our customs full of detriment! // wickedness acquired us by habit, / may goodness acquire us by habit: // be, Excellence, the cause of our relief! / **Blessed is he who chose you for our salvation!**” (CN 21, 7). The only two characters Ephrem can address in the second person are God and the bishop. But God does not have a “tenure” (as in the first line) nor he *is chosen* for salvation; on the contrary, the bishop has a tenure and God has chosen him to save the Nisibenes.



After all, this interpretation agrees with the lexica, where *mār-an* is reserved exclusively for addressing Christ, whereas *mār(y)* is used as an honorific, especially for the clergy<sup>107</sup>. Hence, Ephrem is consistent with later usage as regards the vocatives for the bishops.

When we consider the terms signifying primacy or authority, the main difference between Ephrem and Gregory is that Gregory's usage is two-tiered, entailing one set of words employed in prose and iambs and another for hexameters and elegiacs. There are of course overlapping (πρόεδρος) and further differentiations (προϊστάμενος never used in poetry), but in general Gregory carefully abides by the conventions of genre. In Ephrem, on the other hand, we have no linguistic convention banning some words from a metrical form. This difference, however, points to a deeper similarity: both Gregory and Ephrem have a very generic language, when it comes to terms of primacy, so that Gregory can easily employ different terms for the bishop according to genre; if they did not operate with the same flexibility, we would not observe this difference between the two. In fact, they both know a term more specialised than others for the bishop, ἐπίσκοπος in the case of Gregory and *rēšā* for Ephrem, but they also both retain the original meaning of the term when it is suited and employ generic terms of leadership (προστάτης, *rabbā*) equally or even more often. Ephrem's refusal to employ *mdabbrānā* together with the specialised meaning he gives *qaššišā* and Gregory's limited use of ἐπίσκοπος in favour of terms with a classical pedigree show the independence of both poets from New Testament usage. I do not think this points to an acknowledgement on their part of the differences between the situation implied by the New Testament and the reality they lived in. These choices are fundamentally literary: for Gregory it is classicism and the hot topic of patronage (in the word προστάτης); for Ephrem the avoidance of a word with undesirable connotations in favour of a more conciliatory framing of the role of the bishop, whether as organic part of the community (*rēšā*) or as teacher (*rabbā*). It is also interesting that Ephrem employs two terms used to translate Greek ἐπίσκοπος in contemporary or slightly later Christian texts—namely, *dawqā* and *pāqōdā*—but he uses them in their generic sense and not as *terminus technici*. This fact, together with the absence of *ʿepīsqōpā* and of its calque *sāʿōrā*, manifests Ephrem's distance from Greek conventions.

In any case, the two words that stand most apart are *rabbā* in Ephrem and προστάτης in Gregory. The first has a strong didactic connotation, which Ephrem assumes and employs, in agreement with a broader early Syriac tendency to consider the clergymen, as well as other authoritative figures in the life of the church, primarily as teachers. Προστάτης has a decidedly political character in Greek, and in imperial times it pointed at a particular political institution, the patronage, yet Gregory consciously plays down its political value, discussing whether a good bishop should be also a good patron and concluding that the true leader should be above all an example-setter. However, this choice of words testifies to Gregory's acute awareness of the political role the bishop was expected to play, so much so that he appropriates a powerful tag of ancient political language, τύπαννος, to speak of bad bishops.

107 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2205, 2207, s.vv. ܡܐܪܝܢܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 824 s.v. ܡܐܪܝܢܐ;

### 2.1.3 Liturgical priesthood

Liturgical priesthood is problematic, because the tasks described in the New Testament inside the community don't comprise it, so that the text does not offer terms to express it<sup>108</sup>. Ἐπίσκοπος, πρεσβύτερος, and other terms of primacy do not seem to be associated with liturgical tasks, nor does the term διάκονος have this meaning<sup>109</sup>. Priesthood in the New Testament entails sacrifice and is dependent on Old Testament conceptions and the temple (as demonstrated by the relationship between the community of the apostles and the temple), and when it is not used for a traditional priest (be it Jew or pagan), the term ἱερεύς is applied to Jesus (notably in Hebrews) or to the church as a whole<sup>110</sup>. The problems did not end when the word began to be used for Christian hierarches: as we have seen, "priest" could mean the bishop or the πρεσβύτερος or both, and this ambiguity remained at least until the Middle Ages<sup>111</sup>. According to Lizzi, the ambiguity is conscious in works treating the moral requirements and duties of the priest, because πρεσβύτεροι were called to the same high standard of the bishops, and the priestly order was seen as a single reality, different only in degree and not in quality<sup>112</sup>.

Syriac Christianity has one more problem, since Syriac has two words for the priest, *kāhnā* and *kumrā*<sup>113</sup>. The usage of these words has been extensively studied in early Syriac<sup>114</sup>: in general, there are not many differences, except that *kāhnā* may have a wider spread than *kumrā*. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, while *kohēn* (the form analogous to Syriac *kāhnā*) can refer to any type of priest, whether pagan or Jew, and also to the priesthood of Melchizedek, *komēr* (Syr. *kumrā*) is rarely used, and only for pagan priests<sup>115</sup>.

**108** The lists of charisms in Paul (Rom. 12:6–8; 1Cor. 12:28–30; Eph. 4:11) never comprise ἱερεύς or similar words. On the other hand it is illuminating that at Rom. 12, just before the list of charisms, Paul exhorts the community as a whole to "present your bodies a living sacrifice [θυσίαν/*debhtā*], holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service [τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν/*tešmeštā mliltā*]" (Rom. 12:1), thereby implying that every single member of the community, independently of his particular charism, has a priestly office.

**109** Guerra y Gomez 1962, 333. διάκονος is associated with liturgy at Hebr. 1:14 (the angels) and at 2Cor. 9:12 (the offering), and in both cases it is a service or help offered to someone else, and not directly a liturgical service.

**110** Apostles and Temple: Act. 2:46; 3:1. ἱερεύς for the church: Act. 6:7; Apc. 1:6; 20:6. A pagan priest at Act. 14:13. See Von Campenhausen 1960, 276–280.

**111** Rapp 2005, 25–26, 42; Di Berardino 1998, 43–44; Jerg 1970, 156–157 (imperial letters to bishops).

**112** Lizzi 1998, 87.

**113** Something similar happens with Latin *sacerdos* and *pontifex* (Di Berardino 1998, 45–46), though in much fewer texts and with much less regularity.

**114** Murray 2006, 178–181; Bou Mansour 2019, 9–15.

**115** Brown/Driver/Briggs 1906, 463, 485, s.vv. כֹּהֵן, כֹּמֵר. Interestingly, of the three occurrences of the term in the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint has no correspondence: the term is either left untranslated (Zeph. 1:4, Jerome translates *aeditui*), or it is transliterated (χωμαριμ, 2Reg. 23:5, Jerome: *aruspices*), or is mis-translated as παραπικραίνω, "to irritate" (Hos. 10:5, Jerome: *aeditui*), which is not Hebrew but from an Aramaic root *k-m-r* of the same meaning.

The Peshitta version preserves all three Hebrew occurrences of *komēr* as *kumrā* but also expands the usage of this word, substituting it many times for *kohēn/kāhnā*, without apparent distinctions of meaning<sup>116</sup>. The situation is slightly clearer in the New Testament, where the only pagan priest (Act. 14:13) is rightly a *kumrā*, whereas the ἀρχιερεῖς of Mt 2:4 and the ιερεὺς of the healed leper (Mt. 8:4; Mc. 1:44; Lc. 5:14) are Jewish *kāhnē*. Interestingly, the discussion of Christ's priesthood in Hebrews always features the term *kumrā*, even though Christ's priesthood there clearly replaces the Levitical priesthood. However, the model is that of Melchizedek, whose priesthood is always signified by *kumrā* (Gen. 14:18; Ps. 110:4).

### 2.1.3.1 In Gregory

In our texts, Gregory uses the word ιερεὺς rarely, only four times, twice in the same line in two different poems (II, 1, 10, 1 and II, 1, 13, 1). Ephrem, on the other hand, employs priesthood language much more, so that it constitutes almost the other half of terms for bishops, the first half being the terms of primacy and authority. The indiscriminate use of *kāhnā* and *kumrā* in Syriac notwithstanding, Ephrem's usage is more similar to that of Gregory than one would expect: he ends up using *kāhnā* in all occasions, save one. Another interesting feature of both poets is that they employ the language of religious service, which is institutionally linked to the order of deacon, in relation to the bishop.

Ιερεὺς shows a clear distribution in Gregory's poetry: it is amply attested, but found only twice in iambs, whereas all other occurrences are hexametric. Of these two iambic occurrences, one is II, 1, 12, 751, where the choice of the word is perhaps very significant, since it introduces a definition of the tasks of the bishop, expressed with liturgical language:

Ἐν ἔστω τοῦδ' ἔργον ἱερέως καὶ μόνον,  
 Ψυχὰς καθαίρειν ἐν βίῳ τε καὶ λόγῳ,  
 Ἄνω φέροντα ἐνθέοις κινήμασι,  
 – Γαληνὸν, ὑψίνουν τε τὰς θείας μόνας  
 Ἀκηλιδῶτους ἐμφάσεις τυπούμενον, (755)  
 Ὡσπερ κάτοπτρον ἐνδοθεν μορφούμενον –  
 Ἀγνάς τε πέμπειν προσφορὰς ὑπὲρ τέκνων,  
 Ἔως ἂν αὐτοὺς προσφορὰν καταρτίσῃ.  
 (II, 1, 12, 751–758).

Leave to the priest one task and one only,  
 to purify souls through life and words,  
 bringing them upwards with inspired impulses,  
 being gentle and high minded, only by the divine,  
 spotless reflections moulded, (755)  
 as a mirror reflecting from within,  
 and to send pure offerings on behalf of his children,  
 until he has restored them as an offering.

<sup>116</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1757, s.v. ܙܡܪܐ.

Liturgical language has multiple applications here: the bishop should first purify (καθαίρειν), and then offer (ἄνω φέρειν, προσφορά) his community; but in order to obtain purification, he should first offer the Eucharist (the “pure offerings”) on behalf of the community, and to do so, he must be pure in the first place (ἀκκληλιδώτους ἐμφάσεις τυπούμενον). This is in accordance with Old Testament precepts: Ex. 30:19 shows Aaron and his sons washing hands and feet before the sacrifice, just as Lev. 21:17 and 22:7 prescribe that the priest be without blemish (μῶμος) and pure (καθαρός); Lev. 22:21, on the other hand, prescribes the same absence of blemishes for the sacrificial victim, which should be kosher too (Gen. 7:23; Lev. 9:47; 14:4; 20:25; Dtn. 14:11.20). The relevance of this Old Testament context is demonstrated by Gregory’s word choice: ἀναφέρω, which he renders as ἄνω φέρω, is used together with its derivative name ἀναφορά as a term for the sacrifice in the OT; the same can be said of προσφορά and προσφορέω<sup>117</sup>. Even though ἀκκληλιδωτός has no direct correspondence in the context of OT sacrifices, it can easily be seen as a moralising paraphrase of the word ἄμωμος, which is widely attested in that context. Therefore, this passage, thanks to its allusions to OT sacrifices, is to be read as a typological interpretation of those sacrifices<sup>118</sup>. The Eucharist and the moral progress of the community (its going “upwards”, ἄνω) are the fulfilment of the old sacrifices, and the bishop is the true heir of the Hebrew priest. Probably, it is not a coincidence that in such a context Gregory chose to name the bishop ἱερεύς—all the more so, since a few lines earlier, when the context was still a generic one of guidance, he used the word ποιμήν.

The other two occurrences of the word ἱερεύς are just as context specific as this. In fact, II, 1, 10, 1 and II, 1, 13, 1, the same line, sound: “O priests [ιερῆς], you who offer [πέμποντες] bloodless sacrifices [θυσίας ἀναιμάκτους]”. The sacrificial context is clear: the verb πέμπω is the same as in II, 1, 12, 757, and also the expression found there, ἀγνὰς προσφοράς, is the equivalent of θυσίας ἀναιμάκτους, both denoting the Eucharist, a bloodless sacrifice, and therefore “pure”, since blood was a miasmatical substance in many streams of late antique religious thought. The equivalence of this expression with those at II, 1, 12 is even clearer when we read the following lines of II, 1, 13:

Ὡ θυσίας πέμποντες ἀναιμάκτους, ἱερῆς!  
 Ὡ ψυχῶν ταμίαι μεγακύδεες! Ὡ μέγαλοιο  
 Πλάσμα Θεοῦ χεῖρεσσιν ἐν ὑμετέρησι φέροντες!  
 Ὡ Θεὸν ἀνθρώποισι μέγ’ ἐξοχον εἰς ἐν ἄγοντες!  
 Ὡ κόσμοιο θέμεθλα, βίου φάος, ἔρμα λόγιοι, (5)  
 Μυστοπόλοιο ζωῆς ἀτελευτήτοιο φαινῆς,  
 Χριστοφόροι, θώκοισιν ἐνεδριόωντες ἀρίστοις  
 (II, 1, 13, 1–7)

117 Muraoka 2009, 47, 600, s.vv. ἀναφορά, προσφορά, προσφορέω.

118 Something similar but based on passages of Malachi, at *or* 2, 61; but see also *or* 2, 94, 1–9 (Gautier 2002, 117).

Oh priests, you who offer bloodless sacrifices!  
 Oh most glorious ministers of souls, bearing  
 in your hands the image of the great God!  
 Oh, you who the Supreme God with men together bring!  
 Oh, world's pillars, life's light, foundation of the doctrine, (5)  
 initiators to the shining mysteries of life immortal  
 Christ-bearers, sitting on the topmost thrones

Here the context blurs the lines between liturgical offering and spiritual leadership of the community, which should be the true offering: not only *ιερῆς* at line 1 but also the term *μυστοπόλοι* (6) alludes to the ministration of sacraments; however, the images of the administrator (*ταμίαι*, 2), of the light (*βίου φάος*, 5), and of the thrones (*θώκοισιν*, 7) allude to the bishops' role of leaders in the community (see §2.2.4.6). This same role is expressed by the metaphor of “bearing in the hands the creation of God [i.e., man]” (3) and by the title of *ἔρμα λόγιοι*: the first phrase highlights the bishop's responsibility over the salvation of others, while the second reminds the audience of the bishop's duty to defend orthodoxy. Sacramental and leadership roles are synthesised in the line *Ὡ Θεὸν ἀνθρώποισι μέγ' ἔξοχον εἰς ἔν ἄγοντες* (4), which, through a metaphor of movement which recalls the liturgical movement of offering, expresses the bishop's goal to mediate between God and men, leading the community to spiritual advancement<sup>119</sup>.

Another parallel of these expressions is found at II, 1, 17:

Τοῖος καὶ Χριστοῖο μεγακλέος ἀρητῆρσι  
 Θυμός. Ὁ μὲν βροτέου λάτρης ἀεισθενέος,  
 Κλινόμενος καιροῖσι, δόναξ πολύκαμπτος ἀήταις, (20)  
 Παντοίης κακίης οὐκ ἄκος, ἀλλὰ τύπος  
 Αὐτὰρ ὃ γε τρομερῆσι καὶ εὐαγέσιν παλάμῃσι  
 Δῶρον ἄγει, Χριστοῦ σαρκὶ χαρίζόμενος,  
 Καὶ μεγάλοις παθέεσσι, ἅπερ Θεὸς ἐνθάδ' ἀνέτλη,  
 Ρύσιον ἀρχεγόνων ἡμετέρων παθέων·  
 Ὡ ζῶει μούνῳ καὶ τέρπεται· ὧ ῥα κεάζει (25)  
 Θυμὸν ἀπὸ χθονίων ἐνθεν ἀνιστάμενος.  
 . . .  
 Ἀλλὰ νόον καθαροῖσι νοήμασιν αἰὲν ἀέζων, (35)  
 Ἦδη καὶ Τριάδος ἅπτεται οὐρανίης,  
 Ἦς τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἑῇσι,  
 Κῦδος ἐν ἐν τρισσοῖς κάλλεσι δερκόμενος,  
 Καὶ λαὸν θυέεσσιν ἁγνοῖς θεοειδέα τεύχων,  
 Ὑστάτιον ψυχῆς θύματ' ἀναιμα φέρει. (40)  
 (II, 1, 17, 17–26; 35–40)

119 On the term *Χριστοφόροι* (7), see Rapp 2005, 56–60.

Such is the heart even of glorious Christ's priests.  
 The one is slave to the ever-shifting strength of mortals,  
 bowing to opportunity, a cane oftentimes bent by winds,  
 of all kind of vices not remedy, but model, (20)  
 whereas the other with trembling and cleansed palms  
 offers the Gift, reconciled by the flesh of Christ  
 and by the great sufferings that God bore down here,  
 ransom of our ancestral passions.  
 For him alone he lives and rejoices, for him he rips (25)  
 his heart apart from earthly things, turned away from here.  
 ...  
 Rather, nourishing his mind with pure thoughts, (35)  
 he already grasps the heavenly Trinity,  
 Whose image he fixed in his own senses,  
 beholding one glory in triple beauties;  
 then, making the people Godlike with holy sacrifices,  
 he will finally bring the bloodless offerings of soul. (40)

In these lines is represented the same priestly dynamic of offering the sacrifice of the Eucharist to make of the community a sacrifice to God. The two equivalent sacrifices, the θύος of Eucharist (39) and the θῦμα of the people (40), are here respectively ἀγνόν and ἀναιμον, demonstrating the equivalence of the two terms<sup>120</sup>. The priest's requirements of moral purity and assimilation to God, found also at II, 1, 12, 754–755 (τὰς θείας μόνας / ἀκηλιδῶτους ἐμφάσεις τυπούμενον), are here brought up (II, 1, 17, 35–38) in the context of a comparison between the good and evil priest. The term Gregory uses for “priest” in this instance is ἀρητήρ (17), a rare and precious word, attested thrice in Homer (*Il.* 1, 11.94; 5, 78) and employed as a poetic substitute of ἱερεύς, as Aristotle had already recognised<sup>121</sup>. Gregory and Nonnus employ the word twice each. The whole passage is clearly a paraphrase of II, 1, 12, 751–758, as shown by poetic substitutions, such as ἀρητήρ for ἱερεύς, or the expression θεοειδέα τεύχων (II, 1, 17, 39), with the very epic verb τεύχω, for προσφορὰν καταρτίζω at II, 1, 12, 758. :

All these passages (II, 1, 10, 1; II, 1, 12, 751–758; II, 1, 13, 1; II, 1, 17, 39–40) sum up a doctrine expressed by Gregory extensively in his speeches, and especially in *or.* 2<sup>122</sup>.

<sup>120</sup> It is worth noting again Gregory's tuning of the words to the stylistic context: the offerings are called προσφοραί in the iambic poem, and θυσία, θύος or θῦμα in hexameters, since προσφοραί is a prosaic word, used of sacrifices beginning with the Septuagint (see Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1530 s.v. προσφορά, 2), whereas θυσία (in the plural according to poetic usage) and θῦμα are found in poetry, although not in Homer (θυσία twice in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 312 and 368, more widespread in later literature and the *Orphic Hymns*; θῦμα used in tragedy, rarer in hexameters, notably in Lycophron's *Alexandra* and many times in Gregory's poetry), and θύος at the plural is Homeric. Similarly, the word for “restore” at II, 1, 12, 758, καταρτίζω, is prosaic and a favourite NT word (Meier 1989, 158), whereas II, 1, 17, 39 has θεοειδέα τεύχων, with the verb τεύχω, which is almost exclusively poetic.

<sup>121</sup> Aristot. *poet.* 1457b 35.

<sup>122</sup> The corresponding, though longer, passage, is *or.* 2, 94–95: Οἶδα δ' ἔγωγε μηδὲ τοὺς ἐν τοῖς σώμασι μώμους τῶν ἱερέων, ἢ τῶν θυμάτων ἀνεξετάστους μένοντας, ἀλλὰ τελείους τέλεια προσάγειν

The priest should have purified himself through philosophy before serving, and his aim should be to draw closer to God his community<sup>123</sup>. As correctly pointed out by Elm, these precepts were intended for priests as well as bishops, as demonstrated by the fact that their most organic presentation is given in *or.* 2, which was delivered when Gregory was ordained priest, not bishop<sup>124</sup>. Accordingly, the terms *ιερεύς* and *ἀρητήρ* do not refer specifically to a bishop or a priest. From the context of II, 1, 17, it is clear that Gregory is speaking of bishops, and the same can be said of II, 1, 12 and of II, 1, 13, whereas II, 1, 10, 1 could also be addressing the priests in Constantinople<sup>125</sup>. Now, the majority of occurrences of *ιερεύς* in *or.* 2 are found in OT quotations or allusions, which confirms the close link of the term with OT typology. Elsewhere in the same speech, however, the term seems to be employed indifferently to mean bishops and priests<sup>126</sup>. This is true also

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νενομισμένον, σύμβολον, οἶμαι, τοῦτο τῆς κατὰ ψυχὴν ἀρτιότητος· ... μηδεὶς ἄξιος τοῦ μεγάλου καὶ Θεοῦ, καὶ θύματος, καὶ ἀρχιερέως, ὅστις μὴ πρότερον ἑαυτὸν παρέστησε τῷ Θεῷ θυσίαν ζῶσαν, ἀγίαν, μηδὲ τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν εὐάρεστον ἐπεδείξατο, μηδὲ ἔθυσσε τῷ Θεῷ θυσίαν αἰνέσεως καὶ πνεῦμα συντετριμμένον, ἦν μόνον ὁ πάντα δοῦς ἀπαιτεῖ παρ' ἡμῶν θυσίαν, πῶς ἐμελλόν θαρρήσῃαι προσφέρειν αὐτῷ τὴν ἑξωθεν, τὴν τῶν μεγάλων μυστηρίων ἀντίτυπον· ἢ πῶς ἱερέως σχῆμα καὶ ὄνομα ὑποδύεσθαι, πρὶν ὅσοις ἔργοις τελειῶσαι τὰς χεῖρας; See also: Ταῦτα οὖν εἰδὼς ἐγὼ, καὶ ὅτι μηδεὶς ἄξιος τοῦ μεγάλου Θεοῦ, καὶ θύματος, καὶ ἀρχιερέως, ὅς μὴ πρότερον ἑαυτὸν παρέστησε τῷ Θεῷ θυσίαν ζῶσαν, μᾶλλον δὲ, ναὸς ἅγιος ἐγένετο Θεοῦ ζώντος καὶ ζῶν· ... Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καθαρτέον ἑαυτὸν πρῶτον, εἴτα τῷ καθαρῷ προσομιλητέον (*or.* 20, 4).

**123** See the contributions of Elm, such as Elm 2000a; Elm 2012, 156, 171; also Louth 1997, 284. One of the most quoted passages for this conception is *or.* 2, 22.

**124** Elm 2012, 156.

**125** This ambiguity is reflected in the titles the manuscript tradition gives to the poems. II, 1, 12 is consistently titled “against the bishops” (ἐπίσκοποι, Meier 1989, 33, *apparatus criticus*), as is II, 1, 13 (at least according to the Maurine edition in the *Patrologia Graeca* 37, 1227). II, 1, 17 is a more moralising and general poem, and it never explicitly mentions bishops, though knowing Gregory’s story it is not difficult to understand the references to the bishops of the Constantinopolitan Council. Accordingly, traditional titles oscillate between κατὰ ψευδιερέων and εἰς ἐπισκόπους (PG 37, 1262), a more general and a more particular option. For II, 1, 10, PG 37, 1027 gives only πρὸς τοὺς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἱερέας, which – given that a city cannot have more than one bishop – would suggest the poem to be addressed to the priests. On the contrary, Tuilier/Bady/Bernardi 2004, 54, *apparatus criticus*, report unanimity of the manuscripts on the title εἰς ἐπισκόπους. Moreover, even the expression Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἱερέας must not mean “priests of Constantinople”, if we think that II, 1, 10 is clearly written as if the Council were still going on, meaning that the *ιερεῖς* of the city could just as rightly be the bishops there gathered: in fact, line 27 lists also the *ιερῆας* among the things Gregory wilfully leaves behind in Constantinople – which, given his fondness for the Constantinopolitan community and his bitterness towards his colleagues, must mean “bishops”.

**126** ἡνίκα πολεμεῖ μὲν ἀλλήλοις τὰ μέλη, οἴχεται δὲ τῆς ἀγάπης, εἰ καὶ τι ἦν λείψανον, ὄνομα δὲ κενὸν ἄλλως ὁ ἱερεὺς, ἐκχυθείσης ἐπ’ ἀρχοντας ἐξουθενώσεως, ὥσπερ εἴρηται (*or.* 2, 78); Πρὶν δὲ ταύτην ὑπερσχεῖν ὅση δύναμις καὶ ἀνακαθάραι ἱκανῶς τὴν διάνοιαν, ὑπὲρ τε τοὺς ἄλλους μακρῷ γενέσθαι τῇ πρὸς Θεὸν ἐγγύτητι, ἢ ψυχῶν προστασίαν δέξασθαι, ἢ μεσιτείαν Θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων (τοῦτο γὰρ ἴσως ὁ ἱερεὺς), οὐκ ἀσφαλὲς εἶναι γινώσκω (91, a passage very similar to II, 1, 12, 751–758); ἄνδρες ὁμοῦ καὶ γυναικες, νεανίσκοι καὶ παρθέναι, πρεσβῦται μετὰ νεωτέρων, ἱερεῖς καὶ λαὸς, οἱ μοναδικοὶ καὶ μιγάδες, οἱ τῆς ἀπλότητος καὶ τῆς ἀκριβείας, ὅσοι τῆς θεωρίας, καὶ ὅσοι τῆς πράξεως (10).

of other poetic occurrences<sup>127</sup>. In sum, the word ἱερεύς is employed only rarely as specific of bishops, and almost always in their sacrificing and offering capacity, with clear links to Old Testament priesthood, even when it is interpreted spiritually. The term does not exclude priests (πρεσβύτεροι), though in our poems it is used only of bishops<sup>128</sup>.

### 2.1.3.2 In Ephrem

Compared to other early Syriac authors, like Jacob of Serugh or Aphrahat, Ephrem's usage of *kāhnā* and *kumrā* is more consistent with New Testament usage. His tendency is to employ *kāhnā* for Jewish priests and for the Christian hierarchy (bishops/priests), reserving *kumrā* for pagan priests, for Melchizedek, and for Christ: although Ephrem expresses clearly and in full form the story of the rightful passage of Jewish priesthood from John the Baptist or Simeon (Lc. 2:25) to Jesus, and from him to the apostles and the bishops, his use of language highlights the peculiarity of Christ's priesthood in respect to the traditional succession of Jewish priesthood, in that he refers to Christ mainly as *kumrā*, the term he and the Syriac Bible reserve to Melchizedek<sup>129</sup>. Another characteristic of Ephrem's usage is that he rarely distinguishes between priests and bishops when

<sup>127</sup> Θεὸν φόβου πρόωιστα, καὶ γονεῖς τίμα, / Ἱερεῖς ἐπαίνει, πρεσβύτας σεπτῶς ἔχε (I, 2, 32, 15–16), which is the iambic paraphrase of Ἀζέο μοι πρόωιστα Θεὸν, μετέπειθ' ἱερῆα / Χριστὸν ἐπιχθόνιον, ζωῆς σιμάντορα σεῖο (I, 2, 2, 346–347). In the hexametric text, ἱερεύς is probably the bishop, whereas the plural form of the iambic occurrence could suggest that there it means “priests”. Moreover, the difference between ἱερεῖς and πρεσβύτας is no indication that the first means “bishops”, since the second can't mean “priest”. However, the plural could be due to metrical grounds (avoiding hiatus and resolution of the second *ictus*, after the resolution of the first one). The name remains generic. Two occurrences in the epigrams confirm this picture. At *Anth. Gr.* 8, 165, 1, Gregory defines himself as ἱερεύς μέγας, which could mean “bishop”, but the presence of the adjective μέγας hinders any conclusion on the value of the word ἱερεύς as such. Finally, Nicomedes is said to have been a ἱερεύς at *Anth. Gr.* 8, 140, 5. It is almost certain that Nicomedes was no bishop, though he may have been a priest (McLynn 2006, 230n59). Here, however, the choice of terms is prompted by the language of sacrifice and offering of the text: δῶκεν ἀγνὴν θυσίην παρθενίην τεκέων (4, but see also τίς δὲ Θεῷ πέμψει φρὴν τελέην θυσίην at *Anth. Gr.* 8, 139, 4 on the same person).

<sup>128</sup> It is worth mentioning here briefly the word θυηπόλος, rare and poetic (2x in Eur. *Iph. Aul.*, once respectively in Aristophanes and Aeschylus), meaning “diviner” or “performing sacrifice”, which Gregory employs often as a synonym of ἱερεύς in connection with Old Testament sacrifice: Πιστὸς ἐνὶ προτέροισι θυηπόλος ἔσκεν Ἀαρών (Greg. Naz. I, 2, 1, 316); Καὶ πῦρ ξεῖνον ὄλεσσε θυηπόλου ἐν προτέροισι / Παῖδας, μὴ καθαρῶς ἀπομένους θυσίης (again Aaron, II, 1, 34, 99–100); Ἦν θύος, ἀρχιερεὺς δέ· θυηπόλος, ἀλλὰ Θεός περ (I, 1, 2, 75, this line sums up the priestly typology of Hebr.). In some cases, the word appears to be more generic (I, 2, 22, 5; II, 2, 7, 21), but still referring to the priestly office in the church. In our poems, it appears at II, 1, 13, 111, in the portrait of the perfect candidate for priesthood: since at line 107 it is explicitly stated that the perfect candidate is hindered from priesthood, the word θυηπόλος must be interpreted here not as a synonym of ἱερεύς, but as one who offers a more spiritual sacrifice, in the context of its ascetic portrait (see §3.2.2).

<sup>129</sup> Bou Mansour 2019, 10–12, 270–288; Murray 2006, 178–181; on the passage of priesthood from Moses to Jesus, the *locus classicus* is *hymn. haer.* 22, 19. The only exception to the use of *kāhnā* for Old Testament priesthood is *Epiph.* 3, 12, 1, from a probably inauthentic poem.



using the term *kāhnā*, which he applies to both ranks of the holy orders indifferently. Moreover, he seems to avoid compounds such as *rab-kāhnē* for the bishop, thereby eschewing the parallel between Christian and Jewish priests or between a Christian bishop and a Jewish high priest<sup>130</sup>. This overview of Ephrem's usage shows that it agrees with Gregory's: Christian liturgical priesthood is linked but not identical with its Jewish forebears, Christ and Melchizedek enjoy a certain separateness (though they share some traits with the Christian hierarchy), and, as regards liturgical priesthood, bishop and priest differ more in degree than in nature, so that liturgical priesthood is conceived as a unity, in which bishops and priests partake.

As regards the distribution of *kumrā* and *kāhnā*, our poems agree with the general overview: only once is *kumrā* attributed to the bishop. The passage is worth quoting:

ܩܡܪܬܐ ܕܩܡܪܬܐ ܕܩܡܪܬܐ ܩܡܪܬܐ ܕܩܡܪܬܐ ܩܡܪܬܐ  
<sup>131</sup> ܩܡܪܬܐ ܕܩܡܪܬܐ ܩܡܪܬܐ ܩܡܪܬܐ ܩܡܪܬܐ ܩܡܪܬܐ  
 (CN 21, 5, 1–4)

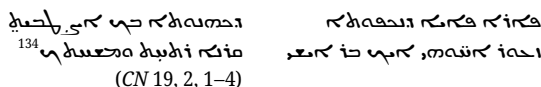
Ephrem is expressing wishes and at the same time giving advice to Abraham, the new bishop, and the stanza continues with similar sentences referring to laymen. Lines 3–4 are clear: the bishop is thought of, or should behave, as a *primus inter pares* with the priests and as an authority with the deacons: with these lines, Ephrem expresses the different relationships the office of bishop should entertain with the other two ranks of church hierarchy (see §2.1.2.2). The sense of the first two lines is much more ambiguous. If we take them as parallel to 3–4, *kumrūtā* refers to the college of presbyters, and *tešmeštā* (literally, “the service”) to the deacons (*šammāšē*). In this sense, the lines express in abstract and metaphorical terms what the following lines express concretely—namely, that the bishop should be the highest and most honoured priest (the “crown”) and should lead the deacons to do their job in the best way possible. Yet we can also take the lines as parallel to each other: “be crown” (*tehwē klilā*) may be taken as a synonym for “be glorified by you” (*b-āk tezdahhē*). In this case, *kumrūtā* would be also a synonym for *tešmeštā*. In such a context, *tešmeštā* could mean only one of two things: either the office of bishop, or the divine service—that is, liturgy<sup>132</sup>. Thus, *kumrūtā* in these lines has three possible meanings: it can mean priesthood in general, comprising bishop and presbyters but excluding deacons; it can mean episcopate, the office of bishop; it can mean priesthood in its most narrow liturgical and sacrificial sense, the role of the one celebrating the liturgy. I would exclude that here *tešmeštā* means either diaconate or episcopate, because in the examples given in Payne Smith's *Thesaurus* the word in this sense is always accompanied by an attribute or a specification, clarifying the nature of the office. The easiest sense for the word taken by itself is “liturgy”.

<sup>130</sup> Bou Mansour 2019, 26–29.

<sup>131</sup> “Be thou a crown for priesthood [*kumrūtā*] / and through you be glorified the worship [*tešmeštā*] // be thou a brother for the priests [*qaššišē*], / a chief for the deacons [*šammāšē*], too.”.

<sup>132</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 4228–4229, s.v. ܩܡܪܬܐ.

However, the *Thesaurus* does not give instances where *kumrūtā* identifies the sacrificial liturgy or identifies the priest narrowly understood as the celebrant of such liturgy. Therefore, the synonymous parallelism between lines 1 and 2 should be abandoned, as should the parallelism between 1–2 and 3–4. It remains true that *tešmeštā* refers to liturgy and *kumrūtā* to the office of the episcopate. In this way, the stanza expresses all aspects of the bishop's tasks: not only must he work with the priests and lead deacons and the community, but he also has liturgical duties and the obligation to discharge his office with dignity. To express it in Weberian terms, the bishop has to add his personal charisma to the charisma of the office and avoid detracting from the charisma of the office by misdemeanours<sup>133</sup>. It remains to explain why Ephrem used *kumrūtā* here instead of *kāhnūtā*. The choice of words may not be absolutely determinative of meaning, given that the distinction between *kāhnā* and *kumrā* is far from being neat and consequent. However, a similar passage may hint at a meaningful usage by Ephrem in these poems:


  
<sup>134</sup> (CN 19, 2, 1–4)

Here, line 2 is a clear parallel to CN 21, 5, 1: the adornment the incumbent brings to the office corresponds to the “crown” of the previous poem. Yet CN 21 has *kumrūtā* and CN 19 *kāhnūtā*. The context helps distinguishing the different meanings: at CN 21, Ephrem was giving advice and wishes for the *future* of the elected bishop; hence the imperfect aspect of the verb *tehwē*. Here at CN 19, on the other hand, Ephrem uses the *past* credentials of the elected person to celebrate the goodness of his election. These lines remind the audience that the new bishop has been a good priest previously and that, though he might seem younger than other priests, he is fit for the task. Therefore, while at CN 21 Abraham is called to bring honour to the episcopate, at CN 19 he is said to have brought honour to the presbyterate or the priesthood in general. Hence, Ephrem employs *kumrūtā* to mean “episcopate” and *kāhnūtā* for “priesthood”. This is confirmed by the fact that, a few lines after CN 19, 2, 1–4, and precisely at CN 19, 3, 7, the bishop is exhorted to establish *kāhnē* “in splendour”<sup>135</sup>. From the parallel objects of the same verb (for example, the *quṭrānā* at 9), it is clear that the verb presumes a superiority of the bishop over the objects of the verb, including these *kāhnē*, who, consequently, should be interpreted as the presbyters of the community.

<sup>133</sup> Weber 1922, 144.

<sup>134</sup> “O fitting fruit of modesty, / by which was priesthood (*kāhnūtā*) adorned, // youngest of his brothers as Jesse’s son! / The horn, fervent, anointed you. . .”

<sup>135</sup> “Establish [*ʿaqtm*] the priests [*kāhnē*] in splendour, / the powerful in humility, // and the people [*quṭrānā*] in righteousness.” (CN 19, 3, 7–9). On the meaning of *ʿaqtm*, see §2.1.2.2 n. 96.

Anyway, in the great majority of cases Ephrem employs the term *kāhnā* to mean the bishop in a very generic fashion: even though single aspects of his idea of the episcopate may be associated with these occurrences, there seems to be no necessary association between the word *kāhnā* and one or more of these aspects. For example, in more than one case the word *kāhnā* is associated with the idea of tradition and succession (*yubbālā*)<sup>136</sup>. However, at CN 16, 14–21 the same idea is associated with family images, with the name “shepherd” (*rā’yā*) or “teacher” (*mallpānā*). Furthermore, there are occurrences of *kāhnā* associated with the task of leadership at CN 19:

ܠܬܝܬܝܠ ܥܘܪ ܦܪܝܬܐ	... 12
(CN 19, 12, 8–9)	<sup>137</sup> ܦܪܝܬܐ ܠܬܝܬܝܠ ܥܘܪ ܦܪܝܬܐ
...	
ܠܬܝܬܝܠ ܥܘܪ ܦܪܝܬܐ	... 14
ܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
<sup>138</sup> ܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܡܕܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
(CN 19, 14, 4–8)	

Here, Ephrem expresses the theme of leadership by example in a way similar to how Gregory’s metaphor at II, 1, 13, 43–58 does: all collectives, and armies in particular, tend to conform to their leaders, so that if the leader is a bad example or incompetent, the collective as a whole will be incapable of doing its task. Interestingly, in the first passage “priest” is correlated to “people”, whereas in the second instance *kāhnā* corresponds to *mar’itā*, which is an ambiguous word, because literally it means “flock”, but in the majority of later occurrences, it means “diocese”, “Christian community under a bishop”<sup>139</sup>. This ambiguity will be explored later, but the fact that here the word corresponds to *kāhnā* and not to “shepherd” (*rā’yā*) suggests that both *kāhnā* and *mar’itā* here have an institutional meaning (“bishop” and “diocese”) and not the literal one.

Even if the usage of *kāhnā* is not restricted to the priestly function, the priestly function is almost always defined through this term. The best example of this usage of *kāhnā* in a liturgical context is at the end of CN 18:

<sup>136</sup> CN 13, 1, 1; 3, 1; 17, 2.4; CN 14, 4, 1.3; 21, 1.3.5; CN 18, 1, 1; 15, 2.

<sup>137</sup> “that we may fit, one with another; // people [*ammā*] and priest [*kāhnā*], in harmony.”

<sup>138</sup> “The church is like a mirror, // which, like the countenance of its beholder, / accordingly, wears his shapes, // for, like the king such his host, / like the priest [*kāhnā*], such his flock [*mar’it-eh*].”

<sup>139</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3948, s.v. ܡܕܝܬܐ.

<sup>140</sup> “Appoint for you scribes and lawyers, / gatherers and givers, too, // and patrons and supporters, / all giving their service to each other, // lest may be sullied by care, / or defiled by anxiety, // the mind and the tongue / by which you offer the intercession [*bā’ūtā*] // propitiating [*l-ḥussāyā*] for the whole community. / **Blessed is he who cleanses your worship** [*tešmešt-āk*])! /// How much the mind may be purged, / and may the tongue too be purified, // how much the hands may be scourged, / and may the whole body be cleansed, // is not enough for the title of priest [*l-kāhnā w-kunnāy-ēh*], / since he, offering [*mqarreb*] the

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<sup>140</sup>

ܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ  
(CN 18, 11–12)

The ritual context is very clear from words like “intercession” (*bā’ūtā*), “propitiation” (*hussāyā*), “worship” (*tešmeštā*) and “offering” (*mqarreb*). As in the passage from Gregory (II, 1, 12, 751–758), the priest is a mediator between the people and the Godhead, and, as such, he must be pure. This common Old Testament image, however, is employed in considerably different ways. While Gregory spiritualises the offering as a moral progression, Ephrem clearly refers to the Eucharist (the “living body”, *pagrā hayyā*), thus superimposing Christian cult on Old Testament sacrifices. While Gregory insists on the purity of the offering as well as the priest, Ephrem mentions only the purity of the priest. Moreover, Gregory employs terms of purity found also in the Greek version of the Old Testament. Ephrem, on the other hand, employs nonbiblical terms of purity and impurity<sup>141</sup>. These nonbiblical terms highlight that the purity of which Ephrem is talking, much like the purity of Gregory’s ἱερεὺς, is not a ritual but a moral one. Another similarity with Gregory is that both strongly emphasise the link between this ritual image and the priest (ἱερεὺς, *kāhnā*): as at II, 1, 12, 751, the ritual is the one and only task of the ἱερεὺς, so here the very title of priest (*kunnāyā*) is associated with the “offering of the living body”. This association is corroborated by other passages, where the name *kāhnā* occurs in the context of a liturgical function, and in particular with the intercessory function<sup>142</sup>. Even more important, at CN 14, 5–6 Valgash’s preaching is contrasted with Aaron’s behaviour in the episode of the golden calf, and, in contrasting the bishop with the Old Testament figure, Ephrem calls the bishop *kāhnā*<sup>143</sup>.

living body, // should purify all himself all time, / to stand as a mediator [*meš’āyā*] // between God and humanity. / **Blessed is he who purified his servants!**”

<sup>141</sup> Moreover, many of these terms are also metaphorical. Terms of impurity: *šhet* (“to rust”, CN 18, 11, 5); *šā’ā* (“to be filthy”, 6). Purity: *zhā* (“to be splendid”, 11, 10; 12, 4); *špā* (“to be plain”, 12, 1); *šallel* (“to filter”, 12, 2; 7; 10). The only biblical term is *mraq*, “to polish”, “purify”, which is found at Lev. 6:28 for a bronze vessel *after* the sacrifice.

<sup>142</sup> CN 13, 17; CN 14, 4.

<sup>143</sup> “Aaron had stripped the ears / of earrings, to make a calf, // [ . . . ] Yet our third priest [*kāhn-an dēn tltāyā*] / pierced the heart’s ears. . . .” (CN 14, 5, 1–2; 6, 1–2). The opposition is clear from the content and is signalled grammatically from the particle *dēn* (“yet”). The suffix-pronoun of the first-person plural (*-an*) clarifies that the *kāhnā* Ephrem is talking of is *not* Aaron (as would be expected) but the bishop.

Given that Aaron was considered as the paradigm of Jewish priesthood and the first priest of Israel, the link between the word *kāhnā* and the liturgical function, as modelled on its Old Testament forerunners, should be clear. Naturally, there are still exceptions to this privileged link between *kāhnā* and the liturgical functions of the bishops. At CN 17, for example, attributes and actions typical of the priest are found side by side with the shepherd imagery<sup>144</sup>.

The occurrences of *kāhnā* in the last part of CN 21 belong to a category of their own<sup>145</sup>: here, *kāhnā* and *kāhnūtā* are compared and contrasted with *malkā* and *malkūtā*. This comparison has both an abstract and a concrete side: on the concrete side (CN 21, 21, 1–6) real bishops and Roman emperors are compared; on the abstract side (CN 21, 21, 7–23, 10), the new emperor and the new bishop receive wishes and exhortations on how king and priests should behave. If then the concrete part of the passage suggests that *kāhnā* should be translated as “bishop” and *malkā* as “emperor”, since those mentioned were indeed bishops and emperors, nevertheless the abstract comparison of the ideal *malkā* and *kāhnā* seems to hint at the more general and biblically attested functions of “king” and “priest”. On one side, this means that the biblical function of priesthood has been concretely transferred, in Ephrem’s thought, to the bishop. However, since the presbyters shared in the name (see CN 19, 3, 7), we cannot say that the priestly function, the rank of bishop, and the title *kāhnā* are coextensive. At the very least, admitting that the priestly function is attached to the term *kāhnā*, we must also rule out that this function is exclusive of the bishop.

In the semantic field of liturgy there is another group of names used for the bishops: in the same manner as *ιερεύς/kāhnā* is shared by both bishops and priests, so the bishop is sometimes referred to with terms that commonly refer to a deacon. Twice Ephrem uses his word for “deacon”, *šammāšā*, to identify the lesser rank of priesthood (CN 21, 5, 4; 19, 7). He identifies the bishops with this same term three times, but with three different connotations. At CN 18, 12, 10, the bishops are the “purified servants of God” (*šallel šammāš-aw(hy)*): this is a line that comes after a stanza crowded with references to ritual purity and the Eucharist as sacrifice. The refrain of the previous stanza mentioned the “liturgy” (*tešmeštā*) of the bishop (CN 18, 12, 9). In this context, the liturgical connotation of the bishop’s “service” is unambiguous. The same word, with the same

144 “He chose him in the multitude of musterers [*‘allānē*], / because he gave proof of his faith; // Time examined him in the flock [*‘ānā*], / [ . . . ] may your fasting [*šawm-āk*] be an armour to our land, / your prayer [*šallūt-āk*] a shield for our city, // your thurible [*pīrm-āk*] may obtain reconciliation [*l-tar’ūta*]. / **Blessed is he who sanctified your sacrifices** [*debḥāt-āk*]! /// The shepherd [*rā’yā*], appointed from his flock [*‘ān-eh*], / fed it on spiritual meadows, // and with his victorious staff / from invisible wolves guarded it; // come on, fill the office of your teacher [*rabb-āk*], / because there’s thirst of the sound of his voice: // he put you as a pillar / in the citadel of a quivering people, // that relies on your prayers [*ba-šlwāt-āk*]” (CN 17, 4, 1–3.7–10; 5).

145 CN 21, 14, 8; 21-23.

specification, “Your [Christ’s] servants” (*šammāšay-k*), has a completely different sense at CN 14, 14, 6, because there the theme is the good deeds of Christ and “his servants”<sup>146</sup>, and indeed, in the following stanzas the “service” is one of education and guidance, not of liturgy. As a consequence, in this instance *šammāšā* expresses the submission of the bishops to Christ, in a temporal, causal, ontological, and functional way. In this respect a possible pun could be playing a role: Ephrem is saying that the deeds of the “servants” can be narrated only because of the previous and more ancient deeds of Christ himself; and this primacy through antiquity is expressed a reference to Christ’s deeds as *qaššīšīn*, “older” (CN 14, 14, 4). Now, the word *qaššīšā* is used overwhelmingly for humans, not for objects. Here, therefore, deeds are being personified. However, the choice of the term *qaššīšā* for “ancient” might be intended to signal the hierarchical difference between deeds of Christ, those of the “priests” (*qaššīšē*), and those of the bishops, who are only “deacons” (*šammāšē*) in comparison to Christ’s. Finally, the bishops are called *šammāšē* in relation to the church at CN 13, 11, 6, here again in the sense of educating and leading it<sup>147</sup>.

Even Gregory employs the vocabulary of service and servitude for the bishops at II, 1, 10. At line 2, for example, he refers to the bishops, who in line 1 were represented as offering the Eucharist, as God’s servants, employing a word, *λάτρες*, of great poetic value: not only a Euripidean favourite (18x), but also a term never attested in Homer and employed by elegiac poets, such as Theognis (302; 486) and Gregory’s model, Callimachus (*aet. frg.* 80, 7; *Hec. frg.* 344, 1). Gregory employs it more than any other poet, except perhaps Nonnus. The word is mostly used in hexameters, but there are three iambic occurrences (II, 1, 11, 199; II, 1, 20, 1; II, 1, 30, 47). It is not used only of bishops, but in general of any kind of devotion and worship, even nonliturgical ones. Such is the occurrence of the term at II, 1, 17, 97, where it refers to ambition towards a prestigious episcopal seat<sup>148</sup>. Therefore, the term is quite generic and certainly not a *terminus technicus* for the deacon or any role in the liturgy, even though at II, 1, 17, 18, where good and evil priests are compared and the good priest is shown offering the Eucharist, the word *λάτρης* may well be used to scorn the evil bishops’ worshipful attitude towards powerful men<sup>149</sup>. At II, 1, 10, 2, it is likely that the expression *μεγάλης μονάδος λάτρες ἐν Τριάδι* has the function of binding the addressees (the bishops at the Council of

146 “For if he who has no beginning / is the Firstborn of all creations, // then his deeds too are the firstborns, / being older [*qaššīšīn*] than the creations. // Your deeds, O Lord, permit / to narrate of your servants [*šammāšay-k*].” (CN 14, 14).

147 “For her ornament corresponds to her beauty [*šupr-āh*], // because her help is like her time, / and her servant is like her help. /// As much as she lacked in her need, / to her need came fulfilment: // her parents apt to her birth / and her teachers apt to her notions, // her nourishment apt to her growth / and her clothing apt to her stature” (CN 13, 11, 4-12).

148 Οὐ γὰρ ἐμῆς πολλῆς παίδειν, καὶ λάτριν αἰετῶς / Ἐμμεναι ἀντὶ θρόνων, ὧν πέρι μαρνάμενοι / Σχίζονται, καὶ κόσμον ὅλον τέμνουσιν ἀθέσμως. (II, 1, 17, 97–99).

149 Τοῖος καὶ Χριστοῦ μεγακλέος ἀρητῆρσι / Θυμός. Ὁ μὲν βροτέου λάτρης αἰσθενέος / ... Αὐτὰρ ὁ γε τρομερῆσι καὶ εὐαγέσιν παλάμησι / Δῶρον ἄγει, Χριστοῦ σαρκὶ χαριζόμενος (II, 1, 17, 17–18; 21–22).

Constantinople) to their Nicene faith, so that the following point raised by the poet—that is, his personal merits in establishing a firm Nicene community in the capital—will be more effective. Two more words are used at II, 1, 10, 15 and 16: respectively, θεοῦ θεράποντες and θεοῦ θέραιες. Semantically, the words are equivalents, and they belong more or less to the same linguistic register: they are both poetic words, though θέραις is rarer and more sophisticated<sup>150</sup>. The words mean “servant”, though not in a derogatory way, since they are used by Homer to mean “squire” of a champion, and more often and in all kinds of poetry to identify the attendant of a god. Therefore, they could be used to express a personal devotion to a divinity: it is so that Archilochus is “attendant of Ares”—namely, a soldier and a war-poet—and the poet of Aristophanes’s *Birds* is a “servant of the Muses”<sup>151</sup>. In a sense more similar to the liturgical role of a Christian deacon, the word θεράπων is used of the attendants at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi by Euripides<sup>152</sup>. However, Gregory seems to employ the word in the sense of devotion towards God, rather than as an allusion to the liturgical service: the “good servants of God” (II, 1, 10, 15) are the bishops who appointed Gregory preacher in Constantinople, and the “servants of God” of the following line are the bishops who at the time were arguing in Constantinople<sup>153</sup>. The context bears no reference to the liturgy; therefore, the terms should be interpreted as highlighting one facet of the bishops’ role—that is, their dependence to God—in order to cast doubts on their adequacy to the task, juxtaposing their inadequacy with their failure to retain the good Gregory in his place. It is not a coincidence that the sentence itself is not directed to the bishops, but to Christ, who is addressed in the vocative as Χριστέ ἄναξ, underlining his lordship and the dependence of his servants. The concentration of the vocabulary of service and servitude for the bishops in the first part of II, 1, 10 corresponds to a unitary rhetorical strategy: the bishops are called to answer for their behaviour towards Gregory in light of their role as servants of God. They should be devoted to the Trinity (i.e., the Nicene faith)—line 2 implies—and therefore uphold Gregory’s Nicene preaching in Constantinople (9–13); they had been “good servants” of Christ the Lord when they had put Gregory in charge of the capital (15); but now, though still in the service of Christ (16), they are shamefully arguing among themselves to choose a substitute for Gregory (17).

Wrapping up this section, we can highlight one major similarity between Ephrem and Gregory, and many differences. Both poets represent the bishop in terms resembling Old Testament priests, and both poets associate this representation with the title

<sup>150</sup> Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 793, s.vv. θεράπων, θέραις.

<sup>151</sup> εἰμι δ’ ἐγὼ θεράπων μὲν Ἐνναλίοιο ἀνακτος, / καὶ Μουσέων ἐρατὸν δῶρον ἐπιστάμενος (Archil. *frag.* 1); Μουσάων θεράπων ὀτρηνός (Aristoph. *av.* 909).

<sup>152</sup> ἀλλ’, ὦ Φοίβου Δελφοὶ θέραιες (Eur. *Ion* 94).

<sup>153</sup> Ἄλλον ... Ἀρθέντ’ ἐξαπίνης θῶκον ἐπ’ ἀλλότριον, / Οὐ με Θεός τ’ ἐπέβησε, Θεοῦ τ’ ἀγαθοὶ θεράποντες; / Ταῦτα νόσος στυγερὴ, ταῦτα Θεοῦ θέραιες, / Οἱ δῆριν στονόεσαν ἐπ’ ἀλλήλοισιν ἔχοντες, / Χριστέ ἄναξ, οὐ μοι ταῦτα νοοῦσι φίλα. (II, 1, 10, 14–18).

of “priest” (ιερεύς/*kāhnā*). However, the memory of the Old Testament liturgy plays a different role in the two poets: if both of them tend to interpret Old Testament ritual purity in a moralising or spiritualising way, the proper “offering” of the new priesthood is intended differently, in that Ephrem interprets it as the Eucharist, whereas Gregory, though recognising the role of the Eucharist, asserts salvation of the souls as the ultimate offering of the bishop. Another difference is that Gregory employs the word ιερεύς only rarely, and always in association to this Old Testament imagery, while Ephrem employs *kāhnā* much more: he surely recognises its liturgical sense but does not limit the word to this function. “Priesthood” is more than sacrificial offering, and, as for Gregory, the bishop is not the only priest, since the inferior orders also participate in priesthood. However—and here lies another difference between Ephrem and Gregory—Ephrem seems to have employed a word to distinguish bishops from the more generic “priests”—that is, *kumrā*. Even if this is not attested elsewhere, nevertheless it seems to be the case here at CN 21, 5, 1. A final difference between the two writers is that Ephrem employs the word for “deacon” (*šammāšā*) for the bishop, not only in a liturgical sense—which clearly points to the ecclesiastical title of deacon—but also as a more generic term of servitude or service; Gregory does not employ the word “deacon” in our poems, and the terms of servitude referring to the bishop are not linked to the liturgical service. This and the different interpretation of Old Testament sacrifice by the poets demonstrates that liturgy is much more present in Ephrem’s idea of bishop than in Gregory’s. Probably, the liturgical context of performance (§1.2.1) influenced Ephrem’s language in this direction, whereas Gregory’s learned recitations lacked this powerful contextual pressure.

## 2.2 Metaphors

In the previous section, I analysed the simple nouns used to designate the bishop, beginning with the words that later become standard terms and moving towards more generic ones. In all these cases, save for the Syriac term *rēšā* (“head”), words were used in their proper sense. The question was how precisely they designated the episcopal office as opposed to other tasks or titles. For example, the Syriac *rabbā* originally meant “teacher”, “master”, and the Greek προστάτης means “patron”. Since the majority of these words had not acquired a specialised meaning of “bishop”, the usage of the one or the other by the poet highlighted a particular function or character of the episcopal office.

Yet the vocabulary to speak of bishops is much more varied than the simple terms examined, because the two poets enrich it with metaphors. Here, the main question becomes the vitality of such metaphors: which of these have retained their original meaning, and thus entail an authentic translation of meaning from one semantic field to the other, and which have become dead metaphors, and therefore specialised terms to talk about ecclesiastical roles. Two dead metaphors for the bishop (and the clergyman in general) are familiar even today—namely, that of shepherd (or pastor) and that of



father. Furthermore, the Bible provided the poets with a wealth of images to define the Christian leader: sometimes they have employed them; sometimes—and this is perhaps more significant—they have avoided them. However, the poets did not limit themselves to biblical images, but in various cases have drawn from contemporary culture and life to further enrich their language.

In the following sections I will analyse three important metaphors from the poems: shepherd imagery (§2.2.1), agricultural language (§2.2.2) and what I have called the “iconography of the bishop” (§2.2.3)—namely, all metaphors treating the bishop as a visual image of some sort. Finally, the fourth section (§2.2.4) will examine metaphors from both poets that do not occur so often as to require a separate treatment. The analysis was guided by two fundamental questions: first, whether the metaphor is already in the Bible in some form and how the poets have adapted (or ignored) the biblical use of the metaphor in their works; second, what the metaphor means—that is, whether the metaphor is still alive or dead, which traits of the various bishops it highlights and what purpose it serves in the wider economy of the poems. In every section I begin with the first question and move on to the second, treating Gregory and Ephrem separately or together depending on whether the points of contact between the two are sparser or more frequent. In the fourth section, I begin with biblically attested metaphors and treat the independent ones thereafter.

### 2.2.1 Shepherd

In the following section I will analyse the most important metaphor for the bishop, namely the “shepherd”/“pastor” imagery. First, I will present the biblical usage that serves as a model for both poets (§2.2.1.1). In this context, it is necessary to treat also the fisherman imagery, because the latter is associated with the apostles, and the bishops claimed to be the apostles’ heirs and descendants, whereas leaders in the Old Testament are normally allegorised through shepherd imagery. Then, I will define the semantic field of this image in Greek and Syriac, so that my criteria for categorising the texts as I did may be clearer. After this, the main part of the section is an analysis of the occurrences of this metaphor in our poems, first in Gregory’s (§2.2.1.2) and then in Ephrem’s (§2.2.1.3). In this analysis, I strove to answer two questions: First, were the words of this semantic field used in their proper sense by way of a living metaphor; or, instead, was the metaphor already dead, with the result that the words had come to properly mean “bishop”? Second, if and when this metaphor was still alive, what was its informative content, or, in other words, which traits of the bishop and his role is the metaphor supposed to express and visualise? In my discussion of Ephrem, the question arises about the meaning of the word *‘allānā*, which I answer in the last part of this section (§2.2.1.4).

### 2.2.1.1 The Bible: Shepherds and fishermen

The title “shepherd” and pastoral imagery are a commonplace for prelates, and since ancient times they had been employed for civil leaders. This is true for both of the foundational texts of Gregory’s and Ephrem’s literary universe: the Bible and Homer. The expression ποιμὴν λαῶν, for example, is regularly employed by Homer for Agamemnon, the chief of the Achaean army, and other heroes<sup>154</sup>. Other similar usages of ποιμὴν with the objective genitive are attested in tragedy<sup>155</sup>. Murray has noted that pastoral imagery is used of civic and political leaders also in ancient Mesopotamian literature<sup>156</sup>, a background which could play a part in Ephrem’s imagery.

In this respect, the heritage of the Bible is more ambiguous. The Old Testament is quite straightforward: the shepherd metaphor is a favourite for religious as well as civic leaders, so that both priests and kings can be signified by the term. Single instances of pastoral imagery are countless, but the fundamental text is no doubt Hes. 34, God’s invective against Israel’s shepherds<sup>157</sup>. The New Testament’s heritage is more complex: on one side, it continues the shepherd metaphor; on the other, for the apostles it prominently introduces the metaphor of fishing. The shepherd metaphor is conspicuously employed for Christ, most of all in the parable of the lost sheep and in the allegory of the good shepherd, which, referring back to Ezekiel’s prophecy, is tantamount to a self-declaration of the role of Messiah<sup>158</sup>. It is perhaps of special importance for the bishop’s titles that 1Petr. 2:25 calls Jesus ὁ ποιμὴν καὶ ἐπίσκοπος τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν. Sometimes the term is used also of the leaders of the community, less in a messianic sense, as was the case for Jesus, and more in line with OT usage<sup>159</sup>. The remarkably new metaphor of the “fishers of men” goes back to Jesus’ calling of his first disciples as narrated in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt. 4:19; Mc. 1:17; Lc. 5:10) and is expanded by the parable of the fish-net at Mt. 13:47–50. These two metaphors are facing each other in the epilogue of the Gospel of John, chapter 21. The chapter combines a miraculous draught of fish with a dialogue between Christ and Peter, in which Jesus gives Peter three similar commands requiring him to shepherd Jesus’s followers: “Feed my lambs. . . . Tend my sheep. . . . Feed my sheep” (Joh. 21:2–8 and 15–17). Raymond Brown is aware of this double symbolism in the chapter, which is justified—in his mind—by a difference of substance: while the

154 For all Homeric occurrences, see Cunliffe/Dee 2012, 334, s.v. ποιμὴν. For a comparison of Homer’s usage with Mesopotamian usage see West 1999, 226–227; at 533, West discusses occurrences of the image referred to gods.

155 Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1430, s.v. ποιμὴν.

156 Murray 2006, 187.

157 Cf. Jer. 23:1–6; Zach. 11:4–17; some single occurrences: 1Reg. 22:17; Jer. 2:8; 3:15; 10:21; 31:10; referred to God: Gen. 48:15; 49:24; Jes. 40:11; Ps. 23; 80:2; 95:7. Ezekiel’s text served as the *Vorlage* for Augustine’s homily *On Pastors* (Aug. *serm.* 46).

158 The lost sheep: Mt. 18:12–14; Lc. 15:4–7; the good shepherd: Joh. 10:1–18. Passing references at Mt. 9:36; 10:6; 15:24; Mc. 14:27.

159 Act. 20:28–29; Eph. 4:11; 1Petr. 5:1–4.

draught of fish in the first half symbolises the mission of the apostles, Jesus's reference to the sheep implies a role of care and guidance entrusted to Peter<sup>160</sup>.

This contrast between fisherman and shepherd imagery is already clear to Maruthas of Maypherkat, writing between the end of the fourth century and the first decade of the fifth. In his homily for the Octave of Easter, the preacher asks why during the old dispensation God appointed shepherds as leaders of the people—the preacher brings the examples of Moses guarding Jethro's sheep, David, Jacob's sons, and the prophet Amos—whereas Jesus in the New Testament chose fishermen as apostles. The difference, which Marutha finds at first only in the profession of prophets and apostles, reflects a different task, connected with fundamental differences in the Old and New Alliance. The shepherd is entrusted with a closed group of animals, which are also marked, and he works in a fixed location: his profession reflects the close and defined group of Israel, the target of the prophets' ministry. The fisherman, on the other hand, has no fixed target, because he does not know what he is going to catch as he throws the net. Any kind of fish can enter his net, and indeed Peter's net contained *all kinds* of fish. Similarly, the apostles venture into the unknown, and their target is not fixed and marked beforehand<sup>161</sup>.

It is interesting to see how this ambivalent biblical heritage is reflected in our texts, even when there are not any signs that the poet is conscious of such an ambivalence. Since the bishops are the successors of the apostles—a belief displayed by both Gregory and Ephrem—it would make sense to apply to them the same imagery as that which is applied to the apostles. Furthermore, authors (such as Ephrem and Gregory) who emphasise the novelty brought about by Christianity in respect to Judaism and who have found in the New Testament Jesus's solemn self-styling as the messianic shepherd might have wanted to avoid the shepherd imagery for the church's clergy. Yet what is found in the texts is the exact opposite: Gregory and Ephrem employ often shepherd imagery, and rarely that of the fishermen. And even when they employ this imagery, it seems to have a different function than it has in the New Testament.

Gregory never refers to a bishop as a fisher in our poems. The only time he discusses the apostles as fishers, at II, 1, 12, 192–224, he does so by taking “fishermen” in a very concrete sense. He is anticipating an objection that may be raised to his idea that bishops should be chosen based on their theological proficiency (more on this at §3.1.3.3); an opponent of the idea might well say that the apostles, the models of the bishops, demonstrate just the opposite of such proficiency, because they were chosen among “publicans and fishermen” (τελῶναι καὶ ῥαλιεῖς) and yet managed to evangelise the whole world. Gregory's answer may be resumed through the closing lines (222–223): “Peter was the chief of the disciples, but he was Peter / not as fisherman but because full

<sup>160</sup> Brown 1999, 1369 (double symbolism); 1386–1387 (on the fishing symbolising the mission).

<sup>161</sup> Kmosko 1903, 412–414; Murray 2006, 177–178.

of zeal”<sup>162</sup>. In this passage, Peter’s job is mentioned as just a job, because its demeaning nature presupposes that Peter was not theologically proficient: the following line mentions the fishing net (τὸ δίκτυον) only as a metonymy of the job and of its humility<sup>163</sup>. Nevertheless, Gregory knows the symbolic meaning of the apostles’ profession, because in the same passage, at lines 194–195, he refers to it<sup>164</sup>. He just avoids applying it to the bishops. Here there is something deeper to unpack: it is true that Gregory’s retort against the example of the apostles as ignorant forerunners of bishops is based on the delineation of a kind of knowledge different from the one commonly intended by the educated classes of the time. However, his description of the deeds of the apostles (II, 1, 12, 194–195 and 238–244) and of those of the bishops (for example, II, 1, 12, 184–188) are also remarkably different from each other: he praises the apostles for evangelising *outside* the Christian community, while he calls the bishops to preserve existing communities in a time of doctrinal confusion<sup>165</sup>. In other words, Gregory attributes to the apostles their traditional task of propagating the faith, and to the bishops their equally traditional task of governing and transmitting the faith. In Maruthas’s words, the apostles’ mission was addressed to everyone and no one in particular, whereas the bishops’ ministry, like that of the prophets, targets the religious community. As we will see, Gregory does not lack a concept of the bishop’s role in converting pagans, but this concept does not entail a specific or planned action in this direction: Gregory’s church is much less preoccupied with proselytising than it is with preserving existing communities.


Ephrem employs the term “fisherman” (*ṣayyādā*) only once for the bishops, at CN 19, 10, 10, where God is acclaimed during the inauguration of bishop Abraham: “Blessed is he who chose you as our fisherman!” The image caps a stanza with two important references to fishing: at CN 19, 10, 4, the bishop is exhorted to “entice” (*garreg*) the poor, but with a verb used also for the baiting of fish, and whose active participle in the first form, *gārgā*, is employed as a substantive meaning “bait”<sup>166</sup>; lines 7–9 are three couples of objects and instrumental complements, all governed by the verb *ṣawwed*, meaning “to chase” or “to fish”. Here, the bishop should “fish” sinners (“the bad”, *bīšē*; “the rapacious”, *bāzōzē*; “the impure”, *ṭamma’ē*), thanks to good Christians (“the good”,

162 Πέτρος μαθητῶν ἄκρος, ἀλλὰ πέτρος ἦν / Οὐχ ὡς σαγηνεὺς, ἀλλ’ ὅτι ζήλου πλέως (II, 1, 12, 222–223). The word σαγηνεὺς is very rare and, even though it is used in poetry (*Anth. Gr.* 7, 276, 1 and 295, 3), it is not exclusively or prevalently poetic (Plut. *vit. Pomp.* 73, 3; Diod. Sic. 9, 3, 2; 13, 2).

163 Πείθει με τιμᾶν καὶ τὸ δίκτυον ὁ τρόπος. (II, 1, 12, 224). Gregory employs the metonymy of the instrument of a profession instead of the profession in order to increase the demeaning connotation of said profession: see §5.2.1.

164 Κόσμον σαγηνεύσαντες εὐτελεῖ λόγῳ / Καὶ τοὺς σοφοὺς λαβόντες εἴσω δικτύων (II, 1, 12, 194–195).

165 Καὶ νῦν μάλιστα ἐν ζάλῃ γλωσσαλγίας / Καὶ τῶν μεγίστων ἀστέων καὶ συλλόγων, / Ὡν καὶ μενόντων ἀσφαλῶς κέρδος πλεόν, / Καὶ μὴ μενόντων ἢ βλάβη πληρεστέρα (II, 1, 12, 184–188); Πόθεν βασιλεῖς τε καὶ πόλεις καὶ συλλόγους, / Κατηγοροῦντας, εὐθύνοντας ἐν λόγοις, / Πρὸ βημάτων τε καὶ θεάτροις ἐν μέσοις, / Σοφοὺς, νομικοὺς, Ἑλληνας ὠφρυωμένους, / Δημηγοροῦντας, εὐστομοῦντες καίρια / Ἐπειθον, ἐξήλεγχον ἐν παρρησίᾳ, / Εἰ μὴ λόγου μετεῖχον, οὐ σὺ μὴ δίδως; (238–244).

166 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 773–774, s.vv. .

*ṭābē*; “the giving”, *yāhōbē*; “the chaste”, *qaddīšē*)<sup>167</sup>. Ephrem certainly knew the symbolism behind the apostles’ fishing trade, as he demonstrates in *hymn. virg.* 32, 8, a stanza completely built on this idea. However, the sense of the metaphor here is different, because the action of the bishop is not explicitly addressed to outsiders or pagans and does not entail a missionary movement. Moreover, Ephrem develops the imagery quite differently than the Gospels, because he is underlining a different trait of the image of fishing, which must correspond to a different trait of the bishop: the fishing nets and the variety (in Luke’s version) or quantity (in John) of fish symbolise the universality and unity of the apostolic mission; the boats moving in these passages symbolise the roaming of the apostles. Ephrem, on the contrary, does not mention boats nor nets, but only the bait as instrumental to the fishing. This detail, together with the list of different kinds of people and sinners, invites us to read the metaphor as describing two requirements of the bishop’s style in approaching different types of sinners—namely, an individualised approach, giving to each what might benefit them, and, consequently, an attracting approach, designed to entice the person, not to scare her off. This piece of advice is repeated in the following stanza, there with a medical metaphor (on which, see §2.2.4.7)<sup>168</sup>. For these reasons, even though an allusion to the Gospels cannot be excluded from the passage, one must admit that in *CN* 19, 10 it is very faint and fundamentally changed in its symbolic meaning: even when the bishop is called “fisher”, he is so in a sense that is specific to his role, as the skilful “physician of souls” (to quote Gregory), knowing the right bait for each sinner; therefore, he is still firmly bound to his community and to a role of guidance, not of mission<sup>169</sup>.

Once the preeminence of shepherd imagery over fisherman metaphors inspired by the Gospels has been assessed, the next question is: How much of this metaphoric field is still alive, and how much of it is stereotyped and frozen? In this case, the object of inquiry is not just a word, “shepherd” (ποιμήν/*rā’yā*), but a whole semantic field, which is allegorically transferred to the language of church and community. This is

<sup>167</sup> “Do not overlook the great, / do not despair of the weak, // soften and instruct the rich, / bait [*garreg*] and win the poor, // with the harsh couple the patient, / and the long suffering to the wrathful, // draw [*sawwed*] the bad with the good, / and the greedy with the giving, // and the impure by hand of the holy. / **Blessed is he who chose you as our fisherman** [*ṣayyādā*]!” (*CN* 19, 10). The same imagery, in a negative sense, in a line by Gregory: Καὶ χαλκὸς λοχῶν πικρὴν νεπέδεσσιν ἔδωδὴν (II, 1, 13, 163). Bad bishops are as baits, concealing death in the appearance of food.

<sup>168</sup> “Take with you myriads of drugs, / rise and go among the sick, // to the weak offer a drug, / and to the one who’s healthy preservation; // do not give any drug / that may not suit the illness, // but apply abundantly any help, / that may bring the illness to recovery, // even you must learn experience. / **Blessed is he who toiled on our wounds!**” (*CN* 19, 11).

<sup>169</sup> That the imagery of fishing would not appear in these fourth-century authors for the bishops should not surprise us, when we think how much the Council of Nicaea (see canons 15 and 16) and later of Constantinople (canon 2) emphasised the link between bishop and city, in keeping with a tendency of the church hierarchy to define itself more and more around the city and its relationship with the Empire and its environs (see Barone-Adesi 1998).

very clear in Syriac, where, besides the term for “shepherd”, there is a synonym that may also identify “musterers”, or subordinate shepherds under the authority of a head shepherd (‘*allānā*), a verb for “feed”, another for “tend” (*r’ā*, whence the name for shepherd, *rā’ā*), and a whole wealth of words to mean “sheep” (differentiating sex and age) and “flock”<sup>170</sup>. Moreover, different words identify the shepherd’s crook and the pastureland<sup>171</sup>. Over time, many words of this semantic field took on a technical meaning in Christian language, without ever losing their literal sense: *rā’yā* was both “shepherd” and “pastor”, being applied to bishops and patriarchs, and ‘*allānā* became much more associated with church hierarchy than sheep tending<sup>172</sup>; *mar’itā* is equally the flock, the pasture, and the ecclesiastic diocese; *ḥuṭrā*, *šabbuqtā*, and *mōrānītā* were used for the shepherd’s crook but were also synonymous with *taqdā*, the bishop’s “crosier”; the words for “sheepfold” and “pen”, *gezrā*, *dayrā*, and *tyārā*, became also terms for “monastery” and “cloister”.

Greek has a great lexical variety, too: besides ποιμήν, the shepherd may be called νομεύς<sup>173</sup>, the words for “sheep” move from generic πρόβατον or κτήνος (which can also identify other cattle), to μῆλον or θρέμμα (for sheep and goats alike), to οἷς and ἀρήν (the latter meaning also “lamb”), to terms specific for the age and sex of the animal<sup>174</sup>. Naturally, all these words form derivatives and composites with prepositions or other semantic roots. There are also many synonyms for the flock, the shepherd’s staff, and the sheepfold<sup>175</sup>. Among these many words, some have entered church language through metaphor, apart from the frequently employed ποιμήν: the bishop might be called νομεύς or κριός (“ram”, as most prominent in the flock), the faithful are sometimes πρόβατα, sometimes a ποίμνη or a ποίμνιον (“flock”), more often θρέμματα, and the church is called figuratively αὐλή or σῆκος (“sheepfold”), whereas the bishop’s crosier and the shepherd’s crook share the name ράβδος; sometimes the church or a

170 Sheep: ‘*erbā*, *neqyā* (sheep, but also ewe), *qenyānā* (corresponding to Gr. κτήνη, generic word for cattle), ‘*emrā* (lamb), *pa’rā/parā* (lamb and ewe in the feminine), *barhā* and *dekrā* (ram); flock: ‘*ānā*, *mar’itā*, *r’itā* (both also “pasture”); sheepfold: *dayrā*, *dārā/dārtā*, *gezrā*, *tyārā* (generic word for any delimited space, as a court, an atrium, a hall), *marbō’itā*, *rbā’ā*. This does not take into account terms specific to cattle, goats and horses.

171 For pasture, besides the already mentioned *mar’itā* and *r’itā*, and the Greek loanword *nōmē*, we have the rare *nāwītā* (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2319, s.v. ܢܐܘܝܬܐ, but not with this meaning, which is given in Sokoloff 2009, 898, s.v. ܢܐܘܝܬܐ), *bēt-re’yā* and *margā*, a Persian loanword meaning also “meadow”. For the shepherd’s crook: *maq’ālā*, *šebṭā*, *ḥuṭrā*, *šabbuqtā*, *mōrānītā*.

172 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2879, 3945, s.vv. ܡܪܝܬܐ, ܡܪܝܬܐ.

173 Other synonyms: ἀρηνοβοσκός, μηλάτης, μηλοβοτήρ and μηλοβότης, μηλονόμης and μηλονομεύς. There are also composites with preposition, such as ἀρχιποίμην or ἐπιποιμήν.

174 Lamb: ἀμνός (ewe: ἀμνή, ἀμνίς, or ἀμνάς), ἀρήν, φάγιλος (when it can be eaten); ram: κάρνος, κριός.

175 Flock: πῶν, ποίμνη/ποίμνιον, νόμευμα, κτήνη (pl., as Syr. *qenyānā* “possession” becomes its metonymy, cattle; Latin shows the opposite process in the word *pecunia*). Shepherd’s crook: καλαῦροψ, λαγώβολον, ράβδος, χαίος/χαίον. Sheepfold: αὐλή (generic as Syr. *tyārā*), μάνδρα, δστριμον, σηκός. There are also many synonyms for “meadow”, “pasture”: βοτάνη, εἰαμενί, λειμών, νέμος, πῖσος, χόρτος. As before, the terms related to ox cattle and horses are omitted.

monastery is compared to a λειμών, a meadow, and μάνδρα, “sheepfold”, is used of the church, the Jewish temple, a heretic sect, and a monastery<sup>176</sup>.

### 2.2.1.2 In Gregory

In our texts, Gregory shows a great flexibility in employing the shepherd metaphor, since sometimes the metaphor is clearly alive and developed, but other times the term ποιμήν seems almost like a synonym for ἐπίσκοπος. A case of developed metaphor occurs in the hexameters of II, 1, 13, 141–142: “I am wearied by the wolves [λύκοι] hurting the flock [ποίμνης], / with the shepherds [ποιμέσι] I strove long”<sup>177</sup>. Here, the word ποιμήν is used to signify the bishops, but in the same context the community is referred to as a “flock” (ποίμνη) rather than as a “church”, and the external enemies are called wolves (λύκοι), so that, even if ποίμνη could have been intended as a *terminus technicus* for the Christian congregation, the presence of “wolves” makes clear that the words ποιμήν and ποίμνη preserve their literal sense and are employed by way of metaphor. The idea of a flock endangered from without by wolves and from within by bad shepherds has deep biblical roots: Hes. 34 and Joh. 10 are the *Vorlage* against which Gregory presents his efforts in church politics. This is part of his broader strategy of representing himself as *alter Christus*<sup>178</sup>. On the other hand, at II, 1, 12, 136 and 747 Gregory employs ποιμήν without referencing other terms of the semantic field of sheep herding, so that these usages may be safely interpreted as frozen metaphors, not dissimilar from the title ἐπίσκοπος in their connotation<sup>179</sup>.

The passage at II, 1, 12, 694 is less clear: here the term ποιμήν is an antonomasia for the patriarch Jacob. However, the example of Jacob is inserted in the broader context

<sup>176</sup> The list of Syriac synonyms have been retrieved querying with key-words “shepherd”; “sheep”; “lamb”; “ewe”; “ram”; “flock”; “sheepfold”; “fold”; “pasture”; “meadow”; “crook”; “staff” Beth Mardutho’s *Sedra* (<https://sedra.bethmardutho.org/lexeme/get/bygloss>, accessed: 09.12.20, 16:49), then confronting the results with Payne Smith 1879–1901. The same keywords have been queried into the “English-to-Greek” search engine of Perseus (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/search>, accessed: 09.12.20, 16:51). The results have been compared to Lampe 1961 to find ecclesiastical usages of the terms.

<sup>177</sup> Κέκμηκα λύκοις δηλήμοσι ποίμνης, / Ποιμέσι μαρνάμενος δηρὸν χρόνον (II, 1, 13, 141–142).

<sup>178</sup> See §1.3.2; §5.1.2 and Hofer 2013, 178.

<sup>179</sup> Ἀλλ’ οἱ καλοὶ τε κάγαθοι συμποίμενες / Φθόνῳ ῥαγέντες (ἴστε τοὺς Θρασωνίδας / Οὐ γὰρ φέρει παίδευσιν ἢ ἀγροικία) / Καὶ τὴν ἔμην λαβόντες ἔκγονον πόνων / Ἀρρώστιαν συνεργὸν . . . (II, 1, 12, 136–140); “Ταῦτ’ οὖν ὁρῶν ἔκαμνες εὐρεῖν ποιμένα; / Ὡς μικρὸν ἐσπούδαζες Ἐγκαλύπτομαι. / Ὡσπερ λογιστὴν ἐσκόπεις τὸν προστάτην. / Κόπρων μέλει σοι, μειζόνων δ’ ἐμοὶ λόγος. / Ἐν ἔστω τοῦδ’ ἔργον ἱερέως, καὶ μόνον . . . (747–751). Note in the first quotation the use of συμποίμενες, a term which stresses the parity and collegiality of the bishops: the “horizontal” relationship between bishops is the fundamental theme of Gregory’s poems, whereas Ephrem is more concerned about the relationship between bishop and community or to the “vertical” relationship of the bishop with his predecessors and successor. In the second quotation, it is clear that ποιμήν is just another synonym for ἐπίσκοπος because in a few lines, Gregory employs ποιμήν, προστάτης and ἱερέως as variations of the same subject.

of an invective against (probably) Maximus, Gregory's archenemy. Here, Gregory references Jacob's and Laban's pact to share the newly born sheep of Laban's flocks:

Πῆξόν τι καὶ σὺ τῶν ἐμῶν, ἂν του λάβῃ (690)  
 Τῶν μαλθακωτέρων τε καὶ νόθων ἐμοί.  
 Τούτων τί ἂν γένοιτο ἐνδικώτερον;  
 Ἔστω Λάβαν τὰ λευκά· τὰπίσημα δέ  
 Τοῦ πολλὰ μοχθήσαντός ἐστι ποιμένος,  
 Νυξὶν παγέντος, ἡλίῳ κεκαυμένου. (695)  
 (II, 1, 12, 690–695)

But rip you too something mine, if you can find something (690)  
 too feeble or fake in me.  
 What would be more right than this?  
 Let Laban keep the white flocks, but the spotted ones  
 are of the shepherd who has long laboured,  
 frozen by nights and baked by the sun. (695)

According to Meier, the example of Jacob and Laban is a reference to the true and the false bishops, and the “spotted sheep”, who belong to the true bishop, would be the baptised. This interpretation can be supported by two clues: first, the ring-composition of section 658–695, whereby the idea presented at the beginning—that the unworthy should not administer what is not his (baptised people)—comes to fruition here at the end through the biblical allusion; second, the traditional interpretation of the “spotted sheep” of Gen. 30<sup>180</sup>. However, Meier's reading deviates too much from the line of Gregory's argument. First of all, if there is a ring-composition between 658 and 695, then it does not suggest that the biblical example should be interpreted in relation to the bishop and his community. To the contrary, the theme of the first lines of this passage is hypocrisy: “maintain either the luxury or the mop! / Why do you strive to possess both what's yours and what's not?”<sup>181</sup> Gregory laments Maximus's hypocrisy, since the man presents himself as an ascetic and a cynic and yet does not avoid mundane pleasures. Maximus feigns primacy in the fields Gregory sees as his own, most of all asceticism. Gregory, on the contrary, would be happy if only Maximus would strip him of his shortcomings and weaknesses. Therefore, Gregory is confronting Maximus on a personal level, raising doubts about the ascetic and moral credentials of his rival. He does not mention the office of bishop or baptism, making the reference to the traditional exegesis of Gen. 30 irrelevant to the passage. Moreover, such a reference would not make sense with the example: If the point of the argument were leadership over baptised people, why mention Laban's white sheep? Following Meier's reading, white sheep would be unbaptised people, implying that Maximus should become bishop of the unbaptised or perhaps evangelise them. On the contrary, the point of this comparison is to establish

<sup>180</sup> Meier 1989, 151–152.

<sup>181</sup> Ἐπίσχες ἢ τρυφῇν ἢ τὰς τρίχας. / Τί καὶ τὰ μὴ σὰ καὶ τὰ σὰ ζητεῖς ἔχειν; (II, 1, 12, 660–661).



a distinction between two sets of behaviours—Gregory’s virtuous one and Maximus’s wicked one—and to argue that all virtuous behaviours should belong to the virtuous, and all wicked to the wicked<sup>182</sup>.

Finally, a good example of Gregory’s ambivalent use of the word “shepherd” to mean the bishops is found at II, 1, 12, 81, where the poet narrates how he was chosen to preach in Constantinople:

**II, 1, 12, 79–82**

Εἴτ’ οὖν τὸ θεῖον Πνεῦμα, εἴθ’ ἁμαρτάδες,  
Ὡς ἂν δίκας τίσαιμι τῆς ἐπάρσεως  
Τὸ δ’ οὖν πρόδηλον σύλλογοί τε ποιμένων (80)  
Καὶ λαὸς ὀρθόδοξος, ἀλλ’ οὐπὼ πλατὺς,

Maybe the Holy Spirit, maybe my sins,  
that I may atone for my conceit.  
This, however, was clear: that the assemblies of shepherds (80)  
and the orthodox people, not yet so widespread

**II, 1, 11, 595–596**

ἔπεμψεν ἡμᾶς ἡ χάρις τοῦ πνεύματος (595)  
πολλῶν καλούντων ποιμένων καὶ θρεμμάτων

at the instance of many pastors and their flocks, (595)  
the grace of the Spirit sent me  
(transl. Meehan 1987, 94)

**II, 1, 10, 14–15**

θῶκον ἐπ’ ἀλλότριον,  
Οὐ με Θεός τ’ ἐπέβησε, Θεοῦ τ’ ἀγαθοὶ θεράποντες; (15)

a throne not his own,  
upon which God had brought me, and God’s good worshippers (15)

The agency is divided between three subjects: God, the bishops, and the Nicene community in Constantinople. The agency of the people is underplayed in II, 1, 10, where the point is less the reconstruction of Gregory’s call to Constantinople and more the defence of his election to the episcopate (θῶκον) in the city. At II, 1, 12, 81, the bishops are called ποιμένες, “shepherds”, but the community is identified with the ordinary λαός (“people”). In this instance, ποιμήν seems not to be used as a metaphor, but as a simple

<sup>182</sup> This might seem paradoxical, and it is so, but it is better understood if we compare this passage with II, 1, 11, 791–798: Καὶνόν τιν’ εἶπεῖν ἐν κακοῖς λόγον θέλω / ἐχρῆν τὸν αὐτὸν πᾶσιν εἶναι δὴ τρόπον, / ἢ τὸν κακῶν ἀπειρον ἢ τὸν ποικίλον. / ἥττον γὰρ ἐβλάπτοντ’ ἂν ἐκ τινῶν τινες / ἀντιζυγούντων ἢ συνεστώτων τρόπων / νῦν δ’ εἰσὶ θήρα τῶν κακῶν οἱ βελτίους. / τίς ἢ τοσαύτη σύγχυσις τοῦ πλάσματος; / ὥς σφόδρ’ ἀνίσως ἐζύγημεν ἐκ Θεοῦ. Gregory is conscious of the paradoxicality of his assertions (Καὶνόν τινα λόγον), but still affirms that bad people should appear bad too, and should be bad in everything, for the sake of good people. The idea is motivated by Maximus’ affair (see §5.2.4).

title. This is confirmed by II, 1, 10, 15, where the same ποιμένες become θεράποντες, demonstrating that names can vary even when the poet is describing similar things. One could object that the difference between ποιμένες II, 1, 12 and θεράποντες at II, 1, 10 is due to the different metres and genres of the poems, but ποιμήν recurs also at II, 1, 13, 142, that is in the same metre as II, 1, 10. On the other hand, II, 1, 11, 596, describing the same event as II, 1, 12, 79–82, has θρέμματα instead of λαός; now, θρέμματα is used sometimes for Christians, but its literal and more widespread meaning is “cattle”. In this case, the shepherd metaphor has been revived. This suggests that ποιμήν was employed as a normal title for the bishop, but it was still possible to revitalise the metaphor.

Even though it is impossible to draw a perfect line, a research of all occurrences of ποιμήν in Gregory’s poetry reveals the following tendency: while in iambs the word is employed indifferently alone as a title equivalent to ἐπίσκοπος or is coupled with λαός or δῆμος and thus highlights the leadership of the bishop or is used as a living metaphor with words like ποιμνη or λύκοι, in hexameters and elegiacs there is a stronger tendency to employ ποιμήν in its original sense and only by means of a metaphor applying it to the bishop<sup>183</sup>. This might account for the use of θεοῦ θεράποντες at II, 1, 10, 15, where, since the reference to the community was absent, the poet could not employ the shepherd metaphor. As a general tendency, valid for both iambs and hexameters, ποιμήν identifies the bishop in his relationship with the community; it does not identify the bishop taken by himself or the position of the bishop<sup>184</sup>.

<sup>183</sup> Iambic usages of ποιμήν as title: II, 1, 11, 56; 858; II, 1, 12, 136; 747; II, 1, 68, 47; with λαός or δῆμος: II, 1, 11, 661; 1070; II, 1, 12, 81; II, 1, 23, 23; II, 1, 68, 59; as a metaphor: II, 1, 11, 596; II, 1, 30, 186; II, 1, 68, 101. The occurrences at II, 1, 11, 847.912; 924 are metaphorical, but there the invective against the “cynic” (i.e., “dog”), Maximus, prompts a contrast between dog and shepherd, cynic and bishop: it is a different metaphor, with a different meaning. In hexametric poetry, the majority of occurrences is metaphorical: II, 1, 13, 142; II, 1, 16, 64; II, 1, 19, 102; II, 1, 45, 218; *Anth. Gr.* 8, 17–18. Exceptions: *Anth. Gr.* 8, 15 (with λαός); II, 1, 102, 9 (used as title). Interestingly, both exceptions are elegiacs and from epitaphs.

<sup>184</sup> Sometimes the metaphor is alluded to, without actually employing the word ποιμήν. At II, 1, 12, 38 for example, Gregory speaks of evil bishops alluding to Jesus’ saying at Mt. 7:15 on false prophets, that they are wolf in sheep’s clothings: τὸ κώδιον πάρελθε, τὸν λύκον βλέπε. A similar image at II, 1, 13, 162: Διπλὸς ἐστὶν ἕκαστος, οἷς λύκον ἀμφικαλύπτων. At II, 1, 12, 115–116, Gregory describes his own exploit in Constantinople and, though he does not use the word ποιμήν, it is clear that he presents himself as a shepherd in the best biblical tradition, defending his flock against wolves and giving it water: Κέκλημ’, ἐπηξα λαὸν ἐν μέσῳ λύκων, / Ποίμνην ἄνδρον τοῖς λόγοις ἐπήγασα. In this case, the metaphor is wholly meant in a doctrinal sense, i.e., Gregory reinforced the faith (ἐπηξα) of the Nicene community (λαὸν) living in an Arian city (ἐν μέσῳ λύκων) and educated through preaching (τοῖς λόγοις ἐπήγασα) a community (ποίμνην) in need of better instructions on dogmatic matters. It is curious that Gregory employs the verb πήγνυμι inside a flock-metaphor, because this reminds us of the relative stability conjured up by the shepherd metaphor compared to the fisherman metaphor. Finally, at II, 1, 12, 574, there is a cowherd metaphor, expressing how difficult would be for an unworthy bishop to lead a saintly faithful: Μὴ βοῦς ἐλαύνης κρείσσονας βοηλάτου (on this line see Meier 1989, 135).

### 2.2.1.3 In Ephrem

As in Gregory, also in Ephrem the name “shepherd” (*rā’ā*) is found as a frozen metaphor. In these instances, *rā’ā* is a mere substitute of *rēšā* or *rabbā*. Two examples of this usage are found in our poems:

ܟܕ ܪܥܝܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	14
...		
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (CN 16, 14; 19)	ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ 186 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	19

The two stanzas are concerned with the succession of bishops in Nisibis (Jacob, Babu, and Valgash). In stanza 14, the bishops are called “shepherds,” “teachers,” and “fathers” in lines 3–6. These three lines are clearly built in a synonymic parallelism; therefore, in this instance the three names *rā’awātā*, *mallpānē*, and *’abāhē* are to be intended as synonyms, stripped of their original meaning and employed as variations of the word *rēšā*, for “bishop”, highlighting its leadership function (see §3.1.3–4). In stanza 19, Nisibis speaks in the first person of her development, presenting herself as a growing child. In the previous stanza (18), the bishop was called *’abā*, “father”, in keeping with this personification. Here, however, the same bishop is called “shepherd” (*rā’yā*), and, since the words *ṭalyūtā* (“infancy”) and *’laymūtā* (“youth”), referring to Nisibis, are used only for human beings, it would be absurd to retain the name “shepherd” in its literal sense: consequently, it must be used as a generic term for “bishop”. A similar semantic shift happened to the word *mar’itā*, which is ordinarily employed to mean “diocese”. However, all usages of the word in this sense given by Payne Smith are later than Ephrem<sup>187</sup>. And yet Ephrem seems to know this derived meaning for *mar’itā*:

ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ 188 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (CN 14, 20)	ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
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185 “Look then how God / framed my generations // through the pastors [*b-rā’awātā*] I had, / and through the teachers [*b-mallpānē*] he gave me, // and through the fathers [*b-’abāhē*] he numbered for me.”

186 “When I was lifted from the ages / of infancy and youth [*ṭalyūtā wa-’laymūtā*], // the former terror passed, / passed the following fear, // and he gave me a mild pastor [*rā’yā bassīmā*].”

187 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3948, s.v. ܡܪܝܬܐ.

188 “Of the first [bishop], who begot the diocese [*d-īled mar’itā*], / his bosom kept her infancy [*yallūdūt-āh*], // the middle with his glad countenance / praised and gladdened her childhood [*ṭalyūt-āh*], // the last with his solemn countenance / inspires awe to her youth [*la-’laymūt-āh*].”

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ  
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ  
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ  
 (CN 19, 14, 4–9)

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ  
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ  
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ  
 189 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

In the first example (CN 14, 20) Ephrem personifies again the community of Nisibis: again we find terms like *ʿlaymūtā* or *ṭalyūtā*, suggesting a human metaphor, and this time the phrase “the first [bishop] who begot the *marʿitā*” excludes the literal meaning of the word *marʿitā* as “flock”, for the image of a bishop begetting a whole flock of sheep would be absurd. At CN 19, 14, Ephrem argues that collectives are shaped by the example of their leaders. An obvious example is the king with his army (7), and the same mechanism plays a role in church life. If in Ephrem’s example *mašrītā* (“army”) is paired with *malkā* (“king”), then the name of a religious group should be paired with *kāhnā*. This means that, in this context, *marʿitā* cannot have preserved its literal sense, and must mean “congregation”, “parish,” or “diocese”. These are not the only places where Ephrem employs the word *marʿitā* with this meaning<sup>190</sup>. To understand the semantic values of *marʿitā* in Ephrem’s language, as opposed to other terms with the same original meaning, such as *ʾānā*, we may compare it to English “flock” as opposed to, for example, “herd”: both terms retain the original meaning of “group of sheep or goats controlled by humans”, but “flock” is also habitually employed to identify a

**189** “The church is like a mirror, // which, like the countenance of its beholder, / accordingly, wears his shapes, // for, like the king such his host, / and like the priest, such his parish [*w-a(y)k kāhnā ʾāp marʿit-eh*], // each is shaped by them after themselves.”

**190** See: “Three priests dazzling / in likeness of the two luminaries, // In shifting transmitted one to the next / throne, orders and diocese [*kursyā w-ʿidā w-marʿitā*].” (CN 13, 1, 1–4, here *marʿitā* is grouped among typical attributes of the bishop); “yet, since you had no spouse [*ba(r)t-zawgā*] / like was Sarah for Abraham, // here, your spouse is your diocese [*hā marʿit-āk ba(r)t-zawg-āk*]! / Rear her children with your fidelity;” (CN 19, 1, 3–6, here *marʿitā* is again used inside a longer family metaphor; therefore, it is highly unlikely that the image is that of the flock of sheep). Other instances are more dubious, because, though the sentence in which they appear seems to require the derived sense, in the same stanza a reference to shepherding may activate the metaphor: “like that merchant [*taggārā*] of our flock [*marʿit-an*], / who multiplied the talent of your doctrine, // then parted and went to your haven: / I will speak of his musterer [*ʿallān-eh*], // who became head of the flock [*marʿitā*]” (CN 17, 1, 3–7, here the name recurs two times but, while at 7 it is clearly intended as a metaphor, as demonstrated by *ʿallānā* at 6, the occurrence at 3, with the bishop called “merchant”, seems to require the derived sense; unless Ephrem is introducing the metaphor already there); “Me too, the dregs of the flock [*šēhlā d-marʿitā*], / I did not skip on what was due, // I painted an image of both, / with the dyes of both, // that the herd [*ʾānā*] may see their ornaments, / and the flock [*marʿitā*] their beauties; // and since I am a speaking lamb [*ʿemrā*] / for You, God of Abraham, // in Abram’s tenure I praise You” (CN 17, 12; when *marʿitā* appears at line 1, nothing suggests it should be taken literally, for the name *šēhlā* has no relation to the semantic field of shepherding; later at 6 the term is repeated in parallelism with *ʾānā* at 5, which can only mean “flock” or “herd” in the literal sense, and with Ephrem’s self-definition as “lamb” at 7, so that in this case *marʿitā* should retain its original meaning, and maybe even the word at 1 should be taken in this sense).

“religious community”, such as a parish or a diocese, while “herd” does not have this established meaning, though it can still be used metaphorically for a group of people<sup>191</sup>.

In most cases, however, terms from the semantic field of shepherding remain in that semantic field and are employed metaphorically for the bishop, with a strong link to scriptural precedents. There is a wealth of parallel texts throughout the poems on Abraham (CN 17–21) that show these characteristics:

<p> <sup>192</sup> יחזקאל אהרן  יחזקאל אהרן  (CN 17, 5, 1–4) </p>	<p> יחזקאל אהרן  יחזקאל אהרן </p>
<p> <sup>193</sup> אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן </p>	<p> 3 אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  ... </p>
<p> <sup>194</sup> אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן </p>	<p> 4 אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן </p>
<p> <sup>195</sup> אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן </p>	<p> 5 אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן  אמרי אהרן </p>

<sup>191</sup> See the entries on Merriam-Webster online: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/flock> and <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/herd> (last accessed: 17.07.2024, 16:34).

<sup>192</sup> “The shepherd, appointed from his herd [*rā’yā da-praš men ‘ān-eh*] , / fed it [*rā’-āh*] on spiritual meadows [*margē*] , // and with his victorious staff [*huṭr-eh*] / from invisible wolves [*dēbē*] guarded it.”

<sup>193</sup> “Here is your flock [*mar’it-āk*] , o blessed, / rise and tend it [*s’ūr-eh*] , o diligent! // Jacob ordered the sheepfolds [*gezrē*] , / you order these speaking sheep [*erbē*] . . .”

<sup>194</sup> “The healthy sheep keep safe, / and heal [*s’ūr*] the one who’s sick, // and bind up the one who’s broken, / and seek the one who’s lost; // feed it on the meadow of Scriptures [*rā’-ēh b-margē*] / and quench it with the fountain of doctrine; // May firmness be a bulwark for you, / may the cross be a crook [*huṭrā*] for you, // and may be justice peace for you! / **Blessed is he who increased your victories!**”

<sup>195</sup> “May be with you among your sheepfold [*b-gezr-āk*] / the strength that was with David, // for if he a transient sheep [*emrā*] / from the mouth of the lion delivered, // how becoming of you, o winner, / to jealously wrest from the Enemy // the soul, which is above all, / since nothing can ransom it, // but Christ’s blood. / **Blessed is who, sold, bought back everything!**”

[illegible]

This chain of texts comes from different contexts. The four lines of *CN* 17 are part of a longer celebration of the newly elected Abraham, *CN* 19 extensively employs biblical examples to exhort the new bishop, and finally *CN* 20 is concerned with the preservation of orthodoxy and the avoiding of schisms in the community. The passages from *CN* 19 showcase many of the biblical models of the shepherd metaphor. At *CN* 19, 3, 3-4, Ephrem mentions Jacob's ordering of the flocks of Laban (Gen. 30), a passage already encountered in Gregory's II, 1, 12, 690-695, though in a completely different context. What the two poems have in common their references to Jacob is his role as the paradigmatic shepherd among the patriarchs: Gregory does not even mention him by name, but only as ὁ ποιμήν. In the stanza that follows the passage from Ephrem quoted above (stanza 4), Ephrem reworks the prophecy of salvation in Hes. 34, following closely the wording in the Peshitta<sup>198</sup>. Ezekiel's prophecy has God tending the sheep, but Ephrem applies it to the bishop: this might be explained by the reference later in Hes. 34 to a

196 “[...] Moses committed to Joshua // a sheepfold [gezrā] whose half was wolves [dēbē], / whereas to you a flock [marʿitā] was entrusted // whose third and fourth part is consecrated. / **Blessed is he who adorned your flock [marʿit-āk]!**”

197 "It is meet for a new shepherd [*rā'yā*] / to inspect the herd [*nes'ūr 'ānā*] anew, // to know how great is its number [*minyān-āh*] / and to see which is its need. // This is the herd [*'ānā*] redeemed by the blood / of him, who is Master of the shepherds [*rabba d-rā'awātā*]. // Call the sheep [*'erba*] by its name and let it pass, / for the flock's [*d-mar'itā*] name and census [*hušbān-āh*] // are written in the Book of Life. / **Blessed is he who claims its number** [*minyān-āh*]!"

198 Cf.: “the healthy sheep keep safe” (*neqyē da-ḥlīmē naṭṭar*) (1) with “I will guard the fat and strong” (*d-šammīnā wa-d-’aššīnā’ aṭṭar*, Hes. 34:16) and the word *neqyē* employed at Hes. 34:17 and 20; “and heal the one who’s sick” (*wa-s’ūr l-’aydā da-krihā*) (2) with “[I] will strengthen that which was sick” (*da-krihā ’ahīl*) (Hes. 34:16); “and bind up the one who’s broken” (*wa-’šūb l-’aydā da-tbīr*) (3) with “[I] will bind up that which was broken” (*w-da-tbīrā e’aššeb*) (Hes. 34:16); “and seek the one who’s lost” (*wa-pqūd l-’aydā d-’abīdā*) (4) with “I will seek that which was lost” (*d-’abīdā ’eb’e*) (Hes. 34:16). Ephrem quotes Hes. 34:16 backwards, starting with the last item of the list (guarding the strong sheep) and following faithfully the sequence until the first (seeking the lost). Note that the verb at line 2, *s’ar* is often employed by Ephrem (CN 19, 3, 2; 4, 2; CN 20, 3, 2) for the shepherd’s review of his flock. In Hes. 34:11–12, the same verb is used of God’s review of the flock of Israel, and the Greek version has the verb ἐπισκέπτομαι. Similarly, the word ἐπισκοπος used for Christ at 1Pet. 2:25 together with ποιμήν is translated in the Peshitta as *sā’ōrā*, “reviewer”, from the same root (see §2.1.1).

messianic shepherd, a “David”, enacting God’s plan for the people, so that this David may be interpreted as the mediator of God’s promise in the preceding verses<sup>199</sup>. That Ephrem interpreted Hes. 34 in this way is shown by the comparison of the bishop with David in the stanza immediately following (stanza 5). Here, with a reference to 1Sam. 17:34–36, David is presented as another paradigmatic shepherd in the Bible, this time among the kings, as Jacob was among the patriarchs<sup>200</sup>. This is due to David’s having been a literal shepherd before he became king, just as Jacob, before becoming a patriarch, had been a shepherd for Laban. Stanza 6 completes the cycle, comparing episcopal succession to prophetic succession, in this case the succession of Moses and Joshua. Like David for kings and Jacob for patriarchs, Moses is the paradigmatic shepherd for prophets, because he served in that role for his father-in-law, according to biblical narrative<sup>201</sup>. Moreover, already in the Bible itself, the succession of Joshua to Moses’s position is represented through pastoral imagery<sup>202</sup>. Therefore, CN 19 presents a complete summary of Old Testament shepherd metaphors, transferring them from the patriarchs, kings, and prophets to the bishop and employing them to frame the tasks and powers of the bishop.

At CN 20, 3 the situation is different, since here the theme is orthodoxy and its defence against heresy; thus, Ephrem refers much more to the New Testament, because it contains more material on this topic. On one side, the bishop has some traits of Christ as “the good shepherd”, calling the sheep by name and leading them out of the fold<sup>203</sup>. On the other, Ephrem echoes John the Evangelist when he says that Jesus redeemed the flock by giving his blood, thus making the Saviour the true “good shepherd”<sup>204</sup>. The rela-

**199** As regards CN 19, 4, 9 “may be justice [*quštā*] peace [*šlāmā*] for you!”, I could not find parallels for the couple *quštā/šlāmā* except for Isaiah’s prophecy on Hezekiah’s reign at 2Reg. 20:3.19 and Jes. 38:3; 39:8. Even though the words are different, line 9 echoes Old Testament messianic prophecies such as Ps. 85:11–12.

**200** “And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.” (1Sam. 17:34–36). Ephrem mentions only the lion and not the bear, because he wants to give a spiritual interpretation of the passage and the “Enemy” (CN 19, 5, 6), the devil, is famously compared to a lion at 1Petr. 5:8.

**201** Ex. 3:1. Both Moses and Jacob were shepherd under their father-in-law, David under his father.

**202** “And Moses spake unto the Lord, saying, Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd (*ʿa(y)k ʾānā d-layt l-āh rāyā*). And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight.” (Num. 27:15–19).

**203** Cf.: “Call the sheep by its name and let it pass” (*qrāy w-ʿaʿbar ʿerbā ba-šm-eh*) (CN 20, 3, 7) with “he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.” (*hū qārē ʿerbā ba-šm-eh w-hū mappeq l-eh*), in the Old Syriac (from the Sinaitic Palimpsest) of Joh. 10:3. In the Peshitta, “sheep” is at the plural (*ʿerbē*): Ephrem’s formulation suggests an Old Syriac reading.

**204** Cf.: “This is the herd [*ʾānā*] redeemed by the blood / of him [*da-zbīnā ba-dm-eh*]” (CN 20, 3, 5–6) with “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. [ . . . ] and I lay down my life for

tionship between Christ and bishop envisaged in this stanza is one of proxy, as demonstrated by Christ's attribute of *rabbā d-rā'awātā*, "head" or "master of the shepherds" (6). The source of this divine delegation to the bishops, the idea of a flock purchased by Christ's blood, and the danger that heresies pose—as wolves endanger a herd—to this order of things are the substance of Paul's last speech to the Ephesian bishops in Acts 20, a passage containing the word *ἐπίσκοπος*/*'epīsqupā*<sup>205</sup>. However, the expression "master of the shepherds" is found at 1 Petr. 5:4, a similar passage in which an apostle gives final advice to the bishops/presbyters of a community, reminding them of their dependence upon Christ's leadership<sup>206</sup>. This hierarchical dependence also entails a chronological limitation of the bishop's mandate, which 1Petr. 5 stresses by evoking the "glory that shall be revealed", the future reappearance of the "master shepherd" and the crown of undying glory that awaits the bishops as a reward for their service. This eschatological perspective is alluded to also by Ephrem, as he mentions the biblical tradition of the heavenly "book of life" (*spar hayyā*, 9). This literary motif is found already in the Old Testament, though its interpretation is not always eschatological, whereas in the New Testament it is decidedly so<sup>207</sup>. Indeed, the majority of biblical occurrences are in Revelation. There the idea of the number of the saved is prominent: the biblical model is clearly the Old Testament censuses, projected onto the eschatological level<sup>208</sup>. Another apocalyptic book in which these literary elements are prominent is the book of

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the sheep." (Joh. 10:11.15). Ephrem paraphrases the "giving of his own life" by Jesus with the theme of redemption through blood (see Mt. 26:28; Rom. 3:25; Eph. 1:7; Hebr. 9:14; 1Petr. 1:19) thanks to the OT tradition that blood is life (Lev. 17:11.14; Dtn. 12:23).

205 προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς καὶ παντὶ τῷ ποιμνίῳ (*mar'itā*), ἐν ᾧ ὑμᾶς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἔθετο ἐπισκόπους (*'epīsqōpē*) ποιμαίνειν (*d-ter'ōn*) τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἣν περιποιήσατο διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου (*da-qnā-h ba-dm-eh*). ἐγὼ οἶδα ὅτι εἰσελεύσονται μετὰ τὴν ἄφιξίν μου λύκοι (*dēbē*) βαρεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς μὴ φειδόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου (*mar'itā*), καὶ ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν ἀναστήσονται ἄνδρες λαλοῦντες διεστραμμένα τοῦ ἀποσπᾶν τοὺς μαθητὰς ὅπισω αὐτῶν. (Act. 20:28–30; Peshitta readings in parentheses). The connotation of "delegate" or "proxy" for someone else's authority in the word *ἐπίσκοπος* is pointed out by Guerra y Gomez 1962, 181, 377.

206 Πρεσβυτέρους (*qaššīšē*) τοὺς ἐν ὑμῖν παρακαλῶ ὁ συμπρεσβύτερος καὶ μάρτυς τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθημάτων, ὁ καὶ τῆς μελλούσης ἀποκαλύπτεσθαι δόξης κοινωνός· ποιμάνετε (*r'aw*) τὸ ἐν ὑμῖν ποῖμνιον (*mar'itā*) τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπισκοποῦντες (*s'ūr(w)*) μὴ ἀναγκαστῶς ἀλλ' ἐκουσίως κατὰ θεόν, μηδὲ αἰσχροκερδῶς ἀλλὰ προθύμως, μηδ' ὡς κατακυριεύοντες τῶν κλήρων (*mar'itā [sic!]*) ἀλλὰ τύποι γινόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου· καὶ φανερωθέντος τοῦ ἀρχιποίμενος (*rab-rā'awātā*) κομειῖσθε τὸν ἀμαράντινον τῆς δόξης στέφανον (1Petr. 5:1–5; Peshitta readings in parentheses).

207 Old Testament occurrences: Ex. 33:32–33; Ps. 68:28; Jes. 4:3; Hes. 13:9; Dan. 7:10; 12:1; Mal. 3:16, but only those in Daniel are decidedly eschatological. In the New Testament: Lc. 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Hebr. 12:23. In Revelation: Apc. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12.15; 21:27. Other occurrences in Ephrem: *Epiph.* 6, 13; 10, 18; *hymn. eccl.* 8, 6; 11, refrain; 8–9.

208 Apc 7:4, where the Syriac version has *minyānā* for the Greek ἀριθμός but note that at 7:9 the multitude before the throne and the Lamb has a number (*minyānā*) that no one can count. The topic of census surfaces at: Ex. 30:12; Num. 1:2.49; 4:2; 14:29; 26:2; 2Sam. 24:2.9=1Chron. 21:2.5 (*minyānā w-ḥuṣbānā*). The word *ḥuṣbānā* is employed also at Mt. 19:23, in the parable of the unforgiving servant, which has a clearly eschatological meaning.



Enoch<sup>209</sup>. However, we need not posit that Ephrem knew Revelation or Enoch directly; he could be subscribing to a literary tradition in common with these books, whose elements were all already in the Old Testament: the census of the people, the book of life, God the Shepherd holding the shepherds of the people to account.

From the point of view of content, the shepherd metaphor serves to define the tasks of the bishop and moral expectations placed upon him, a function that goes back to the figure's use in the Bible. As I already mentioned regarding the metaphor of the head and the body, it is far from clear whether these definitions of the bishop's activity served to praise the individual bishop, to bind him to model behaviours, or to denounce his failure to conform to these behaviours. In general, the shepherd metaphor stresses the leadership role of the bishop, but a leadership conceived as care and providing. This care goes in two directions: inwardly, the bishop is called to take care of the sheep in their individual needs (hence the imagery taken from Hes. 34:16) and, collectively, to educate them on Scripture, identified through the image of the pasture or meadow (*margā*); outwardly, the bishop should defend the congregation from wolves (*dēbē*), a common biblical image to identify heretics and heretical teachings. This model of the bishop agrees with Gregory's self-presentation in Constantinople (II, 1, 10, 15–16; see note 31): sound doctrine feeds the flock; heretical teaching is like the wolves lying in ambush around the sheepfold. On the other hand, Ephrem's stress on right biblical teaching can be linked to the Syriac view of Christianity as a "school", and of the prelates as primarily teachers (see §2.1.2.2).

#### 2.2.1.4 The term 'allānā

Finally, there is one lexical item worth discussing on its own, the noun 'allānā. The word is found only once in the Bible: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon *the little ones*" (Zach. 13:7). The King James Version here follows the Masoretic Text, which at the end of the verse has 'al-ha-ššo'ārīm, meaning "the little ones". However, the Septuagint has ἐπὶ τοὺς ποιμένας, and the Peshitta has 'al-'allānē. This rendering suggests that the term means "musterer", someone who leads a flock but is lesser in rank than a "shepherd". However, the term is overwhelmingly attested as a title for bishops and prelates and, in a few early sources (among which Ephrem and Aphrahat), with the meaning "disciple"<sup>210</sup>. Ephrem's use of the term appears contradictory, and since we do not know much about the organisation

<sup>209</sup> *Hen. aeth.* 47, 47 (theme of the book and of the number of the saved); 89, 68–77 and 90, 20 (the shepherds, the books and the Master of the shepherds); 103, 103 (the Book of Life).

<sup>210</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2879, s.v. ܐܠܠܢܐ. On Ephrem's usage for Old Testament leaders and the apostles see Bou Mansour 2019, 32–35.

prehensive, concrete scenario. Here are the occurrences of the term:

<p>             ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              (CN 14, 1)         </p>	<p>             ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              (CN 14, 1)         </p>
<p>             ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              (CN 17, 1, 6-9; 3, 3-4; 4, 1-4)         </p>	<p>             ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              (CN 17, 1, 6-9; 3, 3-4; 4, 1-4)         </p>
<p>             ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              (CN 18, 3, 1-3)         </p>	<p>             ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              (CN 18, 3, 1-3)         </p>
<p>             ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              (CN 31, 30-31)         </p>	<p>             ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              (CN 31, 30-31)         </p>
<p>             ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              (CN 33, 6, 1-2)         </p>	<p>             ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              ብሔራዊ ስልጣን              (CN 33, 6, 1-2)         </p>

211 “Three shepherds [*rā’āwātā*] / had many musterers (*‘allānē*), // one mother in the citadel / had many daughters in every region: // since wrath ruined her folds [*dayrātā*], / may peace restore her churches!”

212 “[ . . . ] I will speak of his musterer [‘allānā], // who became head of the flock [rēšā l-mar’ūtā]: / disciple was of three, // he was the fourth chief. // [ . . . ] rejoiced the fold of the musterers [dayrā d-‘allānē], / seeing the succession of their orders. // [ . . . ] he chose him in the multitude of musterers [‘allānē], / because he gave proof of his faith; // Time examined him in the herd [‘ānā], / and long wait proved him as a crucible.”

**213** “The last musterer [*ʿalānā* (*ʿa*)*ḥrāyā*], / who was lifted and became head of his limbs, // the little who took primogeniture. . .”

214 “The new shepherd [*rā’yā*] set out, / but at first met him // Downpour and fog, / that tormented the mustersers [*‘allānē*], // and loved the wolves, hoping / that the shepherd [*rā’yā*] was a wolf. /// Since the eye of mustersers [*‘allānē*] / is dulled by the darkness, // may their sight and their mind / be restored by your light, // and may they convert to the shepherd [*rā’yā*] / and may they tend his lambs.”

Blessed is he who gives life to the body at one time  
And life to souls at another!  
Through a clear shepherd, give me to drink  
From the clear river of Books!  
(*hymn. fid.* 35, 10, 9–12)

...  
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ

The pastors of our day, having seen  
Him so disgraced because of his sheep,  
Like those drunk with the taste of wine,  
Think that he is the chief of pastors and shepherds  
(*hymn. fid.* 36, 4)

ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ

The clear font, never troubled,  
That proceeds from the Clear One: debaters have  
disturbed it,  
And it has become troubled, because impurity has  
come in  
It has rendered serenity troubled  
and the flock has gone mad,  
Along with its shepherds  
(*hymn. fid.* 59, 11)<sup>216</sup>

ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ

ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
<sup>217</sup>ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
(*Homilies on Faith* 6, 13–16)

ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ

ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
(*hymn. haer.* 56, 10, 1–3)

ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ  
<sup>218</sup>ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܢܐ

Among these passages, the word ‘*allānā*’ is sometimes employed for bishops: at *CN* 33, 6, 1, where it refers to the bishop of Harran; at *hymn. fid.* 36, 4, where it is employed for heretical bishops at line 1 and for bishops in general at 4; at *Homilies on Faith* 6, 14, where it stands in synonymous parallelism with *rā’yā*, again for heretical bishops; at *hymn. fid.* 59, 11 it again refers to the leaders of the church quarrelling over the Trinity, and therefore probably to bishops. These cases are sometimes doubtful, as the parallelism of *rā’yā* and ‘*allānā*’ at *hymn. fid.* 36, 4, 4 and *Homilies on Faith* 6, 13–14 may well include bishops *and* priests. The occurrence at *hymn. fid.* 35, 10, 11 is highly uncertain, because the context is not clear and seems to point to a divine figure behind the ‘*allānā*’, Christ or the Spirit, but it could also be a reference to the bishop as teacher of Scripture. Anyway, the passage is probably spurious, so its authority is not equal to the

<sup>215</sup> “Your musterer [‘*allān-āk*’] imitated / You, o Lord of All.”

<sup>216</sup> Translations of the *hymn. fid.* from Wickes 2015, 207, 209.

<sup>217</sup> The shepherd (*rā’yā*) fights with his peer / and the musterer (‘*allānā*’) with his companion: // in the strife of the shepherds (*rā’awātā*) / perished the herd and the flock (‘*ānā w-mar’itā*).’

<sup>218</sup> “Let not, o Lord, without reward / the works of your musterer [*d-‘allān-āk*], // for I have not perturbed your herd [‘*ān-āk*].”

others<sup>219</sup>. In the other occurrences, the term identifies a subordinate of the bishop. This is clear for *hymn. haer.* 56, 10, 1–3, *CN* 31, 30–31, and *CN* 14, 1: in the first case, Ephrem is referring to himself, and since there is no indication that he was ever a bishop, the noun must be referring to another role in the church, a subordinate role; at *CN* 31, 30–31, the *‘allānē* in the plural are opposed to the *rā’yā*, in the singular, but Ephrem hopes that they will turn back and follow him in providing for the lambs; at *CN* 14, 1, the *‘allānē* are related to the shepherds (*rā’awātā*)—that is, the first three bishops of Nisibis, as the many villages in the countryside are related to the fortified (*karkā*, 4) city of Nisibis, which points to a subordinate relationship. The occurrence at *CN* 18, 3 is interpreted by Beck as referring to the bishop Abraham as bishop<sup>220</sup>. This is probably due to the attribute (*‘a*)*hrāyā*, which is attached to the noun, because in many cases this attribute is ascribed to the latest elected bishop<sup>221</sup>. However, the noun *‘allānā* should be interpreted also here as referring to a subordinate to the bishop, because *CN* 18, 3 is a text parallel to *CN* 17, 1, 6–9; 3, 3–4; 4, 1–4, where Ephrem expresses in different ways the same fact: Abraham was chosen from among the “musterers” before becoming “the head”—that is, the bishop—of the flock. The attribute (*‘a*)*hrāyā* is explained by line 3 of the same *CN* 18, 3: Abraham was not only a musterer but also the youngest among the musters, the “last” in this sense. Therefore, *‘allānā* can identify a bishop as well as some subordinate of the bishop; the term preserves always a connotation of “subordinate”, “delegate,” and it can be adapted to the bishop on the basis of the dependence of that bishop’s authority on the authority of Christ, which Ephrem hinted at in *CN* 20, 3<sup>222</sup>.

It remains to see what kind of subordinates of the bishop the term *‘allānā* means. Beck interprets the term flexibly, sometimes as “suffragan bishop” (notably at *CN* 14, 1) or as priest (the occurrences at *CN* 17) or as deacon, a translation suggested by Ephrem’s self-styling as *‘allānā* (*hymn. haer.* 56, 10) and the ancient biographical tradition identifying him as a deacon<sup>223</sup>. Indeed, the case of Ephrem is the only one in which we can compare his use of the word to external sources employing more traditional terms, such as “deacon”<sup>224</sup>. Bou Mansour has recently criticised Beck’s interpretations of the term<sup>225</sup>. On the idea of *‘allānā* as “suffragan bishop” at *CN* 14, 1, Bou Mansour denies that such a title is attested in early Syriac times. On the possibility that the term means *both* priest and deacon at *CN* 17, he is sceptical, because Ephrem says that Abraham was chosen as bishop from among the *‘allānē*, and there is no trace of evidence that a deacon was

219 Wickes 2015, 203n1.

220 Beck 1961b, 43n1.

221 E.g., *CN* 13, 1, 6; 2, 6; 4, 5; 6, 5; 7, 6; 14, 5; 15, 5; 16, 6; 17, 5; *CN* 14, 3, 5; 4, 5; 15, 5; 18, 5; 20, 5; 24, 6; *CN* 21, 21, 6.

222 This is clear at *CN* 33, 6, where the bishop is *‘allānā* of Christ and at *hymn. fid.* 36, 4 where the bishops wrongly define Christ as *just* the *rēš-‘allānē*, the head of the musters. Murray 2006, 168n4.

223 Beck 1961b, 43n1, 54n2.

224 Apart from the unreliable *Vita* tradition, Ephrem is called deacon by Jerome (*vir. ill.* 115)

225 Bou Mansour 2019, 32–35.

ever elected to the episcopate in Syriac antiquity. Therefore, the “fold of musterers” at *CN* 17, 3, 3 (*dayrā d-‘allānē*), rejoicing for the continuity of its succession, should indicate bishops rejoicing in the election of a new bishop.

Bou Mansour’s arguments are not conclusive: three points can be raised against them. First, the exclusion of deacons from the ‘*allānē*’ of *CN* 17 is not really warranted: from the earliest time of the church until at least the end of the fourth century, deacons were very important, and it was not impossible that a deacon would become bishop (see §1.2.1). It is true that no such cases are documented in Syria, but neither are there clues that exclude this possibility, and a comparison with the rest of the church suggests that a deacon could indeed become bishop.

Second, the “fold of musterers” at *CN* 17, 3, 3 (*dayrā d-‘allānē*) may well be composed of priests and deacons of the city, as Beck interprets it, as well as of bishops convened to elect Abraham, as per Bou Mansour<sup>226</sup>. Admittedly, the expression “succession of their orders” (*yubbāl-dargay-hōn*) suggests primarily bishops, since the term *yubbālā* is frequently used by Ephrem for the episcopal succession. However, as Beck rightly notes, in all other instances in *CN* 17 the word ‘*allānā*’ means deacon or priest, and it is used to highlight the fact that Abraham was priest or deacon *before* he became bishop. It would be very awkward if the word would mean “bishop” only here and *ex abrupto*. But if the musterers here are not the bishops, what is the “succession of their orders”? If we consider that only the local bishop could order priests and deacons, then it is possible to see the election of a new bishop as the continuation of the other holy orders. Moreover, Abraham was elected bishop when he was a priest or a deacon, a ‘*allānā*’, so that his election can be seen as a succession in the holy orders, from priest or deacon to bishop, and therefore as a pledge of continuity and unity between them. There is more than one way to make sense of the expression *yubbāl-dargay-hōn* even without admitting that *dayrā d-‘allānē* refers to bishops instead of priests and deacons.

Third, there is no reason to rule out the existence of suffragan bishops at Ephrem’s time, for, as has already been said, the organisation of ecclesiastical regions around the metropolis, and of synods of bishops around the metropolitan, reaches back to the third century and is sanctioned by the Council of Nicaea. The various chronicles covering the fourth century confirm that the Nicene canons on metropolitans were indeed enforced in Nisibis and surroundings<sup>227</sup>. In this context, it is easy to see why Beck would have

<sup>226</sup> *Dayrā* appears also at *CN* 21, 12: “may the discerning [*pārōšē*] pray with you, / and proclaim a fast for the educated [*yaddū‘ē*], // and may your pen [*dayr-āk*] be in sorrow, / for the one that is lost [*‘ebad*] to sin, // that he may turn to repentance. / **Blessed is he who found the lost sheep!**!”. The context is still a shepherd metaphor, though not a very developed one. The word *dayrā* is not employed for the flock at large, but for the clergy (as at *CN* 17, 3) and for the “discerning” and “educated”, maybe meaning the ascetics. The application of the metaphor anticipates the later, figurative meaning of the word, “monastery”. This meaning could not have been present at the time of Ephrem, lacking the underlying reality of coenobitic monasticism.

<sup>227</sup> §2.1.2.2 n 92.

seen the *'allānē* of CN 14, 1, 2 as suffragan bishops: lines 1–4 establish a parallel between the three bishops of Nisibis and the fortified city (*karkā*) on one side and the many “musterers” and daughters of the city all around on the other; if the bishops take care of the church in the metropolis, then the “musterers” must be those who take care of the churches all around, in the “daughters” of the city (that is, its villages). This is confirmed by the fact that the same mother-daughter relationship is envisaged by Ephrem at CN 34, 3 for Edessa and Harran, and Edessa is the metropolis of Harran<sup>228</sup>. Naturally, there is no need to envisage the relationships between episcopal seats hinted at in these texts as organised with the same precision as in the Latin and Greek world. Such precision is not to be totally excluded, since the vagueness of titles may be due to the medium of poetry more than to a lack of canonical precision on the ground, and yet, in the absence of direct testimony on Ephrem’s times, a certain vagueness must remain in our reconstruction: it is safe to say that some seats (like Edessa and Nisibis) enjoyed a privileged status and that other seats (like Harran) depended on them; there must have been some kind of enforcement of the canons of Nicaea in the Roman East, and there must have been a kind of metropolitan structure. It remains unclear whether villages and cities had their own bishops, whether these were “suffragan bishops” or “chorepiscopi” or simply priests, and, in general, how the hierarchy of the clergy was configured under the metropolitan<sup>229</sup>.

In all this vagueness, it is clear that *'allānā*, a word used both for the bishop and for his subordinates, expresses a role of guidance while at the same time limiting it<sup>230</sup>: the “musterer” has the task of guiding the flock, but he acts under the orders of the true shepherd, or the “master of the shepherds”, Christ. The metaphorical language of shepherding allows Ephrem to represent with adequate flexibility the complex relationships of hierarchy and community, to present them in a biblical framework, and to make them poetically lively and evident.

To wrap up this survey, we should highlight how Gregory’s and Ephrem’s treatments of the shepherd metaphor are similar. Both refuse to connect the bishop to the apostles by way of the fisherman metaphor, preferring to look at the OT rhetoric of leadership developed through the shepherd imagery. Both already know of a use employ of the metaphor for the bishop but can also still revitalise it when the context requires it. As regards the requirements of context, both poets tend to employ the living meta-

228 “But you, o Harran, my treasure is in your neighbourhood, / the glorious Edessa, the beautiful! / Daughter, imitate your mother, who is salt in the world, / and season with her doctrine your mind!” (CN 34, 3, 3–6).

229 Murray 2006, 22 quotes and discusses fifth-century documents from the church of the East on the titles and hierarchy.

230 Therefore, my interpretation is in agreement with Sokoloff’s analysis of the term: at Sokoloff 2009, 1105, s.v. *حلم*, he defines it at the same time as “servant of a shepherd”, “leader” and “clerics aside from bishop, clergy”. Note the ambivalence between leadership and submission and the purely negative definition of the canonical status of the *'allānē* as something *other* than the bishop.

phor when they want to describe (or prescribe) a model of leadership for the bishop in relation to his community. The main element of difference between the two is the genuinely poetic one: while Gregory's poetry follows clear standards of style imposed by *paideia*, so that his metaphorical use of ποιμήν is concentrated in hexametric poems, Ephrem's poetry finds its artistry in the creative relationship with the biblical text, so that Ephrem evokes, among the categories of patriarchs, prophets, and kings, those who had been shepherds, or he recovers the word 'allānā from Zach. 13:7 to express the ambiguous position of the bishop and his clergy between a higher authority and responsibility towards their subjects.

### 2.2.2 Farmer/vintner

Agricultural metaphors have been employed ever since Old Testament times for the people and its relationship with God. Among these metaphors, the comparison of Israel to a vine having God as a vintner is probably the most important<sup>231</sup>. The metaphor becomes parable in the New Testament, in the tale of the wicked husbandmen and in that of the workers in the vineyard, and it becomes an allegory when Jesus speaks of the "true vineyard"<sup>232</sup>. Other parables are concerned with the cultivation of cereals, such as the parable of the sower and that of the tares<sup>233</sup>. However, agricultural metaphors are less important in defining the relationship between God or leader and people in the Bible than the shepherd imagery, and, as a consequence, they had less impact on ecclesiastical titles.

In Gregory's poems, the metaphor is scarcely present. At II, 1, 13, 41, it has a clearly biblical tone. The line is in fact a paraphrase of Ps. 79:14 (in the Septuagint; Ps. 80:13 in the KJV):

#### II, 1, 13, 41

Πῶς δέ τε σὺς μονόφορβος ἐμὴν δηλήσαθ' ἄλων;  
How come a lone-grazing boar spoils my vineyard?

#### Ps. 80:13 (79:14 Septuagint)

ἐλυμήνατο αὐτήν σὺς ἐκ δρυμοῦ, καὶ μονιὸς [v.l.: ὄνος] ἄγριος κατενεμήσατο αὐτήν.  
The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it.

The vineyard is clearly the church, and the boar, as the following lines (43–45) clarify, is Satan, spoiling the church through bad leaders. A comparison of the two lines makes clear how much Gregory is indebted to the school exercise of paraphrasis and how well

<sup>231</sup> Gen. 49:22; Hos. 10:1; Jes. 5:1–7; 27:2–5; Jer. 2:21; 5:10; 6:9; 12:10; Hes. 15:1–8; 17:3–10; 19:10–14; Ps. 80:9–19; Cant. 2:15; 8:11–12.

<sup>232</sup> Mt. 20:1–16; 21:33–46; Mc. 12:1–12; Lc. 20:9–19; Joh. 15:1–2. See also Mc. 4:26–29; Jac. 5:7.

<sup>233</sup> Mt 13:1–43; Mc. 4:1–20; Lc. 8:4–15.

he commands it. The ἄμπελος of Ps. 80:9 becomes a much more poetic ἄλωή, uniquely written (if the edition in the *Patrologia Graeca* is right) with rough breathing like the Attic form ἄλως, ἄλω<sup>234</sup>. Instead of the verbs λυμαίνομαι and κατανέμομαι, never used in hexameters, Gregory writes the very epic δηλέομαι. The σῦς remains a σῦς, because the noun is employed by Homer and preferred to the form ὕς: indeed, the term appears in *Il.* 9, 539 for the Calydonian boar, which wreaks havoc on Oeneus's vineyard (ἄλωή)<sup>235</sup>. Μονόφορβος is a Gregorian creation and means literally “which grazes [φορβή] by himself [μόνος]”. It is employed only in one other passage, another paraphrase of Ps. 80, this time referring to himself:

Ἡ μεγάλην, φραγμοῖο διαρραισθέντος, ἄλωήν  
 Νηλειῶς τρυγῶσι παρατροχάοντες ὀδῖται,  
 Καὶ δρυμόθεν μονόφορβος ἐῷ δηλήσας ὀδόντι  
 Αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ πόνος ἐστὶν ἀγάστονος  
 (II, 1, 1, 189–192)

Since in this passage δρυμόθεν is the Homeric paraphrase of ἐκ δρυμοῦ in the psalm, μονόφορβος should paraphrase μονιός ἄγριος. The expression is highly problematic: the Masoretic text has *zīz-śāday*, “the *zīz* of the field”, with the rare word *zīz*, attested only here, at Ps. 50:11, and at Jes. 66:11, and variously interpreted<sup>236</sup>. The Greek translators chose the word ἄγριος to translate “of the field”, which seems correct, and to translate *zīz* they used μονιός, which, however, is an adjective, so that the sentence lacks a noun, and μονιός is also redundant in respect to ἄγριος, meaning “savage”, “lonely”. Indeed, the Vatican and Sinaitic manuscripts of the Septuaginta have ὄνος instead of μονιός at Ps. 79:14, which would make much more sense, but Gregory's choice of the prefix μονο- shows that he read μονιός there<sup>237</sup>. Gregory then interprets μονιός ἄγριος as referring to the boar, and synthesises an epic-sounding epithet, combining the meaning of κατανέμομαι and of ἄγριος/μονιός. Here we see how, thanks to the constraints of Homeric language, the paraphrastic exercise becomes both a form of biblical exegesis and an artistic creation.

At II, 1, 12, 117, the metaphor of the sower follows that of the shepherd to express Gregory's work in Constantinople: “[I] sowed the faith that struck root thanks to God”<sup>238</sup>.

<sup>234</sup> Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 75, s.v. ἄλωή

<sup>235</sup> ἡ δὲ χολωσαμένη δῖον γένος ἰοχέαιρα / ὤρσεν ἐπὶ χλοῦνην σὺν ἄγριον ἀργιόδοντα, / ὅς κακὰ πόλλ' ἐρδεσκεν ἔθων Οἰνῆρος ἄλωήν (*Hom. Il.* 9, 539).

<sup>236</sup> For an overview of the interpretations of the word *zīz*, see Wazana 2008, who traces its interpretation as a mythological giant bird in Jewish sources but has also a good note on the different biblical versions and translation at 118n32.

<sup>237</sup> See Thomas 1965, who, however, is not entirely clear in his formulation. The Vaticanus and Sinaiticus both offer the reading ὄνος and in both this reading has been corrected in μονιός. The Alexandrinus, on the other side, has only μονιός. Thus, *Greg. Naz.* II, 1, 1, 191 and II, 1, 13, 41 may be added to the *testimonia* in favour of μονιός.

<sup>238</sup> Ἐσπεῖρα πίστιν τῷ Θεῷ ριζουμένην (II, 1, 12, 117).



As noted by Meier, the idea is found in the parable of the growing seed (Mc. 4:26–29), but also in 1Cor. 3:6–9<sup>239</sup>. The link to these passages of Scripture reminds the audience that Gregory, as bishop, did not have an absolute power over the community, whose growth is always God's work; and on the other side, his success proves that God approved of the mission, since only God could have granted it. Finally, the image of the single ripe grape in an unripe cluster, employed in Jes. 65:8, is adapted by Gregory at II, 1, 12, 89: there, it was the good among the people that God would spare from his judgement; here, Gregory portrays the Nicene community of Constantinople, surrounded by heretics and in a hostile environment<sup>240</sup>.

Agricultural metaphors are much more developed in Ephrem, both for their quantity and for their nature as quasi-titles for the bishop. The scope and meaning of the vine and vintner metaphor of CN 13 will be treated at §4.3. Here, the farmer metaphors will be analysed. The majority appear in the poems on Abraham:

<p>             241 ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              (CN 17, 7)           </p>	<p>             ܝܕܝܗܝ ܕܥܡܐ              ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ           </p>
<p>             ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ           </p>	<p>             ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ           </p>
<p>             ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ           </p>	<p>             ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ              ܟܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ           </p>

**239** Meier 1989, 88. ἐγὼ ἐφύτευσα, Ἀπολλῶς ἐπότισεν, ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς ἠύξανεν· ὥστε οὔτε ὁ φυτεῦν ἐστὶν τι οὔτε ὁ ποτίζων ἀλλ' ὁ αὐξάνων θεός. ὁ φυτεῦν δὲ καὶ ὁ ποτίζων ἐν εἰσιν, ἕκαστος δὲ τὸν ἴδιον μισθὸν λήμψεται κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον κόπον· θεοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί, θεοῦ γεώργιον, θεοῦ οἰκοδομή ἐστε (1Cor. 3:6–9). The metaphor is an extension of the reasoning of Ps. 126:1–2.

**240** Οὕτως λέγει κύριος "Ὁν τρόπον εὐρεθήσεται ὁ ῥῶξ ἐν τῷ βότρυι καὶ ἐροῦσιν Μὴ λυμήνη αὐτὸν ὅτι εὐλογία κυρίου ἐστὶν ἐν αὐτῷ, οὕτως ποιήσω ἕνεκεν τοῦ δουλεῦντός μοι, τοῦτου ἕνεκεν οὐ μὴ ἀπολέσω πάντας (Jes. 65:8); "Ἡ τις μέλαινα ῥὰξ ἐν ἁώρῳ βότρυϊ (II, 1, 12, 89).

**241** "May your doctrine [*mallpānūt-āk*] grow / through works more than words: // when you few words sow [*zāra'*], / then farm [*plūh*] our land [*ar'ā*] through works, // that through much farming [*pulhānā*] / the scarce seed [*zar'ā*] may grow rich. // The ancient seed spontaneously [*kātā*] / ripened thirtyfold among us, // but your new seed sixtyfold. / **Blessed is he who multiplies a hundredfold!**"

242	ܕܝܗܝܬ ܕܝܗܝܬ ܕܝܗܝܬ (CN 18, 8–9)	ܕܝܗܝܬ ܕܝܗܝܬ ܕܝܗܝܬ
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243	ܕܝܗܝܬ ܕܝܗܝܬ ܕܝܗܝܬ (CN 20, 2)	ܕܝܗܝܬ ܕܝܗܝܬ ܕܝܗܝܬ

The farmer imagery combines different recurring themes with a great lexical variety. On a very basic level, the bishop is addressed as “farmer” (*‘akkārā*), and his work is “sowing” (*zra’*) and “cultivating” (*plah*) the “earth” (*‘ar’ā*)—namely, the community. The image can be turned negative, with Julian the emperor as farmer, and with “thorn”, “tares”, or “briar” (*ya’rā*, *zizānē*, *kubā*) instead of the normal “seed” or “wheat” (*zar’ā*, *ḥeṭṭē*). Moreover, Ephrem can expand on details, mentioning parts of the plant such as the stalk or the root (*qanyā*, *‘eqrā*) and natural processes such as the spreading of tares (*sar’ep*) and their climbing on other plants (*sbak*). Besides sowing (*zrā’ā*), he mentions the second sowing (*lqišāyā*) and spontaneous growth on the fallow (*kātā*). The literary sources and themes of these four stanzas are very clear: CN 17, 7 and 18, 9 are inspired by the parable of the sower and exhort the new bishop to lead by example more than by word. CN 18, 8 and 20, 2, inspired by the parable of the tares, are a call to beware of heresy in the community, with CN 20, 2 combining both parables. Stanzas 17, 7 and 18, 9 are very similar, even in the details of formulation, with CN 17, 7, 3–6 and CN 18, 9, 1–4 being almost identical, while CN 17, 7, 1–2 and CN 18, 9, 5–6 on one side and CN 17, 7, 7–10 and 18, 9, 7–10 on the other agree in their content<sup>244</sup>. In these

242 “As the apostate farmer [*‘akkārā d-‘aḥnep*] began / to sow thorns [*zra’ hwā kubbā*] with his left hand, // the righteous farmer [*‘akkārā kēnā*] was upset / and cut and mowed [*gdam psaq*] his left hand; // his right hand was full and sowed [*zra’*] / in the heart living words, // and, lo!, our sense was cultivated [*metpalhā*] / by prophets and by apostles: // by you were our souls cultivated (*netpalhān*). / **Blessed is he who chose you as our farmer** [*‘akkār-an*]! /// And if your words are scarce, / farm our land with works, // for with labour much / the stalk and the root [*qanyā w-‘eqrā*] will get stronger: // better is one fair deed / than listening to ten thousand words. // May your first seed [*zrā-āk*] bring the hundredfold, / and the second sowing [*lqišāyā*] sixtyfold, // and even the fallow [*kātā*] thirtyfold. / **Blessed is he who multiplied your harvest** [*‘allāt-āk*]!”

243 “O farmer [*‘akkārā*], burn against the tares [*b-zizānē*] / that spread [*sar’ep(w)*] and cling upon the wheat [*ḥeṭṭē*], // may the briar [*ya’rā*] be wholly uprooted, / that grew out of negligence: // if a quick air raises it, / it boldly overwhelms the seed. // What the three farmers [*‘akkārē*] sowed, / may it return three times, // thirtyfold, sixtyfold and hundredfold. / **Blessed is he who made your harvest** [*‘allāt-āk*] abundant!”

244 Cf.: *d-qallil mellē zārā-‘a(n)t / plūḥ-ēh l-‘ar-an ba-‘bādē* // *da-b-pulḥānā saggī’ā / ne’tar zar’ā zallilā* (CN 17, 7, 3–6) with *w-‘en-(h)u d-mellay-k z’ōrān / plūḥ-ēh l-‘ar-an ba-‘bādā* // *da-b-gaw pulḥānā rabbā / ne’san qanyā w-‘eqrā* (CN 18, 9, 1–4). The syntactic structure and meaning of these lines is the same. However, Ephrem is careful not to repeat himself and even the most similar lines are slightly varied (7, 4 and 9, 2 have plural and singular of *‘bādā*, at 7, 5 *da-b* contrasts with *da-b-gaw* at 9, 3 and *saggī’ā* with

stanzas, the link to the parable of the sower, apart from obvious lexical elements such as “seed” and “sowing” (*zar’ā* and *zra*), is given by the reference to the thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and hundredfold yield of the seeds<sup>245</sup>. Ephrem deviates from the imagery of the parable, in that he highlights the role of farming (*plah*) on the part of the farmer: this different perspective explains why he does not use the word *zārō’ā* (“sower”) and prefers *’akkārā*, originally meaning “ploughman”, but, differently from *zārō’ā*, having also a more general meaning of “farmer”. A synonym could be *pallāhā*, but Ephrem reserves it for the vintner and uses *’akkārā* for the farmer growing cereals. The difference of imagery points to a difference of meaning: the sower of the Gospel parable is an image of the apostle, spreading the word everywhere and devoting a limited time to each region of his ministry, with little care for its concrete results, because these are left to the goodwill of those who receive the message; the farmer carefully cultivating his plants, on the other side, is an image of the bishop, who is bound to a geographic space and a concrete community and responsible—this is the message Ephrem wants to convey—for the spiritual results of his congregation. The link to the parable of the tares is less explicit: at CN 20, 2, 1 it is conveyed mainly through the word “tares” (*zizānē*), identical to that in the Gospels; at CN 18, 8, the link is the general image of an enemy sowing bad seeds in the field of the good farmer, although there are no clear lexical links<sup>246</sup>. The most notable difference from the parable in the Gospels is that Ephrem straightforwardly contradicts the Gospel parable’s message, as he exhorts the bishop to cut, mow, or uproot the foreign weed in his field. This is due to a difference in interpretation: when Jesus explains the parable at Mt. 13:36–43, he refers to the “children of

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*rabbā*, etc...). This is a significant difference with Gregory, who is not afraid to repeat in different poems identical lines. Also cf.: *mallpānūt-āk tetyattar / ba-’bādā ṭāb men mellē* (CN 17, 7, 1–2) with *ṭāb-(h)u ’bādā šappirā / men šem’ā d-rebbū mellīn* (CN 18, 9, 5–6); *kāt-eh d-zar’ā ’attiqā / ḥad ba-tlātīn tētē b-an // w-zar’-āk ḥa(d)tā ḥad ba-štīn / briḳ-(h)u d-msaggē ḥad b-mā’ā* (CN 17, 7, 7–10) with *zrā-āk nētē ḥad b-mā’ā / wa-lqīšāyā ḥad b-’eštīn // ’āp kātā ḥad ba-tlātīn / briḳ-(h)u d-’asgī ’allāt-āk* (CN 18, 9, 7–10) and *d-’akkārē tlātā zar’u(h)y / ba-tlātā ’a’pīn nētē // ba-tlātīn we-štīn w-mā’ā / briḳ-(h)u d-ma’tar ’allāt-āk* (CN 20, 2, 7–10).

245 Cf. CN 17, 7, 7–10; CN 18, 9, 7–10 and CN 20, 2, 7–10 with: *w-y(h)ab pērē ’īt d-mā’ā w-’īt de-štīn w-’īt da-tlātīn* (Mt. 13:8, Peshitta and Old Syriac Sinaitic); *w-ya(h)bat pērē w-rabb(w) w-y(h)ab(w) ’īt d-mā’ā w-’īt de-štīn w-’īt da-tlātīn* (Mt. 13:8, Old Syriac Curetonian); *w-yāheb pērē w-’ābed ’īt d-mā’ā w-’īt de-štīn w-’īt da-tlātīn* (Mt. 13:23, Peshitta and Old Syriac Sinaitic); *w-yāheb pērē ’īt d-mā’ā w-’īt de-štīn w-’īt da-tlātīn* (Mt. 13:23, Old Syriac Curetonian); *w-y(h)ab pērē ’īt da-tlātīn w-’īt de-štīn w-’īt d-mā’ā* (Mc. 4:8, Peshitta); *w-y(h)ab pērē wa-rbā w-y(h)ab ba-tlātīn wa-štīn w-mā’ā* (Mc. 4:8, Old Syriac Sinaitic); *w-yā(h) bīn pērē ba-tlātīn w-ba-štīn wa-b-mā’ā* (Mc. 4:20); *wa-’bad pērē ḥad b-mā’ā* (Lc. 8:8, Peshitta); *w-y(h)ab pērē ḥad b-mā’ā* (Lc. 8:8, Old Syriac). Ephrem does not conform perfectly to any formulation known: as a verb, he uses *’etā* instead of *y(h)ab* and *’bad* of the Gospels; he differentiates the thirtyfold, sixtyfold and hundredfold yield as Mark and Matthew, but employs the expression *ḥad b-* as in Luke, except at CN 20, 2, where he employs the same formulation as Mc. 4:8 in the Old Syriac version; at CN 17, 7, 7–10 and CN 20, 2, 7–10 he uses the ascending order (30, 60, 100) of Mark, and at CN 18, 9, 7–10 the descending order (100, 60, 30) of Matthew.

246 On the contrary, the enemy at CN 18, 8, 2 does not saw tares (*zizānē*) but thorns (*kubbē*), which are present in the parable of the Sower (Mt. 13:7.22; Mc. 4:7.18; Lc. 8:7.14).

the kingdom” as the wheat and to the “children of the evil one” as the tares, and in this sense, the parable discourages the apostles from dividing between good and bad people in the here and now; but Ephrem subscribes to an interpretation common in the early church, to the effect that the good and bad seed are not individuals, but doctrines, or virtues and vices. If this is true, it makes perfect sense that the bishop would eradicate wrong ideas and evil behaviours from his congregation.

The function of the metaphor at *CN* 17, 7 is to introduce a new theme: *CN* 17, 1–6 focused on Abraham’s election, his worthiness for the charge, and the continuity between him and his predecessor, whereas beginning at *CN* 17, 7 Ephrem sketches the future of Abraham as bishop. He does so sometimes through explicit exhortations in the imperfect tense, as in stanza 7 and 9–10, and sometimes through a description in the perfect tense (stanza 8). Stanza 7 seems to refer to the bishop’s *munus docendi* (here *mallpānūtā*, 1), but Ephrem avoids a direct reference to teaching, arguing that deeds are actually the most effective way of teaching. This corresponds to his broader theological stance in the Trinitarian disputes, whereby, rather than arguing for or against a dogmatic formula, he prefers to define the limits of enquiry and defend the authority of revelation and ecclesiastical tradition<sup>247</sup>. Therefore, Ephrem advises Abraham not only to adopt the most effective pedagogical method but also to be very prudent in matters of teaching, to avoid stirring up controversy and division in favour of a pragmatic approach. Moreover, Ephrem employs the original idea of a thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and hundredfold yield to sketch the ideal progress of the community, attributing the thirtyfold to the community in its spontaneous betterment, coming as per inertia from the “ancient seed” of previous bishops, the sixtyfold to the action of the bishop, and the hundredfold to God’s grace. The different revenues are not intended, as was the case in the parable, to signify different and legitimate results of different people, but different potential results of the same community on the basis of its situation. This builds a hierarchy of efficiency having the people at its lowest level, the bishop in the middle, and God at the top.

*CN* 20 is concerned with the problem of schismatic and heretical groups. Ephrem exhorts the newly elected bishop to prevent doctrinal division from entering the community. In this context he employs the metaphor of the tares, modifying the parable. As an argument for unity, the poet reminds the new bishop (and the audience) that his task is to preserve what the three preceding bishops have already grown, thereby stressing the continued episcopal succession and the legitimacy of Abraham. Here the triple yield of the parable is associated with the three previous bishops, suggesting a historical progress of the community (see §4.1).

The two themes of *CN* 17, 7 and 20, 2 are combined at *CN* 18, 8–9. Structurally, these two stanzas are a hinge between the second and third parts of *CN* 18: having

<sup>247</sup> See the long discussion of Ephrem in the context of the Arian controversies in Wickes 2015, 19–52. The attitude transpires from our poems, too: see §3.1.3.2.

shown Abraham's worthiness to succeed Valgash in stanzas 1–4, Ephrem develops as an example thereof the new bishop's fight against Julian, which covers stanzas 5–8, so that with stanza 9 begins the last part of the poem, in which Ephrem exhorts and advises the bishop. Therefore, stanza 8 is more concerned with doctrinal problems, as connected to Julian, whereas stanza 9 has a more moral bent. The passage is rendered less abrupt by the continued agricultural metaphor, but the change of topic is clearly shown by the changed tenor of the “seeds” and “farming”, for, while at stanza 8 these were clearly words and in particular interpretations of Scripture, at stanza 9 they are deeds and moral teaching by example. That the “apostate farmer” alluded to at stanza 8 (and since stanza 5) is really Julian the emperor can be confirmed comparing this stanza to Ephrem's *Poems against Julian*, because a group of themes and images are clearly shared between these texts, and the choice of this common rhetoric must be purposeful and significant<sup>248</sup>. In stanza 9, apart from the idea of actions over words, the theological significance whereof has already been mentioned, Ephrem underlines the necessity of reinforcing the fundamental elements of the community, symbolised by the “root” and the “stalk” at line 4. Finally, the theme of the triple yield from the parable is employed here as a hyperbole to express the abundance of the new bishop's harvest: the hundredfold, sixtyfold, and thirtyfold are the produce of the main sowing, the second sowing, and the spontaneous growth on the unused field. The idea here is not of a difference of productivity, as in the Gospels, but rather of a total exploitation of the field, reaching the best productivity possible.

It is interesting to consider the only appearance of the farmer metaphor outside of the poems on Abraham, because it holds a different meaning:

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ܡܢ ܕܢܝܢ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ	ܡܢ ܕܢܝܢ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ
ܡܢ ܕܢܝܢ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ	ܡܢ ܕܢܝܢ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ
ܡܢ ܕܢܝܢ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ	ܡܢ ܕܢܝܢ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ
ܡܢ ܕܢܝܢ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ	ܡܢ ܕܢܝܢ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ
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249 ܡܢ ܕܢܝܢ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ ܕܝܠܕ  
(CN 14, 3)

<sup>248</sup> First of all, the verb ‘*aḥnep* “to apostasise”, “to become pagan” is used for Julian in the very first stanza of the poems (*hymn. c. Julian. 1, 1, 6*), and the theme of paganism is repeated over and over in the poems (1, 17, 1; 2, 2, 12; 3, 5; 16, 4; 19, 9; 3, 4, 6; 8, 6; 11, 3.8; 12, 9; 4, 16, 7). Julian's association with the left, at CN 18, 8 expressed through the idea of sowing with the left hand, is prominent in all *Poems against Julian* (*hymn. c. Julian. 1, 2, 12; 7, 12; 8, 4; 12, 3–4; 2, 9, 9; 4, 6, 10*). Furthermore, heathenism, heresy and Judaism are represented as tares (*zīzānē*) and thorns (*kubbē*) in the first two poems, with whole stanzas resembling CN 18, 9, and the reprise of the expression ‘*akkārā kēnā*’ (*hymn. c. Julian. 2, 10*; cf. *hymn. c. Julian. 1, 4, 8–9; 10, 6.9; 11; 12, 5–8; hymn. c. Julian. 2, 11*). The paradox of an enemy (Julian or Satan), who, trying to win over Christians, ends up defeated and glorifying them, is present at *hymn. c. Julian. 1, 13* as well as CN 18, 7. On the stanzas about Julian, see §4.1.2; Griffith 1987; Papoutsakis 2017, 124–131.

<sup>249</sup> “The first tilled the earth [*plāḥ ‘ar’ā*] with toil, / uprooting thence briar and thorns [*ya’rā w-kubbē*], // the middle enclosed her all around, / making her a hedge [*syāgā*] of redeemed, // the last opened the barn [*awšar*] of his Master and sowed [*zra’*] in her the words of her Master.”

Here, the metaphor is used to outline the succession of the first three bishops of Nisibis accompanying the growth of the community. The role each bishop had for the community is represented as a different task in beginning a cultivation, each in its order: the first ploughing and freeing the soil, the second enclosing it, and the third sowing. The process represented here is similar to the one described in Ps. 80:8–9, where God transplants a vine from Egypt in the promised land, a symbol of Israel's liberation. Since in Ps. 80:8 (verse 9 in the Peshitta) God has “cast away the pagans” (*ʿawbedt ʿammē*), it is probable that the “briar and thorns” the first bishop Jacob has uprooted in *CN* 14, 3, 2, are in fact pagan cults. Not that Jacob had literally uprooted every pagan cult from Nisibis; rather, the mere introduction of Christianity to a city is represented as the vanquishing of heathenism. Another interesting parallel is the word *syāgā*, meaning “hedge”, “enclosure”, and present both in *CN* 14, 3, 4 and in Ps. 80:12. This idea of the church as an enclosure, inspired by Old Testament symbology of Israel such as that in Ps. 80, is found also by Gregory, as he laments the moral unworthiness of church hierarches: “But now ’tis one the place known for wickedness and doom / by everyone, the strangers as well as our fellow believers [ἔρκεος ἡμετέρου], / the former august seat of the wise, hedge [ἔρκος] of the best”<sup>250</sup>. Gregory does not use the same word as Ps. 80:12 (φραγμός, in the Septuaginta Ps. 79:13), because it is too prosaic, and employs an epic term, ἔρκος, instead. However, the fundamental idea of this metaphor is the same for Ephrem, Gregory, and the Bible—namely, that the community is composed of carefully elected people, taken apart from the rest of the world and in a hostile relationship with the rest of the world. The fence or hedge serves to establish this difference, or sanctity, and to preserve the people from the forces of the world. Finally, note how in *CN* 14, 3, 1–4 Ephrem hints at the image of the vine, with his reference to Ps. 80 and the verb *plah* used for “till”, but also meaning “cultivate” a vine. However, lines 5–6, with their reference to sowing and the barn (*ʿawṣrā*), break the implicit metaphor of the foregoing lines and settle for a corn metaphor.

To sum up, Gregory and Ephrem treat the agricultural metaphor, coming from the Bible, in completely different ways. First of all, Gregory scarcely employs it, whereas Ephrem uses it often, with particular reference to the parables of the sower and of the tares. Second, when he compares the bishop to a sower, Gregory wants to highlight the divine action that gave him success in Constantinople: if the bishop is but a sower and God is the one who makes grow, then the successful bishop may claim divine legitimacy. In Ephrem the use of the metaphor is the opposite, because it expresses the work and effort poured by the bishops into educating the community. This basic meaning can be applied to such diverse situations as the problem of the correct way of teaching, heresy and unity, Julian's reign, and so on. The bottom line of these uses, however, is that Ephrem tends to reinterpret the imagery, often to the apparent opposite of its original

250 Νῦν δ' ἓνα χώρον ἴσασιν ἀτασθαλίας τε μόρου τε / Πάντες, ὅσοι ξεῖνοί τε καὶ ἔρκεος ἡμετέρου, / Τὸ σεπτὸν τοπάροιθε σοφῶν ἔδος, ἔρκος ἀρίστων (II, 1, 13, 66–68).

meaning. Besides these differences, Ps. 80 (79) seems a favourite of both poets: Gregory paraphrases it, Ephrem alludes to it. This psalm gives them a way to envisage their community and a way to trace its movement through history. Both see the community as an enclosed space (ἔρκος/*syāgā*), but Gregory employs the image to denounce a moment of decadence, whereas Ephrem in the planting, enclosing and cultivating of the psalm sees the progress of his community through time.

### 2.2.3 Iconography of the bishop

There is a group of related metaphors that is very productive in both Ephrem's and Gregory's poetry. These are "iconographic" metaphors—namely, comparisons of the bishop to a figurative work of art or to something or someone capable of reproducing the hue and shape of things, such as a mirror. This kind of metaphor lends itself to different treatments, but it is also a strikingly shared theme between the two poets. In a sense, each of these metaphors is a *mise en abîme* of the poems as a whole, as literary representations of the perfect bishop.

#### 2.2.3.1 Sources of the metaphor

Metaphors of this kind are much more remarkable because their biblical precedence is, to say the least, scanty. In general, there are three different kinds of biblical utterance on images. The first kind represents the relationship between God and man as that of an artist or a model to his work, a case most prominently represented by the creation of man "according to the image and resemblance" (εἰκών, ὁμοίωσις/*šalmā, dmūtā*) of God in Gen. 1:26–27<sup>251</sup>. A good number of narrative passages detail works of arts, figurative and not, linked with the temple and the ark of the covenant, and there are passages in Exodus that attribute artistic ability to God's inspiration<sup>252</sup>. However, commandment passages reveal hostility towards figurative arts, a hostility paired by the prophetic visions of Ezekiel and Daniel, involving a painting and a statue, respectively, and in no friendly terms<sup>253</sup>. In the New Testament, Paul's writings compare earthly knowledge about God to an image in a mirror<sup>254</sup>: in this case, as well as at Gen. 1:26–27, iconographic language aims at limiting human pretensions to divine reality, even as it affirms the link between God and man.

Even though the Bible does not offer any iconographic metaphor for the formation of the religious leader, Gregory seems to imply this at II, 1, 12, 539–540:

<sup>251</sup> See also Jes. 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer. 18:1–11.

<sup>252</sup> Ex. 31:3–6; 35:31–35; 36:1.

<sup>253</sup> Ex. 20:4.23; 34:17; Lev. 19:4; 26:1; Dtn. 4:16–23; 5:8; Hos. 13:2–3; Ezekiel's vision: Hes. 23:14–16; Daniel's vision: Dan. 2:31–35.

<sup>254</sup> 1Cor. 13:12 (ἑσποτρον/*maḥzītā*); 2Cor. 3:18 (κατοπτρίζμενοι/*maḥzītā*); see also Jac. 1:23 (ἑσποτρον/*maḥzītā*). Similar imagery, though with a different meaning, in the Wisdom of Solomon, where the wisdom is "mirror of God's action" (ἑσποτρον/*maḥzītā*) and "image of his goodness" (εἰκών/*šurtā*) (Sap. 7:26).

Ὁ δ' ἐκτὸς οὐδέν οἶδε, πλὴν εὐδοξίας  
 Ὅρον τίθεσθαι τοῦ καλοῦ τῆς πίστεως  
 Ὅς τῶν μὲν αὐτοῦ μηδὲ ἐν λογίζεται,  
 Τῶν σῶν δὲ πικρὸς ἵσταται κατήγορος·  
 Πῶς τοῦτον, εἰπὲ, πείσομεν δόξαν λαβεῖν (535)  
 Ἄλλην, παρ' ἣν δεδώκαμεν τῷ πρὶν βίῳ;  
 Πῶς γλώσσαν ἐμφράξομεν ἢ τίσιν λόγοις;  
 Περιφρονεῖν γὰρ οὐδὲ τοῦτ' ἐμῶν νόμων,  
 Οἱ πάντοθεν ξέουσιν, ὡς ἀγαλμὰ τι,  
 Τὸν προστάτην, ὡς μή τι τοῦ λαοῦ βλαβῆ. (540)  
 (II, 1, 12, 531–540)

But the pagan has, apart from our reputation,  
 no other standard for the goodness of the faith:  
 he, who doesn't care for his vices,  
 becomes a grudging prosecutor of yours.  
 How are we, tell me, to persuade him to change (535)  
 his mind, from the one we gave him formerly?  
 How are we to put to rest his tongue, with which words?  
 Indeed, 'tis not in our laws to despise what  
 in any respect polishes, as a kind of statue,  
 the leader, lest the people suffer any damage. (540)

The comparison to a sculpture concludes one of Gregory's arguments for the necessity of morally superior leaders—namely, that they should dispose pagans favourably towards the church. A good bishop may confute and (rarely) convert pagans, whereas a bishop who lived a wayward life will probably enhance criticism towards the church, perhaps even persecution. That the focus here is not conversion of pagans but protecting the church from persecution is demonstrated by the word “people” (λαός, 540), the usual term for the Christian insiders, and by the characterisation of the pagan outsider as an “accuser” (πικρὸς κατήγορος, 534): the aim is to defend the existing community, not to convert.

Probably the reason Gregory compares the Christian leader to a statue is to allude to the many biblical and canonical exhortations aimed at community leaders, whereby leaders are urged to amend their ways and be beacons of virtue; or he may be alluding to texts prescribing the choice of virtuous men as leaders in the congregation. Here the good reputation of the bishop and his previous experience in the community are strongly emphasised (i.e., he should not be a neophyte)<sup>255</sup>. Indeed, the Gregorian passage seems

255 The prime example are the parallel passages of 1Tim. 3:1–7 and Tit. 1:5–9: πιστὸς ὁ λόγος Εἴ τις ἐπισκοπῆς ὀρέγεται, καλοῦ ἔργου ἐπιθυμεῖ. δεῖ οὖν τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεπίληπτον εἶναι, ... δεῖ δὲ καὶ μαρτυρίαν καλὴν ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἑξῶθεν, ἵνα μὴ εἰς ὀνειδισμόν ἐμπέση καὶ παγίδα τοῦ διαβόλου. (1Tim. 3:1–2; 7); δεῖ γὰρ τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνέγκλητον εἶναι ὡς θεοῦ οἰκονόμου (Tit. 1:7). These doctrines are developed in the *Const. apost.* 2, 6, in particular paragraph 7 where the bishop is said to be a σκοπός (“aim”, “target”, but in the *Didasc. apost.* 4 we have *dmūtā*, “model”, “exemplar”) for his community (the meaning of the word is shifted later to “sentry”, “scout” through the quotation of Hes. 33; correspondently, the Syriac translation of σκοπός in the quotation is *dawqā*).



almost a paraphrase of 1Tim. 3:7: “those outside” (τῶν ἔξωθεν) becomes in Gregory a generic singular “outsider” (ὁ δ’ἐκτός, 531; term attested in Homer, unlike ἔξωθεν); instead of the *koine* Greek expression μαρτυρία καλή in Paul, Gregory adopts the term εὐδοξία, perfectly acclimatised to high poetry<sup>256</sup>; the strongly connoted διάβολος becomes a more “Athenian” κατήγορος. However, no text, in the Bible or in canon laws, compares the leader’s moral amendment to the sculpting of a statue: indeed, this comparison stems from pagan philosophy. Epictetus is the first to compare moral philosophy to sculpting, and a famous passage in Plotinus’s *On Beauty* develops this theme<sup>257</sup>. Gregory may well have known Plotinus’s passage. II, 1, 12, 539–540 demonstrates that the source of this kind of imagery is often found outside the Bible or Christian literature<sup>258</sup>.

### 2.2.3.2 Shape-shifting politician or holy icon (II, 1, 12, 709–760)?

The passage in which Gregory discusses the iconography of the bishop in the most organic way is II, 1, 12, 709–760. Since most other occurrences of this theme can be brought into relation with this treatment, I will analyse this text extensively:

Ἀλλ’ εὐστροφός τις οὗτος ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν,  
 Ὅν οὐκ ἐπαινεῖς, ἐντελής τε προστάτης (710)  
 Τρίβων παλαιῶν καὶ νέων κινημάτων·  
 Ὁ δ’ εὐσεβὴς μὲν, χρήσιμος δ’ αὐτῷ μόνῳ.  
 Τίς ταῦτά φησιν; ὡς λίαν κακότροπος.  
 Οὐδεὶς γάρ ἐστιν ὅστις αὐτῷ ζῆ μόνῳ,  
 Οὗτ’ οὖν καλῶν τις οὔτε μὴν τῶν χειρόνων. (715)  
 Ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ οὗτος οὐ τύχοι σπάσας ἀήρ  
 Εὐωδίας μετέσχευεν ἢ δυσωδίας,

<sup>256</sup> On the use of μαρτυρία as an honorific term instead of its judicial meaning, see Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1082, s.v. μαρτυρία (only inscriptions and papyri are brought as examples for this meaning of the word); Kokkinia 2017. At Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 710, s.v. εὐδοξία, examples from Simonides, Pindar and Euripides (together with classic prose writers as Plato and Demosthenes) are given.

<sup>257</sup> οὐκ ἐπαγγέλλεται, ἔφη, φιλοσοφία τῶν ἐκτός τι περιποιήσιν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ: εἰ δὲ μή, ἔξω τι τῆς ἰδίας ὕλης ἀναδέχεται. ὡς γὰρ τέκτονος ὕλη τὰ ξύλα, ἀνδριαντοποιοῦ ὁ χαλκός, οὕτως τῆς περὶ βίον τέχνης ὕλη ὁ βίος αὐτοῦ ἐκάστου (Epict. diss. 1, 15, 2); Ἄναγε ἐπὶ σαυτὸν καὶ ἴδε· κἂν μήπω σαυτὸν ἴδης καλόν, οἷα ποιητῆς ἀγάματος, ὁ δεῖ καλὸν γενέσθαι, τὸ μὲν ἀφαιρεῖ, τὸ δὲ ἀπέξεσε, τὸ δὲ λείον, τὸ δὲ καθαρὸν ἐποίησεν, ἕως ἔδειξε καλὸν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀγάλματι πρόσωπον, οὕτω καὶ σὺ ἀφαίρει ὅσα περιττὰ καὶ ἀπεύθυνε ὅσα σκολιά, ὅσα σκοτεινὰ καθάρων ἐργάζου εἶναι λαμπρὰ καὶ μὴ παύσῃ <τεκταίνων> τὸ σὸν <ἀγαλμα>, ἕως ἂν ἐκλάμψει σοι τῆς ἀρετῆς ἡ θεοειδὴς ἀγαλία, ἕως ἂν ἴδης <σωφροσύνην ἐν ἀγνῷ βεβῶσαν βάθρῳ> (Plot. enn. 1, 6, 9, 7–15). On the relationship of the bishop/ascetic’s demeanour to the conventions of *paideia* and their iconic value, see Gautier 2002, 190–191.

<sup>258</sup> Another source may be epigraphic practice: if I am reading correctly the dedicatory epigram of a bishop Constantine in Baetic Thebes, he defines himself as an ἰχόνα [sic] in the first line (Daux 1968, 863 fig. 10). Moreover, Gregory (and maybe Ephrem too) could see a link between the μαρτυρία καλή prescribed by the apostle and statues, since it was customary that successful officials and provincial notables, enjoying good fame, had statues of themselves with dedicatory epigrams in public places of their city. I would not push the link too much, however.

Οὕτω τάχιστα τοῖς πέλας ποιούμεθα,  
Καλοῖς μὲν ἦττον, τοῖς κακοῖς δὲ καὶ λίαν.  
Μᾶλλον γὰρ εὐμίμητον ἢ πονηρία. (720)

Εἰ δ' οὗτος ἡμῖν καὶ πρόεδρος ὦν τύχοι,  
Εἰ μὲν κάκιστος καὶ πονηρίας πλέως,  
Τοῦτ' ἔστ' ἐκείνο ράμιον ἄρχειν τῶν ξύλων·  
Εἰ δὲ κράτιστος, αὐθις ἐν στύλῳ πυρὸς  
Ἦγουμενῷ πορεύετ' Ἰσραὴλ μέγας (725)

Πρὸς ἣν ἅπαντες σπεύδομεν γῆν ἐλπίδος,  
Κᾶν μὴ κυκλῶν τις μὴδ' ἀγοραῖος ὦν τύχοι,  
Πρωτεὺς σοφιστῆς εἰς κλοπὰς μορφωμάτων  
Ἦ καὶ Μελάμπους ἢ τις ἄλλος ἄστατος  
Πᾶσιν τὰ πάντα ραδίως τυπούμενος (730)

Πρὸς τὴν ἁπάντων ἀθρόαν καταστροφὴν.  
Πῶς οὖν ἄχρηστον, εἰπέ μοι, τοῦτον καλεῖς,  
Πρὸς ὃν βλέποντες βελτίους γενοίμεθ' ἄν;  
Ἦ πῶς ἄριστον προστάτην καὶ δεξιόν,  
Πρὸς ὃν βλέπων σὺ τοὺς ἐμοὺς διαπτύεις; (735)

Τό τοι περιττὸν καὶ πρόσαντες τοῖς σοφοῖς·  
Τὸ δ' εὐγενὲς μάλιστα πιθανώτατον.  
Ἐκείνος εἴης, ὥς σοι φρὴν, οὗτος δ' ἐγώ.  
Ἦ καὶ γραφῆων ἄριστος οὗτός σοι δοκεῖ,  
Οὐχ ὃς γράφει κινούμεν' ἀπλοῖς χρώμασι, (740)

Ζεῦξίς τις ἢ Πολύκλειτος ἢ τις Εὐφράνωρ,  
Ἀλλ' ὅστις ἀνθηραῖς τε καὶ παντασίοις  
Βαφαῖς ἁμορφα σώματ' ἐξεργάζεται,  
Ἵν Καλλίμαχος, καὶ Κάλαις ἦσθην, ὥς δοκῶ,  
Μόγισ γράφοντες εἰκόνας τῶν εἰκόνων; (745)

Τοιοῦτός ἐστι πᾶς ἀνὴρ πολύτροπος.  
Ταῦτ' οὖν ὁρῶν ἔκαμνες εὐρεῖν ποιμένα;  
Ὡς μικρὸν ἐσπούδαζες! ἐγκαλύπτομαι.  
Ὡσπερ λογιστὴν ἐσκόπεις τὸν προστάτην.  
Κόπρων μέλει σοι, μειζόνων δ' ἐμοὶ λόγος. (750)

Ἐν ἔστω τοῦδ' ἔργον ἱερέως, καὶ μόνον,  
Ψυχὰς καθαίρειν ἐν βίῳ τε καὶ λόγῳ  
Ἄνω φέροντα ἐνθέοις κινήμασι  
– Γαληνόν, ὑψίνουν τε τὰς θείας μόνας  
Ἀκηλιδῶτους ἐμφάσεις τυπούμενον, (755)

Ὡσπερ κάτοπτρον ἐνδοθεν μορφοῦμενον –  
Ἀγνάς τε πέμπειν προσφορὰς ὑπὲρ τέκνων,  
Ἐως ἂν αὐτοὺς προσφορὰν καταρτίσῃ.  
Τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἀφείσθω τοῖς τὰδ' ἐντελεστέροις.  
Οὕτως ἂν ἡμῖν ἀσφαλῶς ἔχοι βίος. (760)

(II, 1, 12, 709–760)

“Still he knows his way around in business,  
this one you blame, and is a perfect leader,  
practised in old and new movements,  
whereas that pious one is useful only to himself.” (710)

Who says such things? Someone too malignant.  
 For no one exists to live for himself only,  
 neither among the good nor among the evil. (715)  
 Rather, as this air, depending on who draws it,  
 acquires a pleasant or a bad odour,  
 so we are made like our neighbours most quickly,  
 less, however, from the good, but too much from the evil.  
 Wickedness in fact is easier to imitate. (720)  
 But if such a man should become also our leader—  
 that is, if he is mean and full of wickedness—  
 then this is the proverbial bramble ruling the trees,  
 whereas if he's excellent, by the pillar of fire  
 once more led, the Great Israel will proceed (725)  
 to that land of hope we all earnestly pursue,  
 even if its leader is not always around in the marketplace,  
 nor a Proteus skilful in stealing appearances,  
 nor a Melampus nor another restless man  
 easily adapting himself in everything to everyone else, (730)  
 based on everyone's continuous changing.  
 So why do you call useless—tell me—the one  
 whose imitation can make us better?  
 Or why is the best leader and right the one  
 whose imitation makes you despise ours? (735)  
 Excess is unsuitable for the sage,  
 while generosity is most trustworthy.  
 You can be that one, if you desire, but I'm this.  
 Do you hold as the best of painters  
 not the one painting lively forms with simple colours, (740)  
 a Zeuxis or Polyclitus or a Euphranor,  
 but anyone who with bright and shadowless  
 dyes contrives misshapen bodies,  
 like Callimachus and Calais did, in my opinion  
 barely representing the copies of the copies? (745)  
 Such is every manifold man.  
 Is it with this in mind, then, that you were striving to find a shepherd?  
 How small an effort! I'm ashamed for you.  
 You look for a bishop as for a city curator.  
 You care for dung, but my concerns are wider. (750)  
 Leave to the priest one task and one only,  
 to purify souls through life and words,  
 bringing them upwards with inspired impulses,  
 being gentle and high-minded, only by the divine,  
 spotless reflections moulded (755)  
 as a mirror reflecting from within  
 and to send pure offerings on behalf of his children,  
 until he has restored them as an offering.  
 Let other tasks be left for the ones in them more accomplished.  
 This way, we can have a secure life. (760)

This discussion is a part of the longer polemic against morally unworthy bishops and the hasty ordination of morally unfit candidates. It follows the tirade against falsehood, implicitly aimed at Maximus: everyone should be true to himself and not feign to be someone he is not (see §5.2.4). At this point, Gregory, with a well-known rhetorical technique, introduces a fictive speaker objecting to his ideas (709–712): the speaker considers the moral requirement for the office of bishop to be of secondary importance in respect to more mundane gifts; a bishop who is also a good politician could secure advantages for the church. This objection is no rhetorical fiction: historical research demonstrates that the ability to be a good patron for the church was a paramount requirement in the choice of a bishop<sup>259</sup>. This means Gregory is reacting to a widespread (and, with some limitations, accepted) habit of his times, and he must defend an unpopular position.

The core of Gregory's counterargument is that the bishop has an exemplary role before his community, and his morality can influence the morality of every faithful person. Since morality is a requirement for salvation, any earthly advantage secured by a wire-pulling bishop pales before the good example offered by the good bishop. The first bit of argument (713–720) aims at demonstrating that everyone is an example setter. Gregory does this in two ways: by comparing good and bad persons with good and bad smells (716–717) and by appealing to common sense (718–720)<sup>260</sup>. The comparison between the renown, fame, and influence of one's moral character on one side and good or bad smell spreading in the air on the other has New Testament and Christian antecedents, but occurs also in rabbinic and Roman literature<sup>261</sup>. In Christian and Jewish literature, the origin of the theme can be found in the good scent of sacrifices (Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18; Lev. 17:4; Num. 28:2), a theme shared with Greek literature, where good scent is a token of divine presence<sup>262</sup>. This may anticipate the sacrificial imagery of the final passage (751–760; see §2.1.3.1). The idea that the people we associate with influence our moral character is first attested in Theognis (27–38), an author Gregory often employed, but also in biblical wisdom (Prov. 13:20; 14:7; Sir. 6:33–37). Then, with an *a fortiori* argument (721–726), Gregory applies this principle to the bishop, illustrating its consequences with two biblical references: a bad leader is like the bramble ruling the trees (Judc. 9:7–15); a good leader, like the pillar of fire guiding Israel towards the promised land (Ex. 13:21–22).

At this point it is clear that Gregory's argument revolves around imitation of the bishop and its consequences. Therefore, Gregory plays out the implications of a lobby-

<sup>259</sup> Cracco Ruggini 1998, 8; Lepelley 1998, 19–20, 24–25; Martin 1998, 61; Rapp 2005, 183, 199–201, 274. A discussion of this theme in Gregory's works in Gautier 2002, 122–125, where the author limits the scope of Gregory's rejections of patronage, an expectation of Christian communities from their bishops, because they are usually inserted in the polemic against Nectarius and in the defence of his works in Constantinople.

<sup>260</sup> Useful parallels for the theme of "living for oneself" are given by Meier 1989, 153–154.

<sup>261</sup> 2Cor. 2:14–16; Lampe 1961, 394, s.v. *δυσωδία*; 585, s.v. *εὐωδία*; Harvey 2006; Toner 2015; Green 2015; Bradley 2015; Stevens 2015–2016.

<sup>262</sup> Clements 2015.

ist-bishop for the example he sets, and, resorting to classical literature, he compares the bishop with Proteus and Melampus. These characters are presented as famous shape-shifters, tapping into one of Gregory's *Leitmotiven*, contemporary bishops' cynical facility for changing their positions in order to gain material advantages<sup>263</sup>. First, it is interesting to note that Gregory chooses pagan exempla for the behaviour of bad bishops, whereas normally he would use biblical examples in our poems. Second, Gregory's language is noteworthy here, as he speaks of "forms" (μορφώματα, 728) and "self-shaping" (τυπούμενος, 730): the language here introduced will be developed later on. Third, it is remarkable that Gregory here criticises the shape-shifting bishop, "easily adapting himself in everything to everyone else, / based on everyone's continuous changing" (Πᾶσιν τὰ πάντα ῥαδίως τυπούμενος / Πρὸς τὴν ἀπάντων ἀθρόαν καταστροφήν, 730–731). The behaviour here criticised bears striking resemblances with Paul's method of preaching: ἐγένόμεν τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν ἀσθενής, ἵνα τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς κερδήσω· τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα, ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω (1Cor. 9:22). The two passages have the same threefold polyptotus (πᾶσιν, πάντα, ἀπάντων or πάντως). However, the result is very different, because Paul aims at salvation (σώσω), while the bad bishop blindly follows the whims of the moment, whims which Gregory expresses with the word καταστροφή, rich in negative connotations: καταστροφή is a "change", but also "subjugation" and "ruin", the exact opposite of "salvation".

The same varied and shifting approach adopted by Paul is suggested by Ephrem to the bishop Abraham:

<p>         264          ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ          ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ          ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ          ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ          ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ          (CN 21, 11)       </p>	<p>         ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ          ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ          ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ          ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ          ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ          ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ       </p>
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<sup>263</sup> Proteus was the proverbial shape-shifter (Jungk 1974, 186; Ambühl 2006; Brown 2016). Melampus never appears as a shape-shifter outside Gregory, a problem studied by Lefherz 1958, 40–44 (see also Meier 1989, 155). Melampus occurs only here and in the parallel text of Greg. Naz. or. 4, 82, coupled with Proteus. Since the shape-shifting ability is otherwise unattested, the coupling with Proteus may be either due to the shared prophetic ability of the two, or to their Egyptian origin (for Melampus see Herodt. 2, 49). It is possible either that Gregory found the coupling already in compilations on mythology for the rhetorician, or that he himself combined the two characters. In the first case, he may have found the two together as proverbial prophets, and mistakenly attributed Proteus' shape-shifting ability also to Melampus. In the second case, he may be led to couple the two at II, 1, 12, based on their common Egyptian provenance, since his polemic against incoherent bishops has much to do with Gregory's conflict with Egyptian clergy (cf. also the use of Proteus against Maximus at II, 1, 11, 808). In this case, however, the passage at or. 4, 82, referred to Julian, remains unexplained. On the incoherence of bishops see II, 1, 12, 336.648 and more at §5.2.2.1.

<sup>264</sup> "Let one be the voice of your faith, / and the voices you borrow [š'īlē] countless; // let the image [šalmā] of truth be on your heart, / while every countenance [kul-demwān] is on your face: // sad, rejoicing or feeble: / to the erring show that you are wrathful, // to the modest show that you are joyful. / Be one for Divinity, // and for humanity be many. / **Blessed is he who with all men was all things!**"

Ephrem elaborates on Paul's model, neatly dividing the roles of unity and multiplicity. The "faith" or "truth" (*šarrārā, quštā*), the content of the bishop's preaching, should remain the same, while the approaches to different people should change according to the needs of those people. The similarities in language are striking because both poets employ the same iconographic metaphors: the "image" of truth (*šalmā*, 3) corresponds to the word τύπος implied in Gregory's verb τυπούμενος (II, 1, 12, 730), whereas the phrase "thefts of appearances" (κλοπαὶ μορφωμάτων, 728) contains the same ideas as the words "countenance" (*dmūtā*, 4) and "borrowed" (*š'īlā*, 2): both phrases refer to outward appearance and to something feigned or inauthentic. Both Gregory and Ephrem employ iconographic imagery to describe and evaluate behaviour. Moreover, their respective organisations of the polarity of "one" and "many" in this case are very similar: Ephrem distinguishes the one and authentic "voice" or "image", which is inner ("in the heart") and visible to God, from the various countenances which are only "borrowed" and instrumental at winning other people, so that they are exterior and visible to people. The similarity with Gregory will be apparent when the positive side of Gregory's argument is examined later. For now, it is enough to note the common idea of "borrowed" or "stolen" appearances, with Gregory emphasising the negative connotation through the choice of the word "theft" (κλοπή). Yet Gregory, like Paul and Ephrem, favourably evaluates the shape-shifting behaviour of the bishop elsewhere<sup>265</sup>. It is for contextual reasons that he here gives a negative turn to the theme. In the case at hand, multiplicity is examined from the point of view of the example it gives to the community and not from the point of view of guidance for every single individual, as in the cases of Paul and Ephrem. This perspective is chosen purposefully to give a negative view of this otherwise praiseworthy ability, because in the wider context of the poem and of Gregory's defence after the 381 council this ability could be more credibly claimed by Gregory's opponents, Maximus and Nectarius. In fact, the other bishops, from Rome to Antioch (and probably even in Cappadocia), did not impute to Gregory a bad conscience in regard to the proceedings of the council, but incompetence and a certain lack of flexibility<sup>266</sup>.

<sup>265</sup> See Beeley 2008, 244–247 for a discussion of Gregory's prose passages on the multiplicity required of the priest. An example from *or.* 2: οὕτως ἐκ πολλῶν καὶ διαφόρων καὶ ἡθῶν καὶ λόγων, καθάπερ ἐνὸς ζώου συνθέτου καὶ ἀνομοίου, τοῦ κοινοῦ τούτου τῆς Ἐκκλησίας συγκειμένου σώματος, πᾶσα ἀνάγκη καὶ τὸν προστάτην ἀπλοῦν τε εἶναι τὸν αὐτὸν κατὰ τὴν ἐν πᾶσιν ὁρθότητα· καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα παντοδαπὸν καὶ ποικίλον κατὰ τὴν πρὸς ἕκαστον οἰκείωσιν, καὶ τὸ τῆς ὁμιλίας πρὸς πάντας ἐπιτήδειόν τε καὶ πρόσφορον (*or.* 2, 44). The multiplicity is linked, both in Gregory's orations (Elm 2000a) and in Ephrem's poems, with the image of the priest as physician (see below, §2.2.4.7; Gautier 2002, 118). Ephrem expresses variety of treatments also through the image of the shepherd and of the fisherman (see §2.2.1.1).

<sup>266</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 384–385; Simonetti 1975, 534–535. This relates to the criticisms that Gregory received for his handling of the council (and of the schism in Antioch in particular), but it is important to distinguish these criticisms, which Gregory appropriated and morphed into a title of merit, from the reality of a skilled *curialis* who, after he succeeded in a number of political situations, failed in an incredibly complex and fraught political moment as was the Council in 381. Recent bibliography is conscious of

Lines 733–738 insist on the bishop’s function as an example setter. The comparison between the good and bad example-setting bishop introduced by these lines is developed in the following passage (739–746) through an analogy with painters. Gregory asks the fictive speaker which painter does a better job, associating two styles of painting with the two types of bishops. This analogy belongs clearly to a larger group of stock arguments for cultural polemics in Greek culture. Rhetors would gladly describe or comment upon paintings (e.g., the *Imagines* by Philostratus or the *Zeuxis* by Lucian). Moreover, the comparison of painting with rhetoric or poetry was a commonplace of ancient aesthetics. Examples of such proceedings are to be found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus’s *opuscula*. It is likely that Gregory had in mind something like these passages as he wrote II, 1, 12, 739–746: he contrasts simple colours and accurate shapes with the mixing of many colours, and he evaluates this latter style negatively, as a kind of delusion, as does Dionysius in *Isae*. 4<sup>267</sup>. From *Isoc*. 3, he seems to take some items for his lists of names, which is baffling, since *Isoc*. 3 is concerned with sculptors, whereas Gregory is talking about painters, so that Polyclitus, Calamis (written “Kalais” because of an ancient error),<sup>268</sup> and Callimachus are out of place here<sup>269</sup>. Zeuxis, mentioned among the “simple” painters, was in fact a pioneer of mixing colours and chiaroscuro; in ancient sources, he is frequently compared to Parrhasius, who was instead famous for the accurate design of shapes<sup>270</sup>. Another difficulty is presented by the adjective παντάσκιος, because it is a hapax of Gregory, occurring only here and in Hesychius, who explains it as “completely without shadows”. In Dionysius’s description at *Isae*. 4, but also in the other sources, there is a stable relation between quantity of colours, prominence of shades and shadows, skill, and realism, all elements which—since the works of Xenocrates of Sicily—had been seen as progressively growing throughout the fifth and fourth century BC, until they reached perfection in Lysippus<sup>271</sup>. Gregory’s utterances cannot be interpreted in this traditional framework: he extols simplicity of colour but criticises absence of shades; he enrolls Zeuxis among the masters of outline

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this difference between rhetoric and reality: McGuckin 2001a, 110–112, 131–133, 140–143, 145–146; Elm 2000a; Elm 2000b; Elm 2001, 69–71; Storin 2017, 278–280. More on this at §5.1.2.1.

**267** ἵνα δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ διαφορά τῶν ἀνδρῶν γένηται καταφανής, εἰκόνι χρήσομαι τῶν ὁρατῶν τινι. εἰσὶ δὴ τινες ἀρχαῖαι γραφαί, χρώμασι μὲν εἰργασμένοι ἀπλῶς καὶ οὐδεμίαν ἐν τοῖς μίγμασιν ἔχουσαι ποικιλίαν, ἀκριβεῖς δὲ ταῖς γραμμαῖς καὶ πολὺ τὸ χαρίεν ἐν ταύταις ἔχουσαι. αἱ δὲ μετ’ ἐκείνας εὐγραμμοὶ μὲν ἦττον, ἐξεργασμένοι δὲ μᾶλλον, σικᾷ τε καὶ φωτὶ ποικιλλόμενοι καὶ ἐν τῷ πλήθει τῶν μιγμάτων τὴν ἰσχὺν ἔχουσαι. τούτων μὲν δὴ ταῖς ἀρχαιοτέrais ἔοικεν ὁ Λυσίας κατὰ τὴν ἀπλότητα καὶ τὴν χάριν, ταῖς δὲ ἐκπεπονημέναις τε καὶ τεχνικωτέrais ὁ Ἰσαῖος. ἦν δὲ περὶ αὐτοῦ δόξα παρὰ τοῖς τότε γοητείας καὶ ἀπάτης, ὥς δεινὸς ἀνὴρ τεχνιτεῦσαι λόγους ἐπὶ τὰ πονηρότερα, καὶ εἰς τοῦτο διεβάλλετο (Dion. Hal. *Isae*. 4).

**268** Meier 1989, 156.

**269** δοκεῖ δὴ μοι μὴ ἄπο σκοποῦ τις ἂν εἰκάσαι τὴν μὲν Ἰσοκράτους ῥητορικὴν τῇ Πολυκλείτου τε καὶ Φειδίου τέχνῃ κατὰ τὸ σεμνὸν καὶ μεγαλότεχρον καὶ ἀξιοματικόν, τὴν δὲ Λυσίου τῇ Καλάμιδος καὶ Καλλιμάχου τῆς λεπτότητος ἕνεκα καὶ τῆς χάριτος (Dion. Hal. *Isoc*. 3).

**270** Childs 2018, 139–140.

**271** Lapatin 2012, 279–280.

over colour and seems to prefer the more ancient style of painting (against the progressive paradigm introduced by Xenocrates), while at the same time insisting on realism. Anyway, the polemic against virtuosic, overspectacular, and more modern art forms is a trope equally applied to music (in the polemic against New Music), tragedy (discussions surrounding Euripides and Agathon), and rhetoric (Plato's polemic against the Sophists). Gregory exploits these well-known cultural disputes to frame Christian strife<sup>272</sup>.

Interestingly, line 739 establishes the comparison with a focus on the *painter*, but in fact the significant attributes are attached to the *paintings*. After all, at 733–738 the bishop was the one “to whom to look” (πρὸς ὃν βλέποντες, 734). Elsewhere, Gregory compares the bishop directly to a painting for his exemplary value, even if in a negative sense<sup>273</sup>. To understand Gregory's analogy better, it is worthwhile to compare it with another passage from our poems, in which its significance is clearer:

Ζωγράφος ἐστὶν ἄριστος, ὃς ἐν πινάκεσσι χαράσσει  
 Μορφὰς ἀτρεκέας, ἔμπνοα δερκομένας·  
 Οὐχ ὃς χρώματα πολλὰ καὶ εὐχρῶα μὰψ ἐπιμίξας,  
 Λειμῶνα γραπτὸν δείκνυσιν ἐκ πινάκων.  
 Νῆα δὲ ποντοπόρειαν ἐπήνεσα, οὐ παρασήμοις (5)  
 Κάλλεσιν, οὐ πρύμνης ἄνθεσι λαμπομένην·  
 Ἀλλ' ἦν ναυπηγοῖο χέρες γόμοισιν ἄριστα  
 Δῶκαν πηξάμεναι κύμασι θαρσαλέην.  
 Καὶ στρατὸς ἐστὶν ἄριστος, ἀρήϊος ἀντὶ καλοῖο,  
 Καὶ δόμος αἰγλήεις δεύτερος εὐπαγέος. (10)  
 Ὡς δὲ βίῳ βροτέων. Ὁ μὲν ἄμβροτος, ὃν τινα Χριστῷ  
 Τάρβος ἄγει, πλεκτηῖς ἀλλότριον κακίης,  
 Ἐμπεδον, ἀστυφέλικτον, ἀπενθέα. Ὅς δὲ κάκιστος,  
 Ἐνδοθεν ἀδρανέων, ἔκτοθε κάρτος ἔχων,  
 Ὡκύμορον, φρενοπλῆξιν ὁμοῖον, οἷσιν ἅπαντα (15)  
 Δινήεντα πέλει ἀστατέουσι νόον.  
 (II, 1, 17, 1–16)

A painter is excellent when he draws on his canvas  
 the exact shapes, looking as if they were alive,  
 not when, mixing many colours and bright aimlessly,  
 he makes a meadow of painting of the canvas.  
 I praise the seafaring ship, not the one counterfeited (5)  
 in her beauty or splendid with garlands on the stern,  
 rather the one the hands of the shipwright had fastened in the best way

272 MacDougall 2017.

273 Εἰκὼ μὲν τις ἔγραψεν ἀπ' εἰκόνης ἀρχετύποιο, / Στησάμενος προπάροιθε, πίναξ δ' ὑπεδέξατο μορφήν / Ὑμᾶς δ' εἰσορόων τις ἐναντίον οἶμον ὁδεύει. / Καὶ τόδε μόνον ὄνειαρ ἄφ' ὑμετέρης κακότητος (II, 1, 13, 112–115). Here, the analogy is not explicitly linked to the discussion of bad bishops, however it is clear that the bad bishop is compared and contrasted with an “archetype”, a previous painting (ἀπ' εἰκόνης ἀρχετύποιο) that the painter should reproduce. The contrast lies in the fact that a bad bishop should not be imitated, whereas, when one paints from a model, one wants to reproduce and learn from an excellent archetype.



with bolts and, confident, given to the swells.  
 Even a host is excellent if braver, not if fair-looking,  
 and the dazzling house is second to the sound and solid one. (10)  
 Such are even the lives of mortals. The one is immortal whom awe  
 brings to Christ, an alien unto twisted vice,  
 steadfast, unshaken, imperturbable. The other most wretched,  
 inside being feeble, outside feigning force,  
 short-lived, the like of the idiots, to whom everything (15)  
 whirls as their mind is unstable.

At the beginning of II, 1, 17, Gregory contrasts different specimens of the same things, distinguishing the praiseworthy from the useless. This serves as an analogy to introduce two different kinds of “life” (βίος)—namely, two different kinds of bishop. The description of the βίοι at lines 11–16 shows us the distinctions we should find also in the analogies: stability, coherence (between appearance and essence) and the actualisation of its natural aim are the signs of the good life, and the contrary applies to the evil life. The first analogy employed by Gregory is an elegiac rewriting of the painting analogy at II, 1, 12, 739–746<sup>274</sup>.

Good painting, according to Gregory, reproduces above all the shape (μορφή) of things, in an accurate manner (ἀτρεκί). The result must seem “alive” (ἐμπνοος). On the contrary, a bad painter will focus on colour (χρῶμα), looking for its variety and individual excellence (πολλὰ καὶ εὐχρῶα), so that the result looks like a “meadow” (λειμῶν), likely meaning a chaotic and self-referential big picture. Clearly, Gregory sees shape as the content of painting, and colour as its appearance. Therefore, colour should not be pursued for colour’s sake, but only according to the coherence and stability of the represented subject. The same ideas are present at II, 1, 12, 739–746: here, Gregory downplays the role of colour in good painting (ἀπλοῖς χρώμασιν, 740) and underlines the exigency of realism, as he says the “bodies” depicted should be “moving” (κινούμενα, 740); bad painters, instead, neglect form (ἄμορφα σώματα), giving undue prominence to colour, using it without shades (παντασκίοις βαφαῖς) and thus producing tones that are too bright and “flowery” (ἀνθηραῖς). Here, Gregory stresses not only the need for coherence and stability of form but also realism as basic requirement, when he says that bad painters “barely represent the copies of the copies” (745). If coherence and stability are clearly linked to the theme at hand—that is, bishops who are too “political” (ἀνὴρ πολύτροπος)—it is less clear how comparing bishops to painters (instead of paintings) and pointing out their failure to reproduce their models (instead of their being bad models) would serve Gregory’s argument against political bishops—namely, that they give a bad example to the people.

This is clarified by what follows. Having scoffed at his imaginary opponent for his earthly preoccupations (747–750), Gregory explains what the function of the bishop is. The passage has already been examined (§2.1.3.1); therefore, I will only bring attention

274 Among the other three analogies, the army (9) bears a resemblance to Archilochus’ *frg.* 114 W. (the poet does not want a beautiful general, but a brave one). The coupling of ships and armies reminds of Sappho’s *frg.* 16 V.

to a detail: Gregory compares the ideal bishop to a mirror (κάτοπτρον) shaped inside (μορφούμενον, 756), because he should receive the impressions (τυπούμενον, 755) produced by the Godhead on him (θείας . . . ἐμφάσεις, 754–755). The parallel passage at II, 1, 17, 37, examined at §2.1.3.1, employs the same language of divine “image” (τύπος)<sup>275</sup>. This language comes ultimately from Gen. 1:26–27, through Paul (1Cor. 13:12; 2Cor. 3:18) and Origen’s theology. It is a cornerstone in Gregory’s conception of ecclesiastical authority. Since the aim of the church is the salvation of mankind, the leaders of the church are responsible for the salvation of the people. In Gregory’s theology, salvation is construed as *theosis*, becoming similar to God. Therefore, chief task of the bishop is making the faithful similar to God<sup>276</sup>. As for Origen, for Gregory assimilation to God is achieved chiefly through contemplation<sup>277</sup>. However, contemplation requires leisure and talent, two resources not everyone can spend freely; here the role of the bishop is paramount: he is the mediator between God and the people, to the effect that he contemplates God, becomes assimilated to God, and offers his own example to the people, who, assimilating themselves to the bishop, are truly assimilating themselves to God. This theological device makes Gregory’s emphasis on the example set by the bishop and the use of iconographic metaphors to express it understandable. For this reason, Gregory compares the bishop to a mirror reflecting God and to a painter who should be very faithful to his subject (i.e., God). Clarity of lines, stability of shapes, and realism are admired in the painting metaphor because they secure an effective, faithful, and orthodox or true reproduction of God’s image in the bishop, and then in turn a reproduction of the bishop’s image in the people. The prominence of colour and the instability of shapes, on the other hand, signify the attractiveness without substance of a political bishop and his facility in deviating in matters of morality or doctrine according to political convenience, thereby jumbling the image of God in himself.

These iconographic metaphors, as well as the concept of the bishop as an example setter justifying them, contain a good deal of simple moralism. And yet in II, 1, 12, 709–760 Gregory approaches this traditional Christian moralism critically. This piece of advice may be much more than moralism and rhetoric: electing as bishop someone who was too implicated in politics could have caused the church substantial harm. An ex-official too prone to anger, someone who upset the tight network of provincial elites or who might provoke critics just as well as attract supporters, might not only fail to represent the church among other members of the elite but also—considering that Gregory writes in a period of high-rank conversions (from paganism as well as from Christian confessions that had fallen out

275 Ἦδη καὶ Τριάδος ἄπεται οὐρανίης, / Ἦς τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἔῃσι (II, 1, 17, 36–37).

276 The concept of *οἰκειώσις* πρὸς τὸν θεόν, with particular emphasis on its Stoic and Platonic origin, has been deeply investigated and put to fruit in interpreting Gregory’s orations by Elm 2012.

277 On the coincidence of love, contemplation and assimilation in Origen’s theology: Orig. in *Joh. comm. frg.13*; in *Joh. comm.* 1, 16, 92–93; 2, 2, 18; 19, 4, 22–25; in *1 Cor. comm. frg. 72*; Crouzel 1956, 232–236; Crouzel 1961, 518–523.

of grace) and that elite citizens must have wanted to avoid losing face when converting—disgrace himself and thus really hinder important converts from joining.

Through his apparently disjointed (in reality, very compressed) way of arguing, Gregory plays out a contrast between two equally traditional Christian ideas of the bishop: the bishop as example setter on one side and the bishop as patron on the other<sup>278</sup>. The contrast brings Gregory to an almost complete formulation of his ideal for church leadership (751–760). In this formulation, not only deep theological arguments play a role, but also his personal experience in Constantinople and the need for a defence before the people who preferred the meddlesome Maximus and the politician Nectarius to Gregory as bishop of Constantinople. Real-life discussions, the theological heritage of Origen, and Christian tradition are brought together in a creative synthesis, skilfully expressed through language and symbols from the Bible and from classical tradition<sup>279</sup>.

### 2.2.3.3 Mirrors and paintings in Ephrem

The metaphors of mirror and painting appear also in Ephrem's poems. Interestingly, sculpture (Gregory's *ἄγαλμα*) is totally absent. Like Gregory, Ephrem employs iconographic imagery to define the role of the bishop as example setter, although his reasons in doing so and the significance of this role for his community are quite different. One of the most organic treatments of the theme, through the image of the mirror, opens CN 16:

<p>ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ</p> <p>refrain</p> <p>ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ</p> <p>ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ</p>	<p>ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ 1 ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ</p> <p>ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ 2 ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ</p> <p>ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ 3 ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܬܐ</p>
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<sup>278</sup> On the bishop as patron see above and n. 259. The need for a credible leader is emphasised already by Paul at 1Tim. 3:1–7, and the exemplary character of the episcopate becomes a trope at least from the fourth century: Rapp 2005, 51–52, 170–171; Sterk 2004, 52n92, 53–64, 123.

<sup>279</sup> Iconographic metaphors appear in other passages regarding bishops. At II, 1, 12, 225–229, the theme is the correct imitation of the apostles, and how to interpret their example. At II, 1, 12, 455–456 the moral character of the bishop is compared to a wax tablet, which might be blank, or well or badly written. The word *τύπος* is employed at 586 for the marks asceticism leaves on the body, and at 369–370 and II, 1, 17, 20 for the bad example set by the bishop.

<p>             ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ           </p>	<p>             ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ 4              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ           </p>
<p>             ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ           </p>	<p>             ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ 5              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ           </p>
<p>             ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ           </p>	<p>             ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ 6              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ           </p>

(CN 16, 1–6)

This preamble, which appears rather generic, refers to Bishop Valgash, as demonstrated by the rest of the poem, discussing the bishop's merits. Moreover, similar passages, though shorter, occur at CN 18, 10, 3–4 and CN 19, 13–14 for Abraham: in these passages, the mirror describes the exemplary function of the bishop for his community.

<p>             ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ           </p>	<p>             ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ           </p>
<p>             ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ           </p>	<p>             ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ              ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ           </p>

(CN 18, 10, 1–4)

(CN 19, 14)

280 "In this is a mirror [*maḥzītā*] culpable, / if its clarity is clouded // because of its own spots, / because the filth on it became // a veil [*taḥpītā*] before the beholder [*ḥazzāyā*]. // **Blessed is he who polished our mirror** [*maḥzīt-an*]! // Since beauty is not adorned by it, / nor is stain despised by it, // it is a real damage to the beautiful, / because their beauty cannot gain // its profit of adornment. // Stains are not uprooted by it, / as ornaments are not increased by it; // the abiding stain is like a damage, / the lack of ornament is a loss, // so that in it loss and damage convene. // Our mirror, if it's dark, / is a real joy for the foul, // whose stains remain unreproached, / yet if polished and shining, // then 'tis our freedom that adorns itself. // By it, damage doubled through loss / for the foul and for the fair, // since the fair are not crowned / nor are the foul adorned: // the mirror shares only damage. // Never did a mirror compel / with violence its observer, // nor is the mercy that came / upon the justice of the law // compulsory as the law."

281 "Light that is damped is unseemly, / salt that loses its flavour is unfit, // stain is not fit for the chief, / as dirt is not for the mirror."

282 "As her leaders were her customs, / as with a loose leader she was loose, // and with a shining one she was splendid. / The church is like a mirror [*maḥzītā*], // which, like the countenance [*paršōpā*] of its beholder [*ḥāyar b-āh*], / accordingly, wears his shapes [*demwāt-eh*], // for, like the king such his host, / like the priest, such his parish, // each is shaped [*mettabb'a*] by them after themselves. / **Blessed is he who shaped her after himself** [*ṭabb'-āh ba-dmūt-eh*]!"

CN 19, 14 is clear: here the church is the mirror, reflecting the image of the bishop, meaning that the moral character of the bishop, by virtue of his exemplary role, will influence the moral character of the community. The bishop can “shape” his community, and note that Ephrem employs here the verb *ṭbaʿ*, whose original meaning is “to press”, “to imprint”, so that this verb can be considered synonymous of the Greek root *τύπος*. In CN 18, 10, the mirror serves as an analogy for the bishop, after two Gospel images (salt and the lamp; see Mt. 5:13–16; Mc. 4:21–22; 9:50; Lc. 8:16–18). The idea is that, as the mirror must be polished and without stains to perform its function, so the bishop should be morally pure to perform his task. The image, however, says something about the nature of this task, too. Salt, light, and mirror all express an outward action of the bishop, who should influence his environment in a positive way: as salt gives taste and light expands and illuminates, so the mirror makes us see things we could not see by ourselves. Therefore, the same task of moral improvement of the community is here expressed with a simile opposite to that of CN 19, 14.

CN 16, 1–6 has the same aim, though in a different context. For CN 18 and 19 have a conative function on the bishop and the community, instructing the bishop on his tasks and prompting the community’s consensus in favour of the new prelate. CN 16, on the other hand, is apologetic for Valgash, who suffered a breach of leadership (see §4.2). The apology is already implied in the first stanza: here, Ephrem limits the culpability of a mirror to its being dirty (1, 1–3), but has the people or the choir singing that God has polished their mirror in the following refrain. Since the mirror is a symbol for the bishop, the voice of the people is induced to let go its grievances against Valgash already in the first stanza. Stanzas 2 to 5 expound the analogy: the mirror’s function is only to reveal to the viewer his own condition, not to change it; therefore, the mirror’s only requirement is to be clean enough to let the viewer see himself. If we take the language of beauty and ugliness and of clarity and filth as metaphors for moral values, then Ephrem’s thought is clear and agrees with the rest of the poem<sup>283</sup>: the bishop is required only to be morally exemplary, especially as an ascetic, in order to implicitly blame the immoral and praise the moral. The beautiful reflecting himself in the polished mirror means that the good find legitimation in the fact that the bishop is similar to them and that they may eventually better themselves. The bad, shamed by the fact that their leader is so different from them, may find motivation for betterment. Conversely, an immoral bishop will enable immorality and undermine morality. This conceptualisation of the bishop’s role is chosen

<sup>283</sup> The moral meaning is attested as a derivative meaning for many words of these semantic field Ephrem employs: *ṣapyūtā* (CN 16, 1, 2) can mean “clarity” or “transparency” as well as “sincerity”, “simplicity” or “purity” in a moral sense (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 4261–4262, s.v. *ṣḥṣṣṣṣ*); *ṣātā* (CN 16, 1, 4) is equally a physical, ritual and moral contamination (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3351, s.v. *ṣḥṣṣṣṣ*); a *mūmā* (CN 16, 2, 2; 3, 1; 3, 3; 4, 3) can be a physical as well as a moral flaw (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2037–2038, s.v. *ṣḥṣṣṣṣ*); the words for “fair” (*ṣappirā*) and “foul” (*sanyā*) have both moral and aesthetic application (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2669, 4275–4276, s.vv. *ṣḥṣṣṣṣ*); the “crown” (CN 16, 5, 3) is a Pauline metaphor for the reward for a Christian life (and eventually of martyrism). Finally, Ephrem’s emphasis on the concepts of “adornment” and “brightness”, expressed respectively with the roots *ṣ-b-t* and *n-h-r*, imply an ascetic behaviour (see §3.2.1).

because it does not require any compulsion on his part towards the behaviour of the faithful. That this is the aim of the argument is made clear at stanza 6, where Ephrem introduces another important theme for this poem, namely supersessionism. The mirror is compared to the grace (*ṭaybūtā*) “coming in place of” (*d-’etat ‘al-*) the justice of the law (*kēnūt-eh d-nāmōsā*). The *tertium comparationis*, which unites the bishop, the mirror, and the grace, is the absence of compulsion and violence (*lā dabbrat . . . ba-qṭīrā*, 1–2; *qṭīr-eh d-nāmōsā*, 6). Therefore, the iconographic metaphor of the mirror is employed, as was the case for Gregory, to express the bishop’s role of example setter, but the significance of this role is played out differently by Ephrem, who emphasises more the freedom left to the people to follow the example than the priest’s role of mediation between God and human beings. Like Gregory, Ephrem interprets the theme of the bishop as example setter in light of his main theological concerns: as the basis of Gregory’s treatment was the doctrine of *theosis*, Ephrem links the theme to substitution theology and his defence of free will against gnostic and astrological fatalism (see CN 16, 7). Finally, linking the mirror metaphor with the two dispensations, Ephrem introduces a historical development in the metaphor that will be prominent in the next group of iconographic images.

A recurring metaphor in the texts dedicated to Abraham (CN 17–21) is that of painting. This metaphor has a considerably different meaning than in Gregory. The meaning is the same in all occurrences, which will be quoted here in full:

<p>             ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ           </p>	<p>             ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ 11              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              [lacuna]           </p>
<p>             ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ           </p>	<p>             ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ 12              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ              ܐܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܝܢ           </p>

284

(CN 17, 11–12)

284 “Painted [*ṣār*] is your master in your person, / behold his features [*demwāt-eh*] all over you! // He parted from us, while he’s with us: / in you we see all three of them // glorious who parted from us; / be for us a wall as was Jacob, // and full of mercy as Babu, / and an eloquent treasure as Valgash, // [lacuna] / **Blessed is he who in one painted [*ṣār*] them!** /// Me too, the dregs of the flock, / I did not skimp on what was due, // I painted an image [*ṣāret ṣalmā*] of both, / with the dyes [*sammānē*] of both, // that the herd may see their ornaments, / and the flock their beauties; // and since I am a speaking lamb / for You, God of Abraham, // in Abram’s tenure I praise You. / **Blessed is he who made me his harp!**”

285 “Lo! As you are priest after your master, / shining after the splendid, // modest after the sober, / vigilant after the fasting, // your master didn’t leave you, / in the living we see the departed, // for, lo!, in you are painted his features [*ṣṭrān demwāt-eh*], / his marks [*’eqbāt-eh*] in you are engraved [*rṣīmān*], // and from all of you all of him shines forth. / **Blessed is he who in his stead gave us thee!**”

ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
<sup>285</sup> ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
(CN 18, 1)	
(CN 19, 1, 10)	<sup>286</sup> ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
	...
ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ 15
ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
<sup>287</sup> ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܟܠܗ ܕܝܗܝ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
(CN 19, 15, 1–6)	

The first problem posed by these metaphors is that of sources, because, as I already said, the Bible afforded little material for this kind of imagery, and in the case of Gregory, these metaphors come mostly from the Greek rhetoric tradition of *ekphrasis* and discussion on works of art and artists. Ephrem does not seem to know this tradition; for example, he does not mention either individual painters or technical details like the use of colours. His metaphors should then be explained differently. The influence of the Bible and the Christian tradition of typology can account for CN 19, 1, 10, where “painting” (*ṣār*) is employed to express the typological relationship between the Old Testament Abraham and the bishop Abraham. A similar case is CN 19, 15, 1–6, where the three previous bishops left to the community a “model” (*ṭupsā*) of evangelical poverty. Here, the word *ṭupsā*, a loanword from Greek τύπος, expresses the example set by the departed bishops. However, both the use of this particular word and the fact that the example left by the bishops constitutes their “testament” (*diatēkē*, another loanword, from Greek διαθήκη) and is gained by meditation on the two Testaments suggest that the use of *ṭupsā* is prompted by the practice of biblical exegesis<sup>288</sup>: Ephrem compares the example of the bishops, fruit of their sound biblical faith, to an “Old Testament” that the behaviour of the community, as a “New Testament”, will fulfil.

#### 286 “Blessed is he who painted you [*ṣār-āk*] in Abraham!”

<sup>287</sup> “Without testament departed those / three priests dazzling, // but since they meditated / those two testaments of God, // a big inheritance [*yurtānā*] they left us, / namely the model [*ṭupsā*] of poverty”. The text at line 5 reads *yutrānā*, “gain”, “profit”, “possession”. It is easy to surmise an error for *yurtānā*, “inheritance” “inherited possession”. The conjecture is satisfying both because of the context (the metaphor of the last will and testament of the former bishops in this stanza), and because *yutrānā* would be *lectio facilior* (a generic “profit” instead of the specific “inherited good”) and a common error. In fact, in at least two places of the Syriac text of Genesis in the Peshitta version (Gen. 23:9 and 49:30), *yurtānā* is given for Greek κτήσις and Hebrew *’aḥuza*, both meaning “profit”, “utility”. This translation is a clear corruption of an original *yutrānā*, testifying for the easy confusion between these two words.

<sup>288</sup> The Peshitta version of 1Cor. 10:6 and 1Petr. 3:21 has *ṭupsā* for Greek τύπος/ἀντίτυπον and the two passages are a prime example of typological interpretation of Old Testament narrations. In other such passages (e.g., Rom. 5:14), Syriac translates Greek τύπος with *dmūtā*.

The metaphor of a legacy, implying legitimate succession, links CN 19, 15, 1–6 to the other passages containing the metaphor of painting—namely, CN 17, 11–12 and CN 18, 1. The principle uniting all these instances of the metaphor is that of historical continuity, be it from Old to New Testament, from Bible to church, or from deceased bishops to the future of the community and their successor. However, the metaphor is here developed differently: at CN 18, 1, 10 biblical Abraham was the image painted, and the bishop the true image, and at CN 19, 15 the image left by previous bishops is aimed at the whole community; here, instead, the living bishop is the painted copy, and the deceased predecessor is the original, and the example left by the predecessor is meant to be picked up by the new bishop only. The detail of the personal traits (*demwātā*, CN 17, 11, 2 and CN 18, 1, 7) of the previous bishop and the repetitions of the verb *šār*, “to paint,” suggest the painted portrait as the tenor of the metaphor. A biblical precedent for this metaphor may be found in Gen. 5:3, where Adam’s generation of Seth is *ba-dmūt-eh a(y)k šalm-eh*, “in his likeness according to his image”, as was God’s creation of Adam (Gen. 1:26–27; 5:1). However, in the idea of generation, contrary to that of creation, the notion of succession is implied, which the biblical text of Gen. 5 makes very clear in presenting a succession of patriarchs, each giving birth to his successor and then dying. Ephrem employs the same words, *dmūtā* (mostly in the plural *demwātā*) and *šalmā*, as Gen. 5. Yet another influence might be at play here. A significant clue is in CN 17, 11, 3–5 and 18, 1, 5–6, where Ephrem stresses the *presence* of the portrayed predecessor in his living portrait. If Abraham’s being a portrait of his predecessor is reason enough to affirm the presence of the predecessor, then Ephrem betrays here a belief in the strong presence of the model in the image. Such expressions may be influenced by the Greek literary trope of the work of art so perfect it lacks only the word or breath to be alive<sup>289</sup>. But if we look in the Syriac context, the concept resonates with contemporary cultural phenomena. The association of a sacred portrait, the Edessan Mandyllion, with the Abgar legend developed probably in the second half of the fourth century: in its first witness, the *Doctrine of Addai*, the Mandyllion works as an *Ersatz* of Jesus’s presence in Edessa<sup>290</sup>. Another important element in the culture of the image that may have influenced Ephrem is Manichaeism, which gave great prominence to painting, so much that one of its sacred books was an illustrated treatise that the Coptic sources title εἰκών<sup>291</sup>. Obviously, the Edessan legend and Manichaeism cannot be classified as “sources” of Ephrem’s metaphor;

289 A classic example are the epigrams on Myron’s *Cow* (*Anth. Gr.* 9, 713–742; 793–798; Posidippus 66 A.-B.; Auson. *epigr.* 63–71); see also Steiner 2012, 29–31.

290 First witness to the Abgar legend is Eusebius of Caesarea (*h. e.* 1, 13, 5–22), in the first half of the fourth century; Egeria in the second half of the same century still does not mention the image in Edessa (*peregr.* 17, 1; 19, 3–19), but only the letter from Jesus to the king (note, however, that at 19, 6 Egeria is shown by the bishop of Edessa the *archiotypae* of Abgar and his son Magnus, i.e., probably sculpted images of their face). The *Doctrine of Addai* (beginning of the fifth century) bears a remarkable similarity to Ephrem’s formulation at CN 17, 12: “because he [Hannana] was the painter [*šayyārā*] of the king, he painted [*šār*] the portrait [*šalm-eh*] of Jesus with choice dyes [*b-sammānē gbayyā*]” (Phillips 1876, A. 6).

291 Pers. *Arzhang*; see Asmussen’s article in the *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Asmussen 1987) and Gulácsi 2015. Ephrem knew of Mani’s link with writing, calligraphy and even art: Vööbus 1958, 129–130.



rather, they should be seen as signs of a cultural context that, the apparent iconoclasm of the Bible notwithstanding, was keenly aware of the power of painted images; in such a context, Ephrem's metaphor makes more sense, because it presupposes from its audience not only acquaintance with painted portraits but also ideological grappling with this form of art.

As regards the meaning and function of this metaphor, it expresses, like the other metaphors of painting, the exemplary value of the bishop. Differently from the metaphor of the mirror and from Gregory, this example is not aimed at the community, but is the example every bishop sets for his successor. Therefore, the function of this metaphor is to underline the similarity between a bishop and his predecessor, so that it is not at random that every instance of the metaphor is found in CN 17–21, poems dedicated to a newly elected bishop. The metaphor legitimises the new bishop and the transfer of power, without thereby binding his hands: Ephrem explicitly names the traits of the old bishop inherited by the new one, his *demwātā*, and they are all very generic moral and ascetic virtues, like modesty, sobriety, fasting, wakefulness (CN 18, 1, 1–4). Even when the poet details characteristics specific to each of the predecessors (CN 17, 11, 6–8), urging Abraham to imitate them, the content of the exhortation is rather generic and does not involve the new bishop in specific choices or policies. In this way, the bishop is requested only to adopt a morally decent behaviour and engage in ascetic practices to secure his legitimation via the similarity with his predecessor, without being bound to any political continuity with them.

At CN 17, 12, Ephrem employs the metaphor of painting in yet a different way: this time the poet himself is the painter, and both bishops, the old and the new, are the subject of his portrait. As was said above, these iconographic metaphors are a *mise en abîme* of the whole poems, and this is demonstrated by Ephrem's use of the painting metaphor in a metapoetic sense. The poems are a painting of the bishops, revealing to the senses of the audience the inner characters of the prelates; at the same time, they are “due”, a thanksgiving prompted and compelled by the excellency of the bishops. These declarations on the part of Ephrem make explicit the double direction of these poems: on one side, they are addressed to the community and aim at legitimising their new leader, showing his virtues; on the other, they are meant to be known by the bishop, as a sign of loyalty and a *captatio benevolentiae* from the poet. In this context, Ephrem's self-definition as “Harp of God” (*kennār-eh*, CN 17, 12, 10) stands out in all its importance, because, sealing the praise of the new bishop, it reminds the prelate of the power of public poetry that Ephrem is putting at his disposal.

In conclusion, iconographic metaphors, though relatively unimportant in the Bible, have a very important function in both Ephrem's and Gregory's poetry: they serve to express a widespread notion in the contemporary church—namely, that the bishop should be a paragon of morality for the community. However, this exemplary function of the bishop is inserted by both poets in the framework of their theology. To put it in a general way, Gregory conceives of the exemplarity of the bishop according to a vertical model, whereas Ephrem has more of a horizontal model: in Gregory's thought there is a hierarchy going from God to the people in the church, with the priest (or bishop)

as the link between the human and the divine plane of existence; in Ephrem, the historical development of the church prevails, a path leading from Old Testament figures to Jesus and the apostles and to the apostolic tradition within the church. Therefore, exemplarity runs for Gregory from God above to the church down here: the bishop models himself like a mirror towards God, and the people are taught by the bishop's example. For Ephrem, instead, exemplarity is a mode of typology, with Old Testament characters setting the example for bishops; but the same mechanism functions for the apostolic succession, with each bishop having his predecessor as an example. In this case the scholarly stereotypes on Gregory and Ephrem are (at least partially) true: Gregory's vertical model denounces his debt to Greek philosophy—Neoplatonism in particular—and, in its stillness and abstraction, it contrasts with Ephrem's horizontal model, which is dynamic, historical, and concrete, a product of Semitic culture and biblical thinking.

## 2.2.4 Other metaphors

In this section I review other metaphors, in a cursory way, either because they have been already sufficiently studied or because the material is not as abundant or as interesting as what has been analysed until now.

### 2.2.4.1 Family

There is a group of metaphors that has unique characteristics: family metaphors. First, they are articulated, developed, and widespread in Ephrem's poetry and almost absent from Gregory's poems. Second, their articulation leads often to ambiguities in the relationship of the bishop to his community, which are worth considering. Third, the metaphor of the father became fixed with time, until the word was employed as a title for prelates and monastics<sup>292</sup>. This group of metaphors has already been studied for Ephrem, whereas in Gregory, being less important, it has not captured scholars' attention<sup>293</sup>. In many passages of Ephrem's poems, the bishops are called "father", or they have a parental role towards the community, which is represented as a child or a young girl<sup>294</sup>. There is more than one *tertium comparationis* in this metaphor. First, the role of the bishop towards the community is very similar to that of a father towards his offspring, because the bishop should educate and guide the community. Furthermore, the

<sup>292</sup> Lampe 1961, 1050, s.v. πατήρ; Payne Smith 1879–1901, 5, s.v. ܐܒܝܬܐ. See Jerg 1970, 103–104 for the evolution of the terms πατριάρχης and πάπας in the official documents.

<sup>293</sup> Murray 2006, 150–162; Bou Mansour 2019, 102–108.

<sup>294</sup> The bishop(s) as "father" (*abā*): CN 13, 12, 3; CN 14, 13, 4; 17, 3; 22, 1; CN 16, 14, 5; 18, 1; 21, 2; CN 19, 1, 2. Two long passages presuppose the metaphor of the community as a young girl and the bishops as parents: CN 14, 16–22; CN 16, 17–21. At CN 19, 1, the bishop is the father of the single faithful.

bishop through his administering of baptism effectively brings forth the single Christians, so that his role can really be considered that of a father on the spiritual level. Moreover, the father-daughter relationship presupposes a growth and a progression in the daughter. Second, the relationship between bishop and community is fundamentally asymmetrical, the bishop being endowed with all authority and the community being bound to absolute obedience. This reflects father-children relationships in late antiquity. Third—and this is perhaps the most neglected and most important point—this metaphor naturalises the relationship between bishop and community as described here: insisting on the paternity of the bishop, Ephrem (as well as other ecclesiastical writers) sought to express the unavoidable necessity of the relationship, removing it from the domain of man-made, socially constructed relationships and projecting it into the natural order. In other words, fatherhood language for the episcopate amounts to a defence of its theological necessity and divine, not human, institution.

There might be an analogous use of the metaphor in Gregory, though a less developed one: at II, 1, 10, 8, he laments his exile from Constantinople as a removal from his “holy offspring” (ιερώων τεκέων), a theme repeated in the iambic miniatures linked to our longest poems<sup>295</sup>. Here, naming the community in Constantinople as “offspring” implies that Gregory’s exile is not only very cruel but also an act against nature. In II, 1, 12 the community is twice termed “offspring” (τέκεια), yet in one case the bishop is not πάτηρ, but προστάτης, because paternity is reserved to the Spirit<sup>296</sup>. Finally, on one occasion it is Gregory who compares himself to a father, but this time the metaphor has nothing to do with the bishop’s role in relation to the community, because here the poet is addressing the other bishops<sup>297</sup>. In this case, the image in the last words, that of a dying father, aims to produce that very sense of asymmetry that the father metaphor enshrines, while at the same time it binds the addressees through pity for an old man and through the shame of not fulfilling the last words of a dying man: the metaphor of the dying father is a clever construction because of the inherent contrast between the hierarchical superiority of the father figure and the fragility of the old, dying, and failing man; therefore, it commands compliance through pity.

#### 2.2.4.2 Marriage and wedding

A metaphor that apparently contradicts the language of fatherhood is that of wedding and marriage: the bishop is sometimes compared to a husband, and the community

<sup>295</sup> οἷά μ’ ἔοργεν / Ὁ φθόνος; ὡς ἱερῶν τῆλε βάλεν τεκέων (II, 1, 10, 7–8); Ποθῶ λόγων γέννημα τῶν ἐμῶν τέκων (II, 1, 5, 2); Τῶν δ’ ἐμῶν τέκνων τυχὸν / Ἄλλοι κατασκιρτῶσι (II, 1, 6, 8–10); Ὡ μοι ἐμῆς Τριάδος! ὦ μοι ἐμῶν τεκέων! / Ὡ φθόνε, τίπτε μ’ ἔοργας; (II, 1, 16, 52–53).

<sup>296</sup> Ἐπειτ’ ἀσάρκων εἰσὶ τέκνων προστάται, / Ἄ πνεῦμα τίκτει σαρκὸς ἐξενωμένον (II, 1, 12, 629–630); Ἀγνάς τε πέμπειν προσφοράς ὑπὲρ τέκνων (II, 1, 12, 757).

<sup>297</sup> Πλήν ἐξιτήριόν τιν’, εἰ δοκεῖ, λόγον, / Βραχὺν μὲν, ἀλλὰ χρήσιμον, δέξασθέ μου / Ὡς οἱ πατρώας λαμβάνοντες ἐν τέλει / Φωνὰς ἐπισκήψεις τε μνήμης ἀξίας / Μεθ’ ἃς λόγος τις οὐκέτ’ ἐξακούεται, / Ὡ καὶ πλέον μένουσιν ἐν βάθει φρενός (II, 1, 12, 811–817).

to his wife<sup>298</sup>. This metaphor is only apparently contradictory, because, exactly as the father metaphor, it expresses an asymmetrical relationship, since the wife was not on par with the husband<sup>299</sup>. The sense of this metaphor is to express the exclusivity of the relationship between bishop and community, binding the bishop to the community to which he was ordered and restating the office *as a function* of the community and not as an attribute owned by the office's recipient<sup>300</sup>.

Both the images of fatherhood and of marriage are developed in another direction by Ephrem: the true Father is God, the true Groom is Christ; therefore, the bishop acts only as a mediator between the Godhead and the community. In one case, Ephrem very explicitly says that the bishop, in his capacity of sacrificial priest, “stands as a mediator between God and mankind”, a sentence strikingly similar to 1Tim. 2:5, referring to Jesus<sup>301</sup>. So it is that in CN 16, 17, 2 the first bishop, Jacob, is called *mrabbyānā*, meaning “foster father”, because he was tasked with making Nisibis's community grow in her first years, whereas her true Father waiting for her is God. The same concept of hierarchy as mediation is applied to marriage imagery. In this respect, it is interesting to note that whereas the bishop is called “groom” (*ḥatnā*) or “father” (*ʿabā*), the community is never called “bride” (*kalltā*) or “betrothed” (*mkirtā*), but always “spouse” (*ba(r)t-zawgā*) or “wife” (*ʿa(n)ttā*): this means that Ephrem actually distinguishes two different metaphors, marriage and wedding. In the metaphor of marriage, the bishop is the husband, and the community is the wife, and the metaphor expresses their union as an accomplished fact to stress its binding value and its permanence through time. The metaphor of betrothal and wedding has a different meaning: here, the betrothed and bride is still the church, but the groom is Christ, whereas the bishop has the role of a paranymph, betrother or go-between for the true groom—Christ—and the church<sup>302</sup>. In this case,

298 “Aptly your name is Abraham, / for you are father of many; // yet, since you had no spouse / like was Sarah for Abraham, // here, your spouse [*ba(r)t-zawg-āk*] is your diocese! / Rear her children with your fidelity; // may you have spiritual offspring, / and children born of the promise, // who may in Eden inherit. / **Blessed is he who painted you in Abraham!**” (CN 19, 1); “O virgin that was bridegroom [*ḥatnā*], / stir up a bit your understanding // towards the wife of your youth [*ʿa(n)tat ṭalyūt-āk*]” (CN 20, 1, 1–3).

299 As shown by Harvey 1993, even though the influence of Marcionism favoured egalitarian experiences in Syriac culture, the responses were ambiguous, oscillating between acceptance and even more misogyny than in Greek culture. Furthermore, Paul's heritage, which Harvey stresses as fundamentally egalitarian (see Gal. 3:28), was ambiguous too (see 1Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22–24).

300 Bishops were officially bound to their seat at least since the Council of Nicaea (canons 15 and 16). The canon was seldom respected in the fourth century, but with time the jurisdiction of the bishop became more and more linked with the city where he resided, both officially and in reality; see Barone Adesi 1998.

301 *D-hu qāyem ʿa(y)k meṣʿāyā / bēt-ʿallāhā la-naṣutā* (CN 18, 12, 8–9); *w-ḥad-u meṣʿāyā d-ʿallāhā w-da-bnaynāšā barnāšā iṣuʿ mšiḥā* (“and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”, 1Tim. 2:5).

302 This theme is elaborated in three stanzas: “Listen to the Apostle, as he speaks / to that virgin [*btaltā*] whom he had betrothed [*mkar*]: // “I burn for you, but with the ardour, / with the ardour of God, // not that of the flesh, but of the spirit.” / You too for her burn purely, // that she may know who is and whence,

the imagery preserves the primacy of Christ in relationship to the church and frames the bishop as instrumental to this relationship, while at the same time stressing that his authority depends on that of the Bridegroom, Christ. If marriage implies duration in time, betrothal is destined to end at the moment of wedding; this image is not static, like that of marriage, but points to the eschatological theme of Christ's wedding with the church. Within the framework of this theme, the bishop's role as paranymp implies a future review of his work by the Groom, who will hold the bishop accountable, both for the doctrinal (CN 20, 4–5) and for the moral (CN 19, 13) shortcomings of his community, so that, in a nuanced way, the use of the imagery of mediation is also a strong conative reminder to the bishop of his responsibilities. As demonstrated by this metaphor group's occurrence in CN 20, the antiheretical poem, both metaphors (marriage and betrothal) are instrumental in preserving unity under the bishop while at the same time delegitimising doctrinal dissent: a breach in communion from the bishop is presented in Old Testament fashion as an act of adultery by the community and heretical leaders.

### 2.2.4.3 Stewardship

Another typically Ephremian image of episcopal mediation is that of the steward, administrator, or treasurer<sup>303</sup>. This image has obvious biblical precedents, most of all in the Gospels, where many parables and sayings involve administrators and stewards and problems of delegation and administration. Ephrem employs this metaphor, going so far as to call the bishops “treasurers” (*gēzabrē*)<sup>304</sup>. Usually, the figure refers to their task of teaching doctrine, because the Word of God is seen as a depository, whence the prelate should choose the right teaching at the right time. Gregory, too, employs this imagery once in our poems. At the beginning of II, 1, 13 (line 2), in his address to the bishops, he calls them ψυχῶν ταμίαι, “ministers of souls”, using the word ταμίαις, attested since Homer and with a wide range of meanings: from referring to the person tasked with making the parts of a meal and distributing them to Zeus as dispenser of all things to referring, in prose, to the financial administrator of a temple, a king, or a

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/ and through you may long for, through you may love // Jesus, her Faithful Bridegroom [*ḥatn-āh da-šrārā*]. / **Blessed is he whose zeal is holy!**” (CN 19, 13); “Here with you is the betrothed of your Lord [*mkīrat mār-āk*], / keep her from all harms, // and from any man violating her, calling / the churches by their own names. // The name of her Betrothed [*mkīr-āh*] she's given, / she should not whore with another name: // since she wasn't baptised in a name of man, / the names in which she's baptised she should profess // of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. / **Blessed is he in whose name she's called!** /// The Apostle, her matchmaker [*mākōr-āh*], had zeal / that she may not be violated by names, // not only by fake names, / but not even by the trustworthy ones, // nor Peter's nor even his own name; / those that were trustworthy matchmakers [*mākōrē šarrīrē*] // gave her the name of her Betrothed [*mkīr-āh*]; / the fake ones as adulterers // put their own names on the flock. / **Glory to your name, Our Creator!**” (CN 20, 4–5). Behind these passages lies 2Cor. 11:2.

<sup>303</sup> This has been studied by Murray 2006, 193–195.

<sup>304</sup> The bishops are called *gēzabrē* at CN 13, 3 and CN 19, 8, 10; other occurrences: CN 14, 3, 5; CN 21, 2, 9–10. At CN 17, 3, 10, the bishop himself is the repository containing teaching.

city<sup>305</sup>. This imagery extols the bishops as leaders of the community, at the same time reminding them that they are responsible to God and that their power springs from a delegation.

In general, the metaphors expressing delegation are more common in Ephrem than in Gregory. As a result, the triangular relationship of God/Christ, bishop, and community is more visible in Ephrem: the single links (God-bishop, bishop-community, God-community) are described by Gregory, too, but Ephrem gives a more consequent image of how all three should relate to one another. He does this partly by subtly introducing the eschatological *redde rationem* of bishops through the metaphor of the wedding. This way, his representation of this relationship is inscribed in a historical framework: as evidenced by Papoutsakis in the case of the relationship between God and Israelite kings, the insistence on vicariousness is linked in Ephrem to the orderly succession in office through time; and this, in turn, is precisely the most important theme of the poems on the bishops<sup>306</sup>.

#### 2.2.4.4 Teaching

It is a common conception among the scholars that the monarchic episcopate emerged also from the necessity to counter doctrinal divisions in the communities, to reduce teaching under a single authority, at least at the local level. Since doctrinal distress did not end in the third century—much to the contrary, the fourth century witnessed the virulent Arian controversy—it is only normal that the *munus docendi*, the bishop's task of teaching, should be an important element of his role. This is also demonstrated by the Greek inscriptions on bishops, which frequently mention διδάσκαλος as an attribute of the bishop, characterising him essentially as the people's teacher<sup>307</sup>.

Indeed, both Ephrem and Gregory present bishops as teachers and use teaching imagery for their aims. Ephrem employs mostly the world *rabbā*, and sometimes the more specific *mallpānā*, often tying them to the personification of the community as a little girl growing and learning<sup>308</sup>. In other instances, the relationship between master and pupil describes the relationship between a bishop and his successor, implying a continuity in their magisterium and making the transfer of powers less traumatic<sup>309</sup>. In one case, Ephrem describes himself as the disciple of the three bishops, at the same time boasting of his intimacy with these prestigious figures and giving a concrete example of their fulfilling their task in his person<sup>310</sup>. Finally, a notable metaphor in these poems,

<sup>305</sup> Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1754, s.v. ταμίας.

<sup>306</sup> Papoutsakis 2017, 85–87: to the vicarious kings of the House of David and their antitypes of the House of Constantine, one must therefore add the bishops as vicars of Christ as enjoying this unique complementarity of orderly succession and vicariousness. On the theme of episcopal succession: §4.1.

<sup>307</sup> Feissel 1989, 802n8.

<sup>308</sup> *CN* 13, 12, 4; *CN* 14, 15–16; see also §2.1.2.2.

<sup>309</sup> *CN* 17, 1, 8–9; 2, 5. See §4.1.1.

<sup>310</sup> *CN* 14, 26, 3–4.

a figure with a clear biblical ancestry, is that of teaching as a food and learning as eating<sup>311</sup>: in *CN* 14, 16, the evolution of the community and the teaching of the bishop are described as a weaning, in terms similar to those used by Paul at 1Cor. 3:1–2<sup>312</sup>; in *CN* 17, 2, 8–9, the bishop's teaching (*yullpānā*) is called “new bread” (*lahmā ḥa(d)tā*), probably a reference to Gospel passages in which Christ describes himself as bread<sup>313</sup>.

Even though it is generally known that Syriac culture tends to see the bishop as a teacher and Christianity as a school, while Greek culture has a more political approach to the bishop's role, Gregory calls the bishops διδάσκαλοι in a number of instances in *II*, 1, 12<sup>314</sup>. This usage has two main functions. The first is to underline the moral decadence of the church caused by the moral decadence of bishops, because they are appointed to *teach* morality to the people, so that their failures reflect poorly on the community<sup>315</sup>: teaching expresses a causative link between the moral character of leaders and the moral character of the people led. More importantly, the use of διδάσκαλος and the representation of the bishop's work as teaching are part of the wider strategy of “rationalisation” of the bishop's office enacted by Gregory, whereby teaching presupposes competence and knowledge, which must be acquired through training, learning, and exercise (see §3.1.3.3; §3.3.2.1). Therefore, Gregory not only stresses twice the paradox of a teacher knowing less than his pupil as a symbol of the neophyte-turned-bishop being less Christian than many of his faithful<sup>316</sup>, but he also mocks and unmasks these bishops through the fable of “Venus and the Cat” (Perry 50):

<sup>311</sup> See Jer. 15:16; Jes. 55:1–2, similar to wisdom's feast at Prov. 9:1–6; see the vision of prophets eating a book: Hes. 3:3; Apc. 10:9–10.

<sup>312</sup> “The first with all simplicity / gave milk [*ḥalbā*] to his infancy [*l-yallūdūt-eh*], // the middle with all readiness / gave a taste [*t'ūmā*] to his childhood [*l-šabrūt-eh*], // the third with all perfection / gave food [*uklā*] to his maturity [*la-gmīrūt-eh*].” (*CN* 14, 16); “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes [*l-yallūdē*] in Christ. I have fed you with milk [*ḥalbā*], and not with meat [*mēkultā*]: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.” (1Cor. 3:1–2). See also: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk [*ḥalbā*], and not of strong meat [*mēkultā šarrirtā*]. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe [*šabrā*]. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age [*gmīrē*], even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebr. 5:12–14); “As newborn babes [*yallūdē šabrē*], desire the sincere milk [*ḥalbā*] of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1Petr. 2:2).

<sup>313</sup> “To be supplied from him with life, / the new bread of doctrine.” (*CN* 17, 3, 8–9); see in particular Joh. 6 with its long discussion on Jesus as bread.

<sup>314</sup> On Syriac emphasis on learning and doctrine: Becker 2004, 179–182; Becker 2006, 22–40; on the bishop as a political leader in Greek culture: Rapp 2005, 131–132.

<sup>315</sup> Ταχθέντες εἶναι τοῦ καλοῦ διδάσκαλοι / Κακῶν ἀπάντων ἐσμέν ἐργαστήριον / Σιγῇ βοῶντες, κἀν δοκῶμεν μὴ λέγειν / Πρόεδρος ἡ κακία· πονεῖτω μὴδὲ εἷς / Κακοὶ γίνεσθε, τοῦτο συντομώτατον / Καὶ λῶον. ἡ δὲ πρᾶξις ἴσταιται νόμος. / Μόλις γὰρ ἂν τις ἐκ βίας διδασκάλων / Νεύσειεν εἰς τὸ κρεῖσσον· εἰ δ' ἔχοι τύπον / Μοχθηρόν, ἥλω, Ροῦς κατὰ πρανοῦς τρέχων (*II*, 1, 12, 362–370).

<sup>316</sup> Ἀλλ' οὐχὶ τοῦτο· ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνο πῶς φύγῃς / Ὅμοῦ μαθητῆς καὶ διδάσκαλος δοκεῖν / Θήγοντα θήγων (ὡς ὀδόντες τῶν συῶν), / Δέον διδάσκειν ἐκμαθόντα τοὺς νόμους; / Τίς ἡ τοσαύτη σύγχυσις τοῦ πράγματος;

Αἰσχροῦν μὲν οὖν αἰσχιστον ἢ τρόπου πλάσις.  
 Ὅμως φύλασσε καὶ μ' ἐπαινέτην ἔχεις.  
 Νῦν δ' οἷόν ἐστι τοῦτο καὶ τῷ προσφερές;  
 Ἄρ' ἐστι καὶ παῖξαι τι τερπνῷ πλάσματι  
 Σπουδῆς μεταξύ· καὶ γέλως ἐν δακρύοις· (700)  
 Γαλῆν καθίζει μῦθος εἰσω παστάδος·  
 Νύμφην γὰρ εἶχε νυμφικῶς ἐσταλμένη·  
 Ἔδνα, κρότοι, γέλωτες· ἦν λαμπρὸς γάμος.  
 Ἡ δ' ὡς ἶδεν μὺν διατρέχοντ' ἐν τῷ μέσῳ,  
 Νύμφη μὲν ἦν, γαλῆ δέ· τῷ φανέντι γάρ  
 Ἐπιδραμοῦσα δεῖπνον εἶχεν, οὐ γάμον. (705)  
 Τοιοῦτός ἐστι πᾶς νόθος διδάσκαλος.  
 Τὸ γὰρ πεφυκὸς οὐ ταχέως μεθίσταται.  
 (II, 1, 12, 696–708)

Therefore, feigning one's character is the worst of shames;  
 however, if you hold fast, I will praise you.  
 But how is it this, and to what is it similar?  
 Can I play a bit with a pleasant fable  
 while being serious? There is laughter even in tears. (700)  
 The tale places a kitten in a bridal chamber,  
 because it depicts her as a bride in bridal garments;  
 Gifts, applauses, laughter: 'twas really a brilliant wedding.  
 Then, she saw a mouse running through the middle of the room.  
 She was a bride, yea, but still a cat: at that sight (705)  
 she ran upon it and had dinner, not wedding.  
 Such is every false teacher:  
 Nature is not easily changed.

### 2.2.4.5 Light

A metaphor related to the representation of bishops as teachers and common to Ephrem and Gregory is that of the doctrine or learning as light. Gregory employs this image in particular for his preaching of Trinitarian dogma in Constantinople,<sup>317</sup> and in this sense the expression “life's light” (βίου φάος, II, 1, 13, 5) must be understood as being

(II, 1, 12, 549–553); Ὁ δ' ἐγκρατὴς ἔστηκεν ἡτιμωμένος, / Κάτω νενευκῶς, πρὸς Θεὸν μόνον βλέπων, / Στέργων μαθητοῦ χώραν, οὐ μὴδ' ἄξιος / Ἵσως μαθητῆς οὗτος ὁ νῦν διδάσκαλος, / Εἴπερ τὸ κρατεῖν οὐ τόπῳ γνωρίζεται. (II, 1, 12, 637–641). See also the usage of the verb διδάσκω as Gregory presents the doctrinal curriculum of a good bishop: Δίδαξον ἡμᾶς, ὡς θέλεις, δίδασκε δέ· / Τίς ἡ Τριάς μοι. . . / Μὴ με στερήσης· εἰ δὲ πάντα τυφλὸς εἼ, / Τί χειραγωγεῖς μὴ βλέπων; Ὡ τοῦ σκότους / Τῷ μὴ βλέποντι χρωμένον διδασκάλῳ, / Ὡς εἰς βόθρον πέσωσι ἀγνοίας ἅμα (II, 1, 12, 309–310; 326–329).

<sup>317</sup> Δηρὸν ἀεθλεύσαντα, φασφόρον οὐρανίοισι / Δόγμασι, καὶ πέτρης ἐκπροχέοντα ρόον. (II, 1, 10, 9–10); Τριάδ' ἔλαμψα τοῖς πρὶν ἐσκοτισμένοις. (II, 1, 12, 118). Naturally, the adjective φαέσφορον is the poetic equivalent of the more ordinary ἐλαμψα. The image has biblical roots: the prophecy at Jes. 9:1 is fulfilled in Christ's preaching at Mt. 4:16; this means that Gregory presents his own preaching as analogous to that of Christ, an usual proceeding in his autobiographical writings (see Hofer 2013, 175–181; §1.3.2).



applied to the bishops, because they are tasked with repeating in space (through collegiality) and in time (through succession) the one teaching (hence the singular φάος) of the church. Ephrem's usage of this image clearly depends on biblical sources: in *CN* 21, 1, he compares the bishop to John the Baptist, whom Jesus described as a lamp (whereas Jesus is the Light itself)<sup>318</sup>; in *CN* 18, 10, the reference to a light not to be concealed is taken from a saying of Christ<sup>319</sup>. In both of these cases, the imagery of light implies the presence of a darkness to be overcome. This is the case also for Gregory's use of the image in relation to his ministry. Hence, the imagery of light, which also, because of its biblical antecedents, implies the presence of darkness, is employed by both poets when the *munus docendi* implies concurrent teachings or the chasing away of ignorance. Concretely speaking, both Gregory and Ephrem seem very concerned with the bishops' task of dispelling heresies in the community. A more developed example of this imagery occurs in *CN* 13 with a different meaning. Here, the bishops of Nisibis are called "luminaries" (*nahhīrē*) already in the first stanza (*CN* 13, 1, 2), anticipating the deeper development of the image in the second, where it is clear that Ephrem is alluding to the creation of the sun and the moon in Gen. 1:14–19<sup>320</sup>. Here, the focus is not so much teaching as guidance, because the "three darknesses" to which the poet refers clearly represent the three Persian sieges, and the biblical passage that is the source of the text speaks of the luminaries (*nahhīrē*) as "governing" (*šlat*): the bishops were leaders in the hard times of the community. The image is reprised at stanzas 7–9, where the bishops are compared to different phases of the sun during a single day, because

318 "John was a lamp [*šrāgā*] / that exposed and rebuked the perverse, // they hurried and quenched the lamp / that the whim of their appetites refused. // Be a torch [*lampēdā*] resplendent / and silence the servants of darkness [*heššōkā*], // for your doctrine shines [*nhar*] so much / that no one in its splendour [*b-denḥ-eh*] dares // to serve the whims of darkness. / **Blessed is he who made you our lamp** [*lampēdā*]!" (*CN* 21, 1); cf. "He was a burning and a shining [*manhar*] light [*šrāgā*]: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light [*b-nuhr-eh*]." (Joh. 5:35); "He was not that Light [*nuhrā*], but was sent to bear witness of that Light." (Joh. 1:8); "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light [*šrāgā*] that shineth [*manhar*] in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (2Petr. 1:19, relevant because Christians considered John the last Old Testament prophet: Lc. 16:16).

319 "Light [*nuhrā*] that is damped is unseemly, [...] and if perchance is light [*šrāgā*] damped, / the stumbling is increased: // may your light [*nuhr-āk*] chase our darkness [*heššōk-an*]! / **Blessed is he who made you our lamp** [*lampēd-an*]!" (*CN* 18, 10, 1; 7–10). Cf. Mt. 5:14–16; Mc. 4:21–22; 9:50; Lc. 8:16–18.

320 "Three priests dazzling [*našṣiḥē*] / in likeness of the two luminaries [*nahhīrē*]" (*CN* 13, 1, 2); "He, who created the two luminaries [*nahhīrē*], / chose for himself this three luminaries [*nahhīrē*] // and fixed them in the threefold / dusk [*heššōkē*] of the past sieges. // As was quenched that couple of luminaries/ truly the last blazed." (*CN* 13, 2). Cf. "And God said, Let there be lights [*nahhīrē*] in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights [*manhrīn*] in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule [*l-šulṭānā*] the day, and the lesser light to rule [*l-šulṭānā*] the night: he made the stars also." (Gen. 1:14–16).

each in his way made the community grow in different stages, this time likely with reference to their magisterium<sup>321</sup>.

#### 2.2.4.6 Metonymies

One tool of figurative language that both poets employ frequently to talk about the bishop or the episcopate is metonymy. It is very common that “bishop” or “episcopal office” are substituted by concrete objects associated with the bishop. For example, Ephrem uses the word “key” (*ʿaqlidā*, from Greek κλείς) to talk about the power of the bishop, an image already current in the Bible and studied and widely used by writers of early Syriac literature<sup>322</sup>. In the Bible, the keys and the power to “bind” and “loose” are very generic attributes of people in power, always reminding them of their divine mandate. In the subsequent Jewish tradition, “bind” and “loose” refer to halachic allowances and prohibitions established by Jewish authorities. When referring to the Christian priesthood, the image can assume different meanings, the most common being the discipline of penance, and more generally, the bishop’s spiritual guidance of the community and its individual members.

Another frequent metonymy is the hands, because the most important part of the consecration of a bishop was the imposition of hands by other bishops. It was understood that every bishop received the imposition of the hands from a previous bishop, in an uninterrupted chain that went back to the apostles<sup>323</sup>. In the Syriac tradition, as attested by Ephrem at *hymn. haer.* 22, 19, the priestly tradition went back even further, from the apostles to Christ, and from Christ to John the Baptist or Simeon as last representative of the Aaronic priesthood of Israel, reaching back to Moses and the Sinai<sup>324</sup>.

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<sup>321</sup> “Behold! In three generations, / as in symbol or mystery, // wrath has become like the sun: / it has dawned from the first, // grew by the middle, / set and disappeared by the last. /// Even the sun shows / three forms in quarter three: // dazzling and bright his beginning, / strong and harsh his middle, // and like a candle perfected / soft and mild his end. // Swift and bright his beginning, / which came to the sleepers to wake them, // hot and harsh his middle / coming to ripen the fruits, // gentle and mild his end / because it has reached his perfection.” (*CN* 13, 7–9).

<sup>322</sup> See: *CN* 13, 3, 3–6; *CN* 17, 6, 3; the basis of this use is Mt. 16:19 (see also Jes. 22:22), referenced at *CN* 21, 3, 7–10. The underlying image is that of the treasurer or administrator (see above). A thorough study of the theme is given by: Murray 2006, 182–187 and Papoutsakis 2017.

<sup>323</sup> New Testament occurrences: Act. 6:6; 13:3; 14:23; 1Tim. 4:14; 2Tim. 1:6 (maybe also 1Tim. 5:22). The Greek word for “ordination” is χειροτονία (Lampe 1961, 1522–1523, s.v. χειροτονέω, χειροτονία), Syr. *sām-ṭdā* (but see Bou Mansour 2019, 367n60 for a bibliography on the different terms employed). Book 8 of the *Apostolic Constitutions* discusses ordinations, and in Syriac the *Testamentum domini*.

<sup>324</sup> On this theme: Murray 2006, 55; Bou Mansour 2019, 246; 365–369. Old Testament occurrences are limited to Moses’ passing of his charisma to Joshua: Num. 27:18; 23; Dtn. 34:9. For Ephrem: “The Highest inclined towards Mount Sinai / and laid his hand on Moses // Moses laid it on Aaron / and it reached till John. // For this reason, Our Lord said / “it is justice to be baptised by you”, // lest that order may be lost: / Our Lord gave it to the Apostles, // so that now it is transmitted inside our church / Blessed is he who delivered us his order!” (*hymn. haer.* 22, 19). See also: *hymn. haer.* 24, 22; *Nat.* 4, 21. Ephrem clearly knew

For Ephrem, the imposition of hands is very important, because it guarantees the apostolic genealogy of a bishop, differentiating the true church from heretical sects<sup>325</sup>. For this reason, Ephrem mentions the imposition of hands mostly against heretics and Jews, as an argument for the legitimacy of the church. It is so important that, according to Bou Mansour, it becomes a substitute for the word “priesthood” itself<sup>326</sup>. Against this interpretation are two passages from our poems, where the “hands” are mentioned in parallel with other facets of the bishop’s role:

<p>ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ (CN 13, 1, 1–4)</p>	<p>ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ (CN 17, 6, 1–7)</p>
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Bou Mansour explains that in these passages, even though the “hand” is linguistically on the same level as the other attributes of the episcopate, since the others (the throne, the key, the diocese) express a function, the hand, expressing the source of the bishop’s power, is still the most important. Another argument in favour of Bou Mansour’s interpretation is that “hand” is here governed by verbs, such as *’ašlem* and *yabbel*, meaning “to deliver”, “to hand out”, “to transmit”, whereas if it meant only “consecration,” it should have been governed by *sām*, “to put”, as in Num. 27:18.23 and Dtn. 34:9. One could even interpret this unusual construction as a zeugma in CN 13, 1, 3–4, but CN 17, 6, 1 leaves no doubt that here *’idā*, “hand”, is objectified and does not refer to the imposition of hands proper. This is all the truer since, at least in theory, no bishop could consecrate his successor, so that the imposition of hands was always performed by bishops from other dioceses. The term *kursyā*, equivalent of Greek καθέδρα/θρόνος and meaning “throne”, “seat”, may symbolise the bishop’s *munus docendi* or his judicial function inside the community<sup>329</sup>. The terms *mar’itā* and *gezrā* point to the leadership

that the main OT model for the imposition of hands was Moses’ election of Joshua as his successor, as he delves on this episode at CN 19, 6.

325 See Griffith 1999.

326 Bou Mansour 2019, 366. See also the passage by Jacob of Serugh quoted in Papoutsakis 2017, 83, with explanation.

327 “Three priests dazzling / in likeness of the two luminaries, // In shifting transmitted [*yabbel(w) w-’ašlem(w)*] one to the next / throne, hand and diocese [*kursyā w-’idā w-mar’itā*].”

328 “He delivered his hand [*’ašlem ’id-eh*] to his own disciple, / the seat [*kursyā*] to the one who was worthy of it, // the key [*qlidā*] to the one who was faithful, / the pen [*gezrā*] to the one who was excellent; // meet for your hand is the consecration [*l-’id-āk ruhḥāpā*], / for your offering [*l-qurbān-āk*] the atonement, // and for your tongue [*l-liššānā*] the comfort.”

329 See Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1837, s.v. ܡܫܝܚܐ; Lampe 1961, 687. For the judicial function, the *locus classicus* is Mt 19:28, which has καθίξειν ἐπὶ θρόνον/θρόνους (for both the Son of Man and the apostles) in Greek, but in Syriac (Peshitta and Curetonian) *tronōs* for the Son of Man and *kursyā* for the apostles

over the diocese, while the keys, as already noted, indicate the disciplinary authority of the bishop. If this symbolism is correct, then “hand” should mean something less general than “priesthood”, *pace* Bou Mansour, and it should rather indicate a particular task of the bishop, passed on by the predecessors to their successors: I suggest “hand” here means the power to consecrate bishops, priests, and deacons. This seems to be confirmed by *CN* 17, 6, 5, where Ephrem says to the living bishop: “It is meet for *your* hand [*l-ʿīd-āk*] the consecration<sup>330</sup>”, a sentence which cannot be interpreted as referring to the consecration of the same bishop but must refer to his worthiness to consecrate others. Moreover, the same wording is employed in another passage to express kingly succession, and there the objects mentioned are the throne and the crown, which must be intended on the same level, facilitating this reading in our case too<sup>331</sup>. Gregory refers to the hands too, but his usage of the term is linked much more strongly to the concrete ritual of consecration than Ephrem’s: in *II*, 1, 12, 503, he discusses the idea that ἐπισκόπων χέρες, the imposition of hands, may forgive all sins as a second baptism; in *II*, 1, 13, 89–91, the throne and the imposition of hands are used as metonymies for the episcopate, which is given away to anyone<sup>332</sup>.

Indeed, the throne (θρόνος) is the preferred episcopal attribute for Gregory: when he wants to express the office of bishop with a concrete term through a metonymy, he chooses θρόνος. Ephrem, on the other side, employs *kursyā* (the equivalent of Greek θρόνος or καθέδρα) only twice in the already mentioned *CN* 13, 1, 4 and *CN* 17, 6, 2. In many occurrences, a θρόνος is a substitute for the charge of a bishop and shares in its authority<sup>333</sup>: the throne has an intrinsic charismatic authority (ἀξία), and its recipient should contribute to the charisma of the charge by being himself charismatic (ἀξιός)<sup>334</sup>. A particular use of this metonymy is in the many passages criticising the bishops’ ambitions: the throne objectifies the episcopate and expresses its link with a particular place, the bishopric, which is not neutral because there are more and less important

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(the Sinaitic version has *kursyā* for both). On the original judiciary function of bishops: Rapp 2000, 381; Rapp 2005, 242–252.

<sup>330</sup> For the many meanings of the term *ruhḥāpā* in Syriac, see Bou Mansour 2019, 367n60.

<sup>331</sup> *yabbel(w) w-ašlem(w) kursyā w-tāgā* (*Nat.* 24, 2); see Papoutsakis 2017, 81–82.

<sup>332</sup> Εἶποι τάχ’ ἂν τις, ὡς ἐπισκόπων χέρες / Τό τ’ ἐν μέσῳ κήρυγμα λουτροῦ τις χάρις (*II*, 1, 12, 502–503); Δεῦρ’ ἴτε θαρσαλέοι. πᾶσι θρόνος εὐρύς ἑτοίμος, / Δεῦρ’ ἴτε, δεξιτερῆσι νέους κλίνετε τένοντας / Πᾶσι προφρονέως, καὶ μὴ ποθέουσι τέτανται (*II*, 1, 13, 89–91).

<sup>333</sup> *II*, 1, 12, 142; 437; 474; 572–573; 635; *II*, 1, 13, 68; 89; *II*, 1, 17, 29.

<sup>334</sup> Gregory recognises the dignity of the throne, but this dignity does not cover for the indignity of the recipient: Ἐν ἐκτρέπου μοι, τοὺς κακοὺς ἐπισκόπους, / Μηδὲν φοβηθεὶς τοῦ θρόνου τὴν ἀξίαν (*II*, 1, 12, 35–36); unworthy recipients may appear worthy on the spot, but they must be proved so in long time: Ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντας ῥαδίως καθίζομεν, / Ἐὰν μόνον θέλωσι, λαοῦ προστάτας / Οὐδὲν σκοποῦντες τῶν νέων ἢ τῶν πάλαι, / Οὐ πρᾶξιν, οὐ λόγον τιν’, οὐ συνουσίαν, / Οὐδ’ ὅσον ἤχον γνωρίσαι νομίσματος, / Οὐδὲ χρόνου πύρῳσιν ἐνδεδειγμένους, / Ἀλλ’ αὐτόθεν φανέντας ἀξίους θρόνων (*II*, 1, 12, 375–381). On the “charisma of office” (especially in the church) and on the testing of charisma, see Weber 1922, 144–145 and below, §3.3 (especially §3.3.2.3 for the charisma of office).

dioceses. Therefore, the image helps to visualise the shameful strife and commerce around episcopal seats, thereby eliciting outrage in the reader<sup>335</sup>. Anyway, the term employed by Gregory is not always θρόνος. In hexametric poetry, for example, in addition to θρόνος he uses θῶκος, an Ionic term current in epic and rare in prose (there used in the form θᾶκος)<sup>336</sup>. This usage of θῶκος is found also in celebrative epigrams for bishops as benefactors, a usage derived from celebrative epigrams for secular officials in the same quality<sup>337</sup>. In one instance, Gregory plays with the word ἔδρα: Ὡς ὄφελον Γετθαῖαν ἀναπλήσαιεν ἀνίην, / Ἐνδικὸν ἐδρήεσαν, ἐφ’ ἔδρη τίσιν ἔχοντες (II, 1, 13, 149–150). Having described the ambition of the bishops, Gregory wishes they could be punished (τίσιν ἔχοντες) with the “pain of Gath”—that is, haemorrhoids (1 Sam. 5). This punishment would be very appropriate (ἐνδικόν), not only because the Gittites were punished for possessing the ark of the covenant without being worthy, as the bishops would occupy their seat without being worthy, but also because the bishops’ object of desire is a “seat” (ἔδρα), and the haemorrhoids strike precisely the body part that would most enjoy the undeserved prize, a body part that in Greek can be called ἔδρα, so that Gregory calls the malady ἐδρήεσσα, “of the seat”<sup>338</sup>. Finally, in one case Gregory employs θρόνος in a name, to designate the other bishops: ὁμόθρονος, a word which resembles the already mentioned συμπομῆν, in that it stresses the collegiality of the episcopate, but it is built upon a different metaphor<sup>339</sup>.

### 2.2.4.7 Medicine

A much-studied metaphor for the bishop is that of the physician. Healing, medicine, and the profession of physician are widespread metaphors for Christ and salvation in all Christian literature. Both Gregory and Ephrem use this metaphor with a variety of aims: Gregory employs it in his speeches on priesthood, as part of his wider strategy of

<sup>335</sup> Θρόνους μὲν οὖν ἔχοιτε, καὶ τυραννίδας / Ὑμεῖς, ἐπεὶ καὶ πρῶτα ταῦθ’ ὑμῖν δοκεῖ / Χαίροιτε, ὑβρίζοιτε, πατριαρχίας / Κληροῦσθε, Κόσμος ὑμῖν εἰκέτω μέγας / τόπους ἀμείβοιτ’ ἐκ τόπων, τοὺς μὲν κάτω / Βάλλοιτε, τοὺς δ’ ὑψοῦτε· ταῦθ’ ὑμῖν φίλα (II, 1, 12, 797–802); Ὡν, οἱ μὲν θῶκων ἱερῶν πέρι δῆριν ἔχοντες, / Ἀντία κυμαίνοντες, ἐπασσύτεροις κακοῖσι / Βαλλόμενοι, βάλλοντες, ἀτειρέες εἰσὶ μαχηταὶ (II, 1, 13, 145–148); Οὐ γὰρ ἐμῆς πολιῆς παίζειν, καὶ λάτρην ἀεικῶς / Ἐμμεναι ἀντὶ θρόνων, ὧν πέρι μαρνάμενοι / Σχίζονται, καὶ κόσμον ὅλον τέμνουσιν ἀθέσμως (II, 1, 17, 97–99).

<sup>336</sup> II, 1, 10, 14; II, 1, 13, 7; 98; 145.

<sup>337</sup> Robert 1948, 41–43.

<sup>338</sup> καὶ λέγουσιν οἱ Γεθθαῖοι Μετελθέτω κιβωτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς· καὶ μετῆλθεν κιβωτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς Γεθθα. Καὶ ἐγενήθη μετὰ τὸ μετελθεῖν αὐτὴν καὶ γίνεται χεὶρ κυρίου ἐν τῇ πόλει, τάραχος μέγας σφόδρα, καὶ ἐπάταξεν τοὺς ἄνδρας τῆς πόλεως ἀπὸ μικροῦ ἕως μεγάλου καὶ ἐπάταξεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὰς ἔδρας αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐποίησαν ἑαυτοῖς οἱ Γεθθαῖοι ἔδρας. (1Sam. 5:8–9). The Hebrew text is even more explicit, employing the word *ʾāpālīm*, glossed with the Aramaic *ṭəḥorīm*, both meaning “haemorrhoids”. The adjective ἐδρήεις is glossed by Hesychius as ἐδραῖος. Ἐδραῖος means generally “steadfast” or “sedentary”, not “relative to sitting” nor “on which one sits” (except at Eur. *Rhes*. 783). Therefore, Gregory here probably creates an adjective in analogy to such epic attributes as σιγαλόεις or αἰγλήεις.

<sup>339</sup> II, 1, 13, 203; II, 1, 17, 91.

“rationalising” the category of bishops<sup>340</sup>. Surprisingly, the metaphor is not so important in our poems, and it never appears in Gregory’s II, 1, 12, which also advocates for a sort of professionalisation of the bishops<sup>341</sup>. Ephrem’s poems have two references to medicine. At CN 16, 21, 4, the three first bishops are compared to medications (*sammānē*) apt to the diseases (*kēbē*) of the community. The more sizeable reference is CN 19, 11, a whole stanza addressing the bishop as a physician:

<p>ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ</p>	<p>ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ</p>
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<sup>342</sup> ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ  
(CN 19, 11)

Ephrem’s recommendations are rather general and have the effect of using the physician metaphor to prescribe a differentiated approach to each member of the community. It is probably in this respect that we should understand Ephrem’s insistence on pharmacological treatment, as the variety of medications and their necessary adaptation to the disease are a good symbol of the different strategies the bishop should adopt to spiritually guide his community, whereas the traditional Syriac idea of the “medicine of life” (*sammā d-ḥayyā*)—namely, Christ—is not relevant here, since Ephrem’s point is precisely that the bishop should not use only *one* medicine, but a multitude<sup>343</sup>. The adaptation of the medicine to the malady may just be commonsensical, but a similar idea can be found in the *Corpus Hippocraticum* (*de locis in homine* 45)<sup>344</sup>. The only line that may point to a specific acquaintance with medical knowledge on the part of Ephrem is 9: “Even you must learn [*tēlap*] experience [*nesyānā*]”. The word *nesyānā* is used, for example, in the Syriac translation of the first aphorism of Hippocrates, to translate Greek *πείρα*, “expe-

<sup>340</sup> On Ephrem’s use of the metaphor: Shemunkasho 2005 (with only 424–425 devoted to the bishops of Nisibis); Murray 2006, 199–203; on Gregory’s use in the *or*: Elm 2012, 171; Gautier 2002, 118; Elm 2000a. More on the rationalisation of the bishop’s office: §3.3.2.1.

<sup>341</sup> The only occurrence at II, 1, 17, 96 serves to differentiate Gregory’s lifestyle from that of other bishops, underlining his moral aptitude and his being beneficial to his community: Τῶνδε γὰρ εἵνεκ’ ἔγωγε μέσος χθαμαλοῖσι κάθημαι / Ἱητρὸς παθέων, αὐτὸς ἄνουσος ἐών. (II, 1, 17, 95–96).

<sup>342</sup> “Take with you myriads of drugs [*sammānē*], / rise and go among the sick [*mār’ē*], // to the weak [*l-da-krih*] offer a drug [*sammā*], / and to the one who’s healthy [*da-ḥlim*] preservation [*nuṭṭārā*]; // do not give any drug [*sammā*] / that may not suit the illness [*l-kēbā*], // but apply abundantly any help, / that may bring the illness to recovery, // even you must learn experience [*nesyānā*]. / **Blessed is he who toiled on our wounds!**”

<sup>343</sup> On the “medicine of life” theme, see: Murray 2006, 320; Shemunkasho 2002, 141, 147–151; Brock 1992, 19–20, 99–106, 175n4; Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2652, s.v. ܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ.

<sup>344</sup> Φάρμακα οὐ χρὴ τὰ ἰσχυρὰ φύσει ἐπὶ τῶν ἀσθενέων νοσημάτων διδόναι, ὀλιγότῃ τοῦ φαρμάκου ἀσθενὲς ποιεῦντα· ἀλλὰ τοῖσι μὲν ἰσχυροῖσι φύσει φαρμάκοις ἰσχυροῖσι χρῆσθαι, τοῖς δ’ ἀσθενέσι φαρμάκοις μὴ ἰσχυροῖσι, μὴ δὲ μεταποιεῦντα τὸ φάρμακον, ἀλλὰ κατὰ φύσιν ἐκάστοισιν· τοῖσι μὲν ἀσθενέσι ἀσθενῇ φάρμακα φύσει, τοῖσι δὲ ἰσχυροῖσι νοσήμασιν ἰσχυρὰ φύσει τὰ φάρμακα. (Hippocr. *De locis in homine* 45).

rience”<sup>345</sup>. However, contrary to the aphorism, Ephrem seems to see experience as the physician’s source of knowledge, a position corresponding to a long tradition in Greek medicine. This position is reflected in the Syriac language by the *Syriac Book of Medicines*, edited by Budger: not only does the author advocate for dissection, vivisection, and an empiric approach throughout the text, but at the beginning it says explicitly, “Are not all physicians as those who learn (*yālpīn*) from experience (*nesyānā*)?”<sup>346</sup>. It is possible that Ephrem had at least a superficial knowledge of contemporary medicine and used this model of empirical activity to characterise the bishop in *CN* 19, 11, in much the same way as Gregory did in his homilies, though not with the same depth and profusion.

#### 2.2.4.8 Merchant

Some metaphors bear the marks of the two different cultural traditions to which Gregory and Ephrem belong. For example, Ephrem twice employs the metaphor of the merchant for the bishop, whereas Gregory does not employ it<sup>347</sup>. Even though this metaphor has a common model in the parables from the Gospels treating commercial affairs, in particular the parable of the pearl of great price (Mt. 13:45–46 and *Ev. Thom.* 76), the parable itself, the image of the pearl, and that of the merchant have had a far greater impact on Syriac-speaking Christianity than in the West<sup>348</sup>. In Ephrem, the metaphor is not linked—as is usual—to the concept of mission and evangelisation, but to the parable of the talents, expressing the bishop’s success in disseminating the Christian doctrine in the community<sup>349</sup>. As in the case of the contradictory metaphors of the bishop as shepherd or as fisherman, even when using the missionary and apostolic metaphor, Ephrem bends it to the necessity of a city bishop and his urban community.

<sup>345</sup> Ὁ βίος βραχύς, ἡ δὲ τέχνη μακρὴ, ὁ δὲ καιρὸς ὀξύς, ἡ δὲ πείρα σφαλερὴ, ἡ δὲ κρίσις χαλεπὴ. Δεῖ δὲ οὐ μόνον ἑωυτὸν παρέχειν τὰ δεόντα ποιέοντα, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν νοσέοντα, καὶ τοὺς παρεόντας, καὶ τὰ ἐξῶθεν (*Hippocr. aph.* 1). For the Syriac translation see Pognon 1903, 3.

<sup>346</sup> Budge 1913, 10 (for the quote) and CLXV (for the cultural outlook of the author). For more recent takes on this text: Bhayro 2015; Bhayro/Rudolf 2018.

<sup>347</sup> *CN* 17, 1, 3–7; *CN* 19, 16, 10.

<sup>348</sup> The paramount text in this case is the *Acts of Thomas*, where the apostle reaches India in his mission thanks to a merchant and in which the so-called “Hymn of the Pearl” or “Hymn of the Soul” was inserted, one of the first poetic texts of the Syriac tradition. On merchants in the Syriac tradition, see: Teixidor 1987; Drijvers 1989; Harrak 2002; Borbone 2015. The bishop as merchant: Murray 2006, 171–176; Ephrem wrote also a cycle of poems on the pearl, *hymn. fid.* 81–85.

<sup>349</sup> “like that merchant of our diocese [*taggārā d-mar’it-an*], / who multiplied the talent [*kakkar*] of your doctrine, // then parted and went to your haven:” (*CN* 17, 1, 3–5). The expression “merchant of our flock”, taken by itself, seems to obliterate the literal meaning of the word “merchant” (as it surely does with “flock” and as it seems to do at *CN* 19, 16, 10), except the following lines clearly presuppose a living metaphor. The two main features of the merchant, the search for profit and his mobility, are interpreted outside the traditional schemes of gaining of souls and mobility in space, but as a gain in doctrine (deepening, preventing of error, education of the already converted) and a temporal mobility, the succession of different “merchants” who come and go (i.e., are elected and die).

### 2.2.4.9 Performing arts

On the other hand, Gregory demonstrates a wide range of metaphors taken from the Greek culture of performing arts and sports. Apart from conventional uses of the word *χόρος* and its derivatives, Gregory employs such metaphors in a positive way only once, as he evokes the boxer, the runner, and the flute-player—all both showmen and contenders for prizes—as a fortiori examples of the preparation needed to be a good bishop<sup>350</sup>. Normally, however, the metaphors referring to Greek show culture have a negative connotation, because that culture is seen negatively, as demonstrated by the disapproval for bishops who were involved with the world of sports and performing arts before their election. Gregory expresses this disapproval in an invective at II, 1, 12, 402–410 (see §5.2.2). There, however, references to theatre and other spectacles are not metaphorical; they claim that those bishops really were performers or spectators before. More interesting for our purpose are passages where Gregory employs these occupations as metaphors for the behaviour of reigning bishops. Gregory's favourite image in this sense is that of theatre: Gregory employs a number of features of theatrical performance—in particular, masks—to denounce the hypocrisy of prelates, with the additional connotation of moral defect inherent in the profession of actor<sup>351</sup>. It is worth quoting in full one such passage because of its structure:

Ὡ θυσίας πέμποντες ἀναιμάκτους, ἱερῆς! (1)  
 Ὡ ψυχῶν ταμίαι μεγακύδεις! Ὡ μέγαλοιο  
 Πλάσμα Θεοῦ χεῖρεςσιν ἐν ὑμετέρῃσι φέροντες!  
 Ὡ Θεὸν ἀνθρώποισι μέγ' ἔξοχον εἰς ἐν ἄγοντες!  
 Ὡ κόσμοιο θέμεθλα, βίου φάος, ἔρμα λόγιοι, (5)  
 Μυστοπόλοιο ζωῆς ἀτελευτήτοιο φαινηῆς,  
 Χριστοφόροι, θώκοισιν ἐνεδριόνωντες ἀρίστοις,  
 Ὑψηλοὶ, θεάτροισι γεγηθότες εὐπρεπέεσσι,  
 Σκηνοβάται, κώλοισιν ἐφισταότες ξυλίνοισιν,  
 Ἀδρανέως χάσκοντες ἐν ἄλλοτρίοισι προσώποις, (10)  
 Εὐσεβίης ὅσα δ' ἐντὸς, ὁμοῖα πᾶσιν ἔχοντες  
 Ὑμεῖς μὲν παίζετε, τὰ περ καὶ παίζετ' ἀεικῶς,  
 Καὶ σοβαρὸν φθέγγοισθε, τὰ δ' ἔρδετε ὡς μάλ' ἐλαφρά.  
 (II, 1, 13, 1–13)

<sup>350</sup> Conventional uses of the word *χόρος*: II, 1, 13, 15; 69; another conventional metaphor is that of the leader (in this case the bishop) as charioteer: II, 1, 17, 103–106 (for this metaphorical usage in classical authors, see Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 775, s.v. ἡνία (B), 2). Performers as positive examples of preparation: II, 1, 12, 555–559 (on which see §2.1.2.1; §3.3.2.1).

<sup>351</sup> Some examples: before his tirade against the low morality of bishop, Gregory says he will present a “scene” (*σκηνή*) more beautiful than reality, judging the “masks” (the types) and leaving the true faces for “later” (meaning the Final Judgement): II, 1, 12, 359–360; religious piety is a comic mask, which can be worn all of a sudden even when one is utterly unworthy: II, 1, 12, 397–399. As long as the church will keep electing clowns – says Gregory – it will resemble a circus. On the comic elements in these invectives: §5.2.1; on the deceit of bishops: §5.2.4.



O priests, you who offer bloodless sacrifices! (1)  
 O very glorious ministers of souls, bearing  
 in your hands the image of the great God!  
 O you who the Supreme God with human beings together bring!  
 O world's pillars, life's light, foundation of doctrine, (5)  
 initiators to the shining mysteries of life immortal  
 Christ-bearers, sitting on the topmost thrones,  
 most high, rejoicing in good-looking theatres,  
 stage treaders, standing on wooden stilts,  
 feebly yawning through alien masks, (10)  
 for what pertains to religion, the very same as everyone else.  
 Yea, you may play, although you play shamefully,  
 and your speech may be haughty, yet what you do is really shallow.

The poem begins like II, 1, 10, and the first lines (1–7) extol the role and importance of bishops along the lines of Gregory's conception of *theosis* already described in respect to II, 1, 12, 709–760 (see §2.2.3.2 and §2.1.3.1). Yet lines 9–13 overturn the praise and attack the bishops as hypocritical: they wear a mask (προσώποις, 10) to go “on stage” (Σκηνοβάται, 9), which is alien (ἀλλοτριόισι, 10) to their true self, and feign a devotion they do not have (11). Moreover, they are bad actors, because their actions are opposed to their speech. The “wooden stilts” (κῶλα ξύλινα, 9) contrast with the “topmost thrones” (θῶκοι ἄριστοι, 7) on which they think they are sitting: even their elevation is fake. The hinge line between praise and invective is 8, which can be read in two completely different senses: the attribute “most high” (ὕψηλός) can reference back to the importance of the bishop's office, but also forward to the haughtiness of bishops; the “good-looking shows” (θέατρα εὐπρέπεα) can be interpreted as the audience of the bishop, being beautiful because it is Christian, and as the audience of a public spectacle, with beautiful appearances (εὐπρεπές) but ultimately meaningless, specious. This antithetical structure is meant to highlight the awesome dignity of the episcopate, while at the same time making painfully visible how short real-life bishops fall of the inherent charisma of their office.

Gregory again compares the public appearance of a bishop, himself, with that of performers in II, 1, 17, 75–82:

Οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδὲ πρόεδρος ἐὼν ἱεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις, (75)  
 Ἦ μόνος, ἢ πλεόνων εἰς ἓν ἀγειρομένων,  
 Φθέγγομαι οὐασὶ τερπνὰ, τὰ Πνεύματος ἔκτοθι ῥίψας,  
 Ὡς κεν ἔοιμι πρόφρων, φίλτρον ἔχων πλεόνων,  
 Τερπόμενός τε κρότοισι, καὶ ἐν θεάτροισι χορεύων,  
 Κρημνοβάτης ἐπέων ἀντικουρυσσομένων, (80)  
 Ἀθλοφόροισιν ὁμοῖα, πολυγνάμπτοις τε λώβαις,  
 Ἦ καὶ μαινομένους ἀντίπαλ' ἡνιόχοις'  
 (II, 1, 17, 75–82)

Nor, presiding in the holy places, (75)  
 be I alone or with many gathered as one,  
 Shall I utter something pleasant to hear, excluding the Spirit,

that I may be prudent and loved by the majority,  
 enjoying the applause and dance in the theatres,  
 a tightrope walker of fighting speeches, (80)  
 the like of winning athletes and much-modulating disgraces,  
 or even the mad antagonist charioteers:

Here, the preaching of the bishop in the church (ιεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις, 75), either alone or in the framework of the council, where many other bishops may have been present (πλεόνων εἰς ἓν ἀγειρομένων, 76), runs the risk of becoming a spectacle. The risk peculiar to Gregory is omitting the divinity of the Spirit for the sake of political expediency, and therefore with a gain in prestige and popular acclaim. For our purposes, this particular theological problem is less important than the more general situation it is coated in: the bishop abuses his liturgical position (πρόεδρος ἐὼν ἱεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις) to give and receive pleasure from his audience (Φθέγγομαι οὔασι τερπνὰ; Τερπόμενός τε κρότοισι, 77; 79) so as to become a favourite (πρόφρων, φίλτρον ἔχων, 78). The whole situation already has theatrical elements, such as the applause (κρότοισι, 79), the pleasure of the performance, and the affection between crowd and performer<sup>352</sup>. Gregory gives it away in the following lines (79–82), comparing the abuse of power by the bishop to the behaviour of different ancient performers: the mime, uniting acting and dance (ἐν θεάτροισι χορεύων), the acrobats but also the extravagant rhetors (Κρημνοβάτης ἐπέων ἀντικορυσσομένων), the athletes (Ἀθλοφόροισιν), the charioteers (μαينوμένοις ἀντίπαλ' ἡνιόχοις), and, maybe, the musicians (πολυγνάμptoις τε λώβαις)<sup>353</sup>. All these performers contribute a vice to the image of the bishop, with the mime exemplifying the shameful movements required to appease the masses, the acrobat facing the danger of falling into heresy when discussing doctrines, the rhetor displaying a misplaced fastidiousness in discussing anything—danger strongly related to that of the acrobat—the winning athlete pandering to the mob, musicians signifying inconsistency through their modulations, and, finally, the charioteer being marked by his aggression<sup>354</sup>. It is more

352 On the pleasure conveyed by spectacles (which are themselves called “pleasures” in late antiquity, lat. *voluptates*, gr. ἀπολαύσεις): Webb 2008, 169, 186. On the consideration enjoyed by actors: Leppin 1992, 160–168; Webb 2008, 139–196.

353 The ἐπέων ἀντικορυσσομένων seem an epic rewriting of the rhetorical exercise of the δίσσοι λόγοι. In the expression πολυγνάμptoις λώβαις, the word λώβη does not say anything on who is meant. The word πολυγνάμptoις seems to have been used only of objects in classical poetry (see Liddell/Scott/Johnson 2011, 1437, s.v. πολυγνάμπος). Considering that γνάμπτω is the Homeric form of κάμπτω, the latter verb could be taken to mean two things: either to guide the chariot around the turning-post in the hippodrome, or to turn and twist a melody (with a negative connotation linked to the New Music; see Liddell/Scott/Johnson 2011, 873, s.v. κάμπτω, II and III). Therefore, πολυγνάμptoις λώβαις are either “the many-races pests” or “the many-modulations pests”. Since the expression is connected to the following ἡνιόχοις by ἢ καὶ, I am inclined to take it as something different to the charioteers and, consequently, to refer it to musicians.

354 Same characterisations of charioteer and mime at II, 1, 12, 395–433, with the barrister taking on the characters of the musician and the rhetor and dance treated separately from theatre; see §5.2.3.

difficult to assess the real import of these performance metaphors. One can go from a minimum of significance—namely, that they were chosen for their expressive force and nothing else by the poet—to a maximum of significance, claiming that Gregory had observed in his time a transformation of the liturgy into a sort of show, perhaps with bishops consciously modelling themselves on the contemporary spectacle-ethos to compete with public shows. I find it difficult to exclude the possibility that these metaphors imply a similarity between the bishop's role in liturgy and that of public performers. Given the mocking intention of these metaphors, which define a negative model for the bishop, Gregory clearly felt that this association must be avoided. If we observe this phenomenon in the wider context of his poems on bishops, such a risk of spectacularising the bishop's role appears even more concrete: Gregory pushes for a rationalisation of the bishop, and he even does so by comparing him with performers, as already said (and see also §3.3.2.1). The stakes of this game are very clear to our poet: the element of shame in these metaphors highlights the subordinate position the bishop falls into when he wants to appease his audience. His formal position of *πρόεδρος* (75), so highly extolled at II, 1, 13, 1–8, would be substantially eroded. Short-term political gain leads to long-term, strategic defeats (see §5.2.5).

Another metaphor typical of Gregory is that of the bishop as helmsman<sup>355</sup>. Its importance is accounted for by the link with the metaphor of the sea storm—so important in the construction of Gregory's literary character—and with the metaphor of the community as seafaring ship, a staple of Greek literary imagery<sup>356</sup>. Among the occurrences of the metaphor, the one in Plato's *Republic* (488) is particularly relevant for Gregory, because Plato employs it to argue for a rationalisation of leadership: in arguing that philosophers must be kings, Plato equates philosophy with a *τέχνη*, an art useful for government and to be learnt slowly before one applies it to oneself to govern others. This attitude towards leadership is accepted also by Gregory (see §3.3.2.1).

## 2.3 Conclusion

It is worthwhile to briefly review the general results of this linguistic analysis before tackling the next chapter, because some points discovered here will prove helpful in the following inquiry. The most prominent characteristic of both Ephrem's and Gregory's language on bishops is their shunning of specialised titles (*ἐπίσκοπος*, *πρεσβύτερος*) in favour of more generic words or of metaphors (§2.1). The consequence is that the distinction between bishops and priests is blurred and much of what is said of bishops

<sup>355</sup> II, 1, 12, 385–388; II, 1, 13, 29–30; 154–155; 204; II, 1, 17, 5–8.

<sup>356</sup> On the storm at sea: Lorenz 1979; on the ship of state: Brock 2013, 53–68 (for classical Greek writers); Rahner 1971, 239–564, Peterson 1950 and Goldammer 1950 (for Christian writers).

may be applied to priests, too<sup>357</sup>. In the case of Ephrem, this lack of precision prevents us from understanding how the hierarchy was articulated below the bishop of Nisibis: the relationship of Nisibis with countryside and village churches, the rank of the clergy ministering in those churches, and their relationship with the bishop of the city are all subject of speculation and not of knowledge, as demonstrated by the controversial interpretation of the word *'allānā* (§2.2.1.4). The main difference between Gregory and Ephrem as regards the choice of words is that Gregory has different specialised languages for different genres and metres, from prose to epic poetry, whereas Ephrem employs the same register and the same words regardless of metre. The fact that in Greek poetry genres prescribe not only a form but also a language and vocabulary, together with contemporary school practices, explains the phenomenon of passages in Gregory with the same or very similar content in different works and with different terms but similar structure: a passage in iambs might have been rewritten following the conventions of hexametric poetry and included in a poem in hexameters, or a prose passage might have been adapted to the iambic rhythm with minimal changes. In such cases, the words for “bishop” may have a prose or iambic form and a hexametric one.

As regards the sources, the place of honour is given to the Bible, not so much because the poets employ the same terminology as the New Testament, but because the imagery of the bishop comes almost entirely from Old Testament metaphors and Jesus's parables. Though the doctrine of apostolic succession was well known to both poets, the apostles play only a minor role in the characterisation of bishops. Furthermore, Christ's priesthood “after the order of Melchizedek” remains exclusive of the Messiah. The model of Old Testament, Aaronic priesthood is much more consequential for the construction of the image of the bishop (§2.1.3). The differences in use and interpretation notwithstanding, both Gregory and Ephrem conceive the liturgical role of the bishop primarily based on Old Testament temple worship, with its sacrifices and purity laws.

Nevertheless, liturgical priesthood is a minor component in the bishop's image. Most titles and metaphors emphasise the bishop's role of leadership in the community, be it through teaching, through the example, or through the imposition of discipline (§2.1.2). In this context, the term *προστάτης* and the abstract *προστασία* are particularly interesting (§2.1.2.1), because they could be construed as a metaphor for NT *προϊστάμενος*, while at the same time being a term widely attested in tragedy for traditional roles of protection and commonly used to translate Latin *patronus*. Because of these multiple associations, the term lent itself to a discussion of the bishop's role in society, differentiating it from or associating it with traditional figures, such as the Roman *patronus*. The fact that leadership was the distinguishing feature of the bishop for the poets is demonstrated also by the great prominence of the metaphor of the shepherd, in its many elaborations (§2.2.1). Much more than OT priesthood or the apostles-fishermen of

357 This will still be the case for John Chrysostom's *On Priesthood* (Malingrey 1980, 72n1; Lochbrunner 1993, 184–190) and for Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care* (Floryszczak 2005, 188–193).

the NT, it is OT leadership, without institutional precision (as in Ezekiel's speech to the shepherds), that influences the discourse on bishops for both poets. In most cases, the bishop is seen in the context of his relationship to the community. Another important metaphor linked to this role is that of the bishop as a teacher as a light who dispels darkness through his teaching (§2.2.4.4–5).

"Image is everything", proclaimed a famous tennis player in a notorious commercial<sup>358</sup>. When it comes to bishops, Ephrem and Gregory would certainly concur, though perhaps not in the same sense as the aforementioned commercial. Both poets attach so much importance to the personal example set by the bishop with his behaviour that his leadership—his main function—is almost totally occupied by this modality of guidance. At the basis of this attitude is the same desire for a morally consequential episcopacy, a desire to be guided by an elite of devotion and morality. Moreover, both poets present and justify this idea through the same group of metaphors, which I have called "iconographic": mirrors, sculptures, and, above all, paintings serve to articulate how the personal behaviour of the prelate relates to the community, to God, to predecessors, and to outsiders (§2.2.3). This is all the more notable since the Bible scarcely uses such metaphors and has on the whole a hostile view of figurative culture. This means that Gregory and Ephrem must have drawn them from contemporary reality and non-Christian culture. Each poet, however, employs the metaphors in the framework of his own theology. Gregory uses the metaphor of painting in a vertical scheme, going from God to the community, with the bishop as mediating ring of the chain, absorbing the images of God in himself and showing them outside so that the community may imitate them and thereby imitate God. Ephrem links the succession of bishops to the relationship between Old and New Testament, with one being the "type" or "figure" of the other, thereby endorsing development without denying the validity of past experiences. For him, the bishop's teaching by example is very important because it preserves the freedom of the community to follow the teaching or not.

Finally, Ephrem employs several metaphors absent or scarcely represented in Gregory—namely, agriculture, family (the bishop as father and husband), administration, medicine, and commerce. Gregory, on the other side, engages contemporary performing arts in a dialogue with the figure of the bishop, on one side rejecting them, while on the other he adopts their imagery to talk about the public role of the bishop. Finally, both Ephrem and Gregory employ metonymies to indicate the office of bishop, but while Ephrem tends to list the different attributes of the office (keys, throne, hands, and so on), Gregory employs often the simple "throne" to mean not only the office of bishop *as such* but also its territorial limitation. Thus, he shows himself to have a more objectified view of the office as a definable unity.

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358 Agassi 2010, chapter 9.

### 3 The Bishop and His World

If the previous chapter was concerned with problems of language, with the words and expressions employed by the poets to identify the bishop as such, in the following chapter I will examine the three main facets of the literary construction of the bishop as put forth by Ephrem and Gregory. First (§3.1), I will consider the complex of functions and relationships with his community that forms the bishop's identity and claim to authority. These can be thematised under three headings—allowing for a good deal of overlap and blurred margins: the bishop as “lover of the poor”, hence his social and civic activities (§3.1.1); the bishop as high priest, in his liturgical activities (§3.1.2); and the bishop as teacher and spiritual guide. This last function has been divided for convenience into two subsections, one more concerned with the doctrinal implications of the bishop's function as teacher (§3.1.3), the other with the moral implications (§3.1.4). From these moral implications, the passage to the following theme is particularly smooth: Ephrem and Gregory largely share a positive view of asceticism, and this in turn influences their expectations on the morality of bishops and Christian communities. Therefore, the second part of the chapter (§3.2) will treat the relationship between the episcopate and asceticism as represented by the poets; the theme is of utmost importance during the fourth century, as new ascetic movements rose to prominence, often threatening traditional hierarchy. Finally, the third part (§3.3) is concerned with the thorny issue of bishop selection, another disputed ground during Ephrem's and Gregory's lifetimes, as the importance of bishops grew, and the councils often had to nominate bishops and decide between conflicting claims to dioceses. The results of this inquiry can be summarised as follows: The two poets share the same general views on the episcopate and its functions (both stressing spiritual guidance over liturgical and social activities) and subscribe to a similar strain of asceticism of Syrian origin. However, the poets employ these common concepts in their literary constructions in remarkably different ways, which reflect the poets' different contexts of production and pragmatic aims. Furthermore, Gregory is marked out by his greater interest in intellectual, doctrinal, and educational questions, in a way that betrays the deep influence on his thought of Origen and the Greek pagan tradition.

#### 3.1 Functions of the bishop

Approaching the theme of bishops and the definition of their role and authority in the community, we find a wealth of perspectives one might employ. One could approach the matter with Weber's distinction of traditional, charismatic, and rational authority in mind, or adopt a modified version of this tripartition, as did Rapp with her concepts of

spiritual, ascetic, and pragmatic authority<sup>1</sup>. A more traditional approach might employ biblical-theological functions, such as kingship, priesthood and prophecy, canonical requirements, or similar distinctions implied by theological reflection<sup>2</sup>. While sociological categories, such as those exemplified by Weber and Rapp, aim at describing the concrete reality of the episcopate, with its differences and articulations, theological categories aim at making sense of the variations of reality, at the same time prescribing behaviours: the former are, so to say, analytic, the latter synthetic. In treating literary texts, however, we face an additional issue: what we try to describe are not facts, but interpretations and perspectives, which are no doubt linked to real facts, but cannot be equated with them. Therefore, the categories we adopt should be literary categories: as literary products are linked to facts, so literary categories have a certain intersection with sociological and theological categories, even without being exactly the same. Hence, previous historical research on the functions and role of the bishops will be of use for this analysis, although its categories will not be used directly.

I have decided to analyse the functions of the bishop described by the poets under three categories, which may be summarised as charity, leadership, and liturgy. The first cue for this partition came from an article by Claudia Rapp on episcopal charity, where two fifth-century hagiographies of bishops, the *Life of Epiphanius of Salamis* and the *Life of Porphyrius of Gaza*, are compared. These two biographies have different takes on episcopal charity, since Epiphanius is often described as giving money and food to the poor, even when these donations upset civil or ecclesiastical leaders, while Porphyrius is represented as merciful with pagans and sinners, leading his community through compassion. These two models of charity—“social” and “spiritual,” so to speak—have a diachronic distribution, so that the social “lover of the poor” becomes more and more prominent from the fifth century onwards in hagiographies, while spiritual compassion is highlighted mostly in canonical documents of the fourth century such as the Apostolic Constitutions<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, the two charities relate to two different fields of action for the bishop: mercy was the defining attitude of the bishop when he stood before a penitent Christian, the most praised virtue of the bishop in dealing with his community and its spiritual needs; the love of the poor was the attitude of the Christian community, publicly represented by its bishop, towards society at large, and it related to the material needs of the city. As explained by Rapp, these two spheres are linked in many ways, both in real life and in theological thinking, but it is also interesting that they corre-

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1 Weber 1922, 122–176; Rapp 2005, 16–18.

2 See the overview of scholarship at Rapp 2005, 6–16; theological categories are explored by Bou Mansour 2019 and Murray 2006 for the early Syriac church; Gautier 2002, 113–134 uses a threefold division of “sacramental”, “doctoral” and “patronal” functions to analyse Gregory’s view of priesthood, but their foundation is primarily theological. They more or less correspond to my “liturgy”, “leadership” and “charity”.

3 Rapp 2009, 77–80.

spond to two different *literary* models of bishop in the genre of hagiography<sup>4</sup>. The lover of the poor and the spiritual counsellor may be compared to common varieties inside a wider and recognised class of literary characters, different species of a genus—like, for example, the different types of *servi* in ancient comedy or the female characters in ancient novels<sup>5</sup>. The literary author employs recognised commonplaces to define his character not only as belonging to a generic social class but also as a type of individuals recurring in that class.

The features of the “lover of the poor” bishop are material charity—as shown, for example in feeding the hungry or freeing prisoners and hostages—and his ability to procure material advantages for the Christian community with his political ability, which may be synthesised under the name of *parrhesia*, the authority and skill to treat with powerful people<sup>6</sup>. The spiritual bishop is defined by his supernatural discernment—namely, his ability to know the heart of his people and treat them with justice, and, most of all, mercy, in order to lead them to God. Under this role of spiritual custody over the community must be included especially the *munus docendi*, the teaching authority and the task of debunking heresy and error. To these two models of episcopal sanctity, we can add a third one, the bishop as worship leader, his role of high priest. In this quality, the bishop is endowed with powerful prayer and, in hagiography at least, eucharistic miracles: these phenomena show another kind of *parrhesia* of the bishop, his direct relationship with God—and his ability to obtain from God what the people need. As worship leader and mediator between God and humans, the bishop must be pure and clean, so that his *parrhesia* flows ultimately from his personal holiness.

Obviously, this threefold distinction is at least partially artificial. It is similar—though not identical—to the threefold office—kingship, prophecy, and priesthood—of traditional theology, and, in the distinction between spiritual guidance and material charity, it partly resembles a distinction assumed by the abundant literature on the expanding jurisdiction of bishops from late antiquity to the Middle Ages<sup>7</sup>—namely, the distinction between a religious and secular jurisdiction of the bishop. However, this distinction between a secular and a spiritual sphere of action is more in our eyes than in the texts: here we should apply the same *caveat* Claudia Rapp used in her distinction between pragmatic and charismatic authority—namely, that pragmatic authority flows from charismatic authority and is still part of a religious worldview<sup>8</sup>. The distinction

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4 Rapp 2005, 279–290 for the evolution of the bishop’s social and political authority from authority in the Christian congregation as a result of societal change.

5 See, for example: MacCary 1969; Haynes 2003, 101–155; also, the discussion of typification in De Temmerman 2014, 8–14; and of character in De Temmerman/van Emde Boas 2018, 1–23.

6 The fundamental treatment of this category of late antique social interaction is given by Brown 1992, 61–70; 77–78 on the bishop exercising *parrhesia* in connection with his “love of the poor”. For a recent history of this ancient category, Leppin 2022.

7 Rapp 2005, 6–12.

8 Rapp 2005, 6, 18, 239, 290.



between material charity and spiritual leadership should be understood more as a distinction between two literary or rhetorical emphases, both rooted in religious values and with spiritual aims, than as two different spheres of jurisdiction. Furthermore, the three models of behaviour seem to correspond to the *munus regendi* (kingship), *docendi* (prophecy), and *sanctificandi* (priesthood), yet the *munus regendi* can describe equally the charitable bishop and the spiritual leader, and even the *munus sanctificandi*, most easily associated with the role of high priest, can be meaningful in describing the spiritual care of a bishop. Furthermore, under the umbrella of “spiritual leadership” fall two different problems the bishop will face—namely, doctrinal error and moral fault<sup>9</sup>: granted that they are united by the fact that the bishop should teach or guide his congregation, sometimes with the same means in both cases, they are nevertheless two different problems, which summon different themes, such as that of formation and culture in the case of doctrinal error and that of mercy and penance in the case of moral fault.

Finally, the distinction between these three models should not be read too rigidly, since in most cases they are just three facets of one coherent conception of the episcopate, and each text may choose to highlight this or that facet in order to make its point. In this, they are similar to the “ideal-types” of authority formulated by Weber: they are never met in their pure form in practice; every literary bishop—just like every historical authority—has *some* elements which *approximate* to this or that type<sup>10</sup>. Such categories are then above all useful heuristic concepts, but the literary portrait of a bishop can be evaluated only a posteriori, after the text has been properly interpreted in its rhetorical mechanisms and artistic choices. In this perspective, the comparison of passages from different texts on the basis of a common literary theme may help us assess the differences and peculiarities in the treatment of these features, which were in some way or other part of the audience’s expectations.

### 3.1.1 Lover of the poor

In their broadest lines, Gregory’s and Ephrem’s approaches to the role of the bishop are similar, though the poets play out the details differently. For both authors, material charity and political skills seem to be the least important features of the ideal bishop. They clearly focus on spiritual guidance, and only in relation to it do they consider the other actions the bishop may pursue. However, the relationship between spiritual guidance and other actions develops in different ways. In this section I begin by analysing the text passages in which the two poets downplay material charity through the suggestion to delegate its tasks to people other than the bishop (§3.1.1.1). Then, I will differentiate between the two poets. First (§3.1.1.2), I will consider Ephrem, as he limits

<sup>9</sup> Same distinction at Gautier 2002, 118.

<sup>10</sup> Weber 1922, 124.

material charity and its rhetorical commonplaces to one bishop, Babu, thereby employing this episcopal trait more as a characterising device than as a generalised theological object. Furthermore, briefer references to the concept can be traced back to the bishop's role in guiding the community and in his priestly prerogatives. My treatment of Gregory (§3.1.1.3) will begin with a passing reference to material charity, which serves to criticise the election of Nectarius. Then I will analyse his handling of the complex and much more important theme of *parrhesia*—namely, the issue of how the bishop should relate to secular power. This theme, introduced here for the first time prominently, will emerge several times in the remainder of this chapter.

### 3.1.1.1 A task to be delegated

From the paucity of the poets' remarks on material charity, the reader can deduce that they ascribed little importance the practice of this virtue as an episcopal task. Gregory discusses the question in only one instance, while Ephrem alludes to it multiple times, but only in passing and, we shall see, with strong limitations. Furthermore, both poets wrote a passage proposing delegation of practical tasks to other figures:

ܟܥܡܡܐ ܟܥܥܬܐ ܐܟ	ܚܒܐ ܟܥܥܬܐ ܐܟ
ܡܝܬܡܝܢ ܕܠܥܐ ܕܐܠܐ	ܟܥܥܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܡܝܢ ܐܟ
ܡܠ ܟܥܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܡܝܢ	ܡܠ ܕܡܝܬܡܝܢ ܕܥܥܬܐ
ܟܥܥܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܡܝܢ ܐܟ	ܟܥܥܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܡܝܢ ܐܟ
<sup>11</sup> ܕܡܝܬܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܡܝܢ ܐܟ	ܟܥܥܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܡܝܢ ܐܟ

(CN 18, 11)

Ἐν ἔστω τοῦδ' ἔργον ἱερέως καὶ μόνον,  
 Ψυχὰς καθαίρειν ἐν βίῳ τε καὶ λόγῳ,  
 Ἄνω φέροντα ἐνθέοις κινήμασι,  
 – Γαληνὸν, ὑψίνουν τε τὰς θείας μόνας  
 Ἀκηλιδῶτους ἐμφάσεις τυπούμενον, (755)  
 Ὡσπερ κάτοπτρον ἐνδοθεν μορφούμενον –  
 Ἀγνάς τε πέμπειν προσφορὰς ὑπὲρ τέκνων,  
 Ἔως ἂν αὐτοὺς προσφορὰν καταρτίσῃ.  
 Τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἀφείσθω τοῖς τὰδ' ἐντελεστέροις.  
 Οὕτως ἂν ἡμῖν ἀσφαλῶς ἔχοι βίος. (760)  
 (II, 1, 12, 751–760)

Leave to the priest one task and one only,  
 to purify souls through life and words,  
 bringing them upwards with inspired impulses,  
 being gentle and high-minded, only by the divine,

<sup>11</sup> “Make thee three judges and officers, / gatherers and givers, too, // and patrons and supporters, / all giving their service to each other, // lest may be rusted by care, / or defiled by anxiety, // the mind and the tongue / by which you offer the intercession // propitiating for the whole community. / **Blessed is he who makes your worship shine!**”

spotless reflections moulded, (755)  
 as a mirror reflecting from within,  
 and to send pure offerings on behalf of his children,  
 until he has restored them as an offering.  
 Let other tasks be left for the ones more accomplished in them.  
 This way, we can have a secure life. (760)

These two passages are strikingly similar. They both propose to delegate practical tasks to figures other than the bishop, and they both justify this idea with the language of priesthood and purity. Note that both passages are appended to an important declaration of the proper role of the bishop: lines 759–760 of Gregory’s poem follow his delineation of the priest’s unique task (see §3.1.1.3), while stanza 11 of Ephrem’s *CN* 18 precedes a stanza (12) where the poet links ritual and moral purity with the definition (*kunnāyā*, *CN* 18, 12, 5) of priest as the “mediator” between human beings and God (again, §3.1.1.3). As for the context in which these declarations are found, it is naturally different, since Ephrem comes to the declaration at stanza 12 after three stanzas of advice (9–11) to the newly accessed bishop, the third part of a poem whose first part defended the choice of the new bishop (stanzas 1–4) and whose middle part related his success in defeating Julian (stanzas 5–8), while Gregory is discussing the contemporary practice of electing someone who is a successful politician, even though inexperienced in matters of religion, to the episcopal throne (part of the discussion is analysed at §3.1.2.3). Even if the aim is different (advice and polemics), the meaning of the passages is the same: at the same time as they clearly define *what* a bishop is, the poets explicitly exclude all tasks and activities that are only contingent and should therefore be delegated to someone else. In fact, these tasks are not only outside the scope of the bishop, but they are outright damaging to his proper activities. Ephrem is very clear in this respect, as he describes the thoughts and preoccupations of these tasks “rusting” (*ʿašhet*) and “defiling” (*ʿeṣṭayyē*) the bishop in his priestly quality. The verbs he chooses for this impurity do not have much biblical attestation; however, the root of *ʿeṣṭayyē*, ṣ-y-y, is used for the “filthy garments” of Joshua in Zechariah’s vision (Zach. 3:3–4), a passage in which Joshua is characterised as *kāhnā rabbā*, “high priest” (3:1). Moreover, the verb “to make shine” (*zahher*) in line 10, which also means “to cleanse, purify”, is employed of Moses’s shining face in and around Ex. 34:29, another passage with priestly themes. The image of “rust”, though not present in the Bible, adds to the idea of ritual impurity that of clumsiness and inefficiency. With these words, Ephrem makes clear that he is describing a situation in which the bishop is impeded from accomplishing his priestly tasks. The causes of this impediment are “care” (*ṣeptā*) and “anxiety” (*renyā*). Also, Gregory indirectly states that the practical tasks of the bishop, most of all because of their moral and psychological impact, prohibit a proper discharge of the priestly office, as Old Testament ritual impurity prevented the priests from sacrificing: Gregory expresses this through the sacrificial language of lines 751–758 and through the image of the mirror, suggesting that the bishop’s attention should be directed only towards God (and, consequently, away from earthly things).

The care and anxiety that Gregory and Ephrem associate with the material tasks of the bishop were a literary commonplace, one of the components of the “refusal of office” trope, but it is likely that, at least in important cities, the commonplace corresponded to reality<sup>12</sup>. A similar idea had been used by Constantine to justify exempting clergymen from liturgies (that is, taxes)<sup>13</sup>. Perhaps the insistence of Gregory and Ephrem on an episcopate free of worldly administration responded to critics of similar exemptions from civic duties: if the bishop was exempted from civic liturgies to be fully devoted to religion, it would have seemed inconsistent for the same bishop to manage much wealth and to pass his time doing what an ordinary civic notable would do.

Gregory is very generic and does not in this passage point to the tasks that do not deserve the attention of the bishop, using simply the word τὰ ἄλλα, “the rest” and describing the bishop’s delegates as τοῖς ἐντελεστέροις, “those more competent”. Ephrem is more specific, giving titles to the delegates of the bishop. These are divided into three couples: “scribes” and “judges” (*sāprē w-dayyānē*), “gatherers” and “givers” (*tābō’ē w-yāhōbē*), and “patrons” and “supporters” (*qāyōmē w-yāšōpē*). Bou Mansour interprets some of these names, while others remain too vague for us to grasp. *Sāprē*, literally “scribes”, is, in his mind, “theologians,” and upon “judges” he offers no clarification. The *tābō’ē* are glossed as “fundraisers”, while *qāyōmē* and *yāšōpē* are linked to administrative tasks, with the *qāyōmē* more specifically associated with the role of the *oikonomos*<sup>14</sup>.

Beck, too, reads *sāprē* as “theologians,” supporting this reading with parallel texts, as he rejects Bickell’s translation of the term as *legisperitos*<sup>15</sup>. Both Beck and Bou Mansour

12 De Salvo 2010, 183 (with sources); Haensch 2007, 162–171. In the case of Nisibis, the importance of the city was perhaps compounded with the difficult situation due to the Persian sieges. Ephrem does not draw clearly this link, but laments profusely in the poems on bishops, and especially at CN 21, the devastations of war (see §4.1.2).

13 διόπερ ἐκέινους τοὺς εἰσὼ τῆς ἐπαρχίας τῆς σοι πεπιστευμένης ἐν τῇ καθολικῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, ἡ Καικιλιανὸς ἐφύστηκεν, τὴν ἐξ αὐτῶν ὑπηρεσίαν τῇ ἀγίᾳ ταύτῃ θρησκείᾳ παρέχοντας, οὐσπερ κληρικοὺς ἐπονομάζειν εἰώθασιν, ἀπὸ πάντων ἀπαξ ἀπλῶς τῶν λειτουργιῶν βούλομαι ἀλειτουργήτους διαφυλαχθῆναι, ὅπως μὴ διὰ τινος πλάνης ἡ ἐξολισθήσεως ἱεροσύλου ἀπὸ τῆς θεραπείας τῆς τῇ θεϊότητι ὀφειλομένης ἀφέλκωνται, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ἄνευ τινὸς ἐνοχλήσεως τῷ ἰδίῳ νόμῳ ἐξυπηρετῶνται (Eus. h. e. 10, 7, 2).

14 Bou Mansour 2019, 453 with n. 222. An overview of the personal dependent from the bishop in this period is given by Sotinel 1998; Haensch 2007. If we were to map the Latin names given in that contributes onto Ephrem’s list, *sāprē* would probably correspond to the *notarii* or the *defensores*, i.e., secretaries and lawyers; *dayyānē* to *defensores*; *yāšōpē* to the *curatores*, people charged with the supervision of euergetic projects; the *qāyōmē* to the *oikonomoi*; since in this period the church is still dependent on her wealthy patrons, they got a say in the administration of the resources they donated (Sotinel 1998, 120–121), a reality to which the name *yāhōbē* may point. However, it is far from certain that these correspondences between distant parts of the empire are to be accepted.

15 Beck 1961, 60n22. The three passages referred to by Beck are CN 19, 16, 7; *hymn. fid.* 51, 4, 7 and *hymn. haer.* 22, 21, 3. As regards *hymn. fid.* 51, *sāprē* is parallel to *hakkmē* “wise men”, and both terms are employed to connote negatively heretics: they belong to the wider language of Ephrem’s anti-intellectualistic rhetoric aimed at non-Nicene Christians. In this sense, *sāprā* here is a generic term for a learned person, who cannot be reduced to “theologians”, as this was a definite category in Ephrem’s time. These words denote, much more than a subject of study (theology), an intellectualistic approach to

failed to recognise that *CN* 18, 11, 1 is a quote from *Dtn.* 16:18 (“Judges and officers shalt thou make thee”), which I have instead translated accordingly<sup>16</sup>. This means that Ephrem is drawing an implicit parallelism between the episcopate and the political organisation described at *Dtn.* 16 (and in the following chapters). Two elements of this biblical organisation may have prompted the parallelism. First, the organisation has its basic unity in the city (*Dtn.* 16:18), in this resembling the episcopate. Second, and more important, these biblical authorities are clearly endowed with judicial powers (*Dtn.* 16:19; 17:9–11). This means that the doctrinal or educational task implied by Beck’s and Bou Mansour’s interpretation of the term is out of place here. The combination of *sāprē* and *dayyānē* is meant to help the bishop in his role as adjudicator in the community. Moreover, Beck himself notes that the word *dayyānē* is evidence that bishops in Nisibis already had a jurisdiction on civil causes that was recognised by the state<sup>17</sup>. Indeed, the task of settling disputes among Christians had been part of the bishop’s ministry since at least the third century. This task was presented as a facet of the bishop’s spiritual guidance, in connection with his responsibility over excommunication, penance and readmission into the community, and over salvation of as many souls as possible<sup>18</sup>. This juridical task does enter imperial legislation at the beginning of the fourth century—which would agree with Beck’s idea of a state recognition of the bishop’s judgement—but more recent studies downsize the extent and degree of such a recognition<sup>19</sup>. One could object that Ephrem’s suggestion that the bishop delegate juridical duties is a sign of the “secularisation” of this task, which was no longer perceived as part of the spiritual guidance of the bishop, but of his more mundane activities, often linked with the social standing of the individual prelate. There would be a measure of truth in such an objection, to which another element may be added: in the course of the fourth century, as the number of Christians grew, as the episcope-

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God. At *CN* 19, 16, 7, bishop Valgash is called *sāpar-nāmōsā* “scribe of the law”, the same expression as that employed by the Peshitta for Ezra at *Esr.* 7:12. This title is a reference to Valgash’s skill in teaching, homiletics and Bible interpretation (see below, §3.1.1.3). It is true that this entails much of what we would call “theology”, but the term has implications on Valgash’s role in the community which exceed the term “theologian”, such as his episcopal role of adjudicator for controversies among the faithful, so that the word *sāpar-nāmōsā* may preserve also a legal tinge in this context. The most meaningful parallel however is *hymn. haer.* 22, 21, because the term *sāprā* appears here in a series of official titles: the “leaders” (*rēšē*), namely bishops, “priests” (*qāššīšē*), “deacons” (*šammāšē*), “scribes” and “readers” (*sāprē w-qārōyē*) and finally the “covenant” (*qyāmā*), i.e., the group of lay ascetics typical of fourth-century Syria. Yet, of all these terms, the only one which has not an official standing is *sāprā*, since it does not appear as a title outside the Bible until the *Chronicle of Edessa* (see Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2708, s.v. *ܣܦܪܐ*), and in that case it refers to secular civic notaries.

**16** *Dayyānē w-sāprē* ‘*bad l-āk*’ (*Dtn.* 16:18, Peshitta version); ‘*bad l-āk sāprē w-dayyānē*’ (*CN* 18, 11, 1).

**17** Beck 1961, 60n22. On fourth-century legislation concerning *episcopalis audientia*: Rapp 2005, 242–252 and the bibliography at Haensch 2007, 162n35.

**18** Key texts for this idea are found at *Const. apost.* 2, 37–54, a Greek text of Syrian provenance, largely borrowing from the *Didasc. apost.* 9–11, another originally Greek text, but today available only in Syriac translation. This means that these texts could have been known to both Gregory and Ephrem.

**19** Humfress 2011; Rapp 2005, 242–252.

pate attracted more important people, and as the prestige of the church increased, more people would have appealed to the bishop's court, significantly increasing the labour required of the bishop<sup>20</sup>. Thus, not only the day-to-day reality of the causes brought to the bishop but also the amount of time they subtracted from seemingly more spiritual tasks may have prompted Ephrem to represent arbitration and adjudication as secondary tasks, which the bishop may delegate to others. After all, Epiphanius of Salamis delegated the task to one of his deacons for this reason, and the assistance of deacons or priests had been required since the *Didascalia apostolorum*, so that one could also guess that it is deacons and priests that are meant under the nouns *sāprē* and *dayyānē*<sup>21</sup>.

Grammatically, *tābō'ē w-yāhōbē* are two *nomina agentis* derived from a verb. *Yāhōbā* (in the singular) is a very generic term, used in many contexts with the simple meaning of “giver”, “one who gives”, “donor”<sup>22</sup>. As far as I can tell, the word does not appear in the Bible together with *tābō'ā*. So, while the combination of *sāprē* and *dayyānē*, though quite generic in meaning, was precisely connoted by its biblical precedent, in the case of *tābō'ē w-yāhōbē* we are left with names too generic to be formal titles—unless they were used as formal titles in Ephrem's community, a usage which would have left no other trace and which is consequently unlikely<sup>23</sup>. *Tābō'ā* comes from the verb *tba'*, meaning “to seek out”, “to demand,” and was employed most of all for “to seek revenge” and “to demand redress”. Therefore, *tābō'ā* is someone who seeks redress or revenge, often in an official capacity. The term can be applied to two fields: on one side, *tābō'ā* is someone seeking to punish, hence a judge, an avenger, or even an inquirer; on the other, it may be applied to the economic field, and then it means “exactor”, whether it be for a private party (a “creditor”) or for the state (as “tax-collector”)<sup>24</sup>. In this context, I find it more likely that the term refers to the financial field, as opposed to the juridical, because the judicial activities of the church are already covered by the “scribes and judges,” and *yāhōbē* seems to point to donations to the church<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, if the first pair of delegates substi-

<sup>20</sup> Witnesses in this regard can be found in Ambrose and Augustine: Aug. *ep.* 33; Possid. *vit. Aug.* 19; on Ambrose see Aug. *conf.* 6, 1, 3; Selb 1967, 214–217; Haensch 2007, 163 with nn. 37–39 for primary sources.

<sup>21</sup> *Const. apost.=Didasc. apost.* 2, 42 (bishop and deacons to judge together); 44, 3 (the deacon should order everything he can, leave the rest to the bishop); 46 (bishop and priests to judge together); *Life of Epiphanius of Salamis* PG 41, 93A. More on assistance to the bishop in adjudicating at Haensch 2007, 164–165; at 166–167 a brief discussion of *notarii* attached to a bishop, who could also serve different purposes beside juridical ones.

<sup>22</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1567, s.v. *ܝܗܘܒܐ*.

<sup>23</sup> Yet, note that Aphrahat, *dem.* 20, 19 employs *yāhōbē* in relation to the giving of alms with a turn of phrase that might suggest a technical sense: “This short meditation I wrote for you on the giving to the poor (*mawhbat meskinē*). Encourage and persuade the givers (*l-yāhōbē*) to sow before themselves the seed of life, as it is written . . .”. If Aphrahat's addressee is a bishop, the idea of a group of “givers” led by the prelate could be defended with this text.

<sup>24</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 4382, s.v. *ܬܒܐܐ*.

<sup>25</sup> Hence, on this interpretation I agree with Bou Mansour 2019, 453 with n. 222.

tuted for the bishop in his capacity of arbitrator, this second pair would help him secure revenues for the church either by firsthand donations (*yāhōbē*) or by requesting, organizing, and eventually asserting the church's rights over the donations of others (*tābō'ā*).

The third pair, *qāyōmē w-yāšōpē*, has the same morphological structure of the *nomina agentis* as the nouns in the second. *Qāyōmē* comes from the very common verb *qām*, roughly corresponding to Greek ἵστημι, and encapsulates the same concepts of Greek derivatives of ἵστημι such as προστάτης and ἐπιστάτης: the concept of control and guidance over some subjects; of protection of those subjects; and of dependence of this role on a higher power—that is, delegation. Indeed, the term in the Peshitta corresponds to Greek προστάτης, ἐπιστάτης, and ἐπίσκοπος, while elsewhere it is employed for the late antique *patronus*<sup>26</sup>. A similar meaning is attached to the other word, *yāšōpā*, from the verb *yīšep*, “to care”, “to worry about”, “to strive to”<sup>27</sup>. In this semantic family, the sense of delegation and protection is more stressed than that of control and guidance. In one instance (1Macc. 14:47), *yāšōpā* translates Greek προστατεύω, which demonstrates the link of *yāšōpā* with asymmetrical relationships similar to patronage, since the context is Simon Maccabeus's command over the whole people of Judah. Bou Mansour, in a note, associates the *qāyōmē* with the role of *oikonomos*, reserving for the *yāšōpē* a more generic administration, but he does not give a reason for this differentiating. Given the similarity of the terms, one is led to doubt that there should be any difference between the two categories: Ephrem may be employing a hendiadys to preserve the parallelism with the other pairs. Apart from their individual meaning, it is still far from clear in which tasks should these figures help the bishop. One can surmise a directing or administering activity, perhaps of the goods acquired through the “donors” and “exactors” of line 2, but it cannot be excluded that these ministers organised some activities of the community either<sup>28</sup>. It is noteworthy that Ephrem proposes to differentiate the bishop from the patron in the same context in which he describes the priestly function of the bishop, because the same discourse was developed by Gregory (§3.1.1.3 and §3.1.2.3): it is in the context of the rejection of the bishop-patron or bishop-politician (II, 1, 12, 709–750) that Gregory explains the priestly task of the bishop (II, 1, 12, 751–760).

To sum up, both Ephrem and Gregory describe the episcopate, in its most proper and most narrow sense, as a priestly mediation between human beings and God. Priestly state, according to the Old Testament, requires purity: Ephrem and Gregory interpret purity in a moral and psychological sense, as concentration on God and absence of other cares. Therefore, they propose to separate some prerogatives from the immediate jurisdiction of the bishop through delegation. Ephrem specifies which prerogatives should be delegated: the bishop's task of arbitration, the securing of resources, and the administration. Gregory implies something similar when (II, 1, 12, 709–762) he criticises

<sup>26</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3532, s.v. *ܩܝܡܐ*.

<sup>27</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1617, s.v. *ܝܫܥܐ*.

<sup>28</sup> For an overview on the *oikonomoi* and other delegates to the administration of church finances see Haensch 2007, 166–171.

those who prefer a politician as bishop to an ascetic. Even though the claim is similar, it has different functions in the texts of Ephrem and Gregory. In the case of Gregory, his definition of the “proper” tasks of the bishop is consistent not only with his theology but also with his apology as bishop of Constantinople against Nectarius.

At first sight, Ephrem’s motivation is not apparent. However, *CN* 18, 3–4 seems to defend Abraham from the envy of other clergymen and the accusation of being too young to be a bishop:

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ	ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ 3 ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ	ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ 4 ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

(*CN* 18, 3–4)

Stanza 3 says that the new bishop was elected with a large consensus for his merits (“he was older than Aaron”, meaning he was wiser) and despite his age (“the little”). The idea of the youngest son acquiring the primogeniture refers clearly to David (1Sam. 16:11–13), with whom Abraham is compared also at *CN* 18, 6, 3, and again for his young accession at *CN* 19, 2, 3<sup>30</sup>. The following stanza (*CN* 18, 4), already analysed at §2.1.1.2, denies that there was any envy (*ḥsāmā wa-ṭnānā*) around Abraham’s election, a claim repeated also at *CN* 19, 9, 1 (“no one envied your election”, *layt d-ḥāsem ba-gbīt-āk*). This insistence betrays a situation less idyllic than that which Ephrem represents<sup>31</sup>. In such a context, Ephrem may suggest delegating some tasks in order to appease those who were discontented because of the election and to reassure those concerned with the young age of the bishop: diverting these tasks from the young bishop would create more opportunities for those who were excluded from the election and would likely lead to the entrusting of delicate matters to people more experienced than Abraham.

29 “The last musterer, who was lifted / and became head of his limbs [*rēšā l-haddām-aw(hī)*] // the little who took primogeniture, / not at a price like Jacob, // nor through jealousy like Aaron, / envied by his brothers, the Levites, // but through love [*b-ḥubbā*] took it, like Moses, / because he was older than Aaron: // your brothers rejoiced in you as Moses. / **Blessed is he who chose you through concord!** /// 4. There isn’t jealousy nor envy / among the limbs in the body [*bēt-haddāmē da-b-gušmā*], // for they obey it for love [*b-ḥubbā*], / they are ordered by it for affection [*b-raḥmē*]: // the head is the limbs’ watchman [*dawqa-(h)w rēšā l-haddāmē*], / for he can see all parts; // though exalted, he is humble for love [*ba- ḥnānā*], / he stoops even to the feet, // to take away their pain. / **Blessed is he who joined your love with us!**”

30 See also *CN* 17, 2, 7–8 and *CN* 19, 2, 4 for the image of the horn of anointment: §3.3.1.1 n. 321.

31 See also Palmer 1998, 124–125, with his customary cynicism.



### 3.1.1.2 The limits of charity in Ephrem

Delegation is only one facet of Ephrem's and Gregory's approach to episcopal charity. Tasks and values connected with it are mentioned elsewhere in the poems, although here the poets follow different paths. Ephrem treats the theme differently in the poems on Valgash (CN 13–16) and in those on Abraham (17–21). In the poems on Valgash, Ephrem employs episcopal charity as an element in his framing of the history of Nisibis as a development through phases defined by the three first bishops. In order to differentiate the bishops—and the phases they define—Ephrem highlights always the same qualities for each bishop:

<p>ܠܡܥܠ ܐܝ ܠܥܡܠ ܕܥܝܪܐ 16  ܠܡܥܠ ܥܡܟܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ  ܠܡܥܠ ܥܡܟܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ</p>	<p>ܠܡܥܠ ܐܝ ܠܥܡܠ ܕܥܝܪܐ 16  ܠܡܥܠ ܥܡܟܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ  ܠܡܥܠ ܥܡܟܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ</p>
<p>ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ 17  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ  (CN 13, 16–17)</p>	<p>ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ 17  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ</p>
<p>ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ 2  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ</p>	<p>ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ 2  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ</p>
<p>ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ 3  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ</p>	<p>ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ 3  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ</p>
<p>ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ 4  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ</p>	<p>ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ 4  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ  ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ</p>

...

32 “Against the first wrath / fought the toil [‘aml-eh] of the first; // against the sultriness at midday / stood the shade of the middle; // against the ungrateful peace / multiplied the last his warnings [zuhhārā]. /// To the first siege resisted / the first, triumphant [naṣṣiḥā] priest; // to the second siege resisted / the second merciful [raḥmānā] priest; // the prayers of the last, then, / mystically [kasyāʾit] closed our breaches.”

33 “The good toil [‘aml-eh] of the first / bound the land up in her distress; // the bread and wine [laḥm-eh w-ḥamr-eh] of the middle / cured the city in her ruin; // sweetened our bitterness in distress / the sweet talk [maml-eh] of the last. /// The first tilled the earth with toil [‘amlā], / uprooting thence briar and thorns, // the middle enclosed her all around, / making her a hedge of redeemed [prīqē], // the last opened the barn of his Master / and sowed in her the words of her Master [mellay mār-āh] /// The first priest by hand of fasting [ṣawmā] / had closed the gates of the mouths, // the second priest with the prisoners [šabyē] / had opened the mouth of the purses, // now the last has pierced ears / and put in them the jewel of life [hešlat-ḥayyē].”

ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ	ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ 23
ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ	ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ
ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ	ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ
ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ	ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ 24
ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ	ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ
ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ <sup>34</sup>	ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ

(CN 14, 2–4; 23–24)

The theme is reprised briefly in the form of advice to Abraham later:

ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ	ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ
ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ	ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ
ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ	ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ
ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ	ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ
ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ <sup>35</sup>	ܐܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ

(CN 19, 16)

The terms employed in CN 13 and CN 14, 2–3 and 23–24 are still vague. Jacob, the first bishop, is consistently associated with the word “toil”, “work” (*amlā*), and described with the adjective *naṣṣīhā*, with a wide range of meanings, spanning from “bright”, “shining”, to “victorious” and “famous”<sup>36</sup>. These characteristics, repeated in CN 19, 16, can be interpreted as pointing at Jacob’s strict asceticism, as manifested by his fasting (*ṣawmā*) in CN 14, 4 (see below, §3.1.2). The features of Babu and Valgash, the second and third bishops, are more shifting, but it seems safe to say that Valgash is associated with preaching and teaching, while Babu is associated with charity and “redemption”, expressed with nouns coming from the root *p-r-q* (the passive participle *prīqē* and the *nomen agentis* *pārōqā*). These three portraits are projected onto the historical past of Nisibis, being associated with the sieges in CN 13, 16–17, and they are again projected onto the eschatological future of Nisibis—as the church “reaches out to meet the Groom”, an eschatological image taken from the parable of the ten virgins—in CN 14, 23–24. So the eschatological Christ is presented with different titles and attributes matching the feature of the single bishop: with toiling and ascetically poor Jacob, he

34 “As she comes to the Rich [*attirā*], / she shows the treasure [*gazz-eh*] of the first; // as she comes to the Redeemer [*pārōqā*], / she shows those redeemed [*prīqē*] by the middle; // as she reaches out to meet the Groom / she shows the anointment of his luminaries. /// Before the One rewarding the wearied, / she brings the labour [*aml-eh*] of the first; // before the One loving the bountiful [*rāhem yāhōbē*], / she brings the alms [*zedq-eh*] of the middle; // before the One judging the doctrines [*dāyen yullpānē*], / she brings the debating [*drāš-eh*] of the last.”

35 “Like the triumphant [*naṣṣīhā*] priest Jacob, / with him she triumphed [*nṣaht*] like him; // since he joined his love to his zeal, / she put on fear and love. // Through Babu, loving almsgiving [*rāhem zed-qātā*], / with money she ransomed the prisoners [*praqt l-šabyē*], // through Valgash, learned in the Law [*sāper-nāmōsā*], / she opened her heart to Scriptures, // through you then may her benefit increase! / **Blessed is he who extolled her merchants!**”

36 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2438–2439, s.v. ܐܡܠܐ.

“rewards the wearied” (CN 14, 24, 1) and is “rich” (CN 14, 23, 1); with charitable and redeeming Babu, he is the “lover of those who give” (CN 14, 24, 3) and the “redeemer” (CN 14, 23, 3), and with learned and eloquent Valgash, he “judges doctrines” (CN 14, 24, 5). More on this relationship between different bishops and time will be said at §4.1.

More substantial information on Babu and Valgash is given in CN 19, 16, where Ephrem makes clear that Valgash’s distinguishing achievement had been his teaching, in particular his teaching of Scripture, and Babu’s defining deed had been his ransoming (*praq*) some prisoners, indicating a broader engagement in collecting and employing alms (*zedqātā*). This clarifies also CN 14, 4, 3–4 where it is said that Babu, through the prisoners—namely, by proposing to the community that it ransom the prisoners—had “opened the mouth of the purses”—that is, he had persuaded the faithful to give alms. The same activities are hinted at by the epithet *rahmānā*, from the same root—*r-ḥ-m*—that forms the name *mraḥḥmānutā*, one of the terms for “charity” and “almsgiving” in Syriac<sup>37</sup>. One is even led to suspect that the text has lost an *m*- and that the original had *mraḥḥmānā*, meaning “merciful”, but also “almsgiver”, “benefactor”, which is metrically equivalent to *rahmānā*. Furthermore, the shadow (CN 13, 16, 4) and the bread and wine (CN 14, 2, 3) associated with Babu are standard biblical images for God’s protection and favour<sup>38</sup>. Naturally, bread and wine also recall the Eucharist, which would seem to depart from Babu’s image as “social saint”, if the Eucharist were not a theological model for Christian charity and solidarity<sup>39</sup>.

The prominence Babu gives to the ransoming of captives is remarkable because it agrees with many other sources, already from the third century, which task the bishop with this particular duty<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, in many cases this duty allowed bishops to break away from or limit the influence of wealthy lay donors; for example, Ambrose melted liturgical silverware donated by wealthy laymen linked with his Arian predecessor, in order to ransom captives in the Balkans, thereby effectively erasing the memory of the donors while at the same time using their wealth to increase his own prestige<sup>41</sup>. Ephrem’s vivid formulation of Babu’s accomplishment—“with the prisoners / had opened the mouth of the purses” (CN 14, 4, 3–4)—may hint at a similar process, in that Babu is credited with the ransoming of captives even though the money probably came from lay donors. In any case, such a formulation is in agreement with a wider tendency of the church in the whole empire, to regard the bishop as the centre of Christian charity, compelling all other actors (laymen, but also priests and countryside communities) to have their offerings mediated by the bishop<sup>42</sup>. The ransom puts the

37 See Aphrahat *dem.* 20, 19, where “lover of the poor” is spelled *rāḥem l-meskēnē*.

38 Ryken/Wilhoit/Longman 1998, 434–438, s.vv. “Bread”; 2620–2623, “Shadow”; 3201–3204, “Wine”.

39 Brown 2012, 42; Magnani 2009, 111–113.

40 Rapp 2005, 224, 228–232.

41 Brown 1992, 96; Rapp 2005, 230–231.

42 Brown 1992, 94–97; Wypszczycka 1998. Two sources are particularly eloquent: *Const. apost.* 2, 27 and the canons 7 and 8 of the Synod of Gangra.

bishop even more in the spotlight, since money must necessarily pass through his hands and be employed by him in person: donors were allowed to and did claim participation in and prestige from the construction of new buildings, but the bishop acted alone as representative of the Christian community when it came to negotiating the liberation of prisoners of war.

For all its importance, the role of charity in Ephrem's poems is still limited. First of all, it is confined to Babu, with the other two bishops (Valgash and Jacob) being singled out for other activities. One could object that this is a rhetorical device to differentiate between the bishops and that, if it limits the importance of Babu's episcopal charity, it should also limit the importance of Jacob's episcopal asceticism and Valgash's magisterium. However, it is clear from Ephrem's poems and from later influence that the three bishops did not enjoy the same popularity. The defence of Valgash's preaching is the main theme of *CN* 14, and *CN* 15 and 16 are an apology for his disciplinary methods. Jacob is the main theme of *CN* 13, and he is considered the founding father of the church in Nisibis. On the other hand, Babu appears in the poems only as "the one in the middle" where the other two are present, so that he seems to lack a distinct character of his own. At *CN* 21, 21 the poet does not even mention Babu's episcopate, as he creates a parallelism between Jacob's tenure and Constantine's reign before, Valgash's and Constantius's time after. This inequality is reflected in later sources: in various chronicles, either Babu is absent from the succession of Nisibene bishops, or his episcopate is placed sometimes before and sometimes after Jacob<sup>43</sup>. This confusion hints to a lack of reliable information about him, which may mean that his episcopate was considered unimportant. Therefore, when Ephrem confines episcopal charity to the person of Babu, he limits its importance even as he acknowledges it as a proper part of the bishop's duties.

In Ephrem's poems there are other instances of episcopal charity and episcopal intervention in civic and political life. I will defer to another section (§4.1.2) the role of the bishops during the Persian sieges of the city (*CN* 13, 2; 4) and Abraham's withstanding Emperor Julian (*CN* 18, 5–6), to concentrate here on two important occurrences of episcopal charity. The first has already been mentioned in relation to the image of the fisherman:

ܠܒܒܐ ܕܒܒܐ ܕܒܒܐ ܕܒܒܐ  
ܠܒܒܐ ܕܒܒܐ ܕܒܒܐ ܕܒܒܐ  
(*CN* 19, 10, 1–4)

ܠܒܒܐ ܕܒܒܐ ܕܒܒܐ ܕܒܒܐ  
ܠܒܒܐ ܕܒܒܐ ܕܒܒܐ ܕܒܒܐ

<sup>43</sup> See Fiey 1973, 124; Fiey 1977, 26 refers and explains Elijah of Nisibis' notice that Babu was bishop before Jacob, but was listed in the diptychs of the city after Jacob because Nisibis was not a metropolitan see at his time. Even if this late reconstruction were true (which is unlikely, since the diptychs agree with Ephrem and both are more reliable than Elijah's source), it would not change the relative unimportance of Babu. This is testified also by his absence from other chronicles: *Chronicle of Edessa*, entries 17 and 23; *Chronicon ad 819* (Chabot/Barsaum 1920, 4) = *Chronicon ad 846* (Brooks 1904, 193, 196).

<sup>44</sup> "Do not overlook the great [*rabbā*], / do not despair of the weak [*ḥallāšā*], // soften and instruct the rich [*'attīrē*], / bait and win the poor [*meskēnē*]."

Ephrem advocates for a differentiated approach to the different categories of faithful, in the conviction that the bishop should not let anyone on his own. The approach towards the poor is to “bait” (*garreg*) and “acquire” (*qnī*) them. The image of the bait suggests a material gratification used to attract these people, while the verb *qnā*, “to acquire”, could imply a financial transaction, even though, admittedly, it has a very general meaning. Together, these verbs intimate that the bishop should employ material charity to attract, convert, and sustain the poor in the faith. Therefore, even if the line refers to material charity, it does so in a passing way and subordinates it to the pastoral care of the bishop, which remains paramount in Ephrem’s view.

Finally, two stanzas from CN 21 suggest that the bishop was involved in religious buildings:

<p>             ܕܡܪ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ           </p>	<p>             ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ 19              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ           </p>
<p>             ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ           </p>	<p>             ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ 20              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ              ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ ܕܡܫܥ           </p>

(CN 21, 19–20)

These stanzas describe Ephrem’s wishes after the end of Julian’s reign and the accession of Abraham as bishop. Ephrem sees Julian’s reign as a fever, the fever of paganism, from which the world is recovering (stanza 18). Previous stanzas had framed Julian’s reign as a period of persecution and generalised confusion (stanzas 15–17; see §4.1.2). Stanzas 19–20 describe a return to normalcy, with stanza 19 implying a previous discontinuity in Christian cult. Independently from historical reality, Ephrem wants to present Julian’s end and Abraham’s accession as a resurrection event, as is clear from stanza 19, especially line 10. The bishop’s role in this resurrection is twofold: stanza 19 describes his building and providing for churches, and then stanza 20 calls the bishop to exercise his intercessory power through prayer. What is remarkable in this literary construc-

45 “May the land be appeased in your days, / having seen you so full of peace! // By you may churches be built [*netbryān ‘iddātā*], / may their ornaments return, // in them may their books be opened, / and may their altars be arrayed, // and may their deacons be purified, / may praise rise from them, // first fruits for the Lord of Peace. / **Blessed is he who resuscitated [*mnaḥḥem*] our churches! /// May your prayer rise to the sky / and may rise with it reconciliation; // may the Lord of the sky rain / his bounties on our wickedness, // and his comforts on our grieves, / and his collecting on our dispersion; // may he guard his zeal with his love / our shame may his justice avenge, // our wickedness may his mercy blot out. / **Blessed is he who blessed his flock!**”**

tion is the inextricable link of political and liturgical elements. Building churches and arraying them for the liturgy is clearly the sign of the end of a political-religious regime and, in some sense, a public act; and yet it also serves the bishop's function and role as liturgical intercessor before God, since the churches are built in order to give the bishop a proper place for prayer, so that the building activity, even if its political implications are recognised, is primarily seen as a liturgical act, pertaining to the bishop's duties as priest and mediator. This conception of building is totally different from the personal and familiar pride of wealthy lay patrons (and occasionally bishops) or the attention to the "common good" that prompted bishops to participate in civic building enterprises in later times: here, building activity—and, more generally, providing materials (the decors and books in the churches)—is deduced from the bishop's priestly role as heir of Old Testament priesthood<sup>46</sup>.

### 3.1.1.3 Charity between asceticism and parrhesia in Gregory

Gregory limits the role of material charity even more than Ephrem. There is only one reference to giving to the poor in all our poems, and it is framed in a very limiting way:

Σὺ δ' εἰπέ μοι, βέλτιστε, καὶ πράκτωρ φόρων  
 Ἦ καὶ στρατοῦ τιν' ἐκλελοιπῶς ἀξίαν,  
 Πόθεν πένης ὦν, εἴθ' ὑπερβάλλων Κῦρον  
 Τὸν Μῆδον ἢ τὸν Κροΐσον ἢ Μίδαν πόροις (435)

– Πλήρη τὸν οἶκον δακρύων κεκτημένος –  
 Μετῆλθες εἰς τὸ βῆμα καὶ κρατεῖς θρόνου,  
 Ἐπειτα πάντα συλλαβὼν ἔχεις βίαν,  
 Τέλος τυραννῶν καὶ Θεοῦ μυστήρια,  
 Οἷς οὐδὲ θαρρεῖν προσβλέπειν ἔχρῃν ἴσως (440)  
 Τοὺς μὴ λίαν πόρρωθεν ἡὔτρεπτισμένους;

...  
 Γενοῦ Ζακχαῖος· τοῖς μὲν ἡδίκημένοις  
 Μὴ πλεῖον, αὐτὸ τὸ κεφάλαιον, εἰ δοκεῖ,  
 Μόνον κατάθες· οὐ γὰρ φέρεις τὸ τοῦ νόμου·  
 Τοῖς δ' αὖ πένησιν εἰσένεγχε' ὅσον θέλεις, (460)  
 Καὶ τότε γε Χριστὸν ἐστιάσεις ἀξίως.  
 Εἰ δ' ἔνδον ὄντων τῶν σύλων ἢ μικρὰ δοὺς  
 Πένησιν οἷσι τυγχάνειν ἐλεύθερος,  
 Τὸ θεῖον ἡμῖν πέπρατ', εἰ θέμις λέγειν·  
 (II, 1, 12, 432–441; 457–464)

<sup>46</sup> A famous example of lay familial pride is the dedicatory epigram of the church of St. Polyeuctus in Constantinople, *Anth. Gr.* 1, 10; a similar example, but from a bishop, is Eugenius' epitaph, Calder 1928n170. On episcopal building see Rapp 2005, 220–223, with later examples of civic endeavours "for the common good". Ephrem's framing of the bishop's role in church-building is unique when confronted with the examples given by Rapp; I examine the political and historical implications of these acts on the backdrop of Julian's reign and Ephrem's theology of history at §4.1.2.

But tell me, dear friend and exactor of tributes,  
 or former-something in the civil service,  
 how come you, being poor, and then exceeding Cyrus  
 the Mede, Croesus, or Midas with your revenues, (435)  
 owning a house made and full of tears,  
 you migrated to the altar and took hold of the throne,  
 and still retain what you seized by force?  
 And finally, you are a tyrant even of God's mysteries,  
 upon which one shouldn't perhaps even dare to look (440)  
 if not prepared for a very long time.

...  
 Become a Zacchaeus, and if you want to,  
 don't give more, but just the sum you stole from them,  
 for you cannot abide by the law;  
 give to the poor as much as you want, (460)  
 and then you'll host Christ properly.  
 But if you keep the spoils inside or give little  
 to the poor, and believe yourself to be acquitted,  
 then our God—if I may speak thus—can be sold.

It is important to give the context of these lines: Gregory has already denounced the moral inadequacy of contemporary bishops and traced its cause to their hasty consecration, which brings to the episcopal throne people with all sorts of vices from their previous life in the world. Gregory brings out the paradoxical situation of these bishops, calling to conversion and atonement the ones already elected.

Furthermore, this portrait of the greedy-turned-bishop also has a real-world referent: Nectarius. Indeed, the hypothetical bishop in the poem is a “former-something in the civil service” (στρατοῦ τιν’ ἐκλελοιπῶς ἀξίαν, 433), as Nectarius had been a *praetor urbanus* and then a senator in Constantinople<sup>47</sup>. No other source suggests that Nectarius had also served in any charge that could be described as “exactor of tributes” (πράκτωρ φόρων), though it is not to be excluded. On the other hand, it is possible that here Gregory equates the πρᾶκτωρ with the much more generic “former-something”, in order to make Nectarius (if he was never an exactor) fit into the comparison with Zacchaeus. What is certain is that Nectarius was only a catechumen when the Council of Constantinople chose him as bishop, a circumstance which gives great poignancy to Gregory’s discussion, just after this passage (442–456 and then again at 465–502), of the purifying power of baptism<sup>48</sup>. Moreover, Nectarius had to be quite rich, since he had

<sup>47</sup> Lt. *militia* and *miles*, as well as Gr. στρατός and derived terms (in classicizing writers) could be loosely used for any appointment at the service of the emperor; see Jones 1964, 377. On Nectarius: Jones/Martindale/Morris 1971, 621 s.v. “Nectarius 2”.

<sup>48</sup> θαῦμα δὲ πᾶσιν ἐγένετο, καὶ ἐπυνθάνοντο ὅστις εἷη Νεκτᾶριος οὗτος καὶ ποδαπὸς τὸ ἐπιτήδευμα καὶ πόθεν. μαθόντες δὲ μηδὲ μυστηρίων μετεσχηκέναι τὸν ἄνδρα ἔτι μᾶλλον κατεπλάγησαν πρὸς τὸ παράδοξον τῆς βασιλέως κρίσεως. ... ἐπεὶ δὲ πάντες εἶξαν καὶ τῇ ψήφῳ τοῦ κρατοῦντος συνέβησαν, ἐμύθη. καὶ τὴν μυστικὴν ἐσθῆτα ἔτι ἡμφιεσμένος κοινῇ ψήφῳ τῆς συνόδου ἀναγορεύεται Κωνσταντινουπόλεως

been *praetor urbanus*, a charge that entailed footing the bill for public games: a venture of considerable expense<sup>49</sup>. This fits well with Gregory's comparison of Nectarius with Cyrus and Croesus, whereas the comparison with Midas is part of Gregory's accusing Nectarius of greed and, consequently, of having hoarded wealth through dishonest means.

Confronted with this rather extreme case, a dishonestly enriched politician pursuing the episcopate without even being baptised and without renouncing his wealth, Gregory takes a surprisingly soft stand: he compares the offender to Zacchaeus and applies a lower standard. Zacchaeus, in a similar situation, had returned four times what he had stolen, in accordance with Roman law and Jewish law (but only for the theft of cattle), giving half of his wealth to the poor, too<sup>50</sup>. And Zacchaeus obtained only forgiveness with his act, while our hypothetical politician is pursuing forgiveness *and* authority in the church. Nonetheless, Gregory's standard is to give back only what was stolen and to offer to the poor a sum of one's choice. It is clear from this discourse that charity is envisaged primarily as a reparative act, purifying the candidate for baptism—and, a fortiori, for the episcopate—of his previous greed. Granted, giving riches to the poor is not just the duty of a former thief, since Gregory makes clear in other places that his ideal bishop must have renounced worldly wealth. Moreover, Gregory recognises a positive function of almsgiving as “hosting Christ” (Χριστὸν ἐστιᾶσαι, 461), a concept echoing the last judgement as predicted by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (in particular, Mt. 25:40). And yet these feats are required as *preconditions* for becoming bishop, not as activities typical of a bishop. They seem to be much more linked to the individual's salvation and dignity than to his mission as head of a commu-

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ἐπίσκοπος (Soz. 7, 8, 6–7); Ἦν δέ τις Νεκτάριος ὄνομα, συγκλητικὸς μὲν γένους, ἐπεικὴς δὲ τὸν τρόπον, δι' ὅλου θαυμαζόμενος, καίτοι τὴν τοῦ πραιτῶρος χειρίζων ἀρχήν· ὃς ἀρπασθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ εἰς τὴν ἐπισκοπὴν προβλήθη (Socr. h. e. 5, 8, 30); *Apud Constantinopolim vero Nectarius ex praetore urbano catechumenus et nuper baptisma consecutus, sacerdotium suscepit* (Rufin. h. e. 2, 21). The discussion on baptism is analysed at §3.3.2.1.

<sup>49</sup> Jones 1964, 689–690, 706.

<sup>50</sup> Meier 1989, 124, though I do not agree with Meier's interpretation of οὐ γὰρ φέρεις τὸ τοῦ νόμου (459). He takes it to mean that the subject does not have enough to satisfy the Roman and Jewish law's requirement to give back fourfold the stolen, noting that either Zacchaeus or the subject had formally broken those laws. However, he also contradicts himself, as he says that Gregory is orienting himself on the gospel law, in requiring less from the thief as the Roman and Jewish. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is the teaching of the gospel (which may be dubbed νόμος in this context) which requires from the thief more than Roman and Jewish law, as Zacchaeus' innocence before those laws, and the fact that he gave back and donated anyway, show. Moreover, this is in keeping with the logic of other Gospel teachings, requiring a stricter observance of previous laws (see Mt. 5:21–48 on homicide, adultery, perjury and justice; Mt. 18:21–22 on forgiveness). Therefore, the νόμος Gregory is referring to is neither Jewish nor Roman law, rather it is Zacchaeus' example, the gospel law; the verb φέρω in this context does not mean “to have”, but “to bear”, “to tolerate”. Gregory is applying οἰκονομία to the ἀκριβεία of Zacchaeus' example, because he recognises his target is not capable of such a spectacular renunciation as the gospel would require.



nity. It is, in other words, a matter between the bishop and God, at best pertaining to the moral purity of the minister approaching God on behalf of others, as 439–441 and 464 seem to imply.

If Gregory seems relatively uninterested in material charity as an episcopal function, he dedicates much more attention to a fundamentally episcopal feature—that is, *parrhesia*. The theme has already been investigated by historians, because of its significance to late antique society and the dialectic between this concept and that of *paideia* in the stance taken by different public figures of the time<sup>51</sup>. *Parrhesia* and *paideia* imply two galaxies of concepts and social institutions, which can be rhetorically organised so as to agree or contrast in a variety of ways. According to Brown, *paideia* (“education”, παιδεία) is the language of traditional elites, such as *curiales* or senators, and it implies emotional restraint and poise; a classical education and a refined, classicizing language; and a network of ties and bonds placing the individual firmly inside society—through family, marriage, friendship, patronage, and civic service. On the other hand, *parrhesia* (παρρησία)—namely, “speaking truth to power”—is the language of the philosopher and, later, of the “man of God” or holy man. *Parrhesia* implies detachment from society and its bonds, renunciation and retreat from wealth and power, fortitude and restraint of one’s emotions, but also the courage to utter inconvenient truths and, in its monastic declination, the refusal of classical culture and its sophisticated speech. Faced with this dichotomy, bishops had to mediate between the urban and lay life of *paideia* and the extremes of ascetic *parrhesia* as they represented an established urban hierarchy claiming also charismatic authority. It is clear from this situation that *parrhesia* and *paideia* not only were the bishop’s concrete means of exercising material charity—since he depended for financial support on the urban and imperial elites—but also gave him the role of spokesperson, which the bishop exercised in favour of the Christian congregation and the poor and, with time, of the whole city council; therefore, *parrhesia* is a component of the bishop’s social charity.

Gregory’s approach to the contrast between *parrhesia* and *paideia* is to propose—as is often his habit—a middle road<sup>52</sup>:

<sup>51</sup> The fundamental treatment is given by Brown 1992, 62–70, 72–73, 78, 117. See also: Rapp 2000, 396–397; Rapp 2005, 267–274; for Gregory: Elm 2012, 157; Gautier 2002, 15–16, 122–125. All these studies are in one way or another indebted to Foucault’s treatment of the question, which is critically analysed—together with earlier treatments of *parrhesia* in Early Christian texts—by Lynn Benedict 2018, 48–97 (for “episcopal” *parrhesia* in Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, see her analysis of Basil’s showdown with Valens at 237–251). For a more general history of the term, see Leppin 2022.

<sup>52</sup> On the significance of the intellectual device of the “middle road” for Gregory’s theories: Plagnieaux 1951, 231–232; McGuckin 2001a, 263–264, 246, 250, 254, 263, 273; Gautier 2002, 40, 46–51 (see also 67–69); McGuckin 2006; Boudignon 2017.

Ἐπεὶ δέ σοι μέγιστον ἡ παρρησία,  
 Ἔστω μὲν· οὐδ' ἔμοιγε φαίνεται βραχύ,  
 Εἰ σὺν λόγῳ τε χρώμεθα καὶ μετρίως.  
 Ὅμως δ' ἄκουσον, ὡς ἔχει· τοῦ γὰρ σοφοῦ  
 Πλέον τὸ σιγᾶν ἢ τὸ σὺν περιτρέχειν· (765)  
 σοῦ μὲν γάρ ἐστι καὶ τὸ θάρσος ὡς θράσος·  
 Τοῦ δ' εὐγένεια καὶ τὸ συστέλλειν λόγον.  
 Εἴ που δὲ καιρὸς ἐμπέσοι παρρησίας,  
 Ὅψει μαχητὴν τὸν πρᾶον, καὶ πηλίκον  
 Ἔστιν κατορθῶν, τηνικαῦτα γνωρίσεις. (770)  
 Γνώσῃ, τί κέρκωψ καὶ τί βρυχᾶται λέων,  
 Ὅταν τὸ μὲν σὺν ἐκπτύητ' ἀνθρώπινον  
 Κάμπτοντος εἰς γῆν τοῦ κακοῦ συνειδότος,  
 Ὁ δ' ὦν ἄληπτος λαμβάνηται ῥαδίως.  
 Τρόπου γὰρ οὐδέν ἐστι πιθανώτερον. (775)  
 Οὕτως ἔλαττον κἀνθάδ' ὃ τρίβων ἔχει·  
 Ὅμως δὲ λαμπρὸς ἐν μέσοις καθέζεται  
 Ἀλλοτρίαν τράπεζαν ἐκκαρπούμενος,  
 Περιφρονῶν ἅπαντας ὡς ἀμβλώματα  
 Τοσοῦτον, ὅσον αὐτὸς περιφρονητέος, (780)  
 Ἐν τοῦτ' ἔχων φρύαγμα λαμπρὰν τὴν πόλιν –  
 Ἐφ' ᾧ σε δεῖ καὶ μᾶλλον ὀλλυσθαι κακῶς.  
 Πλείους γὰρ οὕτω δημιουργεῖς τοὺς κακοὺς.  
 (II, 1, 12, 761–783)

Yet, as you deem free speech the highest value,  
 I accept it: nor do I find it unimportant,  
 provided we use it with reason and moderation;  
 however, mind how things are: the wise man's  
 silence is worth more than your claptrap, (765)  
 for, while even your courage is boldness,  
 nobility means also curbing our words.  
 But if the right chance occurs for speaking freely,  
 you'll see the meek turn pugnacious, and you'll experience  
 in that circumstance how much he's successful. (770)  
 You'll learn how the ape and how the lion roars,  
 when your human nature will be spit,  
 as the bad conscience turns towards earth,  
 while he, being irreproachable, is easily received.  
 Nothing else in fact is more trustworthy than temper. (775)  
 Thus in this respect too is the skilful one worse.  
 Nevertheless he boastfully takes seat in the spotlight,  
 enjoying the fruits of another man's table,  
 so much despising all the others, like abortions,  
 as he himself should be despised, (780)  
 having this one spur of pride, his glorious city,  
 and deserving for this an even more abject downfall:  
 for in this way you are producing more wicked men.

This passage comes directly after the criticism of the “political” bishop, the forceful definition of the priest’s tasks, and the recommendation to delegate the rest to others. The keyword here is *μετρίως*, “with moderation,” which describes Gregory’s attitude towards *parrhesia*. The poet concedes to his fictive counterpart that *parrhesia* is an important feature for a bishop, but at the same time he limits its value and attributes it to his own model bishop. Indeed, at 763–767, Gregory reminds the interlocutor of the importance of silence and restraint in addition to *parrhesia* and subtracts *parrhesia* proper from the “political” bishop (ὁ τριβών, 776), reserving it for the bishop who is σοφός (764), εὐγενής (767), and πῶος (769). These are, however, the marks of late antique *paideia*, noble birth, the command of culture and mastery of one’s own emotions, especially rage. Thus, Gregory’s attitude towards *parrhesia* implies the presence of *paideia*. Neither Gregory nor his audience is prepared to utterly upend the social order and its conventions for the sake of unrestrained *parrhesia*, and Gregory’s emphasis on silence as a balancing principle forces his hypothetical counterpart into the unpalatable position of the radical, reserving for Gregory himself the commonsensical middle way. Furthermore, by setting *paideia* as a prerequisite for authentic and authoritative *parrhesia*, Gregory implies that at the heart of *parrhesia*, there must be a renunciation of a former, exalted status: no uneducated commoner can easily claim to teach and criticise<sup>53</sup>. The distinction between authentic and authoritative *parrhesia* on one side and simple rashness on the other is aptly expressed at 771 with the metaphor of the lion and the ape: the lion represents authority, and the ape a distorted imitation thereof. In fact, the bad bishop is marked by his greed and pride, features opposed to the selfless renunciation which only gives the authority necessary to speak with *parrhesia*. In the end, such vices make for the opposite of what a bishop should be: Gregory expresses this thought obliquely when he says that the skilful bishop in his pride despises the others “as abortions” (ὡς ἀμβλώματα, 779). The word ἀμβλωμα is the Atticist synonym for the Koine Greek ἔκτρωμα, a word famously used by Paul in his self-presentation as the “last of the apostles”<sup>54</sup>. However, since Paul is, in Gregory’s thought, the very model of the bishop—as demonstrated by his long discussion of Paul’s life in *or.* 2—when the skilful bishop applies this comparison to his colleagues instead of applying it to himself, he is effectively reversing Paul’s example.

This negative image of the bishop is reprised and expanded at II, 1, 17:

<sup>53</sup> Regarding renouncement as the heart of authority: Brown 1992, 74–75. A certain elitism in the Cappadocians’ approach has been often observed, but it must not be forgotten that Gregory stresses above all moral adequacy as the primary requisite for the bishop and the theologian, and even his definition of σοφία cannot be totally identified with secular *paideia*.

<sup>54</sup> ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡς περὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὥφθη κάμοι (1Cor. 15:8); Ἐξέτρωσεν ἡ γυνὴ μὴ λέγε, ἀλλὰ ἐξήμβλωσεν· ὡσαύτως ἀμβλωμα καὶ ἀμβλωθρίδιον, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἔκτρωμα (Phrynichus Arabius *Eclogae* 257–258).

Οὐ θνητοῦ βασιλῆος ὁμέστιος, ὡς τοπάροιθεν,  
 Γρηγόριος, θυλάκῳ ἦρα φέρων ὀλίγην, (60)  
 Κείμενος ἐν μέσσοισι, κατηφιόων καὶ ἄναυδος,  
 Ἄπνοον ἄσθμα φέρων, δούλια δαινύμενος.  
 Οὐχ ἔδρη τίσει με δικασπόλος, ἡὲ συνέδρῳ,  
 Ἦὲ χαμαιπετεῖ, πνεύματι μέτρα νέμων.  
 Οὐδὲ χέρας φονίους προσπτύξομαι, οὐδὲ γενείου (65)  
 Δράξομαι, ὥστ' ὀλίγης ἀντιτυχεῖν χάριτος·  
 Οὐδ' ἱερὴν ἐπὶ δαῖτα, γενέθλιον, ἡὲ θανόντος,  
 Ἦ τινα νυμφιδίην σὺν πλεόνεσσι θέων,  
 Πάντα τὰ μὲν γναθμοῖσιν ἐλώρια, τὰ δ' ἄρ' ὀπηδοῖς  
 Θήσσομαι, ἀρπαλέαις Βριαρέω παλάμαις· (70)  
 Ὅψὲ δὲ φορτίδ' ἄγων, τάφον ἔμπνοον, ἅψ ἐπὶ δῶμα  
 Ἐλξω, τὴν μογερὴν γαστέρα τειρόμενος,  
 Ἄσθμα κόροιο φέρων, ἄλλην ἐπὶ δαῖτα παχείην  
 Σπεύδων, πρὶν προτέρην ὕβριν ἀποσκεδάσαι.  
 (II, 1, 17, 59–74)

No more a guest of a mortal king, as was before,  
 is Gregory, giving tiny gifts to his envelope, (60)  
 lying in the public, downcast and mute,  
 with a breathless panting and feasting on slavish food.  
 The judge won't punish me with a seat, either equal  
 or lower; to give a measure to my inflation.  
 Nor will I greet murderous hands or clutch (65)  
 their cheek to obtain a measly favour;  
 nor will I run with many people to some holiday feast,  
 either for a birthday or for a funeral or a wedding,  
 to put every spoil in my jaws or give it to my attendants  
 with the rapacious hands of a Briareus; (70)  
 then late, bearing a burden, as a living grave, I'll drag myself  
 back home, worn out by the toiling belly,  
 slurring the breath of surfeit, still hurrying towards another  
 fat feast, before having dispersed the previous glut.

Here, Gregory is describing the consequences of his renunciation of the episcopal see of Constantinople. He describes behaviours that are expected from the bishop of an important city. They are similar to the behaviours of the bishop-politician of II, 1, 12, 777–783, who is in fact described as the bishop of an important city (λαμπρὰν τὴν πόλιν, II, 1, 12, 781). The difference is that the bishop-politician is proud of such behaviours, whereas Gregory sheds light on their moral corruption and their unworthiness of a bishop. This is shown by the different attitudes of Gregory and the bishop-politician regarding public life: while the skilful bishop is boastful (λαμπρός, II, 1, 12, 777) in his public appearances, Gregory shows a humble demeanour (κατηφιόων καὶ ἄναυδος, II, 1, 17, 61), because he is conscious that much of his public importance is just a concession from the powers that be, and in particular from the emperor (θνητοῦ βασιλῆος, II, 1, 17, 59). Even the verbs expressing the public appearance of the bishop reveal two different attitudes: the

proud bishop “takes his seat in public” (ἐν μέσοις καθέζεται, II, 1, 12, 777), while Gregory helplessly “lies in public” (Κείμενος ἐν μέσσοισι, II, 1, 17, 61).

This contrast, as well as the contrast between the lion and the ape at line 771, shows how self-deluded and inauthentic the life of the skilful bishop is: he prides himself in a condition he should be ashamed of, he eats from somebody else’s table (ἀλλοτρίαν τράπεζαν, II, 1, 12, 778) without noticing that these perks cost his freedom (δούλια δαινύμενος, II, 1, 17, 62), he despises his inferiors, while it is he who should be despised (II, 1, 12, 779–780), and, finally, he believes that his important seat is an advantage, while in reality for him it is a source of damnation, because the greater the episcopate, the greater damages he makes (II, 1, 12, 781–783).

The passage from II, 1, 17 is clearly written to convey disgust for feasts, most of all. It does so not only with the plural neuter δούλια (62) but also with the word “jaws” (γναθομοῖσιν, 69), a Homeric term used at *Od.* 18, 29 in Irus’s threat to Odysseus to “knock off all his teeth from his jaws as those of a wild crop-devouring sow”, reprised by Euripides in a metaphor comparing poison to a wild beast devouring Glauce’s flesh (*Eur. Med.* 1201) and often employed for animals (Leonidas, *Anth. Gr.* 9, 99, 4; Nicander *Theiaca* 183; Tryphiod. 73). The word “spoils” (ἐλώρια, 69) is used in the proem of the *Iliad* (Hom. *Il.* 1, 4) of the corpses left for the wild scavengers. The metaphor of the “living grave” (τάφον ἐμπνοον, 71) for the belly full of food was a theme of cynic diatribe against meat eaters—for example, the sentence γίνεσθε νεκρῶν θηρίων περιπατοῦντες τάφοι, found in Palladius *de Gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus* 2, 45, 9. The reference to the foul breath overeating leaves (ἄσθμα κόροιο φέρων, 73) is meant to elicit disgust for the whole affair. Besides, disgust, pain, and exhaustion are also associated with public feasts, as the stuffed body is described as a “merchant ship” (φορτίδα, 71), movement is a “dragging oneself” (ἔλξω, 72), the toiling stomach fatigues (τὴν μογερὴν γαστέρα τειρόμενος, 72), the feasts are fat (δαῖτα παχείην, 73), the bishop is always in a hurry to content everyone (θέων, 68; σπεύδων, 74), and eating is an outrage (ὕβριν, 74). Avoiding feasts and banquets likely meant cutting oneself out of the network of lobbying that shaped so much of late antique public life, which is exactly what Gregory wants to do, since he explicitly refuses to engage in social networking at lines 65–66. Note also how he minimises the advantages of such activity: his guest is only a mortal king (θνητοῦ βασιλῆος, 59), as opposed to God, the Immortal King; the food is scarce (ἥρα ὀλίγην, 60), the gratitude measly (ὀλίγης χάριτος, 66). He also presents social networking as a series of humiliations (κατηφιῶν καὶ ἀναυδος, 61; δούλια δαινύμενος, 62; lines 63–64) suffered to appease unworthy masters (χέρας φονίους προσπύξομαι, 65). Finally, these lines are immediately followed by the reduction of the bishop’s preaching to a form of spectacle which we have examined in §2.2.4.9.

It is true that Gregory presents this stance as a personal one, since he mentions his own name in line 60, and it must be noted that the context is not the choice of a new bishop, but the motives and prospects of the resigning one. Hence, even though II, 1, 17, 59–74 shares many features with II, 1, 12, 776–783, it is not completely correct to treat them as if they were addressing the exact same topic. However, the passage

at II, 1, 17 demonstrates that, in Gregory's view, there can be an excess of *paideia*, or rather, a misplaced *paideia*, through which the bishop becomes too accommodating to the powerful and too entrenched in the mechanisms of this world, thereby losing his moral high ground and, ultimately, his freedom. This means that, as authentic *parrhesia* cannot exist without the foundation of *paideia*, because otherwise it loses authority, so *paideia* cannot be appropriated without preserving a space of *parrhesia* and "otherness" for the mechanisms of the world, for otherwise the bishop would become just a political position among others, thereby failing his mission. Therefore, although in II, 1, 12, 761–783 Gregory seems to reject *one* model of bishop and to propose another, he is really rejecting two different models: on one side, the unruly and uncouth "outsider", who ignores the rules of politics and order with his licentious *parrhesia*, and on the other, the politician perfectly integrated in those rules, pursuing his personal ambition through the church and without moral concerns. The model bishop is Gregory himself: firmly grounded in the world of *paideia*, he renounces that very world, so that he can judge it from the outside and exercise an authentic and measured *parrhesia*.

Gregory rejects false *parrhesia* in line 776: οὕτως ἐλαττον κἀνθάδ' ὁ τρίβων ἔχει. This line is very ambiguous, because τρίβων can have two meanings: first, it is the name of a kind of cloak worn by philosophers, in particular Cynic philosophers; second, it can mean "expert", "skilful". The second meaning is very apt, both because at the beginning of the discussion on the political abilities of the bishop the same term and a synonym were employed, and because the term is employed in this rare sense most of all in iambic poetry<sup>55</sup>. On the other hand, the philosopher's coat may not be out of place here, since Gregory is talking about *parrhesia*, a concept commonly associated with philosophers, particularly those of Cynic tendencies: indeed, the τρίβων was almost the distinctive sign of the παρρησιαστής<sup>56</sup>. This double profile corresponds to Gregory's two competitors for the seat of Constantinople, or at least it corresponds to their literary

55 For the meanings, see Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1817, s.v. τρίβων (A) and (B). The first three lines of this discussion sound: ἀλλ'εὐστροφός τις οὗτος ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν / ὃν οὐκ ἐπαινεῖς, ἐντελής τε προστάτης / τρίβων παλαιῶν καὶ νεῶν κινήματων (II, 1, 12, 709–711). Clearly, ὁ τρίβων (776) refers back to this passage. εὐστροφος is somewhat equivalent to τρίβων, since both refer to skill in social relationships, one by way of the attitude implied by this skilled (quick changes to adapt to new situations) and the other by way of the experience required. Excluding Herodt. 4, 74, all instances of τρίβων in the sense of "expert" are in iambs: Eur. *Bacch.* 717; *Med.* 686; *El.* 1127; *Cycl.* 520; Aristoph. *nub.* 869–870; *vesp.* 1429. Later is employed also in prose; see: τρίβωνα λόγων at Greg. Nyss. c. *Eunom.* 1, 1, 12 (quoting Eur. *Bacch.* 717); *virg.* 6, 2, 34. The expression παλαιῶν καὶ νεῶν κινήματων subverts the character of the scribe who learns from the Kingdom of Heaven in Mt. 13:52: πᾶς γραμματεὺς μαθητευθεὶς τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν ὁμοίως ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπῳ οἰκοδεσπότῃ, ὅστις ἐκβάλλει ἐκ τοῦ θησαυροῦ αὐτοῦ καινὰ καὶ παλαιὰ (see also: καὶ ἐπὶ θύραις ἡμῶν πάντα ἀκρόδρυα, νέα πρὸς παλαιὰ, ἀδελφιδέ μου, ἐτήρησά σοι. Cant. 7:14).

56 The pun on the double meaning of τρίβων had been already exploited by Aristophanes at *nub.* 869–870 (Sommerstein 2007, 203 ad 870). On *parrhesia* being associated with the philosopher (and the Cynic in particular): Brown 1992, 62–65; Montserrat 2017, 69–71; Lynn Benedict 2018, 184–187. On the τρίβων and his association with the philosopher: Urbano 2014, 177–183 (with copious bibliography).

presentation by Gregory himself: the “Cynic” Maximus, backed by Ambrose and Italian bishops, would be the radical big mouth of 761–775, whereas Senator Nectarius, backed by the Antiochians and the emperor, would be the old fox of politics of lines 777–783 (and implied at II, 1, 17, 59–74)<sup>57</sup>. Therefore, Gregory’s device of the middle road serves not only to imply that he himself is the model bishop but also, and most of all, to relegate his main contenders to the two extremes of the spectrum.

To sum up, both Ephrem and Gregory have a very limited vision of the material charity of the bishop. It is interesting to observe that, while the poets employ many terms of leadership and of priesthood (see §2.1.1–2), they almost completely lack words for material charity. They both propose to delegate the tasks connected with the material and “secular” managing of the community to other figures, arguing that such tasks damage the psychological and moral purity of the bishops, thereby impairing their priestly powers. However, the theme is not completely absent from our texts; it is just limited to individual cases, as opposed to such general statements as advice, exhortation, or theorisation.

Ephrem employs charity primarily to flesh out the character of one of the three bishops of Nisibis, Babu. Therefore, charity is less a required virtue of the bishop in general and more of a personal characteristic of Babu; and since Babu is clearly the least important of the three bishops, material charity ends up as a low priority. It is true that Ephrem recommends two typical behaviours of this character to the new bishop, Abraham, thereby recognizing their universal validity, but the recommendations are very limiting. Material charity is to be used as an evangelizing technique towards poor people, and the rebuilding and refurbishing of churches belongs more to the priestly duties of the bishop, which are materially determined in this case by the aftermath of Julian’s reign.

Gregory does not even describe reigning prelates with the most common characteristics of lovers of the poor. He mentions donations and charity only as a prerequisite to the episcopate and as a reparative act in the case of rich people wanting to enter

57 On the different claims on Constantinople’s episcopal seat, see §4.1.2. Maximus was commonly associated with Cynicism and the τρίβων: in *Constantinopolitana civitate Cynicum ad sacerdotium vocare* . . . *nesciebant philosophorum habitum non convenire incessui christiano* (Damas. *ep.* 5); *περὶ Μαξίμου τοῦ Κυνικοῦ καὶ τῆς κατ’αὐτὸν ἀταξίας τῆς ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει γενομένης* (*Canons of Constantinople* 4); *Μάξιμον* . . . γὰρ Ἀλεξανδρέα τὸ γένος ὄντα κυνικόν τε φιλόσοφον τὸ ἐπιτήδευμα (Soz. 7, 9, 4); *Μάξιμόν* τινα χειροτόνηκε κυνικόν, εὐθὺς αὐτοῦ τὰς κυνικὰς ἀποκείρας τρίχας (Theodrt. *h. e.* 5, 8). Gregory amplified this image in his poetry: Maximus as a Cynic and dog (II, 1, 11, 751–752; 924–926; 938; II, 1, 41, 3; 35; 48); carrying a stick (βακτηρία) as the Cynic did (II, 1, 11, 768); inauthentic (II, 1, 11, 791–806; 954–967); like Proteus (cf. II, 1, 12, 729 with II, 1, 11, 807–808); exercising *parrhesia* (Τὸν Μάξιμον γνώτωσαν ἐκ παρρησίας, II, 1, 41, 32); with the τρίβων (II, 1, 41, 42); full of conceit (θράσος; cf. II, 1, 12, 766 with II, 1, 41, 10; 31; 49; 59, the last one ἀπαίδευτον θράσος!). The same antithesis between lion and ape is found at II, 1, 39, 80, another poem which may have Maximus as its target. Nectarius is never addressed directly, but it is likely that Gregory is often referring to him: McLynn 1997; McGuckin 2001a, 375n25; McGuckin 2001b, 161; Storin 2011, 236.

the clergy. He devotes much more energy to the theme of *parrhesia*, which is understandable for a poet who had to deal personally with the emperor. Gregory recognises the importance for the bishop of treating with the powers that be and describes two characters that exemplify two opposing errors in this realm. One is the big-mouthed outsider, the Cynic philosopher who tries to upend the social order through his philosophy—a covert satire of Maximus. The other character, corresponding to Gregory's memories of Constantinople in II, 1, 17 and to the proud and protean politician of II, 1, 12, is the bishop too attached to secular hierarchies and too involved with the elite world. Gregory criticises both not only for their moral failures but also for their political insignificance: the Cynic is invested with an inauthentic *parrhesia*, because he lacks the authority that would make his criticisms credible; the politician may gain personal or short-term advantages from his closeness to secular power, but he will ultimately depend upon them to the point of humiliating his own exalted office.

### 3.1.2 High priest

The main lines of Gregory's and Ephrem's treatment of priesthood have already been traced at §2.1.3 through the analysis of related terms, such as *ιερεύς* and *kāhnā*. Having recalled them, I will add other passages to flesh out better the elements already known. As regards Gregory, I will analyse a recurring structural element of our poems—namely, the use of priestly imagery towards the end to describe Gregory's asceticism in retirement. This priestly imagery is lexically parallel to the passage already analysed at §2.1.3 on the ideal priest. Then, I will consider some passages in Ephrem where priestly attributes are passed down from one bishop to the other on the basis of personal holiness. I will ask if this means that the episcopate is conceived as an honorary title more than a function in the community. Finally, I will examine a group of Ephremian passages where the poet attributes beneficial powers to the bishop's celebration of the liturgy. These passages tie into broader themes of Ephrem poetry that are here anticipated and will be reprised extensively in the chapter that is specifically on Ephrem (§4.1.2). However, these passages also show some differences in Ephrem's and Gregory's conceptions of liturgical priesthood.

Ephrem and Gregory conceive priesthood by and large along the lines of the Old Testament institution. They concentrate on the rules of purity, interpreting them allegorically as requiring moral probity. In this respect, Gregory goes further than Ephrem, because while Ephrem interprets the Eucharist as the true sacrifice, Gregory says that, besides administering the Eucharist, the bishop should present the souls of his community, morally perfected in his guidance, to God as an offering. Ritual purity in this moral sense serves Ephrem as a basis for excluding from or including in the bishop's personal jurisdiction different tasks, such as judging—excluded on the ground of the distractions it entails—or building churches—included because part of the bishop's role as priest



before God. Finally, for both poets, the bishop is a mediator between God and humanity, transmitting top-down truth, morality, and spiritual gifts.

To these ideas, it is worth adding a pattern recurring in Gregory's poems. At the beginning of II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 13, as well as in various other places, Gregory presents the task of the bishop as the priestly offering of the Eucharist. The profusion of words of purity and the context of such utterances suggests that the theme is touched upon to conjure the devotion due to the Eucharist against immoral—and therefore impure—bishops: Gregory expresses outrage and enjoins the reader to the same. In II, 1, 10, the first line (Ἦ θυσίας πέμποντες ἀναϊμάκτους, ἱερῆς) is a call to witness that uses the most sacred function of bishops in order to bind and solemnise their summoning. In II, 1, 13, 1 the same line opens an anticlimax, ending with a description of bishops as comic actors, and in this context, it is fitting to begin with the most sacred function of bishops. The insistence on purity at II, 1, 12, 148–151 (ἀγνοὶ, καθάρσια, ἀγνίσουσι) contrasts with the vicious treatment the bishops gave Gregory, removing him during an illness<sup>58</sup>. The mention of θεοῦ μυστήρια in II, 1, 12, 439 may well be a reference to the Eucharist—or in general to sacraments, introduced to excite outrage at the “tyranny” (τυραννῶν) that the greedy-man-turned-bishop exercised over them<sup>59</sup>. Lines 751–760 have already been analysed more than once (see §2.1.3 and §3.1.1.1). Their parallel in II, 1, 17, 21–40 is clearly employed as a foil to present the bad behaviour of real-life bishops: the aim of the poem is precisely to confront the two different lifestyles of good and bad bishops<sup>60</sup>. The passage at II, 1, 13, 184–197 develops a long description of the Old Testament temple and its purity regulations in order to chastise the bishops for their take adequate time to deliberate when electing new prelates (see §3.3.2.2).

However, words of offering and sacrifice tend to appear also in another specific location in these poems. In fact, Gregory caps them with descriptions of his ascetic retirement in terms of priesthood, often as an antithesis to the unworthy deeds described in the body of the poem:

58 Ἐπειτ' ἀροῦσι χεῖρας ὡς ἀγνοὶ Θεῷ / Καὶ δῶρα πέμψουσ' ἐκ φρενὸς καθάρσια / Καὶ λαὸν ἀγνίσουσι μυστικοῖς λόγοις, / Οἱ καὶ μ' ἐπεμψαν ἔνθεν ἐκ πονηρίας (II, 1, 12, 148–151).

59 Τέλος τυραννῶν καὶ Θεοῦ μυστήρια (II, 1, 12, 439). See also §2.1.2.1; §3.1.1.3.

60 Αὐτὰρ ὃ γε τρομερῆσι καὶ εὐαγέσιν παλάμησι / Δῶρον ἄγει, Χριστοῦ σαρκὶ χαριζόμενος, / Καὶ μεγάλοις παθέεσσι, ἅπερ Θεὸς ἐνθάδ' ἀνέτλη, / Ὑψίον ἀρχεγόνων ἡμετέρων παθῶν / Ἦ ζῶει μούνῳ καὶ τέρπεται· ᾧ ῥα κεάζει / Θυμὸν ἀπὸ χθονίων ἔνθεν ἀνιστάμενος, / Ἀνθρώπων δ' ἀγαθοῖσι διδοῖ φρένα, τοῖς δὲ κακοῖσι / Κάμπτεται, ὅσα λίθος ὀκρυδεῖς ἀδάμας· / Οὐδ' ὃ γ' ἐπιστρέφεται πλούτου μεγάλων τε θοώκων, / Οὐ δόξης βροτῆς ἐνθάδε συρομένης· / Οὐδὲ δορὴν βασιλῆος ἔχων βριαροῖο λέοντος, / Κεῦθει κερδῶν ἐνδοθὶ δουλοσύνην, / Νεκροβόρος, δολόμητις, ἀτάσθαλος, ἄλλος ἐν ἄλλοις / Παντοδαποῖς κακίης εἶδει κλεπτόμενος, / Ἀλλὰ νόον καθαροῖσι νοήμασιν αἰὲν ἀέζων, / Ἦδη καὶ Τριάδος ἅπτεται οὐρανίης, / Ἦς τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσι νῆσι, / Κῦδος ἐν ἐν τρισσοῖς κάλλει δερκόμενος, / Καὶ λαὸν θυέεσσιν ἀγνοῖς θεοειδέα τεύχων, / Ὑστάτιον ψυχῆς θύματ' ἄναιμα φέρει (II, 1, 17, 21–40).

**II, 1, 10, 31–34**

Τοῦνεκα καγχαλῶν φθόνον ἔκφυγον, ἐκ μεγάλου δὲ  
 Χείματος, ἐν σταθερῷ πείσμα βάλλον λιμένι,  
 Ἐνθα νόου καθαροῖσι νοήμασι θυμὸν ἀείρων,  
**Θύσω** καὶ σιγὴν, ὡς τὸ πάροιθε λόγον.

Therefore, with a laugh I flew envy, and from a violent  
 storm I dropped anchor in a steady haven,  
 where, elevating my spirit with pure thoughts of the mind,  
 I shall offer silence too, as before speech.

**II, 1, 12, 803–808**

Χωρεῖτ'· ἐγὼ δὲ συστραφήσομαι Θεῷ,  
 Ὡς ζῶ πνέω τε καὶ πρὸς ὃν βλέπω μόνον,  
 Ὡς πρὶν γενέσθαι μ' ἢ τεκοῦσ' ὑπέσχετο,  
 Ὡς κίνδυνοὶ συνῆψαν καὶ νυκτῶν χάρις.  
 Τούτῳ τε **θύσω** νοῦ καθαρά κινήματα,  
 Ὡς γοῦν ἐφικτὸν, προσλαλῶν μόνῳ μόνος.

Go ahead, I'll recollect myself in God,  
 by whom I live and breathe and for whom I look,  
 to whom before birth my mother promised me,  
 with whom dangers and the gifts of night bound me,  
 and to him I'll sacrifice pure movements of the mind,  
 as far as it's possible at least, alone talking to him alone.

**II, 1, 13, 209–215**

Ὡν ὁδε δεσμὸς ἔχει πλάγκτην νόον ἔνδον ἀγείρας,  
 Εἶσω πᾶς ὁρόων, γελῶν βιότοιο θυέλλας,  
 Αἶ ῥά τε καὶ πιτυῶν αἰσχυρῶς κονίουσι πρόσωπα,  
 Αἰεὶ τε πραπίδεσσι νοήματα θεῖα χαράσσω,  
 Χείροσιν οὐκ ἐπίμικτα, διαυγέα, φωτὶ πελάζων  
 Τρισσοφαοῦς θεότητος, ἐπειγομένοισι πόθοισιν  
**Ἰλαον** ἀθανάτοιο Θεοῦ πρὸς θῶκον **ἱκοίμην**.

Whence this bond stops the erring mind, recollecting it inside:  
 all turned inwards, laughing about the storms of life,  
 which still soil shamefully even the faces of the wise,  
 and always impressing on the heart divine notions,  
 approaching nothing mixed with evil, but pure, to the light  
 of the Thrice-Shining Godhead, with urging longings,  
 I shall come to the propitious throne of God immortal;

**II, 1, 17, 101–102**

Ταῦτα μὲν, οἷσι φίλον, καὶ κερκῶπων κράτος εἶη·  
 Αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ Χριστοῦ πλήσομαι ἀτρεμέων.

Let these things to the one who cares about them, and the power to the monkeys,  
 while I'll fill full of Christ in stillness.

These passages share the same context and a group of themes. They are all towards the end of the respective poems, preceded by a forceful denunciation of the bishops' bad ways and Gregory's denial of his involvement in their workings: I preserved in the quotations the sentences bridging this theme to Gregory's description of his ascetic retreat (II, 1, 10, 31–32; II, 1, 12, 803; II, 1, 13, 208–211; II, 1, 17, 101). However, this description is never the last word of the poems. This is particularly clear in II, 1, 12, where Gregory introduces his “valedictory speech” (ἐξιτήριον λόγον, 812) right after the quoted passage, and the speech goes on some twenty lines after that, but the other poems, too, have at least a couplet after the passage quoted. Except for II, 1, 10, all poems end on a slightly threatening note, entrusting the ecclesiastical situation to God's judgement<sup>61</sup>.

Among the common themes in these passages, remarkable is the priestly language describing ascetic practices. In II, 1, 10, Gregory “sacrifices” (θύσω, 34) silence<sup>62</sup>. In II, 1, 12 the sacrifice is the “movements of the mind” (νοῦ κινήματα, 807), which, in accordance with Old Testament precepts, must be pure to be offered (see §2.1.3.1). The phrase κινήματα νοῦ (and hence its synonym, the νοήματα)<sup>63</sup> is a technical term, κίνημα, which can have many different meanings but, in its most generic sense, is any content of the mind<sup>64</sup>. Origen notably employs it for the voluntary and free intentions of rational beings; from Origen, the term in this sense enters theological and ascetic vocabulary, in particular in the Cappadocian Fathers<sup>65</sup>. Therefore, the “pure movements” and “pure thoughts” of Gregory's poems refer to a striving, half intellectual and half practical, to meditate exclusively on God, avoiding material interests and other desires. In II, 1, 13,

61 Τὰ δ' ἄλλα ἐκεῖθεν, ὧ φίλοι, λελέξεται (II, 1, 12, 811), where ἐκεῖθεν means “in the afterlife” (see Meier 1989, 164); Ἐνθα τε πάντ' ἀναφανδὰ, τὸ δὲ πλεον ἰσοτάλαντον / Τῆμος δ' ἔν χειρῶν Θεοῦ ζυγὸν ὀρθοδίκαιο (II, 1, 13, 216–217); Εὐχομαι, ὡς κεν ἅπαντα Θεῷ φίλα τοῖσδε μεμῆλοι, / Εἰ δὲ χειριότερᾳ, τηλόθεν οὐατ' ἔχειν. (II, 1, 17, 107–108).

62 On the theme of silence as sacrifice and the meaning of this innovative practice in Gregory's asceticism: Gautier 2002, 51–52, 195–213; Storin 2011.

63 See νοῦν δὲ τίνα; μὴ τὸν ἐν ἄλλῳ, καὶ οὐ κινήματα τὰ διανοήματα (or: 28, 13). All other occurrences of διανοήματα are coupled with κινήματα.

64 E.g.: ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ διάφορα κινήματα φαίνεται, καὶ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῇ τὸ λογίζεσθαι, καὶ τὸ ἐπιθυμεῖν, καὶ τὸ θυμοειδὲς, ἐκ δὲ τῆς τούτων κινήσεως καὶ ἡ τῶν μελῶν γίνεται τοῦ σώματος ἐνέργεια (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 27); πολλὰ γὰρ δυνάμεις καὶ διάφορα κινήματα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ· καθ' ἃ ποτὲ μὲν σπουδαῖόν τι διανοούμεθα, ποτὲ δὲ ἐπιθυμοῦμεν, ποτὲ δὲ ἐπιθυμούμεθα, ποτὲ δὲ κρίνομεν (Eus. *in Ps.* 101, 1).

65 E.g.: οἱ δὲ ἀνακείμενοι τῷ θεῷ λόγῳ καὶ πρὸς μόνῃ τῇ θεραπείᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ γινόμενοι γνησίως κατὰ τὴν διαφορὰν τῶν εἰς τοῦτο κινήματων λευτίζονται καὶ ἱερεῖς οὐκ ἀτόπως λεχθήσονται, (Orig. *in Joh. comm.* 1, 2, 10); Ἐξ ἰδίας αἰτίας τῶν μὴ προσεχόντων ἑαυτοῖς ἀγρύπνως γίνονται τάχιον ἢ βράδιον μεταπτώσεις, καὶ ἐπὶ πλεον ἢ ἐπ' ἑλαττον, ὡς ἀπὸ ταύτης τῆς αἰτίας, κρίσει θεῆς συμπαραμετρούσῃ τοῖς ἐκάστου βελτίοσιν ἢ χείροσι κινήμασι καὶ τὸ κατ' ἀξίαν, ὃ μὲν τις ἔξει ἐν τῇ ἐσομένῃ διακοσμήσει τάξιν ἀγγελικὴν ἢ δύναμιν ἀρχικὴν ἢ ἐξουσίαν τὴν ἐπὶ τινῶν ἢ θρόνον τὸν ἐπὶ βασιλευομένων ἢ κυρείαν τὴν κατὰ δούλων, (*princ. frg.* 11). In later authors, e.g.: Εἰ γὰρ μὴ τὰ πρῶτα πρὸς πονηρίας κινήματα τῆς ψυχῆς ἐκτμηθεῖ, (Eus. *in Ps.* 99, 8); τὸ εὐμετάβλητον καὶ ἄστατον τῶν κατὰ προαίρεσιν κινήματων (Basil. *hex.* 3, 9); δόλον λέγω καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν καὶ τυφον ὀργὴν τε καὶ φθόνον καὶ ὅσα πονηρὰ τῆς κακίας ἐνδον ἔστι κινήματα (Greg. Nyss. *inst.* 8, 1, 55, 18). For a story of these κινήματα stretching back to the Stoics, see Sorabji 2000.

Gregory, as the Hebrew high priest, approaches the throne of God, being ἱλαον, a word with sacrificial undertones. In fact, the sentence ἱλαον ἀθανάτοιο Θεοῦ πρὸς θῶκον ἱκοίμην expresses succinctly and in Homeric Greek the elements of the Yom Kippur ritual (Lev. 16) and its Christian interpretation (Hebr. 9): the verb ἱκνέομαι not only is an epic metaphor of the biblical εἰσπορεύομαι (Lev. 16:2), εἰσέρχομαι (Lev. 16:3), or εἴσεμι (Hebr. 9:6) but also has the technical sense of “beseech” “approach as suppliant”<sup>66</sup>, which is apt for the mediatory function of the high priest and the the Yom Kippur ritual’s aim of finding forgiveness; even more remarkable is the expression ἱλαον θῶκον, which, to my knowledge, is unparalleled. I suspect this expression tries to convey in Homeric language the concept of “mercy seat”, the lid on the ark of the covenant whereupon God was thought to sit as on a throne. The lid of the ark—in Hebrew, *kapporet*, from a root expressing both “covering” and “atonement”—was called in Greek ἱλαστήριον (see Lev. 16:2; 14 in the Septuagint version; Hebr. 9:2), preserving only the “atonement” meaning. Though the term, which has the same root of Gregory’s adjective ἱλαον, does not imply the concept of “seat” or “throne” in Greek, it must have been known to Gregory (for example, from 1Sam. 4:4) that the space between the two cherubim on the lid of the ark was conceived as God’s throne; hence Gregory’s use of the term θῶκος. The elegiac II, 1, 17 does not present this theme, but shares with II, 1, 10 the idea of “silence” (ἀτρεμέων, 102).

These priestly elements are very significant if we take into account the position of the passages and their language. The same language of purity, of approaching to the divine and of mental discipline, employed here to describe Gregory’s retreat, is employed in the body of the poems to describe the ideal priest<sup>67</sup>. Furthermore, the description of Gregory’s retreat is encased between Gregory distancing himself from the behaviour of bad bishops and his entrusting true judgement to God. The resulting message is that, paradoxically, the true priest is the one renouncing priesthood—at least in its institutional, public, and concrete sense—to embrace a concealed and spiritual kind of priesthood, ascesis. Hence, the liturgical priesthood exercised by the other bishops in the poems ends up being rather minimised in its importance. Here Gregory shows clearly the influence of Origen on his thought: Origen’s spiritual interpretation of priesthood, touching not only on the Old Testament institution but also on contemporary church hierarchy, tended to relativise the importance of institutional priesthood

<sup>66</sup> Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 826–827, s.v. ἱκνέομαι.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. the passage II, 1, 12, 751–760 and its parallel at II, 1, 17, 21–40 with these passages: ψυχὰς . . . ἄνω φέροντα (II, 1, 12, 752–753), θυμὸν . . . ἀνιστάμενος . . . νόον ἀέξων (II, 1, 17, 26; 35) and θυμὸν ἀείρων (II, 1, 10, 33); ἐνθόεις κινήμασι (II, 1, 12, 753), καθαροῖσι νοήμασι (II, 1, 17, 35) and καθαροῖσι νοήμασι (II, 1, 10, 33), καθαρὰ κινήματα (II, 1, 12, 807), ἐπειγομένοισι πόθοισιν (II, 1, 13, 214); τὰς θείας μόνας / ἀκηλιδῶτους ἐμφάσεις τυπούμενον (II, 1, 12, 754–755), Τριάδος . . . τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἔησι / Κῦδος ἐν ἐν τρισσοῖς κάλλει δερκόμενος (II, 1, 17, 36–37) and αἰεὶ τε πραπίδεςσι νοήματα θεῖα χαράσσω / χεῖροσιν οὐκ ἐπίμικτα, διαυγέα, φωτὶ πελάζων / τρισσοφαοῦς θεότητος (II, 1, 13, 212–214). The main difference of the passages at the end of poems from those in the body is the absence of any reference to the people the priest should lead to God, because here Gregory is renouncing his leading position.

in favour of spiritual and moral accomplishment, to the point that sometimes he seems to doubt the very necessity of institutional priesthood. On the other hand—and this is what Gregory took from Origen—Origen's stress on moral accomplishment kept the institution in check, providing a forceful call to be up to the task the Spirit had given to them<sup>68</sup>. Gautier, who has noted this minimisation, reads into it a Messalian tendency and a contradiction with Gregory's idea that public priesthood is the culmination of asceticism, not vice versa<sup>69</sup>. In my opinion, the importance of these passages should not be overstated: except for one passage in *or.* 2<sup>70</sup>, texts<sup>71</sup> in which Gregory presents asceticism as a priestly sacrifice are all in contexts similar to the passages examined here, where Gregory tries to minimise the failure of a retreat from the episcopal office; if one takes into account the late antique rhetorical trope of refusal of office, it becomes clear that this imagery is more of a rhetorical strategy than a committed theological claim on the relationship between asceticism and sacramental liturgy. However, it remains true that, in Gregory's view, the sacrament is still a partial fulfilment of sacrifice, with the offering of saved souls (among them, one's own) being the authentic priestly sacrifice. As already noted (§2.1.3.1), Gregory's interpretation of priesthood does assign meta-physical value to asceticism.

One of the recurring themes of Rapp's study on the episcopate in late antiquity is the interplay between an honorific view of the episcopate and a functional one. Canonical documents and theological reflection, at least until the fourth century, tried to instil the functional view of these roles, following Paul, who defined the episcopate (ἐπισκοπή) as a ἔργον (1Tim. 3:1)<sup>72</sup>. As the importance of bishops and priests in the community grew, the orders were increasingly seen as honours (τιμαί), which could be assigned, for example, to holy men and ascetics, without requiring them to exercise any service in the community, but only as a recognition of their spiritual authority<sup>73</sup>. As should be clear from the texts already analysed, neither Gregory nor Ephrem shares this view; rather, they emphasise the duties of the bishop towards the faithful. However, this does not exclude that the bishop's role is endowed with a certain honour and that, consequently, it should be bestowed according to spiritual merit.

In Ephrem's case this results in a series of passages in which the episcopate appears as the reward for the holiness of its recipient. These passages are all in the poems on Abraham (CN 17–21), so that they are likely meant to defend Abraham's elec-

68 On Origen's view of priesthood: Daniélou 1948, 56–63; Crouzel 1985, 287–290; Rapp 2005, 35–36, 63–5.

69 Gautier 2002, 115–116.

70 *or.* 2, 95, 1–98, 2, which clearly refer to ascetic retreat *before* taking office, perfectly in line with Gregory's ideas of asceticism and priesthood as presented by Gautier in the same and the previous chapters of his book.

71 Gautier 2002, 115 quotes in particular *or.* 26, 16.

72 In the Peshitta, the text has *qaššišūtā* for ἐπισκοπή and *'bādē* (at the plural!) for ἔργον.

73 Rapp 2005, 90–91, 135, 138–141, 166–168, 203–207.

tion from objections of the people or of other, more experienced, clerics. Here are the passages:

<p>ܡܠ ܟܥܝܐ ܟܥܡܠ ܟܥܡܝܢܐ ܡ ܥܕܝܟܐ ܟܥܡܠ ܟܥܡܝܢܐ 74 ܟܥܡܡܐ ܥܡܝܢܐ (CN 17, 6, 1–7)</p>	<p>ܡܥܬܠܬܠ ܡܥܥܥܥܥܐ ܥܡܡܝܢܐ ܟܥܡܠ ܟܥܡܝܢܐ ܟܥܡܝܢܐ ܥܡܡܠ ܟܥܡܝܢܐ ܟܥܡܡܐ ܥܡܝܢܐ</p>
<p>ܥܡܝܢܐ ܟܥܝܐ ܟܥܡܝܢܐ (CN 19, 2, 7–9)</p>	<p>ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ 75 ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ</p>
<p>ܡܥܥܥܥܥܐ ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ 76 ܡܥܥܥܥܥܐ ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ (CN 21, 3, 7–10)</p>	<p>ܡܥܥܥܥܥܐ ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ ܡܥܥܥܥܥܐ ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ ܥܡܥܥܥܥܐ</p>

In these passages, powers (CN 21) and insignia (CN 17 and 19) of the episcopate are handed down to Abraham by Valgash, because Abraham is the best candidate for the job, being a trusted disciple of the previous bishop (CN 17, 6, 1; 3; CN 21, 3, 9) and a saintly man (CN 17, 6, 4). Interestingly, besides the symbols of pastoral leadership I have already analysed<sup>77</sup>, Ephrem recalls in this context the priestly role of the bishop. The language is very clear: Ephrem speaks of *tešmeštā*, literally meaning “service”, but with the specialised sense of “liturgy” (CN 19, 2, 7; CN 21, 3, 10); he uses the term *qurbānā*, literally “offering”, but normally employed for “Mass”, and *madbhā*, which clearly alludes to liturgy. The term *ruhḥāpā*, literally meaning “brooding”, “hovering”, has a fundamental importance in the sacramental doctrine of the Syriac churches; hence the fact that Abraham’s hand is apt to *ruhḥāpā* (CN 17, 6, 5) concretely means that he is worthy to administer the sacraments—baptism, Eucharist, and orders<sup>78</sup>. In these passages, the ministering of sacraments is put on par with pastoral care among the tasks of the bishops, and, just like leadership, it is considered honourable, so that only one worthy of it can be its recipient. Indeed, the impersonal expression “it is meet” (*yāyē*) at CN 17, 6, 5–7 and the nominal sentence at CN 19, 2, 7–9 convey a sense of inevitability, as if the conferral of sacramental powers were to follow personal holiness automatically. However, although these formulations presuppose great honour for the bishop’s functions and the need for the recipient to be worthy of this honour, they

74 “He delivered his hand [*ʾīd-eh*] to his own disciple, / the seat [*kursyā*] to the one who was worthy [*šwē*] of it, // the key [*qīdā*] to the one who was faithful [*d-ethaymen*], / the pen [*gezrā*] to the one who was excellent [*d-ʿetnaṣṣah*]; // meet for your hand is the consecration [*yāyē l-ʾīd-āk ruhḥāpā*], / for your offering the atonement [*wa-l-qurbān-āk ḥussāyā*], // and for your tongue the comfort [*wa-l-leṣān-āk buyyāʾā*].”

75 “The pure altar for your ministry [*madbhā dakyā l-tešmešt-āk*], / the great seat for your honour [*kursyā rabbā l-ʾīqār-āk*], // and everything as one for your crown!”

76 “. . . you can bind on earth like him, / and you can loose on high in his manner, // since your faith is like his. / **Blessed is he who handed to you his ministry** [*tešmešt-eh*]!”

77 For the analysis of the seat, keys, binding and loosing, and the hand, see §2.2.4.6.

78 For the meaning of *ruhḥāpā*: Brock 2000, 181–185; Brock 2001, 393–397.

should not be read as implying that the episcopate is a honorific title; rather, they must be read, together with CN 21, 3, 10, as persuading the audience that the very concrete task of bishop has been assigned to the right person: in CN 21 this is expressed by a reference to the divine choice of the candidate<sup>79</sup>, whereas in CN 17 and 19 Ephrem's formulation suggests a natural and necessary link between the task and the recipient, a link mediated by sanctity—the personal sanctity of the candidate, the sanctity of the priestly office.

As already seen, material charity is not the prime focus of Ephrem's poetry on bishops. However, this does not mean he never ascribes the cause of material benefit for the community to the bishops. It is remarkable that Ephrem makes this ascription not in connection with the bishop's call to charity, but to his priestly and mediatory role: in other words, the main avenue for the bishop to acquire benefits for his faithful is intercessory prayer. In the context of the poems on Nisibis, the material benefit implied is protection from war or defeat:

... 4	
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ	ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ
...	
... 5	
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ	ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ
80 (CN 17, 4, 5–10; 5, 7–10)	
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ	ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ
20	
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ	ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ

79 Admittedly, the turn of phrase would suggest that the subject of line 10 is the same third-person masculine singular as the three preceding lines (Simon Peter, mentioned at CN 21, 3, 6). However, line 10 is not part of the stanza in the same way as the other lines, because in this metre the last (tenth) line of the stanza works as a refrain. The refrains change in every stanza, but their form is consistent, presenting the predicate *brik* (occasionally completed with the subject pronoun *hu*) and a relative clause expanding on why the subject is “blessed”. All such refrains, in the totality of CN 17–21, refer to God as subject. Therefore, in this case, too, the refrain should be read as an independent clause after a full stop, referring to God and not to Peter. For the relationship between Ephrem's idea of divine choice of the bishops and the refrain-structure of his poems, see §3.3.1.

80 “Because of his personal trial [*beqyā*], / he made him a wall to the multitude: // may your fasting [*ṣawm-āk*] be an armour to our land, / your prayer [*ṣallūt-āk*] a shield for our city, // your thurible [*pūrm-āk*] may obtain reconciliation [*tar’ūtā*]. / **Blessed is he who sanctified your sacrifices** [*debḥātā*]! // [ . . . ] he put you as a pillar [*ammūdā*] / in the citadel of a quivering people, // that relies on your prayers [*ṣallwāt-āk*]. / **Blessed is he who made you our pillar!**”

ܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ  
ܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

ܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ  
ܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

...

<sup>81</sup> ܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ  
(CN 21, 20; 23, 1–2)

ܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ 23

In these texts, benefit from God is acquired through the bishop's prayer (*ṣallūtā*), with the only exception being CN 17, 4, 7, where the ascetic practice of fasting (*ṣawmā*) should protect the city, although it is remarkable that even in this case fasting is coupled with prayer. Prayer was required of all Christians, and in principle any prayer could be effective, provided the person praying was saintly enough. Why did Ephrem deem the bishop's prayer particularly important? Because the bishop could offer prayers other Christians could not offer: this is clarified by Ephrem's reference to the "thurible" or "censer" (*pīrmā*). For the offering of incense is a very rich image, pointing not only at the biblical usage of comparing prayers to the smoke of incense rising to God but also to the concrete offering performed by the priest in Old Testament times and perpetuated by the church, even in Ephrem's time<sup>82</sup>. Hence, the mention of the censer explains the importance of the bishop's prayer: only the bishop, as true heir of Hebrew priesthood, could offer a sacrifice to God, meaning the Eucharist, during which also incense was burnt<sup>83</sup>. This is confirmed by line 10 of the same stanza, where God is praised for having "sanctified" (*qaddes̄*) the "sacrifices" (*debhātā*) of the bishop, a clear eucharistic reference. Moreover, the result of the bishop's prayer is qualified as "reconciliation" (*tar'ūtā*), a word with distinct eucharistic overtones<sup>84</sup>. Therefore, the bishop's prayer, conveyed and embedded in these solemn rites, was far more valuable and effective than that of

<sup>81</sup> "May your prayer rise to the sky / and may rise with it reconciliation; // may the Lord of the sky rain / his bounties on our wickedness, // and his comforts on our grieves, / and his collecting on our dispersion; // may he guard his zeal with his love / our shame may his justice avenge, // our wickedness may his mercy blot out. / **Blessed is he who blessed his flock!** /// ... Let the priests pray for the kings / that they may be a bulwark for humanity"

<sup>82</sup> Aaron offered incense in a thurible (*pīrmā*) to save Israel from a pestilence at Num. 17:11. Incense was offered twice a day by *kohanīm*: Ex. 30:7–8; 2Chron. 13:11; in the Day of Atonement: Lev. 16:12–13.

<sup>83</sup> In the OT, when flour is offered, it is required to add oil and frankincense upon it: Lev. 2:1. If we add this offering of bread and incense together to the offering of incense on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:12–13), linked to the Mass ever since Hebr. 9 (see esp. Hebr. 9:3–4), the relevance of incense for the Mass should be evident. The so-called "Ecclesiastical Canons", or "Canons of the Apostles", in *Const. apost.* 8, preserved in Syriac in the third book of the Clementine Octateuch, set rules for the offerings at Mass, implying that, beside bread and wine, also oil for the lamps and incense were brought and employed in the rite: τῷ καιρῷ τῷ δέοντι πλὴν νέων χίδρων ἢ σταφυλῆς μὴ ἐξὸν ἔστω προσάγεσθαι τι πρὸς τὸ θυσιαστήριον (*madbhā*), καὶ ἔλαιον εἰς τὴν λυχνίαν καὶ θυμίαμα (*besmē*) τῷ καιρῷ τῆς θείας ἀναφορᾶς (*qurbānā*) (*Const. apost.* 8, 47, 3). At Apc. 5:8 incense is explained as "the prayers of the saints", an image already employed at Ps. 141:2.

<sup>84</sup> See its use in the christological passages Rom. 5:10–11; 11:15; 2Cor. 5:18–19, where Christ is the sacrificial victim for the "reconciliation" with God of all mankind. Ephrem employs the word in relation to the Eucharist: *hymn. virg.* 4, 10, 6–7 (with the expression *qurbān tar'ūtā*, "propitiation offering"); *hymn.*



any other member of the community. Naturally, this does not exclude the possibility that the bishop would be a saint, if he wants his prayers to be heard; rather, it is implied that he is bishop *because* he is a saint. This is the sense of CN 17, 4, 5–6, stressing the thoroughness of the bishop's preparation and the rightness of his selection.

The aims and results of the bishop's prayer are, as noted, remarkably concrete. Ephrem's imagery makes clear that the bishop's intercession serves to protect the city from external threats: the bishop is called "a wall" (*šūrā*, CN 17, 4, 6) or "a pillar" (*'ammūdā*, CN 17, 5, 7), his fasting "an armour" (*zaynā*, CN 17, 4, 7), his prayer "a shield" (*sakkrā*, CN 17, 4, 8), and the beneficiary is always a collective, whether it be "the multitude" (*saggīē*, CN 17, 4, 6), "the land" (*'atrā*, CN 14, 4, 7), "the city" (*mdittā*, CN 17, 4, 8), or "the people" (*'ammā*, CN 17, 5, 8). That defence should be the aim of the bishop's prayer is explicitly stated in CN 21, 23, 1–2, where Ephrem recommends that the bishops—here significantly named "priests" (*kāhnē*)—pray for the military success of the emperors. In this insistence on protection and defence we can read a trace of the traumatic war experiences of the Nisibenes in the fourth century, a perspective completely different from that of the relatively sheltered Gregory.

Yet there is more than that here: as we shall see in detail later (§4.1.2), Ephrem offers a theological interpretation of this experience. The hardships of war are at the same time a punishment for the city's collective sins and a pedagogical device for the spiritual progress of the community. On the other hand, peace and tranquillity are granted by God when the community has reached its maturity or as a sign of mercy and forgiveness. The idea is perfectly encapsulated in line 6 of CN 21, 20: "His collecting [*kunnāšā*] on our dispersion [*buddārā*]". Its literal meaning is that God gathers anew the dispersed inhabitants of Nisibis after the hardships of Julian's reign. However, the sentence has a moral connotation, too: *kunnāšā* may be taken as "reconciliation", "concord," and *buddārā* as a metaphor for moral dispersion, given its position parallel to "wickedness" (*bīšūtā*, 4). Dispersion and wickedness are the same thing; the reuniting of the city depends upon the reconciliation of God. In this great scheme of things, the bishop has the critical role of intercessor, who through his prayer can elicit God's change of approach towards the community. This constellation of themes around the bishop's priesthood has its roots in Bible narratives where the holy man, whether a prophet or a priest, is able to summon God's help for Israel, thereby granting military victory. More deeply, the Bible assumes time and again that Israel's destiny depends on preserving the correct religious practices and beliefs.

To wrap up this section, the passages here examined conform by and large to the characteristics already highlighted in the lexical analysis (§2.1.3). Both Ephrem and Gregory highlight the liturgical role of the bishop and its link with moral purity when they want to uphold or undermine the legitimacy of a prelate. Ephrem stresses the holi-

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*parad.* 13, 1, 10–11 (where the *qurbānā* is poetry, but it is clearly compared to a form of sacrifice that should meet God's "benevolence").

ness of sacraments to legitimise the newly elected Abraham, who is worthy of administering them. The priesthood is not thereby equated with an honorary title, but the correspondence between holiness of the office and holiness of the recipient serves to highlight the divine choice on which the bishop's power is based. Gregory, on the contrary, insists on holiness when he wants to elicit outrage at the moral lows reached by the bishops.

In Gregory's texts we have noticed a tendency to limit the importance of sacramental priesthood. The counterpart of this limitation is the transfer of priestly imagery and words to describe asceticism and spiritual endeavour, especially in autobiographical passages. This rhetorical strategy may be connected to his forceful criticism of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and at the same time the need to reestablish his own legitimacy as a bishop. However, it is not only rhetoric on the part of Gregory: his theology of priesthood is deeply indebted to Origen's, so that a certain limitation of the liturgical role in favour of spiritual values is surely at work here.

Here again we observe a remarkable difference between Gregory and Ephrem. Both preserve the tradition of the bishop as Old Testament priest and mediator before God for his people; however, they explain it differently. If for Gregory mediation is first of all the communication of God's image to the community, for Ephrem episcopal intercession has benefits which are very much material: the prosperity of the community in a time (and geographic space) of wars. As often happens in a case of divergence, Ephrem subscribes to a more traditional and biblically based view, whereas Gregory draws from Origen's thought and example.

### 3.1.3 Spiritual father I: The *munus docendi*

Among the names and metaphors examined in the previous chapter (§2), the great majority and the most important ones referred to the bishop's leadership of the community: not only terms of leadership proper but also important metaphors, such as that of shepherd, of husbandman, or of father, single out this feature of the prelate. Furthermore, the group of "iconographic" metaphors (§2.2.3) refer to the bishop's duty to set a moral example, which can be subsumed in the category of spiritual guidance. Accordingly, our texts contain a wealth of references to and discussions of different facets of this episcopal task.

In the next two sections I will examine how Gregory and Ephrem articulate the bishop's leadership in texts in which they describe the bishop in his role as leader, and I will note the context in which they have him act and what kind of character emerges from their treatment of the theme. In this treatment I have decided to separate the bishop in his quality of doctrinal teacher from the bishop as custodian of morality, discipline, and spirituality in the community. In the two poets the two roles receive remarkably different treatments. I will begin by stressing the importance of leadership compared to other traits of the bishop's figure for both poets and how they argue for such importance by situating the bishops in a concrete historical context (§3.1.3.1). The two poets have two

different approaches to the question of the bishop's position in history, but they both use it to advocate for their stance towards his office: Gregory underlining the necessity of doctrinal preparation for the bishop, Ephrem downplaying it in favour of good morals. Next, I will delve into Ephrem's downplaying of doctrinal teaching (§3.1.3.2): like charity, which was a peculiar characteristic of Babu, preaching and doctrinal knowledge end up being peculiar characteristics of the third bishop, Valgash. As such, they are praised and exalted when Valgash is to be defended, but, overall, they are limited in scope and validity. The second half of this section (§3.1.3.3) is occupied by a close reading of Gregory's discussion of the intellectual prerequisites for the bishop, in which Gregory makes clear how much theological competence is important for his view of the prelate.

In the following section (§3.1.4), I will examine the bishop as moral leader. First, I will look again at the historical narrative pushed by Gregory, this time in the narrative part of II, 1, 13 (§3.1.4.1). Then, I will present what little Gregory has to say on the content of this moral leadership, with reference to a list of vices in II, 1, 17, which in part anticipates the systematisation of Evagrius (§3.1.4.2). As regards Ephrem, on the contrary, many passages refer to moral leadership, in particular the correct style and modes of leadership the bishop should use (§3.1.4.3). In this respect two preoccupations stand out: (1) the ambiguous place of meekness and humility, sometimes limited to one particular character and at other times employed for the episcopate as such; (2) the correct order of speaking—that is, the regulation of expressions by the bishop and his scrutiny over them, to avoid rash choices and, in particular, slanderers. Finally, I will look at the contents of Ephrem's moral pedagogy (§3.1.4.4). Here greed and its repression will play a role, and I will explain why. Then, I will present texts in which Ephrem upholds an array of ascetic virtues for the bishop and the community, as a kind of bridge to the next part of the chapter (§3.2).

### 3.1.3.1 Leadership and church history

The importance of leadership goes deeper than a simple question of quantity of names or stress laid upon different themes. Spiritual leadership is at the core of our poems. Indeed, if both poets did not believe that the fundamental role of the bishop was guiding the faithful towards God, the poems would be meaningless. Both poets try to enjoin the bishops, albeit with different means and in different contexts, to a set of behaviours. Why are these behaviours desirable, if we were to exclude spiritual leadership? Material charity or civic leadership may have required such behaviours, but, at this time, those tasks were still largely reserved for state officials or lay notables, so that there would not have been any reason to address the head of the Christian community in particular or as such. Sanctity was required from every Christian, and, as Rapp notes, in the first centuries Paul's recommendations to Timothy on the choice of the bishop were interpreted as applying to every Christian<sup>85</sup>. If the same convictions had lain at the basis

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85 Rapp 2005, 32–41.

of Gregory's and Ephrem's poems, the idea of poems specifically devoted to bishops would have made no sense: it is no accident that prose treatises, as well as poems, on priesthood began to be written only in the fourth century. In principle, liturgical priesthood may have called for treatments of the bishop's behaviour outside liturgy, as the belief in the sanctity of ritual action inspired by Old Testament typology could have raised—and did in fact raise—the need for “pure”, “holy” ministers. In fact, however, spiritual leadership was so important that it subsumed the administration of sacraments in itself: this is particularly clear in the case of Gregory's II, 1, 12, 751–760, where the Eucharist is described almost as a provisional sacrifice, which will be fulfilled in the bishop's offering of the souls of his community. Moreover, the practice of penance and admission to the Eucharist or to baptism blurred the line between liturgical leadership and spiritual or disciplinary care. No doubt, the need for pure liturgical ministers, or the necessity to defend the purity of existing ministers before the community, is part of the poems' concerns—those of Ephrem in particular—but they are by no means the main concern.

The necessity of addressing the question of leadership—and, hence, of bishops—emerges clearly in Gregory's poems, both in its doctrinal implications and in its moral ones. The doctrinal implications are explored in particular in II, 1, 12:

Ἀλλ' οὐ κάκιστα ταῦτα οὐδ' ἐπισκοπῆς,  
 Ὡ λῶστε; μὴ τοσοῦτον ἀρχαίως φρονεῖν,  
 Ὡς τηλικούτο πρᾶγμα τιμᾶσθαι κακῶς,  
 Μὴδ' εἰ λίαν τὸ χθαμαλὸν σπουδάζεται·  
 Οὐ γὰρ κάκιστον ἡ ἐπισκοπὴ. Χρεῶν (180)  
 Πάντως τιν' εἶναι τῶν [δ'] ἀρίστων ἐκλέγω  
 Τὸν πρῶτον· εἰ δ' οὖν, ἀλλὰ μὴ τὸν ἔσχατον,  
 Εἴπερ νομίζεσθαι τι δεῖ μου τὸν λόγον,  
 Καὶ νῦν μάλιστα ἐν ζάλῃ γλωσσαλγίας  
 Καὶ τῶν μεγίστων ἀστέων καὶ συλλόγων, (185)  
 Ὡν καὶ μενόντων ἀσφαλῶς κέρδος πλέον,  
 Καὶ μὴ μενόντων, ἡ βλάβη πληρεστέρα·  
 Ὡν δὴ χάριν σοι τοὺς καλοὺς ἐκλεκτέον.  
 Μόλις γὰρ ἂν τις τῶν μέσων οὕτω τύχοι,  
 Εἰ σφόδρ' ἀγωνίζοιτο, τοὺς καλοὺς κρατεῖν. (190)  
 Οὕτω γινώσκειν γνώμονος ἀψευδεστάτου.  
 (II, 1, 12, 176–191)

Are not all these things awful, especially for a bishop,  
 my good friend? Let's not be so old-fashioned  
 as to wrongly approve such a situation,  
 not even if we zealously pursue humility.  
 The episcopate is not the least of things. Since it should (180)  
 definitely be reserved for the best ones, I would choose  
 the very first; if not, at least let him not be the last.  
 If my opinion should find some acceptance,

especially now, in this squall of raving tongues,  
 and enormous cities and congregations, (185)  
 which, if they can keep firm, are a greater gain,  
 but, if they don't persevere, the loss is even greater;  
 according to it, then, you should be choosing the good,  
 for a mediocre man could barely manage,  
 even with serious effort, to equal the good. (190)  
 Only a most truthful observer can take such a stance.

In this terse passage, Gregory sets forth his historical analysis of the situation of the episcopate. The historical approach is revealed by two expressions: at 177, ἀρχαίως φρονεῖν, “to think in an old-fashioned way”, and at 184, καὶ νῦν μάλιστα, “especially now”. These words imply a chronological difference between an ancient “before” and a new situation, requiring new ways of thinking. In context, since this passage follows a tirade on the lowly background of contemporary bishops (see §5.2.1), the theme is the background and education of the candidates to the episcopate. In fact, the “old-fashioned” way is characterised by “humility” (τὸ χθαμαλὸν), meaning not so much a spiritual or behavioural feature as a social station. In principle, says Gregory (180–182), the role of bishop should always be given to the best people (τῶν ἀρίστων), because the role itself is endowed with a certain worth or authority: οὐ γὰρ κάκιστον ἡ ἐπίσκοπὴ, expressed with a sarcastic litotes. However, this principle is especially true in that historical juncture (καὶ νῦν μάλιστα): Gregory is saying that in the past, personal holiness was enough to make a good bishop—in the background lies the example of the apostles—but in his days culture (*paideia*) is also paramount and, since culture is very expensive, only “the best”—namely, the socioeconomic elites—may make good bishops.

The reason for this change of attitude is encapsulated in the expression ζάλη γλωσσαλγίας (184): this “squall of raving tongues” is a clear allusion to the doctrinal conflicts so prevalent in fourth-century Christianity. Ζάλη, meaning “squall”, is frequently used as a metaphor for sudden and chaotic troubles (Pind. *Ol.* 12, 12). Apart from this obvious meaning of chaos and troubles, the word may be used for storms during navigation (Aeschyl. *Ag.* 656; Sophocl. *Ai.* 352), so that here it may suggest Gregory's beloved metaphor of the storm at sea (Lorenz 1979), particularly meaningful when the poet is talking of political collectives—such as the ἀστέων καὶ συλλόγων of line 185—because the metaphor latches on to the classical tradition of the ship of the state. The word γλωσσαλγία is part of a nautical metaphor in its first appearance at Eur. *Med.* 523–525<sup>86</sup>. The term is one of Gregory's keywords for heretical discourse, especially of the Eunomian persuasion, since skilful Eunomian argumentation lent itself to the accusation of being empty verbiage<sup>87</sup>. Therefore, according to Gregory, his time is so

86 ἀλλ' ὥστε ναὸς κεδνὸν οἰακοστρόφον / ἄκροισι λαΐφους κρασπέδοις ὑπεκδραμεῖν / τὴν σὴν στόμαργον, ὦ γύναι, γλωσσαλγίαν. (Eur. *Med.* 523–525).

87 τὴν κατέχουσιν τῶν αἰρετικῶν γλωσσαλγίαν (*ep.* 41, 8); τίς ἡ τοσαύτη περὶ τὸν λόγον φιλοτιμία καὶ γλωσσαλγία; (*or.* 27, 7, a speech on the proper way to exercise theology, against Eunomius); αἰτιόν σοι

deeply defined by doctrinal conflict that candidates to the episcopate should be chosen according to their theological proficiency, which essentially means their education<sup>88</sup>. The silent premise of this analysis is that the bishops are the main actors of theological conflicts, since they should be the highest doctrinal authority in their community: if it weren't for this premise, Gregory's argument would lose much of its force, and the poem itself would be ultimately meaningless.

Poem II, 1, 12 is not the only place where Gregory presents this historical analysis: as Susanna Elm has shown, it is the main theme of *or.* 6, where he tries to justify his father's signature on the Arian creed of Rimini/Constantinople. The argument goes thus: Gregory the Elder signed the creed through inadvertence, being misled by the sophistication of the Trinitarian debate and by his lack of specific philosophical competence. This lack of competence is not in itself negative, because it is the vestige of simpler times, when Christians were less prone to doctrinal divisions and simplicity was valued above all. However, times have changed, and Christians have become more divided and contentious, while the debate has got more and more sophisticated. Therefore, it is necessary that future bishops be professional philosophers, which means ascetics<sup>89</sup>. Interestingly, the argument in *or.* 6 is employed to relativise the importance of a socioeconomically elite status in the choice of a bishop in favour of renunciation and *paideia*. In II, 1, 12, on the contrary, the argument excludes people of humble status and stresses the importance of an elite status in the choice of a bishop. The two usages are contradictory only if one forgets Brown's analysis of the authority of bishops, which highlights that sacrifice and renunciation are sources of authority only insofar as one has something substantial to renounce: poverty as a choice, not as a condition, commands authority<sup>90</sup>.

It is worth noting that Gregory's historical analysis, though fascinating, need not correspond to historical reality; it is his personal interpretation of the ecclesiastical situation, and, though we need not doubt Gregory's sincerity in espousing it, we should also keep in mind that it serves his rhetorical point—namely, to defend Gregory the Elder in *or.* 6 and to criticise his peers at II, 1, 12. Other stances with regard to doctrinal controversies were possible; in fact, Ephrem's poems do show a different historical perspective. This can be easily seen when one reads *CN* 20, the poem Ephrem devotes to the bishop's duties concerning heresy and the defence of orthodoxy:

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γίνεται βλασφημίας, καὶ τῆς περιττῆς ταύτης γλωσσαλγίας καὶ ἀσεβείας (*or.* 31, 21, to those denying the divinity of the Spirit, and note that βλασφημία and ἀσεβεία are functionally equivalent to “heresy”);  
 Ἰουδαῖοι σκανδαλιζέσθωσαν, Ἑλλήνες διαγελάτωσαν, αἰρετικοὶ γλωσσαλγέτωσαν (*or.* 38, 2).

<sup>88</sup> Elm 2000a, 85 (on the model of the pagan philosopher and the physician); Elm 2012 demonstrates how Christian doctrinal disputes presupposed classical *paideia* and were in fact often disputes *internal* to classical culture, albeit in a Christian clothing.

<sup>89</sup> I am broadly summarizing Elm 2000a.

<sup>90</sup> Brown 1992, 74–75.

ܠܐܢܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	5
ܠܐܢܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	
ܠܐܢܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	
ܠܐܢܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	
ܠܐܢܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	
ܠܐܢܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	...

ܠܐܢܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	7
ܠܐܢܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	
ܠܐܢܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	
ܠܐܢܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	
ܠܐܢܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	
ܠܐܢܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ	

91  
(CN 20, 5; 7)

In the last stanzas of this poem (5 and 7), Ephrem compares and contrasts the behaviour of the apostles—in particular, Peter and Paul—with that of heretics, in order to show how a good bishop should behave. It is clear that Ephrem finds the apostles' example paramount in the doctrinal struggles and that heresy has not essentially changed from apostolic times. In fact, the discourse on names he develops in this stanza comes directly from Paul's dealings with congregational division in Corinth and is by no means isolated in Ephrem's oeuvre; on the contrary, it is a standard theme of his antiheretical writings<sup>92</sup>. Furthermore, Ephrem explicitly declares in stanza 7 that the apostles are in the same condition with the church as the prophets with Israel, while the heretics are likewise all similar. Nowhere does he suggest that heresy, or its skilful expression, is a novelty. The typological relationship between prophets and apostles is prolonged in the bishops, who consequently should be similar to the former. It is also remarkable that Ephrem's static vision of heresy is paired with an approach to contemporary heretics very different from Gregory's. Faced with doctrinal disputes, Gregory advises that when his fellow churchmen choose bishops, they take into account the candidates' theological proficiency. On the other hand, Ephrem prefers deeds over words in a bishop's magisterium, criticises heretics by saying that the very premise of approaching God through reason leads to heresy, and asks

91 "The Apostle [*šlīḥā*] [Paul], her matchmaker [*mākōr-āh*], had zeal / that she may not be violated by names, // not only by fake names, / but not even by the trustworthy ones, // nor Peter's [*b-kēpā*] nor even his own name; / those that were trustworthy matchmakers [*mākōrē šarrirē*] // gave her the name of her Betrothed [*mkīr-āh*]; / the fake ones as adulterers [*zēpānē 'a(y)k zannāyē*] // put their own names on the flock. / **Glorify to your name, Our Creator!** /// ... Look to the prophets and the apostles [*ba-nbī'ē w-ba-šlīḥē*], / how much they resemble [*dāmēn*] each other! // 'Twas the name of God the prophets / gave to God's people // and 'twas the name of Christ the apostles / gave to Christ's church; // even forgers [*zēpānē*] resembled [*dmaw*] each other; / since by their names were called // the churches that whored with them. / **Blessed is he in whose name we're sanctified!**"

92 1Cor. 1:11–16; 3:3–6. On the argument of names: Griffith 1999.

bishops—this can be read at *CN* 21, 23, 8—to *stop* theological inquiry altogether, comparing it to war<sup>93</sup>.

### 3.1.3.2 Ephrem's anti-intellectualism and the *munus docendi*

Naturally, though they partly disagree on the means, both Gregory and Ephrem believe that the bishops are first of all actors in doctrinal struggles and that it is the bishop's responsibility to deal with these problems. In Ephrem, this is demonstrated by his employment, in the context of doctrinal struggles (*CN* 20, 4–5), of the metaphor of the matchmaker, highlighting the unique position of the bishop before the Christian community and, hence, his unique responsibility (see §2.2.4.2–3). Since Ephrem was a deacon and was personally involved in doctrinal struggles<sup>94</sup>, it is by no means trivial to understand what behaviour he recommends to the bishop in respect to doctrinal struggles. Gregory was his own ideal bishop and could claim to write out of personal concern when he wrote of the responsibilities of the bishop, but one could sense a contradiction between Ephrem's engagement with doctrinal struggle (and moral discipline) and his ideas on the role of the bishop. The fact that he likely wrote with the permission—or even commission—of his bishop is not sufficient to explain this contradiction, because Ephrem's poems, even the doctrinal ones, are written with Ephrem's voice, not *in persona episcopi*. This means that *his* voice had a recognised and legitimate role, which did not coincide with that of the bishop.

Piecing together various clues already discussed, one can glean the relationship between the strong role of the deacon and the equally strong imagery associated with the bishop. First, there is the important role of deacons in the early church, and in the Syriac church in particular, most of all if they were—as Ephrem most probably was—associated with the *bnay qyāmā* (§1.2.1). Second, there is Ephrem's plea to the bishop to delegate part of his responsibilities (§3.1.1.1). Third, Ephrem stresses more than once that the bishop should teach more through his deeds than with the word. This is in keeping with Ephrem's criticism against contemporary theologians, in which he devalues theological speculations in favour of moral action<sup>95</sup>. Finally, there is Ephrem's argument concerning the “marks of the true church”, among which apostolic succession through the bishop is paramount<sup>96</sup>. All these elements taken together suggest that Ephrem does not conceive theological rebuttal as an essential part of doctrinal struggles. In his view, it is much more important to keep the community united through discipline and obedience to the bishop, who is the token of unity by virtue of his apos-

93 “May the kings stop the battling [*taktūšā*], / may priests stop the inquiring [*‘uqqābā*]: // Let dispute [*drāšā*] and war [*qērsā*] cease!” (*CN* 21, 23, 7–9). On the terms *‘uqqābā* and *drāšā*, Wickes 2015, 48–50.

94 The fundamental passage for this is *hymn. haer.* 56, 10.

95 Ephrem's stance face the Arian controversy and heresy in general is masterfully analysed by Wickes 2015, 19–52.

96 See in particular Griffith 1999.



tolic consecration. For this reason, the bishop is the main actor of theological division, because his personal worth and his pastoral abilities can make the difference between a united community and a split one. Ephrem sees theological rebuttal and discussion on the merits of a question as dirty work unworthy of the prelate: being endowed with apostolic authority, a bishop is unnecessarily lowered to the level of the heretics if he engages in a technical discussion. Ephrem himself employs the image of “dirtiness” for such tasks (§3.1.1.1). Naturally, one could not leave such questions utterly unaddressed, and here the lower and more specialised religious personnel<sup>97</sup> come in handy, because the bishop can always delegate one of them—especially if he is as talented and educated as Ephrem—to further the correct doctrinal agenda. This would not be a long stretch for a deacon or an ascetic—from his traditional role of secretary of the bishop and of catechist for new Christians: as secretaries, deacons were probably literate and privy to the political situation; as catechists, they were delegated with a teaching task. Naturally, the delegate was still and always beholden to the bishop, who had the ultimate responsibility for the doctrinal state of his community.

Anyway, Ephrem and Gregory, though sharing the idea of the bishop as main guarantor of doctrinal unity, have two different ideas about the doctrinal struggles of their time and the concrete role the bishops have to play in them: Ephrem’s devaluation of speculative theology is impressive when compared to Gregory’s emphasis on the ministry of λόγοι and his effort to construe the bishop’s authority as that of a quasi-professional philosopher. However, it would be wrong to reduce Ephrem to a unilateral anti-intellectualism. The fact that he was very wary of theological speculation and its perils does not exclude the possibility that argument may have its role to play in the church, even if a limited one—and, after all, one could not explain Ephrem’s sophisticated response to contemporary heresies otherwise. Moreover, his stance does not exclude *other* intellectual endeavours outside speculation, nor does he bar any and all discourse on God. This is even truer in the case of the bishop, who, as has already been said, was readily seen as a “teacher” (*rabbā*) in the Syriac tradition. Hence, Ephrem praises Bishop Valgash’s ability as a preacher:

ܠܐܬܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܐܡܢ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܬܐ (CN 15, 8)	ܠܐܬܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܐܡܢ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܬܐ <sup>98</sup> ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܬܐ
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Since he must defend Valgash in front of the community (§4.2), Ephrem praises him, so that it is likely that what is said in these texts of Valgash corresponds to Ephrem’s ideal

<sup>97</sup> Apart from ascetics as the *bnay qyāmā*, who may not have always had educating functions, Ephrem’s bishops had a number of lower clerics at their disposal, as the discussion at §2.2.1.4 and passages such as CN 21, 5 demonstrate, even if the poems do not care to represent a clear-cut hierarchy.

<sup>98</sup> “He was excellent [*naṣṣiḥ*] among the preachers [*kārōzē*] / and he was learned [*spīr*] among the lectors [*qārōyē*] // and he was eloquent [*miḥl*] among the sages [*ḥakkimē*], / he was chaste among his brethren // and he was venerable among his friends.”

of a bishop. *CN* 15, 8 enumerates Valgash's virtues *before* he became a bishop; indeed, he became a bishop because of these qualities—which means that these qualities were sought after in a bishop. Each virtue is seen in the context of a category in the community.

As usual in Ephrem, it is difficult to discern whether these categories represent real institutions or just informal categories. In *CN* 15, 8, this seems to be the case. Ephrem mentions the lectors (*qārōyē*), who were the most important of the “minor orders”. As regards the preachers (*kārōzē*), Ephrem seems to imply an institutional sense when, in the lines before, he describes how Valgash became one of them: “he became a leader [*rēšā*] already in his youth [*ba-z'ōrūtā*], // as he was made preacher [*'abdū(h)y kārōzā*] for the people.” (*CN* 15, 7, 4–5). If one is made a preacher, then one cannot just be a preacher by way of personal virtue; hence, it is likely that this is an institution. But if in Ephrem's community the office of “preacher” is distinct from sacerdotal orders, then we face again Ephrem's tendency to remove doctrinal or learned tasks from the bishop to other figures, especially if these others came from the ranks of the ascetics<sup>99</sup>. The words “his brethren” (*'aḥ-ū(h)y*) and “his friends” (*ḥabbīb-aw[hy]*) in fact must be understood figuratively as “his equals”, since it is likely that these are other members of the *bnay qyāmā*, as Valgash was (cf. *CN* 15, 9; §3.2.1). Only the reference to “sages” (*ḥakkīmē*) cannot be easily interpreted as a title.

The poet describes thereby Valgash's career before his election to the episcopate, and it is remarkable that his is a career defined by learning, since he had been reader and preacher. Furthermore, among the virtues ascribed to him, two are “intellectual” virtues—namely, learning (*spīr*) and eloquence (*mlīl*). Hence, Ephrem could appreciate a good and learned preacher.

Yet it is difficult to extract from his remarks on the theme the parameters that made a good preacher for him. A promising passage may be *CN* 14, 5–6:

ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	...	4
ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ		5
ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ		
ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ		6
ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ		
ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ		
ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ		
ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ		

(*CN* 14, 4, 5–6; 5–6)

<sup>99</sup> For this tendency, see: Escolan 1999, 227–265.

<sup>100</sup> “Now the last [Valgash] has pierced ears / and put in them the jewel of life [*ḥešlat-ḥayyē*]. // Aaron had stripped the ears / of earrings [*qdāšē*], to make a calf, // a dead calf which mysteriously / once cold killed the encampment, // those who forged his horns / with his horns ripped up. // Yet our third priest / pierced the heart's ears // and put earrings [*qdāšē*] forged / from the nails that were fixed // to the Cross where his Lord was crucified, / thereby saving his fellows.”

These stanzas are introduced by a remark on Valgash having “put the jewel of life” in the ears of the people. This metaphor, inspired by Prov. 25:12<sup>101</sup>, is clarified in stanzas 5 and 6, where Ephrem compares Valgash favourably with Aaron and develops the metaphor in a full-fledged typology: Valgash and Aaron correspond because both are characterised mainly as preachers; both use earrings, but Aaron takes them from the people and uses them to forge the golden calf, whereas Valgash forges them from the nails of the cross and gives them to the people; the earrings, the nails, and the calf correspond, because all three pierce, but the calf pierces to kill, whereas the nails of the cross pierce to save. The choice of this episode is likely prompted by the fact that Aaron is one of the Old Testament paradigms of the Jewish priest, but the fact that he is adduced as an example in relation to a bishop is surprisingly similar to his position as paradigmatic priest/bishop in the Latin tradition as opposed to Greek texts, which privilege Moses as paradigm for the bishop<sup>102</sup>. Anyway, the example of Aaron is ambiguous, because it can be played in a negative as well as in a positive way<sup>103</sup>. The negative foil he offers to Valgash does not reveal too much of Ephrem’s desiderata for preachers, apart from the obvious: one should not preach other deities than God and Christ (as was the calf), whose death and resurrection—symbolised by the nails—is the centre of ecclesiastical preaching. If we are willing to read many things into the metaphor, the fact that the bishop’s preaching is compared to earrings may indicate that—as did the calf and the nails—the bishop’s words should “pierce” his audience—namely, unsettle them, rebuke them, or hit their weak spots, remaining there, as a nail or an earring, and bringing adornment—which, in Ephrem’s language, means ascetic discipline (§3.2.1). It is doubtful that a learned discussion of, say, the *homoousios* would have had this kind of effect on the congregation at large. The idea that the Christian proclamation should focus on the cross and that this focus will and should scandalise the audience is prominent in Paul<sup>104</sup>. If Paul’s passages are specifically alluded to by Ephrem’s metaphor of the nails of the cross, then the whole contrast between Aaron making the calf and Valgash making earrings can be read as the contrast between a preaching inspired by worldly

**101** “As an earring [*qdāšā*] of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise [*ḥakkīmē*] reprovener upon an obedient ear.” (Prov. 25:12).

**102** On this difference: Rapp 2005, 131–132, who links it with two different conceptions of the church, with the Greeks conceiving it as endowed with a secular power, while the Latins perceived the church as an order different and opposed to the secular one. The difference between a political and a liturgical leader is perceived also in the Syriac area, if Murray 2006, 192–193 is right. For Ephrem, even if sometimes Moses received the priesthood through the imposition of hands and transmitted it to Aaron (*hymn. haer.* 22, 19; *Nat.* 4, 21), normally it is Aaron the first priest (*hymn. fid.* 8, 8; *hymn. eccl.* 11, 3; *CN* 53, 13; 48, 1).

**103** Ephrem’s prevailing tendency is to spare Aaron from criticism and to see him as a positive character: this is demonstrated by his treatment of the Golden Calf in the prose *Commentary on Exodus*, which is consistent with all other occurrences in the *madrašē*; see Conway-Jones 2017. This means that the passage at *CN* 14 is somewhat unique, as it presents Aaron in a negative light, without redeeming qualities.

**104** 1Cor. 1:17–25; 2:1–5; 13–15; 1Thess. 1:5.

eloquence and sophistication and a preaching more in line with the Pauline ideology of the cross plain and simple, in all its scandal. Yet these reasonings are perhaps too speculative, and we should not draw too much from these lines.

Even in recognizing the goodness of Valgash's preaching, Ephrem maintains an ambiguous attitude to this gift. Indeed, interpreters such as Palmer have even cast doubts on Ephrem's sincerity in his praise of Valgash: such a praise was needed to defend the bishop from accusations of spinelessness, a flaw Ephrem would criticise in ecclesiastical leaders at *Homilies on Faith* 6, 195–198<sup>105</sup>. Obviously, historiography stops at the threshold of conscience, and there is no way to prove Palmer's claim on the sincerity of our poet. Anyway, it is clear from our texts that Ephrem links learning and preaching *particularly* to Valgash, whereas the other bishops are more rarely seen in their teaching function, and with consistently fewer intellectual connotations. One need only compare Ephrem's descriptions of Valgash—

<p>3          ܡܕܢܐ ܩܠܒܐ ܕܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ          ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ          ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ</p>	<p>3          ܡܕܢܐ ܩܠܒܐ ܕܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ          ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ          ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ</p>
<p>4          ܡܕܢܐ ܩܠܒܐ ܕܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ          ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ          ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ</p>	<p>4          ܡܕܢܐ ܩܠܒܐ ܕܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ          ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ          ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ</p>
<p>24          ܡܕܢܐ ܩܠܒܐ ܕܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ          ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ          ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ</p>	<p>24          ܡܕܢܐ ܩܠܒܐ ܕܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ          ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ          ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ</p>

<sup>105</sup> Palmer 1998, 124–125. On the accusations against Valgash, see below §4.2. *Homilies on Faith* 6, 195–198 goes like this: “For a relaxed master [*rabbā rapyā*], the disciples / are of no comfort [*nyāhā*]: // They take from him corruption / he takes from them stupefaction”.

<sup>106</sup> “The first tilled the earth with toil, / uprooting thence briar and thorns, // the middle enclosed her all around, / making her a hedge of redeemed, // the last opened the barn of his Master / and sowed in her the words of her Master /// The first priest by hand of fasting / had closed the gates of the mouths, // the second priest with the prisoners / had opened the mouth of the purses, // now the last has pierced ears / and put in them the jewel of life.”

<sup>107</sup> “Before the One rewarding the wearied, / she brings the labour [*aml-eh*] of the first; // before the One loving the bountiful [*rāhem yāhōbē*], / she brings the alms [*zedq-eh*] of the middle; // before the One judging the doctrines [*dāyen yullpānē*], / she brings the debating [*drāš-eh*] of the last.”

with his description of instances of preaching from other bishops:

<p>ܡܠܠܐ ܠܝ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ</p>	<p>ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ 15 ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ</p>
<p>ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ 108 (CN 14, 15–16)</p>	<p>ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ 16 ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ</p>
<p>ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ 109 (CN 17, 5, 1–6)</p>	<p>ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ</p>
<p>ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ 110 (CN 19, 8, 5–10)</p>	<p>ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܠܠܐ</p>

The stanzas taken from CN 14 tend to differentiate between the three first bishops, giving to each one of them a distinguishing feature. As already seen, Babu's feature is material charity, and—as will be delved into later—Jacob's focus is asceticism; Valgash stands out for his preaching and teaching. Ephrem does express this feature using terms which clearly denote intellectual refinement, but they are also morally ambiguous for him: at CN 14, 24, where Ephrem imagines Nisibis's eschatological account before God, Valgash's legacy is presented to the deity in her quality of “judge of doctrines” (*dāyen-yullpānē*), because it consists of “debating” (*drāšā*). The word *yullpānā* is, by itself, a *vox media*, capable of assuming both negative and positive connotations; however, Ephrem uses it in the singular when he is talking of correct doctrine, whereas

108 “The first, at the step of conversion [*tulmādā*], / adapted his speech [*maml-eh*] to his stage; // the middle, at the second step, / to his stage his sermon [*turgam-eh*] lifted; // the last, at the third step, / magnified his speech [*maml-eh*] in accordance. /// The first with all simplicity [*ba-pšītātā*] / gave milk [*ḥalbā*] to his infancy, // the middle with all brevity [*b-dallilātā*] / gave a taste [*t’umā*] to his childhood, // the third with all perfection [*ba-gmīrātā*] / gave food [*’uklā*] to his maturity.”

109 “The shepherd, appointed from his herd, / fed it on spiritual meadows [*margē rūḥānā*], // and with his victorious staff [*ḥuṭr-eh naṣṣīḥā*] / from invisible wolves [*dēbē ksayā*] guarded it. // come on, fill the office of your teacher, / because there's thirst of the sound of his voice [*ṣawtā d- ne'māt-eh*].”

110 “Because you loved the misery / of your master, the inwardly rich [*d-rabb-āk 'attirā kasyā*], // May the fountain of his word [*ma'yan mell-aw(hy)*] gush from you, / so that you become the Spirit's lyre, // and he sings [*tezmar*] to you in you his wills. / **Blessed is he who made you his treasurer!**”

the plural is found without attributes as an antonomasia for heretical doctrines<sup>111</sup>. The term *drāšā* in the *Hymns on Faith*, according to Wickes, never has a positive meaning<sup>112</sup>. Valgash is therefore characterised by an intellectualism that, while positive in his case, verges dangerously towards a mistaken approach to religion.

This is consistent with the characterisation of Valgash in CN 14, 15–16, where Ephrem confronts the teaching ministry of the three bishops, ranging them on a scale that goes from the simplest preaching of the first bishop, when the community was still in its first steps, to the magnificent and complete teaching of Valgash, when the community is finally capable of handling it. CN 14, 16 in particular is interesting. First of all, Babu's character, expressed in line 3 with the term *b-dallilātā*—though in the context it obviously means that Babu began to teach deeper things (giving “a taste” of what was to come) but did so only briefly—may also be an allusion to a short tenure as bishop, giving the historian an important clue on the time frame of the episcopal tenures in Nisibis in the first half of the fourth century. Another interesting point is that CN 14, 16 is very similar to CN 14, 21:

ܡܬܝܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܬܝܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܬܝܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ <sup>113</sup>	ܡܬܝܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܬܝܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܬܝܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
(CN 14, 21)	

Lines 2 and 4 of each stanza are practically identical, line 6 differs only by a word, meaning “his maturity” (or “perfection”, *gmīrūt-eh*) at stanza 16 and “her youth” (or “fortitude”, *laymūt-āh*) at stanza 21. However, the metaphor of food to talk about instruction, stemming from such scriptural passages as 1Cor. 3:1–2; Hebr. 5:12–14; 1Petr. 2:2, is maintained in both stanzas. The oddly numbered lines maintain the same adjectives for the three bishops (*qadmāyā/kāhnā qadmāyā; meṣ'āyā/kāhnā meṣ'āyā; tltāyā/kāhnā da-tlātā*), but change the determination: stanza 16 had a determination of mode, explaining how the bishops taught (“with simplicity,” “with brevity,” and “with perfection”), whereas stanza 21 gives the relationship between the community and each bishop according to the stage of growth the community is in. Jacob's “begetting” (*yiled*) means “founding”, Babu's “explaining” (*targem*) is a verb used for “preaching a homily” and here means that Babu gave the first lessons to the community, whereas Valgash's “nurturing” (*tarsī*) indicates his giving solid food. If we are not to conjecture

<sup>111</sup> Examples of positive occurrences of *yullpānā*: *comm. in diatess.* 4, 20; 5, 8; 12; 18; 6, 19; 21; 8, 7; *hymn. parad.* 6, 1, 1; *hymn. fid.* 12, 7, 2; 28, 15, 3 (here as an antonomasia *the* positive doctrine). Remarkable the neutral connotation of *hymn. fid.* 12, 2, in a stanza describing Christ's judgement of doctrines with eschatological overtones. Examples of *yullpānē* without attributes meaning “heresies”: *comm. in Gen.* 1, 6; *hymn. fid.* 86, 2, 3; 20, 4; 12, 4. It is notable that the Syriac translator of the Acts in the Peshitta has always rendered Gr. αἵρεσις with *yullpānā*, something that it is not found in the other books of the NT.

<sup>112</sup> Wickes 2015, 49.

<sup>113</sup> “The first priest, who begot, / gave milk to her infancy; // the middle priest explained / and gave a taste to her childhood; // the third priest nurtured / and gave food to her youth.”

that *tarsī* should be moved to line 3 and *targem* to line 5, then it will seem that Ephrem has inverted the usual characterisation of the bishops, with Valgash associated with material charity (nurturing), while Babu is linked to intellectual enterprises (explaining, interpreting). This is not so, because here the terms are employed figuratively to describe the spiritual growth of the community: Valgash's food is teaching (see §2.2.4.4). On a wider level, stanzas 16 and 21, although similar, are concerned with different themes: 16 is talking of the doctrinal growth of the community, because it comes after stanza 15 where the focus is on the bishops' words (*mellē*); 21, on the other hand, is concerned with the community's moral growth, as demonstrated by the many references in stanzas 18–20 to fear, discipline, but also encouragement and joy, delineating a path from compulsion through freedom.

All in all, this succession is no doubt schematic, but it puts Valgash's preaching in context, justifying Ephrem's emphasis on this aspect of the third bishop: no doubt, all bishops had preached and taught, but Valgash, from the vantage point of a community come to full maturity, could develop in all its depth and complexity the ecclesiastical teaching, making him *the* preacher among the three first bishops. This characterisation is reprised in the poems on Abraham, who is called to be a preacher as competent as Valgash: here, too, even though the successor is called to be similar to the predecessor, competent preaching remains something particularly linked with Valgash. Indeed, it is clear from the imagery that the object of Valgash's legacy to Abraham is preaching. At CN 17, 5, 6 and CN 19, 8 this is expressed through consistent reference to auditory phenomena: *ṣawtā* indicates the very act of perceiving with the ear, and only by derivation does it mean the "sound" of something; *ne'māt-eh* are pleasurable sounds—whether spoken or sung; the words, *mellē*, have naturally a sonic dimension, as well as the lyre, *kennārā*, and the act of singing, *zmar*. Moreover, at CN 17, 5 the mention of "spiritual meadows" (*margē ruḥānā*), "his victorious staff" (*ḥuṭr-eh naṣṣīḥā*), and "invisible wolves" (*dēbē ksayā*) suggests the image of the shepherd, while indicating through the attributes that the image should be read in reference to divine realities: then the meadows are Scriptures, and the wolves heretics snatching sheep from the flock (Act. 20:28–30), so that the shepherding must be understood as explaining Scripture, and the staff as polemic against heresy. The "inner" (*kasyā*, but also "hidden", "mysterious", "mystical") riches of CN 19, 8, 6 are the "treasure of words" (*gazzā d-mellē*) identified with Valgash at CN 17, 11, 8. Since, then, preaching is commended to Abraham only insofar as it expresses the rightful succession from the great preacher Valgash and not in itself, and granted that Valgash is more important than Babu, so that preaching is more important than material charity, yet competent preaching remains something of a secondary requirement for a bishop, desirable but not indispensable.

### 3.1.3.3 Gregory's didactic program: II, 1, 12, 263–329

In comparison to the limited role that doctrinal teaching and polemic has in Ephrem's view, one appreciates better the originality of Gregory's proposal for the

episcopate, with its historical diagnosis and his insistence on theological competence as a fundamental prerequisite for the bishop. The theme is greatly expanded upon in II, 1, 12 after the historical diagnosis already commented on: Gregory defends his view against the objection posed by the example of the apostles, who are normally represented as ignorant people, and then he goes on to state his proposal more completely<sup>114</sup>.

Since the whole section is very long, I will summarise Gregory's defence and concentrate on the positive part. Gregory raises three points to counter the example of the apostles. The first point is the extraordinary faith demonstrated by the apostles, which reflected itself in the miracles they worked and in their exceedingly ascetic way of life. In presence of such a faith, Gregory acknowledges, learning can safely be ignored: spectacular asceticism and wonderworking are more credible tokens of soundness of doctrine than any carefully crafted argument<sup>115</sup>. Gregory is not explicit about it, but his tone and argument imply that no one could claim to resemble the apostles in his day and age. Moreover, using the apostles to excuse ignorance in the bishops is a logical fallacy: in the apostles it is not ignorance that is admired and praised, but faith; the fact that they were *also* ignorant does not grant that ignorance without faith is admirable<sup>116</sup>. The second point is that the apostles were ignorant only as regards their upbringing, but they were actually made wise in order to discharge their ministry, as the depth and wisdom of their writings demonstrate<sup>117</sup>. Since the apostles were made to participate in wisdom supernaturally, and notwithstanding their illiterate upbringing, it is clear that learning and wisdom are good and indeed necessary for the bishops, the heirs of the apostles. Granted, it was the Spirit who made the apostles wise, and not *paideia*, but this means that they were indeed wise and not ignorant, which is a negation of the premise of the example<sup>118</sup>. Third, if the Holy Spirit made the apostles wise and gave them the faculty of speaking, and if the unclean spirits are mute, as the Gospel of Matthew seems to imply (Mt. 9:32–33), then the one who advises bishops to be mute is possessed by an unclean spirit and not by the Spirit of God<sup>119</sup>.

At this point, Gregory introduces his positive proposal. Gregory's argument employs all the weapons his classical upbringing and his Christian studies equipped him with in order to present his view of Christian culture, beginning with the necessity of such a culture (lines 276–294), continuing with its formal requirements (295–308), and defining in the end its contents (309–321). The whole passage is enclosed between a preface of general value (263–275) and a final exhortation (323–329). My analysis is divided

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<sup>114</sup> The objection of the apostles is treated at II, 1, 12, 192–264, whereas lines 265–329 present Gregory's proposal.

<sup>115</sup> II, 1, 12, 199–215.

<sup>116</sup> II, 1, 12, 216–229.

<sup>117</sup> II, 1, 12, 230–244.

<sup>118</sup> II, 1, 12, 245–253.

<sup>119</sup> II, 1, 12, 254–263.



into three parts: first, I will consider Gregory's statements *against* classical culture; second, I will problematise his stance, pointing to the many loans from that same classical culture Gregory criticises. Through this ambiguity, the poet tries to delineate the peculiar position of Christian culture vis-à-vis pagan *paideia*. Finally, I will set Gregory's proposal in the tradition of ecclesiastical writers to show that his main model is Origen, although he develops it in an original way.

The preface (263–275), building upon the previous argument, which attributed to the apostles a form of wisdom (λόγος), introduces a fundamental distinction between the form (λέξις) and content (νοῦς) of knowledge, giving pride of place to content in the context of Christianity (ἡμῖν, 274). This apparently simple argument is, in reality, laden with tacit implications and allusions to existing debates and commonplaces both inside the Christian community and in the empire at large:

ὥς δέ τ' ἀληθὲς ἔχει  
 Φρονεῖν τ' ἄμεινον, συντόμως ἐγὼ φράσω.  
 Ἦσαν ποτ', ἦσαν εὐμαθεῖς, εἴπερ τινες, (265)  
 Οὐκ εὐμαθεῖς δὲ τὸν εὐπρεπῆ πάντες λόγον.  
 Ἐχει γάρ οὕτως διττὸς ἡμῖν πᾶς λόγος,  
 Λέξεις τε καὶ νοῦς· αἱ μὲν οἷον ἔκτοθεν  
 Ἑσθημ', ὁ δ' ἔνδον σῶμα ἡμφιεσμένον.  
 Καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἄμφω καλὰ, τοῖς δὲ θάτερον, (270)  
 Ἦ αἰσχρὸν αὖθις—ὥς μάθησις ἢ φύσις.  
 Ἡμῖν δὲ τοῦ μὲν ἐκτὸς οὐ πολλὸς λόγος,  
 Ὅπως ποθ' ἔξει, τοῦ δ' ἔσω λίαν πολὺς·  
 Ἐν νῶ γάρ ἐστιν ἡμῖν ἡ σωτηρία,  
 Πλὴν ἐκλαλουμένῳ τε καὶ δηλουμένῳ. (275)  
 (II, 1, 12, 263–275)

But let me say briefly  
 how things really are, and what is better to think.  
 They were, yea, they were well learned back then, of course, (265)  
 but not well learned even in the pleasantries of speech,  
 because, here's the thing: our every speech is double,  
 the words and the meaning; the ones are like the outward  
 clothing, the other is the body clothed.  
 Someone has both good, others only one of them, (270)  
 or finally both are bad, according to nature or nurture.  
 As regards us, the outside is not a big deal,  
 nor its conditions, while the inside is really important,  
 for in the meaning is our salvation,  
 if it's uttered and shown. (275)

The use of νοῦς to indicate the meaning of a linguistic expression and of λέξις to indicate the expression itself, in its linguistic nature, is commonplace in classical literature<sup>120</sup>.

<sup>120</sup> See Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1180–1181 s.v. νόος with the example from Herodotus: οὔτος δὲ ὁ νόος τοῦ ῥήματος τὸ ἐθέλει λέγειν (Herodt. 7, 162, 2); Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1038 s.v. λέξις with the exam-

These two words are contrasted often by Plutarch, especially as he praises brachylogy, the ability to condense much “meaning” (νοῦς) in a few “words” (λέξεις). For Galen this distinction is an important exegetical tool<sup>121</sup>. Gregory is moving inside the categories of a polemic well known in the Imperial Age among pagan authors—namely, the quarrel between philosophy and rhetoric. This question had obvious educational ramifications, because the inclusion or exclusion of rhetoric from the philosopher’s curriculum (and of philosophy from the rhetor’s) would influence not only the syllabus of texts studied but also the way in which texts might be studied and in which philosophical knowledge might be communicated<sup>122</sup>.

These educational ramifications are not lost on Gregory, who conceives of the bishop—among other things—as a teacher (see §2.2.4.4). Apparently, Gregory’s stance is an ascetic one: content is the only important thing, and as long as it is taught and communicated, anything goes. Furthermore, he seems even to despise the refinement of forms, since in line 266 he denies rhetorical prowess (τὸν εὐπρεπῆ λόγον) to the apostles, calling them “simple as regards speaking” (εὐτελεῖς τὰ τοῦ λόγου, 285), and in lines 295–308 he calls for the rejection of refined writing:

Πέζευέ μοι τὴν λέξιν, ἀγροικοστόμει, (295)

Οὐδὲν διοίσωμ’· οἶδα καὶ βαίνειν κάτω.

Λιτὴ τράπεζα πολλάκις μοι φιλτέρα

Τῆς ὀψοποιῶν χερσὶν ἐξησκημένης.

Ἑσθὴς δ’ ὁμοίως ὡς δὲ κάλλος εὐπρεπές,

Οὐχ ὁ γράφουσι χεῖρες, ἡ φύσις δ’ ἔχει. (300)

Ὁ νοῦς ἀνείσθω, καὶ τόδ’ ἡμῖν ἀρκέσει.

Οὐδὲν τὸ κομψόν, τοῖς θέλουσι δώσομεν.

ple from Polybius: προσαγορευομένους δὲ διὰ τὸ μισθοῦ στρατεῦειν Γαισάτους· ἡ γὰρ λέξις αὕτη τοῦτο σημαίνει κυρίως (Polyb. 2, 22, 1). In general, λέξις seems slightly more specialised than νοῦς, since this appears in all genres with this meaning (and has also many other meanings), whereas λέξις, based on the dictionary entry, seems employed primarily in philosophical and rhetorical treatises.

121 οὕτως ὁ Φωκίωνος λόγος πλεῖστον ἐν ἐλαχίστῃ λέξει νοῦν εἶχε. (vit. Phoc. 5, 5, 1); vit. Demosth. 10, 3, 4; garr. 510E, 6; 511B, 4; praec. ger. 803E, 8; in Galen’s exegetical works: Galen. Hippocr. vict. morb. ac. 15, 470, 6 (Kühn); comm. in Hippocr. nat. hom. 15, 82, 8 (Kühn); comm. in Hippocr. epid. 17b, 160, 8 (Kühn); 217, 6; 223, 3; difficult. respir. 7, 894, 17 (Kühn).

122 Von Arnim 1889, in particular 112–114. A fine example of this polemic is Synesius’ *Dio*, as the dedicatory letter (ep. 154) shows; see also Op de Coul 2012. One can glimpse in Synesius’ allusions a representation of the conflict similar to that of Gregory with Maximus: on one side, a landowning gentleman who came to philosophy by way of traditional *paideia* and, though claiming to be more authoritative than a simple educated *curialis*, does not want to completely discard his command of the language of *paideia*; on the other, a *parvenu* claiming divine authority on the basis of a radical lifestyle entailing the rejection of *paideia* in the name of *parrhesia*. The gentlemen (Synesius, Gregory) characterise the *parvenus* as rash (θράσος being a keyword (see Greg. Naz. II, 1, 12, 766 at §3.1.3.1) and immoderate in their ascent to God and their tendency to brag about it, whereas μετριότης, the right measure, is the gentleman’s feature.

Μή μοι τὰ Σέξτου μηδὲ Πύρρωνος πλέκε·  
 Χρύσιππος ἔρροι, μακρὰν ὁ Σταγειρίτης.  
 Μηδὲ Πλάτωνος στέργε τὴν εὐγλωττίαν. (305)  
 Ρίψον τὸ κάλλος, ὦν τὰ δόγματ' ἀποστρέφῃ.  
 Ἐμφιλοσόφει τῇ εὐτελείᾳ τοῦ λόγου.  
 Ἡμῖν ἀρέσκεις, κἂν ἀπαιδεύτως λαλῇς.  
 (II, 1, 12, 295–308)

Be the style pedestrian, the language coarse, (295)  
 I won't mind: I can walk lowly, too.  
 The frugal meal I oftentimes find dearer  
 than the one adorned by the hands of the cooks.  
 For the garment is the same: fair is the beauty  
 not feigned by hands, but inherent to nature. (300)  
 Be the meaning noble, and it will be enough.  
 Sophistication is vain, we leave it to those who like it.  
 Spare me Sextus and Pyrrho,  
 goodbye Chrysippus, far be the Stagirite from me,  
 don't grow fond even of Plato's eloquence. (305)  
 Renounce the ornaments of the doctrines you rejected.  
 Be philosopher, but with plain words  
 you'll please us even with unrefined talks.

This crucial passage can be divided into three sections: in 295–300, Gregory characterises his preferred style through three metaphors; 301–302, two sentences of general value, are a link to what follows—namely, the rejection of all pagan philosophers in 303–308. The perfect symmetry of this passage is notable: six lines, two lines as bridge, and then again six lines.

The rejection of pagan philosophers is topical in Gregory's oeuvre and expresses a polemical stance towards Greek tradition from inside that tradition more than a real condemnation. In our case this is demonstrated by two details, two meaningful omissions: Gregory rejects Sextus and Pyrrho (scepticism), Chrysippus (stoicism), Aristotle (Peripatetics), and Plato (Academy). However, he fails to mention Epicurus for Epicureanism and Diogenes for Cynicism; otherwise his list would be a complete rejection of Greek philosophy. The omission of Epicurus demonstrates that Gregory's rejection comes from inside the tradition: Epicureanism in Gregory's time was considered as a petty cover-up for licentiousness in the best case, outright atheism and sedition in the worst; if the poet wanted to sign an irrevocable sentence and present himself as an outsider, he would have thrown Epicurus in with the other philosophers, but by omitting him he recognised the philosophical consensus on Epicureanism, which deemed it fundamentally different from and worse than any other philosophy (thus not needing to be even mentioned). On the other side, failing to mention Diogenes, a person Gregory clearly admired<sup>123</sup>, leaves the door open for a parallel between Cynicism and Gregory's

<sup>123</sup> Greg. Naz. I, 2, 10, 218–227; Dziech 1925, 104n103; Krueger 1993, 39–42; Moreschini 2012, 114–115.

idea of philosophy. Indeed, Cynicism not only agrees with Gregory's teaching program involving uncouth language and consistency between life and doctrine, but it probably inspired this very trope of rejecting the dialectical trappings of other schools<sup>124</sup>.

The flaw Gregory decries in these philosophers is not wholly clear, because even if the context and the reference to Plato's εὐγλωττία points to a refusal of literary qualities, one cannot say that Sextus and Pyrrho, Chrysippus and Aristotle were renowned for their style; rather, they were known for their logical and dialectical skill<sup>125</sup>. This means that, contrarily to our modern expectations, the logical and dialectical method adopted by philosophers is considered by Gregory more form than content, since it can be equated to literary style as something added to doctrine<sup>126</sup>: what Gregory refuses is summarised in the expression τὸ κομψόν (302), meaning "refinement" and applied to sophisticated and luxurious things as well as to skilful and ingenious ones. In Gregory, as well as in the other Cappadocians, it is a buzzword in the anti-Eunomian polemic, because Eunomius adopted (according to the Cappadocians) a method of theology too skilful and logical<sup>127</sup>.

<sup>124</sup> Moreschini 2012, 111–113. For an analysis of this passage in the context of Gregory's oeuvre, see Meier 1989, 105–106. See also §5.1.2.1.

<sup>125</sup> On Sextus, Diogenes says: Σέξτος ὁ ἐμπειρικός, οὗ καὶ τὰ δέκα τῶν Σκεπτικῶν καὶ ἄλλα κάλλιστα (Diog. L. 9, 12, 116), however it is doubtful that κάλλιστα refers to style; Pyrrho left nothing to judge his style upon: Ἔστι δὲ καὶ τὸν ὅλον τῆς συναγωγῆς αὐτῶν τρόπον συνιδεῖν ἐκ τῶν ἀπολειφθεισῶν συντάξεων. αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ ὁ Πύρρων οὐδὲν ἀπέλιπεν (9, 11, 102); Chrysippus is remembered for his dialectical skills and his careless style: Οὕτω δ' ἐπίδοξος ἐν τοῖς διαλεκτικοῖς ἐγένετο, ὥστε δοκεῖν τοὺς πλείους ὅτι εἰ παρὰ θεοῖς ἦν [ἡ] διαλεκτική, οὐκ ἂν ἄλλη ἦν ἢ ἡ Χρυσίππειος. πλεονάσας δὲ τοῖς πράγμασι τὴν λέξιν οὐ κατῴρωσε. (7, 7, 180). Aristotle is problematic, because of the difference in style between his exoteric works (see Cicero's *flumen orationis aureum fundens Aristoteles* in *ac.* 2, 38, 119) and his esoteric ones, considered obscure (πολὺ μὲν ἐν σοφοῖσι κοῦκ ἀνώνυμον τὸ Περὶ ἑρμενεύσεως τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους βιβλίον τῆς τε πυκνότητος ἔνεκα τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ παραδιδόμενων θεωρημάτων καὶ τῆς περὶ τὴν λέξιν δυσκολίας, Ammon. *Philos. in Aristot. int.* 3r). Gregory knew probably Aristotle from his esoteric writings on logic and rhetoric (Norris 1997, 26–39), hence not as a stylist but as an accurate dialectician. Gregory explicitly recognises the different grounds on which these philosophers are rejected in a passage parallel to this: τὰς Πύρρωνος ἐνστάσεις, ἡ ἐφέξεις, ἡ ἀντιθέσεις, καὶ τῶν Χρυσίππου συλλογισμῶν τὰς διαλύσεις, ἡ τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους τεχνῶν τὴν κακοτεχνίαν, ἡ τῆς Πλάτωνος εὐγλωττίας τὰ γοητεύματα (*or.* 32, 13, 25), where Pyrrho, Chrysippus and Aristotle are characterised by their dialectical devices, whereas Plato is endowed with a more irrational kind of persuasion (γοητεύματα), linked to his beautiful style.

<sup>126</sup> It is likely that rhetoric and logic were not so sharply distinct in late antique school curricula as we may think: Norris 1997, 19–25. In another passage, criticizing the Arian George of Cappadocia but in reality aiming at contemporary neo-Arians such as Eunomius, Gregory links again criticism of rhetorical devices, in the form of a reprise of Dionysius of Halicarnassus' critique of Asianism, with criticism of dialectic, as he recalls the names of Pyrrho and Sextus: *or.* 21, 12–13; MacDougall 2017.

<sup>127</sup> E.g.: Gregory's theological orations begin with the sentence Πρὸς τοὺς ἐν λόγῳ κομψοὺς ὁ λόγος (*or.* 27, 1, 1); οἷς καὶ τοῦτο μέρος τρυφῆς, ἡ περὶ ταῦτα ἐρεσχελία καὶ κομψεία τῶν ἀντιθέσεων. (3); τὸ ἀσθενὲς τοῦ λόγου τοῦ μυστηρίου φαίνεται: καὶ οὕτω κένωσις τοῦ σταυροῦ τὸ τοῦ λόγου κομψὸν ἀναδείκνυται, ὡς καὶ Παῦλος δοκεῖ. (*or.* 29, 10, 21); οὕτω γὰρ ἂν πιθανὴ τε καὶ εὐπαράδεκτος ἡ ἀπάτη τοῖς ἀκούουσι γένοιτο, κατεγλωττισμένη καὶ περιηρησμένη ταῖς τοιαύταις τοῦ λόγου κομψείαις (Greg.

In the lines devoted to Gregory's positive description of the style he prefers, there are three main points to note. First, the three images the poet employs (295–300): language should walk lowly (instead of ride high on a horse)<sup>128</sup>, it should be like a simple meal, as opposed to refined dishes made by professional cooks, and it should be like a simple piece of clothing, letting natural beauty transpire without adding anything to it. The two latter images, cooking and fine clothing, allude to the foundational passage of the quarrel between rhetoric and philosophy—namely, Socrates's critique of rhetoric and sophistry in *Gorgias* 465B<sup>129</sup>.

This leads us to the second remarkable point, the concept, expressed at 299–300, of discourse as having an intrinsic and natural beauty, provided by its contents, and also having a form of artificial beauty, covering the natural one from the outside as a clothing covers the body: the same concept—already present in Plato's passage—is developed by Themistius in his comparison of philosophy and rhetoric, in which he aimed at conciliating the two<sup>130</sup>. In this case, Gregory is more like Plato, in that he discards rhetoric.

Furthermore, these points share, in Gregory's formulation, also a moral undertone, so that the three images are formulated as ascetic renunciations of worldly goods<sup>131</sup>. Although owning a horse and using it as transport was clearly much more expensive than walking,

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Nyss. c. *Eunom.* 1, 1, 19); ὁ δὲ τοὺς σοφιστὰς διαβάλλων καὶ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ καθοπλιζὼν τὸν λόγον καὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων πλημμελημάτων κατηγορῶν οὐκ ἐρυθριᾷ ἐν τοῖς περὶ τῶν δογματικῶν λόγοις διὰ σοφισμάτων ἀστεϊζόμενος καὶ μιμούμενος τοὺς ἐν τοῖς συμποσίοις διὰ κομψευμάτων τινῶν ἐφελκομένους τὸν γέλωτα (608); ταῖς γὰρ κομψείαις τῶν σοφισμάτων τὸ φθοροποιὸν δόγμα οἷόν τι μάλιστα καταχρῶσαντες (2, 1, 58). It is remarkable that, except for two Euripidean occurrences, the word is typical of Old Comedy (see Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 977, s.v. κομψός).

**128** The verb πεζεύω is almost always employed in contrast with πλέω, not to horse-riding, and almost never figuratively for language: Gregory's use is innovative but warranted by the adjective πεζός, which refers to infantry as opposed to cavalry and is often used for language, whether prose as opposed to poetry or in general for an unpretentious language. For Gregory is particularly important the Callimachean αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ Μουσέων πεζὸν ἔπειμι νόμον, *Ait.* 4, 112, 9. A similar usage is found at Greg. Nyss. c. *Eunom.* 3, 7, 15: τί ταῦτα, Εὐνόμει; καὶ σὺ πεζεύεις κατὰ τοὺς ἰδιώτας ἡμᾶς καὶ καταλιπὼν τὰς τεχνικάς περιόδους ἐπὶ τὴν ἄλογον συγκατάθεσιν καὶ αὐτὸς καταφεύγεις ὁ πολλὰ τοῖς ἄνευ λογικῆς ἐντρεχείας ἐπιχειροῦσι τῷ γράφειν ἐπνοειδίσας. Ἀγροικοστομέω is a Gregorian *hapax* (for ἀγροικία in Gregory see §4.1.2.1).

**129** τῇ μὲν οὖν ἱατρικῇ, ὥσπερ λέγω, ἡ ὀψοποιικὴ κολακεία ὑπόκειται: τῇ δὲ γυμναστικῇ κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον τοῦτον ἡ κομμωτικὴ, κακοῦργός τε καὶ ἀπατηλὴ καὶ ἀγεννὴς καὶ ἀνελευθέρος, σχήμασιν καὶ χρώμασιν καὶ λειότητι καὶ ἐσθήσιν ἀπατώσα, ὥστε ποιεῖν ἄλλότριον κάλλος ἐφελκομένους τοῦ οἰκείου τοῦ διὰ τῆς γυμναστικῆς ἀμελεῖν (Plat. *Gorg.* 465B).

**130** ἄλλότριον κάλλος ἐφελκομένους τοῦ οἰκείου (Plat. *Gorg.* 465B); πλόκαμοί τε οὕτε ἄφροτοι μεθίενται πλανᾶσθαι οὕτε ἐκ ποικιλίας κομμωτικῆς ἀναπλέκονται, ἀλλὰ μέσον τινὰ ἔχουσι κόσμον ἀταξίας τε καὶ τρυφῆς. φιλοσοφία γὰρ τὸ κατὰ φύσιν κάλλος ἄφραστον ἔχουσα πᾶν ὃ τι περ ἐπέισακτον ἀτιμάζει καὶ οὐ προσίεται. οὐκοῦν οὐδὲ ὑπογράφει τὰ δῆματα οὐδὲ τεχνητὸν ἔρευθος αὐτῇ τὰς παρειὰς χρώννυσιν ... Ῥητορικὴ δέ—πάντως γὰρ που καὶ ταύτης τὴν εἰκόνα ποθεῖτε—γενναῖα μὲν τις καὶ αὐτὴ καὶ παγκάλῃ, ἀτὰρ οὐ τῇ φύσει μόνον ἀρκεῖται, πολλὰκις δὲ θέλει καὶ τοῖς ἐξωθεν καλλωπίζεσθαι. καὶ αὐτῆς πολὺς μὲν καὶ ποικίλος κόσμος τὸ σῶμα σκέπει (Themist. *or.* 24, 303b–304a). In the same tradition, Aelius Aristides' defence of rhetoric from Plato's *Gorgias*: Dittadi 2017.

**131** The moral undertone may have been present already in Plato: Reames 2016.

there is scant reference to walking as an ascetic choice. Socrates and some Cynics are represented as walking barefoot<sup>132</sup>, but the emphasis is on bare feet, not on the act of walking, while Cato the Younger and Jesus are often portrayed walking<sup>133</sup>. In Syriac, a whole poem, dedicated to the hermit Julian Saba (*Iul. Saba* 11), praises him for the humility he displayed by renouncing every means of transport other than feet. The expression λιτή τράπεζα (297) is found in the plural in the gnomic poem of Pseudo-Phocylides (λιταῖσι τραπέζαις, 82), which, considering Gregory's fondness for gnomic poetry, is his likely source. However, in Pseudo-Phocylides the context is hospitality, whereas here Gregory alludes to ascetic sobriety, a feature of philosophers ever since Aristophanes's *Clouds* (μήτ' ἀριστῶν ἐπιθυμεῖς, / οἶνου τ' ἀπέχει καὶ γυμνασίων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀνοήτων, 416–417), which Gregory often expresses with the Cynic keyword μάζα accompanied by adjectives meaning “scarce”, “small” (μικρά, στενή, ὀλίγη)<sup>134</sup>. Among the occurrences, II, 1, 12, 74 and II, 1, 41, 45–46 are notable, because in the first passage the expression refers to Gregory's model ascetic, whereas in the second passage it is applied to the Cynic Maximus (see below, §3.2.2.1). As regards clothing, Socrates proverbially used only one cloak for all seasons, the so-called τρίβων, which became part of the philosopher's traditional attire (§3.1.1.3).

Other clues to a moral interpretation of language come from the already mentioned reference to Plato's *Gorgias*: the counterparts of cookery and cosmetics being medicine and gymnastics, the ideal bishop is indirectly characterised as physician and athlete. The first is traditionally associated with pastoral guidance (see §2.2.4.7); the second with asceticism and the martyrs. Furthermore, the role of φύσις in determining what is authentically beautiful resembles analogous stances in the moral sphere on the part of Cynics and Stoics, in particular the concept of “life according to nature”<sup>135</sup>. Finally, the idea of language (or the lack thereof) as an ascetic instrument resonates with other passages of Gregory's poetry<sup>136</sup>.

Gregory's stance in the quarrel between philosophy and rhetoric would seem straightforward: philosophy—in this case, orthodox Christian doctrine—is the main concern, trampling everything else, to the point that a polished form is not merely indifferent but bears negative connotations, as the linguistic correspondent of a life without authenticity and full of unnecessary pleasures and commodities. Here, I come to the second point of the analysis, problematisation: it is true that some formulations (the reference to the apostles, 265–266; true beauty in the contents and not in the form, 299–300; the refusal of the

<sup>132</sup> Zanker 1995, 33, 130.

<sup>133</sup> Καὶ διεπόνει τὸ σῶμα γυμνασίῳ ἐνεργοῖς, ἐθιζόμενος ἀνέχεσθαι καὶ καύματα καὶ νιφετὸν ἀκαλύπτῳ κεφαλῇ, καὶ βαδίζειν ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς πᾶσαν ὥραν ἄτερ ὀχήματος. τῶν δὲ φίλων οἱ συνεκδημοῦντες ἵπποις ἐχρῶντο, καὶ πολλάκις ἐκάστῳ παρέβαλλεν ὁ Κάτων ἐν μέρει προσδιαλεγόμενος, περιπατῶν αὐτὸς ὀχομένῳν ... πολλάκις δ' ἀνυπόδητος καὶ ἀχίτων εἰς τὸ δημόσιον προῆει (Plut. *vit. Cat. min.* 5, 6–7; 6, 3); ὁδοιπορῶν, καὶ πεζεύων διηνεκῶς (PsBasil. *const. asc.* 4, 6).

<sup>134</sup> Dziech 1925, 105–106 with n. 199; Meier 1989, 83–84.

<sup>135</sup> Adamson 2015, 14–15, 77.

<sup>136</sup> See §1.3.2 and the theme of silence explained by Storin 2011.

philosophers, 302–308) seem to imply a complete rejection of polished forms, but many others are, rather, *excusing* the lack of polished forms for the sake of orthodox content (indifference to form, 272–273; “we don’t look for anything more”, 284–285; uneducated language as just a possibility, 295–298). Most of all, the passage at 276–283 implies through its images that a formally good exposition is better than a mediocre one (see §1.3.1):

Πηγῆς τί κέρδος ἐστὶν ἐμπεφραγμένης;  
 Τί δ’ ἡλιακῆς ἀκτίνος, ἣν κρύπτει νέφος;  
 Τοιοῦτόν ἐστι νοῦς σοφὸς σιγώμενος,  
 Οἷον ῥόδου τὸ κάλλος, εἰ κάλυξ σκέπει  
 Οὐκ εὐπρεπῆς· τὸ τερπνὸν ἐκφαίνει δ’, ὅταν  
 Αὔραις ῥαγεῖσα τὸν τόκον θεατρίσῃ.  
 Εἰ δ’ ἦν αἰεὶ τὸ κάλλος ἐσκεπασμένον,  
 Οὐδ’ ἂν τις ἦρος ἦν χάρις τοῦ τιμίου.  
 (II, 1, 12, 276–283)

Which profit from a sealed spring,  
 from a ray of sun concealed by clouds?  
 Such is a wise thought unspoken,  
 like the beauty of a rose that an ugly cup  
 covers; the beauty appears when,  
 burst open by the wind, the cup pushes its offspring onstage;  
 but if the beauty were to remain always covered,  
 there would be no delight in much-revered spring.

Furthermore, Gregory steadily changes the connotation of the terms he uses as stylistic descriptors. For example, the term εὐπρεπῆς travels from a negative connotation at 276, where it describes the affectation of Greek style, which in general was refused by the apostles, to a positive connotation in the image of the rosebud (279–280) and of the clothing (299). Conversely, κάλλος, “beauty”, is positive in the analogy of the rosebud (279) and in that of clothing (299) but is then rejected when it refers to pagan philosophers (306). This ambiguity might be explained with two orders of considerations. On a more concrete level, Gregory has to steer a middle course between two models of bishop, which he could not hope to incarnate as successfully as his contenders to the throne of Constantinople—namely, Maximus and Nectarius: he could not sport the spectacular renunciations of the Cynic, nor could he present himself as the man of traditional *paideia*, of the niceties of elite society, as was the former *praetor urbanus*. He had to present a model that cut right through the middle. This model, on a more elevated level of reflection, could also stand as a response to Julian’s attack on Christianity: here, Gregory would have wanted to present Christianity as the culmination of the tradition of *paideia*, but at the same time preserve its outsider status as an “alien wisdom”, allowed to harshly criticise pagan culture. The difficulty of expressing this middle stance of Christian culture lies, among other aspects, in the circumstance that Gregory has no single keywords like the Greek παιδεία and the various marks of style to define such culture, so that the poet is compelled to employ traditional words and shift continually

between their traditional and their new Christian sense, negating and affirming them in different passages. Nowhere is this process clearer than when Gregory defends the apostles against the accusation of being ἀπαιδεύτοι (230) and describes his adversary with this epithet (262), but then, having rejected the philosophers, allows for teaching ἀπαιδεύτως (308). Gregory is trying to cut, inside the Greek language, the space to talk of a distinctively Christian culture<sup>137</sup>. Yet to understand the nature of such a culture, we have to examine the content of the teaching proposed by Gregory.

In the context of Christian discourse, the distinction between λέξις and νοῦς evoked by Gregory at the beginning of this passage (268) belongs to the realm of biblical exegesis and expresses the difference between the literal meaning of Scripture and its allegorical or typological interpretation. The fundamental line is the γνώμη: ἐν νῷ γὰρ γάρ ἐστιν ἡμῖν ἡ σωτερία (274), to which a parallel is found in the poem *On His Verses* (II, 1, 39, 51): εἰ καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἡμῖν ἐν θεωρίᾳ. If we add the term employed at II, 1, 12, 286, we have Gregory's lexicon as regards the form/content antithesis: form is expressed with λέξις, content as νοῦς, θεωρία or ἔμφασις<sup>138</sup>. Λέξις is normally used to signify a text, especially in its material form and contingent formulation as opposed to the meaning it expresses, and hence it is the term used by Alexandrine tradition to indicate the "letter" as opposed to the allegory, which in the same tradition is frequently called νοῦς<sup>139</sup>. On the contrary, the Antiochene tradition prefers to use the term θεωρία and to differentiate it sharply from Alexandrine allegory<sup>140</sup>. However, as explained by Lampe 1961, 649,

<sup>137</sup> Gregory's project in these lines echoes many characters of similar educational projects, especially from church writers, examined by Stenger 2022: the priority given by Gregory to content over style, and his very description of literary style in terms of life style reflect the prevalent interest on the personality and life forming aspects of education rather than the technical ones in late antiquity; in view of this interest, educational projects were frequently presented in the form of biographies or autobiographies, such as is the case here with Gregory (Stenger 2022, 95–98, 185–187). Moreover, Gregory's critical relationship with the classics and his attempt to delineate a specifically Christian form of education echo the widespread conscience of late antique authors to be indeed "late" and removed from the classics, as well as the tendency to see education as defining group identities (Stenger 2022, 53–56, 282–284).

<sup>138</sup> It is remarkable that one of Gregory's pupils, Jerome, expressed a similar distinction of *sensus* and *verba* in the context of his translation theory, focalizing on *sensus* to the detriment of *verba* (see his *ep.* 57), even though in his case Cicero's influence is also prominent.

<sup>139</sup> Lampe 1961, 797, s.v. Λέξις; 927, s.v. νοῦς; εἰ μὴ ἔχοι νοῦν τινα κεκρυμμένον καὶ ἐτι ἡμῖν ἀσαφὴ ἢ προκειμένη λέξις (Orig. in *Joh. comm.* 5, 1, 1); Ὅσον γὰρ ἐπὶ τῇ λέξει δύο σημαίνεται ἐκ τοῦ «νιέ μου, φυλάξαι τοῦ ποιῆσαι βιβλία πολλά» ἐν μὲν ὅτι . . . ἕτερον δὲ ὅτι . . . (Orig. in *Joh. comm.* 5, 2, 1); διόντων ἡμῶν ἐκ τῆς προχείρου λέξεως ἐπὶ τὸν ἐξ αὐτῆς θεωρούμενον νοῦν (Eus. *Against Marcellus* 1, 3, 15, but note the use of the verb θεωρεῖσθαι); οὐχ ἴσταιται ἐπὶ τῆς λέξεως τὴν δὲ τῶν λεγομένων διάνοιαν πολυπραγμονεῖ (Eus. *Ecclesiastical theology* 2, 10, 2); τὸν νοῦν μόνον, οὐ τὴν λέξιν, παριστὰν ἐπαγγέλλεται. (Clem. Alex. *strom.* 7, 1, 1); οὐ τὸ σημαινόμενον ἀπ' αὐτῶν σκοποῦντες, ἀλλ' αὐτῇ ψιλῇ ἀποχρώμενοι τῇ λέξει (Clem. Alex. *strom.* 7, 16, 96).

<sup>140</sup> τὴν ἀγωγὴν καὶ τὴν θεωρίαν τὴν ὑψηλοτέραν οὐκ ἀποκωλύσομεν . . . ἐκεῖνο δὲ μόνον χρὴ φυλάττεσθαι μὴ ποτε ἀνατροπὴ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου ἢ θεωρία ὁφθῇ ὅπερ οὐκέτι ἂν εἴη θεωρία ἀλλὰ ἀλληγορία (Diodore of Tarsus *Proemium in Psalmos* 88); ἄλλο τὸ ἐκβιάσασθαι εἰς ἀλληγορίαν καὶ ἱστορίαν, ἄλλο δὲ καὶ τὴν ἱστορίαν φυλάξαι καὶ θεωρίαν ἐπινοῆσαι (Severian. Gabal. *mund. creat.* 4, 2).



s.v. θεωρία, the term is employed indifferently as a synonym of ἀλληγορία by Alexandrians and Cappadocians. The term ἔμφασις is consistently used by Gregory of Nyssa to indicate the “meaning” of divine names or the spiritual interpretation of Scripture, and with the same meaning it is employed here by Gregory of Nazianzus<sup>141</sup>.

The usage of such terms suggests that Gregory is not just discussing doctrine in an abstract manner, nor does he intend primarily preaching, but above all writing and exegesis in particular: this is confirmed by one of the arguments proving the apostles’ wisdom, earlier in II, 1, 12 (230–237)—namely, the fact that their writings are still studied to Gregory’s day by the finest minds of his generation; that this is Gregory’s intention is confirmed also by his remark later in this passage (284–294) on the utility of written works (γεγραμμένοι λόγοι, 288):

Οὐδέν πλέον ζητοῦμεν ὡς οὕτω λαλεῖν  
 Ὡς οἱ δοκοῦσιν εὐτελεῖς τὰ τοῦ λόγου. (285)  
 Εἰ δ’ οὖν, παρίστη τὰς ἐκείνων ἐμφάσεις.  
 Αὐγῆς ποθῶ τι καὶ μέρος τῆς σῆς λαβεῖν.  
 Εἰ μὲν γὰρ οὐδέν εἰσιν οἱ γεγραμμένοι  
 Λόγοι, τοσοῦτον πῶς ἐπαιζόμεν χρόνον  
 Ἦ πῶς θαλάσσης ψάμμον ἠρίθμουν μάτην (290)  
 Νύκτας συνάπτων ἡμέραις ἐν τοῖς πόνοις,  
 Ὡς ἂν τις ἐλθοι εἰς γε ῥυτίδας λόγος;  
 Εἰ δ’ εἰσιν ὥσπερ εἰσιν, εὖ γεγραμμένοι,  
 Μὴ δῶς ἀράχναις τῶν δικαίων τοὺς πόνους.  
 (II, 1, 12, 284–294)

We don’t look for anything more than speaking  
 like those who seem simple as regards speaking. (285)  
 At least, may their meanings be present.  
 I long to perceive if only a part of your splendour.  
 For if written doctrines are of no value,  
 why did I jest such a long time,  
 or rather: why did I count vainly the sands of the sea, (290)  
 in toils weaving nights with the days,  
 in order to have, if only with wrinkles, a bit of learning?  
 But if they are—as they are—well written,  
 then leave not to the cobwebs the labours of the just.

This passage gives us a glimpse of the kind of knowledge Gregory is defending—before he presents its contents: it must be something rooted in Scripture and taking advantage of previous works of exegesis (“the labours of the just”, τῶν δικαίων τοὺς πόνους, 294). Incidentally, he presents himself as an experienced practitioner of such knowledge (289–292). The term πόνος recurring in these lines is a keyword of Christian asceticism, because it defines not only ascetic exercises but specifically a learned asceticism, in

141 Lampe 1961, 456, s.v. ἔμφασις.

which studying has a spiritual and moral function<sup>142</sup>. The final lines of the discussion (323–329) contain a *peroratio* calling Gregory's fictive listener, who must be conceived as a bishop, to teach something if he has anything to teach, and otherwise to remain silent:

Πῶς ρεῖ τὰ πάντα, φάσκε μοι, ποῦ δ' ἵσταται.  
 Εἰ σοί τι τούτων ἐτρανώθη Πνεύματι –  
 Τὸ σύμπαν εἴτε καὶ μέσως εἴτ' ἐνδεῶς,  
 Ὅσον κεχώρηχ' ἢ κάθαρσις σῆς φρενός –, (325)  
 Μὴ με στερήσῃς· εἰ δὲ πάντῃ τυφλὸς εἶ,  
 Τί χειραγωγεῖς μὴ βλέπων; Ὡ τοῦ σκότους  
 Τῶν μὴ βλέποντι χρωμένων διδασκάλῳ,  
 Ὡς εἰς βόθρον πέσωσιν ἀγνοίας ἅμα!  
 (II, 1, 12, 323–329)

Tell me, prithee, how everything goes, and where it stands,  
 if the Spirit has revealed some of these things to you,  
 or every thing, whether only a little or even poorly,  
 inasmuch as the purity of your mind was capable. (325)  
 Rob me not of these! But if you are totally blind,  
 then why do you blindly lead? Alas, the dimness  
 of those who trust a blind guide,  
 how shall they fall together in the pit of their ignorance!

Through this *peroratio*, Gregory gives away his conception of the role of the teacher and of the nature of knowledge in this new Christian culture<sup>143</sup>. Knowledge, he says, is bestowed by the Spirit (323); hence, it is divine in origin. The role of the teacher is to be the vessel of such knowledge and to transmit it. However, the movement is not only top-down, because different people may be more or less receptive to this knowledge, depending on their inner purification. The terms used by Gregory are particularly interesting: the capacity for reception is expressed by the verb χωρέω, “to contain”,

<sup>142</sup> Lampe 1961, 1121, s.v. πόνος; 1480, s.v. φιλόπονος.

<sup>143</sup> Beginning with the expression ρεῖ τὰ πάντα, one could construe this passage as alluding to Greek natural philosophy: apart from the reference to Heraclitus' flow-theory, Gregory asks the much-debated question of why and where the world stands still in space (ποῦ δ' ἵσταται), discussed by Anaximander and Anaximenes (Anaximander *frag.* 26 D.-K.; Anaximenes *frag.* 6–7 D.-K.) and ends the *peroratio* with the fall into a pit, which may remind of the anecdote of Thales falling into a well (ἄνω βλέποντα, πεσόντα εἰς φρέαρ, Plat. *Theaet.* 174A). Vaguer still, the expression στερήσῃς (326) may remind of Aristotle's principle of στέρησις (Aristot. *phys.* 189b 30–191a 22) and κάθαρσις the second poem by Empedocles (Diog. L. 8, 77). However, I do not think these links important for the text: the expression πῶς ρεῖ τὰ πάντα may well derive from doxological literature on physics, but then ποῦ δ' ἵσταται can be explained simply as the contrary to the former expression, as a way to complete Gregory's questions. The other allusions are too vague to be relied upon, and the falling into a pit is best explained by Mt. 15:14 and Lc. 6:39, which are also verbally nearer to Gregory's text than, e.g., Plato's account of Thales, whose meaning, with the falling caused by the act of looking above, would contradict Gregory's very argument here.

while the central element of reception is *κάθαρσις*, “purity” or “purification”<sup>144</sup>. These two lexical elements are typical of Origen’s theory of knowledge and revelation: for Origen, revelation is a dialogical process; it progresses in time and engages two people, Christ the Logos and the rational creature. The Logos reveals himself to the creature in the form most apt to the creature’s progress, while the creature, purifying (*κάθαρσις*) itself through the different revelations, increases her capacity (*χώρεω*) for new knowledge. Therefore, Christ may appear different to different people, depending on their spiritual progress<sup>145</sup>. This theory of knowledge, adopted by Gregory, gives a theological foundation to his contention that the Christian teacher should be an ascetic, since it is through asceticism that one purifies oneself for knowledge.

Gregory’s emphasis on Scripture and previous exegetical works, together with his allusion to Origen’s theory of knowledge, clarifies the real-life model for Gregory’s teacher: Origen. The Christian culture Gregory is proposing follows Origen’s lead and has the same two pillars as Origen’s: Scripture and asceticism. Gregory’s Origenism is confirmed by the contents of such a teaching, laid out in lines 309–322:

<sup>144</sup> Ὅσον κεχώρηχ’ ἡ κάθαρσις σῆς φρενός (325). *φρήν*, at the singular and in the sense of “mind”, can be considered a poetic word. If we admit that *φρήν* is a poetic substitution for *καρδία*, there may be an allusion to the fifth beatitude (Mt. 5:8).

<sup>145</sup> Οἱ γοῦν προφήται καὶ διὰ τὸ καθαρῶς βεβιωκέναι τὸ θεῖον πνεῦμα χωρήσαντες (Orig. *c. Cels.* 7, 18); Λόγον γὰρ προϋπάρχει τὸν καθαίροντα τὴν ψυχὴν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ δεῖ, ἵνα κατὰ τοῦτον καὶ τὴν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ κάθαρσιν, πάσης περιαιρεθείσης νεκρότητος καὶ ἀσθενείας, ἡ ἀκραιφνὴς ζωὴ ἐγγένηται παρὰ παντὶ τῷ τοῦ λόγου καθ’ ὃ θεὸς ἐστὶν αὐτὸν ποιήσαντι χωρητικόν (*in Joh. comm.* 2, 18, 129); διὰ τοῦτο οἱ γινόμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τῷ λούσασθαι, τὸν ὀνειδισμόν ἀποτίθενται τῆς Αἰγύπτου, καὶ ἐπιτηδειότεροι πρὸς τὸ ἀναλαμβάνεσθαι γίνονται, καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς μιαιωτάτης λέπρας καθαρίζονται, καὶ διπλασιασμόν χωροῦσιν χαρισμάτων, καὶ ἔτοιμοι πρὸς πνεύματος ἁγίου παραδοχὴν γίνονται, ἄλλω ποταμῷ οὐκ ἐφιπταμένης τῆς πνευματικῆς περιστρεφᾶς. (6, 48, 250); Πρὸ γὰρ τούτων τῶν οἰκονομιῶν ἅτε μηδέπω κεκαθαρμένοι οὐκ ἐχώρουν ἀγγέλων παρ’ αὐτοῖς ἐπιδημίαν (57, 293); οὐκ ἂν χωρὶς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου χωρησάντων ἡμῶν τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ λόγου ὠφέλειαν, μένοντος ὁποῖος ἦν τὴν ἀρχὴν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα θεόν, καὶ μὴ ἀναλαβόντος ἀνθρώπου, τὸν πάντων πρῶτον καὶ πάντων τιμώτερον καὶ πάντων μᾶλλον καθαρώτερον αὐτὸν χωρῆσαι δυνάμενον. (10, 6, 26); μόνος γὰρ καὶ πᾶς ὁ νιψάμενος τοὺς πόδας ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ὁδεύει τὴν ὁδὸν ταύτην τὴν ζῶσαν καὶ φέρουσαν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, καὶ οὐ χωρεῖ ἡ ὁδὸς αὕτη πόδας μεμολυσμένους καὶ τοὺς ἐτι μὴ καθαροὺς. (32, 7, 81); on the interpretation of Scripture: καὶ τάχα διὰ τοῦτο αἱ ἐπὶ καθαρισμῷ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ὑδρίαι κείσθαι<sup>1</sup> λεγόμεναι, ὡς ἐν τῷ κατὰ Ἰωάννην εὐαγγελίῳ ἀνέγνωμεν, ‘χωροῦσιν ἀνά μετρητάς δύο ἢ τρεῖς’· αἰνισσομένου τοῦ λόγου περὶ τῶν παρὰ τῷ ἀποστόλῳ ‘ἐν κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαίων’, ὡς ἄρα οὗτοι καθαρίζονται διὰ τοῦ λόγου τῶν γραφῶν, ὅπου μὲν ‘δύο μετρητάς’, τὸν ἵν’ οὕτως εἶπω ψυχικὸν καὶ τὸν πνευματικὸν λόγον, χωροῦντων, ὅπου δὲ ‘τρεῖς’, ἐπεὶ τινες ἔχουσι πρὸς τοῖς προειρημένοις καὶ τὸ σωματικὸν οἰκοδομῆσαι δυνάμενον (*princ.* 4, 2, 5; it is the first excerpt in the *Philocalia Origenis* attributed to Gregory and Basil); γένοιτο δ’ ἀνευρεθῆναι καρδίαν ἐπιτηδείαν καὶ διὰ τὴν καθαρότητα χωροῦσαν τὰ γράμματα τῆς σαφηνείας τῶν παραβολῶν (*in Mt. comm.* 14, 12); πρὸς τοῦτο δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ σωτὴρ, διδάσκων ἡμᾶς δῶρον εἶναι τὸ διδόμενον ἀπὸ θεοῦ τὴν παντελὴ καθάρευσιν, καὶ οὐ μόνον ἀσκήσει παραγινόμενον ἀλλὰ μετ’ εὐχῶν πολλῶν ὑπὸ θεοῦ διδόμενον, τὸ οὐ πάντες χωροῦσι τὸν λόγον, ἀλλ’ οἷς δέδοται (25).

Δίδαξον ἡμᾶς, ὡς θέλεις, δίδασκε δέ·  
Τίς ἡ Τριάς μοι, πῶς ἐνίζεται Θεός (310)

Καὶ τέμνετ' αὐθις, ἐν σέβας, φύσις μία,  
Μονὰς Τριάς τε, ἀγγέλων δὲ τίς φύσις  
Κόσμου τε δισσοῦ καὶ προνοίας ἐνδίκου  
(Κᾶν πολλὰ μὴ δίκαια τοῖς πλείστοις δοκῇ)·  
Ψυχῆς τε σώματος τε τίς λόγος, νόμων (315)

Πρώτου τε δευτέρου τε· σάρκωσις δὲ τίς  
Τοῦ καὶ νοητῶν πλείστον ἐξεστηκότος·  
Καὶ τῶν ἀνίσων μίξις εἰς δόξαν μίαν,  
Νέκρωσις εἰς ἔγερσιν, οὐρανὸν πάλιν,  
Ἀνάστασις δὲ καὶ κρίσις τίνος λόγου, (320)  
Ἦ τίς δικαίους, τίς δ' ἁμαρτωλοῖς βίος,  
(II, 1, 12, 309–321)

Teach us as you prefer, but teach,  
who is Trinity for me, how God is One (310)

and still distinct, one worship, one nature,  
monad and triad; which is the nature of angels,  
the duplicity of the world, the justice of Providence  
in spite of many injustices apparent to the majority  
and which is the relationship between soul and body (315)

and the first and second laws and what is incarnation,  
which exceeds by far any other object of knowledge,  
and the mixture of two natures in one glory,  
mortification resulting in awaking and heaven again,  
and what is the sense of resurrection and judgement, (320)  
which the life of the just, which of the wicked.

This list is a systematic presentation of the Christian faith, containing almost all of its basic tenets and then more: indeed, when the list is compared with the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds, some differences stand out. First, the creeds do not treat separately Jesus's earthly life and God the Son as a part of the Trinity; they also link the resurrection and last judgement to Jesus's life (ἐρχόμενον κρίναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς). Second, in the Constantinopolitan Creed the relationship between Old and New Testaments is only alluded to in relation to Jesus's resurrection (ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ κατὰ τὰς γραφάς) and the role of the Spirit (τὸ λαλήσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν). Third, the Constantinopolitan Creed has an ecclesiological clause (Εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν) and a sacramental one (ὁμολογοῦμεν ἐν βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν), both items completely lacking from Gregory's list. Fourth, Gregory's list contains many items left unaddressed by the creeds, such as the angels, the nature of the world, theodicy and providence, and anthropology. Therefore, this list cannot be linked to the creeds.

Gregory offers a systematic presentation of the Christian tenets in another instance—namely, the *Poemata arcana* (I, 1, 1–5; 7–9). These present an account of the faith very similar to our list: the Persons of the Trinity are examined in their relationship (I, 1, 1–3); then follows the world (I, 1, 4) and providence (I, 1, 5), the rational creatures, mainly the angels (I, 1, 7), the soul—namely, a rational creature in a body, man (I, 1, 8)—and finally

the relationship between the two Testaments and Jesus's incarnation (I, 1, 9). The list is almost complete; only a comprehensive and autonomous treatment of the *novissima* is lacking. This means that, as usual, Gregory is implying that he is the best example of the kind of teaching he is proposing. However, it still leaves open the question of whether he was the first to organise Christian dogma in this way or if he has a source.

The answer is found, of course, in Origen. Although the prospect of faith presented at the beginning of the *De principiis* does not correspond with Gregory's list, the order of the subjects in the body of the treatise—at least in the form witnessed by Rufinus's translation—corresponds so perfectly that one could employ Gregory's lines as the index for Origen's work. In his *praefatio*, Origen distinguishes apostolic preaching from ecclesiastical tradition<sup>146</sup>. Apostolic preaching is composed of God the Father and Creator, the God of the Old and New Testaments; the Son, as Logos and Christ incarnated, dead, resurrected, ascended, and returning to judge; the Holy Spirit (*praef.* 4); and the soul, merits, demerits and their retribution in the afterlife, and the resurrection of the bodies (*praef.* 5). Ecclesiastical preaching entails free will (*praef.* 5); the devil and his angels (*praef.* 6); the end of the world (*praef.* 7); the divine inspiration of Scripture and its occult meaning (*praef.* 8); and the good angels (*praef.* 10). Interspersed in this exposition, Origen presents themes still undecided by the church, promising to discuss them.

Here is the correspondence between Gregory's list and the contents of the *De principiis*:

II, 1, 12, 309–321	Origen, <i>De principiis</i>
God as Triunity (310–312) <sup>147</sup>	<i>De deo</i> (1, 1) <i>De Christo</i> (without incarnation) (1, 2) <i>De Spiritu Sancto</i> (1, 3–4)

<sup>146</sup> On this distinction, Behr 2017, xxxix–xlvi.

<sup>147</sup> Over against Gregory's keen interest in Trinitarian question, even in relation to the episcopate, it is worth noting the lack of references to them in Ephrem's poems. The only, disputed, reference is found at CN 13, 3: "Three priests, three treasurers, / who steadfast keep // the key of "trinity" [*tlitāyūtā*], / three gates opened up for us, // each one of them with his key / opened his gate in his time." The problem is that in the following stanza the bishops use the "key of trinity" to usher historical incidents related to Nisibis' position in the Persian-Roman war, which is difficult to link to "Trinity" in the dogmatic sense of the word. However, the term *tlitāyūtā* seems to be used mainly for the Trinity, and Ephrem too employs it in this sense in four cases (*hymn. fid.* 18, 4, 3; 73, 2, 1; 21, 2 and *comm. in Gen.* 2, 34). In another instance, *tlitāyūtā* indicates a period of three days during the Creation of the world (*comm. in Gen.* 1, 9), and such a meaning would fit perfectly CN 13, 3, where the three bishops define three periods of time (*zabn-eh* at line 6) in Nisibis' life. Finally, the word *tlitāyā*, literally "third", can be used to mean "third party", "mediator". Therefore, it is equally employed for the Holy Spirit (as third Person of the Trinity) and for Christ (as "mediator" for humanity), as well as for the bishop, mediator of his community. Hence, *tlitāyūtā*, as the abstract name derived from *tlitāyā*, may as well be translated "episcopate", "intermediation", and much more so since the stanza employs the image of the bishop as steward administering the master's treasury through the key. I fail to see a deciding factor among these three interpretations of the word, yet in any case one cannot argue for a keen interest in the theme of Trinity on the part of Ephrem in the poems on bishops.

(continued)

II, 1, 12, 309–321	Origen, <i>De principiis</i>
The angels (312)	<i>De rationabilibus naturis</i> (1, 5–6)
The world, intelligible and material (313)	<i>De caelestibus</i> (= the stars) (1, 7) <i>De angelis</i> (1, 8)
Theodicy (313–314)	<i>De mundo</i> (2, 1–3)
Man as composite of soul and body (315)	
Relationship between Old and New Testament (315–316)	<i>Quia unus est deus legis et prophetarum et domini nostri Iesu Christi Pater</i> (2, 4–5)
Incarnation (316–318)	<i>De incarnatione Christi</i> (2, 6)
Death, resurrection, ascension of Christ (319)	
	<i>De Spiritu Sancto</i> (2, 7) <i>De anima</i> (2, 8)
<i>Novissima</i> : resurrection, last judgement, heaven and hell, the end (320–322)	<i>De mundo et motibus rationabilium creaturis</i> (2, 9) <i>De iudicio</i> (2, 10) <i>De repromissionibus</i> (2, 11) <i>De arbitrii libertate</i> (3, 1) <i>De contrariis potestatibus</i> (3, 2–3) <i>De humanis temptationibus</i> (3, 4) <i>Quod mundum tempore coeperit et finem speret</i> (3, 5) <i>De consummatione</i> (3, 6) <i>Quod Scripturae divinitus inspiratae sunt</i> (4, 1) <i>Quomodo oportet legere et intellegere Scripturas</i> (4, 2–3) Summary (4, 4)

Admittedly, there are some minor differences: Gregory's insistence on Trinitarian doctrine as opposed to Origen's separated treatment of the Three Persons reflects the evolution of this dogma in the fourth century; anthropology is treated repeatedly by Origen, partly under the heading of "rational beings" and "world" (*princ.* 1, 5–6 and 2, 1–3) and more in detail later, as a prelude to the *novissima* (*princ.* 2, 4–5); similarly, the Holy Spirit is reprised at *princ.* 2, 7; moreover, the third book preserves a long discussion of free will and moral progress, which, however, can be justified as a defence of God's judgement and so is correctly put among the *novissima* (3, 1–4); finally, *princ.* 4 contains a discussion of Scripture. Gregory avoids these repetitions, because in the context of his poem he is not interested in reproducing Origen's double cycle of "theology" and "economy", each divided into "apostolic preaching" and "ecclesiastical tradition". Furthermore, the discussion of Scripture is condensed in the idea of the relationship between Old and New Testaments.

These differences notwithstanding, it is certain that Gregory is alluding to Origen here, because the separation of the treatment of the Son (II, 1, 12, 310–312; *princ.* 1, 2) and of Christ incarnated (II, 1, 12, 316–318; *princ.* 2, 6) is unique to Origen. Moreover, one cannot understand why Gregory mentioned Providence or theodicy in the same breath with the corporeal constitution of man (313–315) if one does not take into account Ori-

gen's idea of the material life of the souls as divinely disposed; it is through this idea that the government of the world by divine Providence and the fact that human beings must live in a body are treated together in *princ.* 2, 1–3. Another analogy between the two is that Gregory, in introducing the incarnation, says σάρκωσις δὲ τίς / τοῦ καὶ νοητῶν πλεῖστον ἐξεστηκότος (316–317), highlighting its mysterious nature, which defies rational interpretation; similar formulations on the incarnation are found at *De principiis* 2, 6, 2:

*Verum ex omnibus de eo miraculis et magnificis illud penitus admirationem humanae mentis excedit, nec invenit mortalis intelligentiae fragilitas, quomodo sentire vel intelligere possit. . . . Fortassis etiam totius creaturae caelestium virtutum eminentior est sacramenti istius explanatio.*

The similarities lie in the reference to “mind” and “intelligence” (νοητῶν, *mentis*, *intelligentiae*) and in the expressions of excellence construed with the preposition ἐκ (in Latin *ex*; see ἐξεστηκότος, *excedit*, *eminentior*; this last word being a comparative may point to something like Gregory's πλεῖστον). Finally, it is curious that, as Gregory alluded to Plato's *Gorgias* by way of the images of cookery and cosmetics, Origen begins the *prae-fatio* of the *De principiis* with a quote from Plato's *Gorgias*, the participles πεπιστευκότες καὶ πεπεισμένοι (Plat. *Gorg.* 454E and Eusebius's *Against Marcellus* 1, 4, 26): both theologians borrow from Socrates's criticism of rhetoric to introduce Christianity as the true philosophy (Rufinus's translation has the word *scientiam* in the same sentence, and Socrates in *Gorgias* is contrasting πίστις and ἐπιστήμη).

To sum up the results of this analysis, Gregory finds very problematic the spread of heresies of his times, which—in his opinion—demands that bishops should be teachers and should be educated for this task, something they currently are not. Gregory's ideal education corresponds to Origen's intellectual project: a wide scriptural science, bringing together all instruments of contemporary *paideia* (mainly linguistics and philosophy) to meditate on Scripture, at the same time leaving the door open for the inspiration coming from the Spirit—that is, uniting asceticism to education. Between Origen and Gregory there are two main differences: first and foremost, Gregory is engaged in a farther-reaching dialogue with pagan *paideia*, because he does not limit himself to engaging philosophy, but also consults literature (that is, rhetoric); hence—and here is the second point—Gregory is more ambiguous in his stance towards classical tradition, as if he was more of an insider of that tradition than Origen—who could, after all, pose as an “alien wise”. This was no longer a possibility for Gregory, after Julian's attack against the “uneducated Nazarenes”.

### 3.1.4 Spiritual father II: Moral leadership

Gregory's interest in doctrine notwithstanding, our poems emphasise much more the disciplinary role the bishops are supposed to undertake. This task has different facets: on a very general level, the bishop should make sure that his community is morally upright; on a more detailed level, the bishop oversaw the administration of penance

and communion, thereby regulating the admission to the community<sup>148</sup>. These functions made it desirable for the bishop to possess certain qualities and demanded that he perform certain acts: traditionally, the bishop was asked to be virtuous, in order to teach not only with words but most of all by example, and to be meek, since his administration of penance must not result in people leaving the church for his exceeding strictness<sup>149</sup>.

### 3.1.4.1 The epos of the church (II, 1, 13, 27–74)

Gregory connects these traditional themes, once again, with his historical diagnosis of the state of the church. If in regard to doctrine the extraordinary spread of heresies inside the church called for more theological education of bishops, then similarly, as regards morality the church is plagued—this is Gregory's take—by wicked bishops in an unprecedented proportion; the main reason for this problem is the defective process for selecting bishops. This insight, often repeated, is placed inside a grandiose and sweeping view of history, aptly presented in the epic poem II, 1, 13. I will examine the narrative part of this poem (27–74), beginning with Gregory's expression of anguish at the current state of the church (27–42), then discussing his take on sacred history, meant to causally explain this state (43–58), and finally explaining his interpretation of what is happening, expressed through biblical typology (59–74).

It all begins when Gregory notes the chaos of ecclesiastical struggles, which stridently contrasts with the church's vocation and its beginnings:

Σῶμα μέγα Χριστοῦ, τὸ τίμιον εὖχος ἀνακτος,  
 Λαὸς ὅλης γαίης βασιλῆϊος, ἔθνος ἀπιστον,  
 Ἦν ὅτ' ἔην. Νῦν αὖτε Θεοῦ κτέαρ ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα  
 Σείεται, οἷά τε κύμα πολυσμαράγιοι θαλάσσης, (30)  
 Ἦ ἐφυτὸν ζαμενέσσι τινασσόμενον ἀνέμοισι.  
 Λαὸς ὅδ', ὃ Θεὸς ἦλθεν ἀπ' οὐρανίου θωώκου,  
 Κύδος ἐὼν θνητοῖσιν ἐνὶ σπλάγχνοισι κενώσας,  
 Καὶ μίχθη μερόπεσσι, Θεὸς βροτὸς εἰς ἐν ἀγερθεῖς,  
 Καὶ μέγαν ὦνον ἔδωκε παθῶν δέμας, αἷμα τε θεῖον (35)  
 Ὑψιον ἡμετέρης κακίης χέεν, ἄλλα τε πολλὰ  
 Θύματα, τοὺς μετέπειτα λόγον σπεύραντας ἅπασι.  
 Καὶ γλυκεροῦ θανάτοιο πικρῆς χερὸς ἀντιάσαντας,  
 Ὡς κε λόγῳ τίσωσι Λόγον Θεόν, αἵματι δ' αἶμα.  
 Τίς δονέει τόδε σῶμα; πόθεν τόσον ἄχθος ἔμοιγε; (40)  
 Πῶς δέ τε σὺς μονόφορβος ἐμήν δηλήσαθ' ἁλώην;  
 Πῶς μήνη σκοτέεσσα τόσον κλέος ἀμφεκάλυψε;  
 (II, 1, 13, 27–42)

148 Rapp 2000, 381; Rapp 2005, 24.

149 Rapp 2000, 380, 382; Rapp 2005, 25–26, 30–31, 55, 96; Rapp 2009, 76–77, 80.



Christ's great body, the Lord's pride and glory,  
 a kingly people from the whole earth, a nation beyond belief  
 was **once**; **now instead** God's property is shaken  
 to and fro, like a swell in the roaring sea, (30)  
 or a plant quaking through raging winds.

This people, for whom God came from his heavenly throne  
 and emptied his glory in the bowels of a mortal  
 and mixed with mankind, God and mortal in one conjoined,  
 and, suffering, gave his body as a great price, his divine blood (35)  
 poured as restitution of our sin, and many other  
 victims, those who later sowed everywhere the gospel

and from a bitter hand accepted a sweet death,  
 thereby paying God the Word with word, his blood with blood.  
 Who is disturbing this body? Whence such a burden for me? (40)  
 How come a lone-grazing boar spoils my vineyard?  
 How come a shadowy night conceals such splendour?

These first lines of this first part introduce the theme: lines 27–29 address the church in an almost hymnic way through a series of periphrases, culminating in the verb in 29, “was once” (ἦν ὅτ’ ἔην). Such a construction, with its biblical allusions, highlights the contrast between what the church *should* be and was and what she has become<sup>150</sup>. The previous state is characterised by unity (the “body”), quantity (μέγα, ὅλης γαίης, ἔθνος ἅπιστον), and glory (τίμιον εὖχος, βασιλῆϊος): these attributes, normally employed for political power, are here used to delineate a religious triumph. The nexus of “was once” and “Now instead” (ἦν ὅτ’ ἔην. Νῦν αὖτε) makes clear the downfall from a previous, utopic state<sup>151</sup>.

The main problem decried by Gregory is chaos, an effect of contemporary struggles: the situation is vividly painted by the images of the wave and of the plant shaken by the wind in 30–31 and again decried with four tragic questions, each provided with its own metaphor (40–42). The double simile of 30–31 has a clear model in Homer’s description of the Achaean assembly (ἀγορή) in turmoil, a theme particularly apt for describing the assembly of the church<sup>152</sup>. Lines 40–42 contain four questions, the former two of which

<sup>150</sup> The series of epithets (σῶμα μέγα Χριστοῦ, τίμιον εὖχος ἀνακτος, λαὸς ὅλης γαίης βασιλῆϊος, ἔθνος ἅπιστον) alludes to NT passages such as 1Petr. 2:9 (γένος ἐκλεκτὸν, βασιλεῖον θεράπευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν) while at the same time employing classical phraseology: λαὸς . . . βασιλῆϊος is similar to βασιλῆϊον γένος, employed of Telemachus at Hom. *Od.* 16, 401; the expression ἔθνος ἅπιστον in the sense of “unbelievable” for its number (and not “unreliable”) is found at Appian. *b. civ.* 1, 1, 10 but similar expressions—πλήθος ἅπιστον is particularly meaningful in this respect—are found all over historiography (πλήθος ἅπιστον—for example, at Thuc. 3, 113, 6; Diod. Sic. 1, 41, 7; 2, 16, 14; 3, 15, 4; 5, 10, 2; 26, 2 and *passim*).

<sup>151</sup> The nexus seems to be a favourite of Gregory: see also II, 2, 7, 232. It is his invention, since the clause ἦν ὅτε ἦν (or ἔην) is never found in poetry outside Gregory’s hexameters (see also *Anth. Gr.* 8, 143, 4; 178, 1; the only exceptions are a Christian poem on papyrus (see Cougny 1890, 339 [3, 390]) and a riddle (Cougny 1890, 569 [7, 27, 22]), but both may be inspired by Gregory. However, the nexus imitates Homeric expressions: ὥς ποτ’ ἔον· νῦν αὖτε (Hom. *Il.* 23, 643); ἦα πάρος, νῦν αὖτε (Hom. *Od.* 19, 549).

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Θεοῦ κτέαρ ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα / Σείεται, οἷά τε κύμα πολυσμαράγιοι θαλάσσης, / Ἢ φυτόν ζαμένεσσι τινασσόμενον ἀνέμοισι. (II, 1, 13, 29–31) with κινήθη δ’ ἀγορὴ φηὶ κύματα μακρὰ θαλάσσης / πόντου

inquire about the culprit responsible for the church's ruin (τίς; πόθεν), while the latter seem to ask how this state of affairs has come to be (πῶς, twice). Nor are these authentic questions, since Gregory already knows the information he is asking for; rather, they serve—as he often does in his writings—to define the theme upon which he will speak next. However—and herein lies the resemblance with tragic speech—they also convey his emotional stance towards the matter at hand: in this case, one of indignation and rage. Therefore, they belong, in Mastronarde's classification of tragic questions, to the category of “apistetic” and “epiplectic” questions<sup>153</sup>. Between 30–31 and 40–42, Gregory recalls the reason why Christians—the people he is talking of—were in such a blessed state to begin with: recalling Christ's work on earth and the church of the martyrs serves to sharpen the contrast with the current situation. The choice of chaos and agitation as the main problem, instead of heresy or immorality, betrays something of Gregory's situation and aims, because he had to renounce his post in Constantinople precisely because of a struggle between bishops, a struggle in which, formally, no charges of heresy or immorality were brought<sup>154</sup>. Hence, Gregory is going to blame the bishops for their discord: to the same strategy belongs the insistence on the church as “body” (σῶμα, 27 and 40), because it makes internal strife even more hideous; the same tactic is employed by Ephrem in relation to Valgash (see §2.1.2.2).

The following section (43–58), in which Gregory answers his tragic questions, has already been examined (§2.1.2.1): the poet argues that the devil is the real culprit of this situation, inserting it in the history of salvation. He echoes his own epic treatment of Adam's ban from paradise by hand of the devil in order to demonstrate the hostility Satan has always nurtured against the human race. In this way, the current situation is framed inside an ancient and always valid notion. The element of novelty is given by the fact that, after the conversion of the whole world, Satan resolved to turn to cunning instead of violence (which he had used against the martyrs) and to hit the

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Ἰκαρίοιο, τὰ μὲν τ' Εὐρώς τε Νότος τε / ὥρορ' ἐπαίξας πατὴρ Διὸς ἐκ νεφελῶν. / ὥς δ' ὅτε κίνησι Ζέφυρος βαθὺ λήϊον ἐλθὼν / λάβρος ἐπαιγίζων, ἐπὶ τ' ἡμῦν ἀσταχύεσσιν, / ὥς τῶν πᾶσ' ἀγορὴ κινήθη (Hom. *Il.* 2, 144–149). There are many analogies between these two passages: the subject of the simile is a collective of people in turmoil, the two similes describe the same phenomena, namely waves in the sea and the wind moving plants, and there are even some detail in common, such as the metrical position of the word θαλάσσης, the idea of oscillating movement in the waves (ἐνθα καὶ ἐνθα; τὰ μὲν τ' Εὐρώς τε Νότος τε), the attribute of the wind expressing its power (ζαμενέεσσι; λάβρος). Obviously, both similes have many parallels in Homer's and Gregory's oeuvres (see Frangeskou 1985). The nexus ζαμενέεσσι τινασόμενον ἀνέμοισι is similar to Hom. *Od.* 5, 368: ὥς δ' ἄνεμος ζαῖς ἦων θημῶνα τινάξει (but see also Sapph. *frag.* 47 V.). The expression πολυσμαράγιο θαλάσσης comes from Oppian. *cyneg.* 2, 138.

<sup>153</sup> For the classification of tragic questions, see Mastronarde 1979, 7–18. The verb δονέω reminds Sappho's *frag.* 130 V. (as in *frag.* 47 V., with the verb τινάσσω, here the subject is Ἔρως and the object the poet). The image of the σὺς μονόφορβος has already been analysed (§2.2.2). As regards the image of the new moon, the best parallel is Oppian. *halieut.* 4, 65–67.

<sup>154</sup> Later on in the poem he writes: πρόφασις Τριάς ἐστι, τὸ δ' ἀτρεκέξ, ἔχθος ἄπιστον (II, 1, 13, 161), making clear that doctrine is not at issue. For more: §5.2.5.

leaders instead of the people at large: here Gregory inserted general considerations on the decisive role leaders play in any collective of people (§2.1.2.1).

From the point of view of style, it is notable that the history of salvation is here presented as a military campaign, with the devil as a military enemy devising plans to conquer the opponent's army: this gives an epic allure to the passage. The Son's divine glory and the church itself had already become, respectively, *κῦδος* (33, a metaphor for *δόξα*) and *κλέος* (42), two keywords of Homeric warrior ethics. Moreover, the church is compared to an army (51–53), whereas in the parallel passage at II, 1, 12, 642–646 she is compared to a people (*δῆμος*) or a city (*πόλις*):

II, 1, 12, 642–646	II, 1, 13, 43; 51–53
Τοιαῦτ' ἐν ἡμῖν ἰσχύειν τὸν βάσκανον. Οὕτω σοφίζετ' εὐστόχοις πονηρίαις, Ὅταν δῆμόν τιν' ἢ πόλιν πλῆξαι θέλῃ. (645) Πρὸς οἷς ἐκάστου πειράται, καὶ σύντομον Νόμον δίδωσι πονηρίας τὸν προστάτην	Λυσσῆεις, κακοεργὸς, ἐπεὶ, μερόπεσσι μεγάρων ... Δεύτερον εὖρατο μῆχος ἐπὶ κλοπον. Ὡς στρατὸν ἐγνώ Καρτερόν, ἡγητῆρσιν ὀλοῖον ἐμβαλεν ἔχθος. Καὶ γάρ, ἀγοῦ πίπτοντος, ὅλος στρατὸς ἐς χθόνα νεύει.
Such is the power of the Slanderer among us! Such subtle, shrewd tricks he plays whenever he wants to strike a city or a nation: (645) besides the individual temptations, he also gives the leader as a summary law of wickedness.	Rabid, malevolent, grudging mankind ... He found another wily means. Recognizing the power of the army, he threw a deadly enmity between its leaders. Thus, once the chief is fallen, the whole army declines.

The iambic poem treats the problem by employing the civic imagery of comedy, tragedy, and rhetoric, whereas the hexametric poem presents to us the epic vision of a military collective. Comparison of the passages brings out these different connotations. *Βάσκανος* (II, 1, 12, 642) is a term of abuse frequently used by Demosthenes and found also in Aristophanes<sup>155</sup>, but the epic poem has *μεγαίρων* (II, 1, 13, 43), a Homeric word, with the same meaning of “envying/envious” (going as far as “bewitching”). Moreover, the epic version expands on the attributes, adding *λυσσῆεις* and *κακοεργὸς*. Similarly, *σοφίζετ' εὐστόχοις πονηρίαις* (643) is a prosaic version of *εὖρατο μῆχος ἐπὶ κλοπον* (II, 1, 13, 51), the idea of cunning being conveyed in the two passages by *σοφίζομαι* and by *ἐπὶ κλοπος*, which, like *πονηρία*, also expresses the idea of knavery, while *μῆχος* and *εὐστοχος* give the idea of accuracy. Interestingly, the devil's resource is slightly different in the two cases: against the church conceived as a city, the devil gives a “law of knavery” (*νόμον* . . . *πονηρίας*, II, 1, 12, 646), while against the church as army he gives a “deadly enmity” (*ὀλοῖον ἔχθος*, II, 1, 13, 52), an expression with powerful Homeric

155 Demosth. *or.* 18, 132, 142, 317; 21, 209; Aristoph. *equ.* 103.

resonances<sup>156</sup>. From a structural point of view, the fact that the devil's plotting is presented in the context of Gregory's historical analysis contributes to the narrative sense of a conflict, and therefore to epic associations, whereas in the iambic poem the same considerations are developed en passant, among other arguments against letting neophytes into the episcopate.

As regards the contents, Gregory's analysis of the moral situation aligns with his account of the doctrinal situation, in that both view the church falling from a previous state of grace—represented by apostolic simplicity and by the martyrs' victory—into a present state of trouble—represented by doctrinal struggles and strife between the bishops. The parallel between this pattern and the fall of Adam, explicitly drawn by the poet, suggests something of a cyclical movement: the pride before the fall, then God's grace and rescue, then again pride and a renewed fall.

In the last part of Gregory's narration (59–74), biblical typology serves to express this pattern. It is worthwhile to compare the passage with a passage of II, 1, 12 of similar function and content:

II, 1, 13, 59–74	II, 1, 12, 355–367
<p>Πρόσθε μὲν ἀνδροφόνουσι φυγῆς πτολίεθρα τέτακτο, (60) Καὶ χώρος τις ἔην ἀποπομπαίοις θυέεσσι, Καὶ τις καὶ πικρὴς καὶ αἵματος ὕστατίοισιν ἡμᾶσιν, οἳ Χριστοῦτο κακόφρονες ἐξεκένωσαν Μισθὸν ἀτιμήτιο κακὸν καὶ τυτθὸν ἔχοντες, Οὐ τι μὲν ἐξ ἀέκοντος, ἐπεὶ Θεὸς ἐστὶν ἀληπτος (65) Χεῖρεσιν, εὗτ' ἐθέλησιν· ἀτάρ γε μὲν ἐξεκένωσαν. Νῦν δ' ἓνα χώρον ἴσασιν ἀτασθαλὴς τε μόρου τε Πάντες, ὅσοι ξεῖνοί τε καὶ ἔρκεος ἡμετέροιο, Τὸ σεπτὸν τοπάρουθε σοφῶν ἔδος, ἔρκος ἀρίστων, Βῆμα τόδ' ἀγγελικῆσι χοροστασίῃσι τεθληδός, (70) Κιγκλίδα τὴν μεσάτην κόσμων δύο, τοῦδε μένοντος, Τοῦ τε παριπταμένου, θεῶν ὄρον, ἡμερίων τε. Ἦν ὅτε ἦν. Νῦν αὖτε γελοῖον, ἡνίκά πᾶσιν Ἐντὸς ἀκληῖστοιο θύρης δρόμος, ὥς δοκέω μοι Κήρυκος βοδώντος ἐνὶ μεσάτοισιν ἀκούειν·</p>	<p>(355) Ἦδη σχεδὸν τι τῆς ὅλης οἰκουμένης Οἶαν λαβόντες ἐκ Θεοῦ σωτηρίαν, Ὡς σφόδρα χρώμεθ' ἀναξίοις τοῖς προστάταις. Βοήσομ' οὐ ψευδῇ μὲν, οὐχ ἡδιστα δέ. Σκηνὴ τις, οἶμαι, παίζειτ' εὐπρεπεστέρα· (360) Νῦν τὰ προσωπεῖα, τὰ πρόσωπα δ' ὑστερον. Αἰσχύνουμ' εἰπεῖν, ὥς ἔχει, φράσω δ' ὁμως. Ταχθέντες εἶναι τοῦ καλοῦ διδάσκαλοι Κακῶν ἀπάντων ἐσμέν ἐργαστήριον, Σιγῇ βοῶντες, κἂν δοκῶμεν μὴ λέγειν· (365) Πρόεδρος ἡ κακία· πονεῖτω μηδὲ εἷς· Κακοὶ γίνεσθε, τοῦτο συντομώτατον Καὶ λῶσον. ἡ δὲ πρᾶξις ἵσταται νόμος.</p>

156 Beginning with Hom. *Il.* 1, 1, the μῆνιν . . . οὐλομένην dividing Achilles and Agamemnon and bringing ruin to the Achaeans, but also the discord between Menelaus and Agamemnon caused by Athena and described by Nestor at *Od.* 3, 135–136: μήνιος ἐξ ὅλοῃς γλαυκῶπιδος ὀβριμοπάτρης, / ἥ τ' ἔριν Ἀτρεΐδῃσι μετ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἔθηκε. See §5.2.5.

(continued)

**II, 1, 13, 59–74**

In the past a city was assigned as exile for the murderers, (60) and a place to send the scapegoat to, and also one of bitterness and blood in the last days, whither those who despised Christ gushed out, having the scarce and petty price of the Priceless, and not from One unwilling, since God is intangible (65) to the hands, if he wants; and nevertheless they gushed out. But now one is the place known for wickedness and doom by everyone, the strangers as well as our fellow believers, the former august seat of the wise, hedge of the best, this stage thriving with angelic choirs, (70) the midmost gate between two worlds, the perennial and the one flying away, boundary of gods and mortals. Such was once; now instead 'tis ludicrous, as everyone is given way inside through an open door, so that I seem to hear a herald shouting in the town square:

**II, 1, 12, 355–367**

(355) What a salvation we have received from God, one that spread already almost to the whole world, and nevertheless what utterly worthless leaders we have! I won't speak falsely, yea, but neither pleasantly. Alas, what a specious scene is played: (360) Personages now, and the persons later. It is shameful to say how things are, and still I'm going to say it. Appointed to be teachers of virtue, we are the workshop of every vice, silently screaming even when appearing not to talk: (365) "Wickedness presides: let no one labour, be wicked instead, 'tis the shortest and best way: action lays down the law."

In II, 1, 13, the poet repeats the scheme of a "before" and an "after", but in a more complex fashion. The idea of a previous state of grace and a present state of decadence is still present in the second part of the passage (66–74), where Gregory in a triadic movement describes the change: first, he introduces the theme of the current (Νῦν δέ, 66) infamy of the church (66–67); then, he gives a contrasting subject to his predication, describing what the church was (τοπάρποιθε, 68) and should be (68–71); finally, he turns to the contemporary, fallen state of the institution with his trademark nexus Ἦν ὅτε ἦν. Νῦν αὖτε (see note 151).

The same scheme, though in a less complex rendition, is employed in II, 1, 12, 362–364. First, note that the remark is inserted in the same historical schema as in II, 1, 13, because Gregory recalls at the beginning (355–356) the history of salvation: compare σχεδόν τι τῆς ὅλης οἰκουμένης / Οἶαν λαβόντες ἐκ Θεοῦ σωτηρίαν in II, 1, 12, 355–356 with σπινθήρ δὲ λόγου, καὶ πυρσὸς ἀερθεῖς, / Πᾶσαν ἐπέδραμε γαῖαν αἰδίδμος in II, 1, 13, 48–49, both referring to the spread of the Christian faith causing persecutions to stop<sup>157</sup>.

<sup>157</sup> Note the epic rewriting: generic ἐκ Θεοῦ σωτηρίαν (II, 1, 12, 356) is expressed with the metaphor of fire (σπινθήρ δὲ λόγου, καὶ πυρσὸς, II, 1, 13, 48; σπινθήρ only once in Homer, in a simile, *Il.* 4, 77) and the attribute αἰδίδμος, a favourite of Pindar (Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 172, s.v. αἰδίδμος); the verb ἐπιτρέχω (II, 1, 13, 49) to mean "spread over" of a fluid substance such as smell, light or fog is eminently epic (Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 668, s.v. ἐπιτρέχω, II.2); instead of the prosaic οἰκουμένη (II, 1, 12, 355), the poetic γαῖα (II, 1, 13, 49; Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 335, s.v. γαῖα).

Second, the initial state of the church is expressed in similar terms when Gregory stresses the wisdom of its prelates and, consequently, their teaching function (σοφῶν ἔδος, II, 1, 13, 68 and τοῦ καλοῦ διδάσκαλοι, II, 1, 12, 362). Moreover, in both texts the description of the current state of the church employs the same spatial metaphor, with the prosaic and unsavoury-sounding ἐργαστήριον κακῶν ἀπάντων at II, 1, 12, 363 and the epic-sounding χώρον . . . ἀτασθαλίας τε μόρου τε at II, 1, 13, 66<sup>158</sup>. Finally, both passages serve as a bridge towards an invective against the bishops, and both employ a *prosopopoiia* as a framing device: The motif of the public announcement, given by a κῆρυξ in II, 1, 13 and betrayed by the bishops' behaviour at II, 1, 12, is strikingly similar. The image is powerful because it personifies the message that the bishop's behaviour sends, compelling the reader/hearer to confront that message as a very concrete voice; it is an effective and creative use of this scholastic exercise (see §3.3.2).

The main difference between these two passages is that at II, 1, 12 Gregory is concerned only with bad bishops. His description of the ideal state of the church through the expression Ταχθέντες εἶναι τοῦ καλοῦ διδάσκαλοι (362) focuses on the task the bishops have been assigned and how *they* are falling short of it. On the contrary, Gregory's concern in II, 1, 13 is the church at large, and it is only because the bishops are the aim of Satan's new strategy that they acquire such an importance. Gregory highlights this causal link between church and bishops through his reprise of the Ἦν ὅτε ἦν. Νῦν αὖτε nexus, which served to describe the decadence of the community in line 29 and now describes the decadence of priesthood in line 72. That the poet is referring to priesthood in these lines is demonstrated by his description of its ideal state, which corresponds to Gregory's idea that the priest should mediate between people and God (§2.1.3.1; §3.1.2; §3.2.2.3). The expressions ἔρκος (67–68), βῆμα (69), and κιγκλῖς (70) suggest Gregory is not speaking of the church at large, but rather of the chancel (in Greek βῆμα) delimited by altar rails (κιγκλῖς) and thus, by metonymy, of the priests, who alone were permitted to step into the chancel. This idea of seclusion for the priests is highlighted by the expression τὸ σεπτὸν σοφῶν ἔδος (68). The fact that the chancel is described as “thriving with angelic choirs” (ἀγγελικῇσι χοροστασίησι τεθελός, 69) suggests a liturgical action, because of the idea that the liturgy on earth corresponded with and participated in the eternal liturgy in heaven, so that the angels were believed to be present at the liturgy with the celebrating priest<sup>159</sup>. Finally, the idea of mediation is explicitly referred to: the altar rail is defined as μεσάτην κόσμων δύο, τοῦδε μένοντος, / Τοῦ τε παριπταμένιοι, θεῶν ὄρον, ἡμερίων τε (70–71). This no doubt refers to its dividing the people from the priests and angels, with the priests joining the angels in the

<sup>158</sup> On the Homeric allusion behind the term ἀτασθαλίη, see §5.2.3.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. the last clause of the preface of the Antiochian liturgy in the *Const. apost.* 8, 12, 27: σὲ προσκυνοῦσιν ἀνάριθμοι στρατιαὶ ἀγγέλων, ἀρχαγγέλων, κυριοτήτων, θρόνων, ἀρχῶν, ἐξουσιῶν, δυνάμεων, στρατιῶν αἰωνίων· τὰ Χερουβὶμ καὶ τὰ ἑξαπτέρυγα Σεραφίμ ... λέγοντα ἅμα χιλίαις χιλιάσιν ἀρχαγγέλων καὶ μυρίαις μυριάσιν ἀγγέλων ἀκαταπαύστως καὶ ἀσιγήτως βοώσαις, καὶ πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἅμα εἰπάτω· Ἄγιος, ἅγιος, ἅγιος Κύριος Σαβαώθ κτλ.

ranks of the θεοί, a reference to Ps. 81, which makes their downfall seem more deplorable. However, if the κινκλῖς is to be taken as metonymically referring to the priesthood, its role of μεσάτη should have far more weight, suggesting that the priest is “midmost between two worlds, the perennial / and the one flying away, boundary of gods and mortals”. After all, the word μεσάτος also means “mediator”, “arbiter”.

Gregory inserts the scheme of decadence in a wider historical context in II, 1, 13 than in II, 1, 12, by invoking analogous situations from a past even more remote than the previous state of grace—namely, the asylum cities of Old Testament laws, the specific place to which the scapegoat was released, and the Akeldama from the New Testament<sup>160</sup>. Such past examples show the contemporary church in the worst possible light. Even though formally these images are introduced as rhetorical *exempla*, the fact that they all come from the Bible and that the first two come from the Old Testament while the last comes from the New suggests a typological relationship between all these places: the Potter’s Field and Judas’s death are prefigured in the asylum cities and in the scapegoat, and they then prefigure the decadence of the church and the betrayal of the episcopate. Thus, one can understand whence came the seemingly cyclical view of history presupposed by Gregory’s diagnosis of the contemporary episcopate: it is the practice of typological interpretation of the Bible that produces cyclical accounts of historical events, most of all when biblical stories are employed to clarify contemporary events with the deep conviction that contemporary history is in continuity with biblical stories<sup>161</sup>.

As regards the matter at hand—the moral state of the episcopacy in Gregory’s time—this scheme serves to corroborate the idea that, after the persecutions ceased and the great majority of the empire was converted, moral (and doctrinal) problems arose that were never seen before. Obviously, there is much to this picture that the modern historian may find fault with, but I shall only highlight one detail: Gregory of course describes a change from a previous to a new state, and he does so by explaining how the devil

**160** For the cities of refuge, see: Ex. 21:13; Num. 35:11–12; Dtn. 4:41–42; 19:2–10; Jos. 20:1–3. For the scapegoat: Lev. 16:10; 21–22. For the Akeldama, Gregory draws clearly from Act. 1:18–19: οὗτος μὲν οὖν ἐκτίσας χωρίον ἐκ μισθοῦ τῆς ἀδικίας καὶ πρηνὴς γενόμενος ἐλάκησεν μέσος καὶ ἐξεχύθη πάντα τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ· καὶ γνωστὸν ἐγένετο πᾶσιν τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν Ἰερουσαλὴμ, ὥστε κληθῆναι τὸ χωρίον ἐκεῖνο τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ αὐτῶν Ἀκελδαμά, τοῦτ’ ἐστὶν χωρίον αἵματος. Χωρίον is rendered by Gregory as χώρος at line 60; αἵματος is preserved at 61, as well as μισθοῦ τῆς ἀδικίας as μισθὸν κακόν at 63; the gory detail of Judas’ death—ἐξεχύθη πάντα τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ—seems to me to be rendered by Gregory in the verb ἐξεκένωσαν, repeated twice at 62 and 66.

**161** One can see an extreme example of this kind of thinking in Gregory’s model of biblical exegesis and philosophy, Origen: the ubiquity of typological interpretation leads Origen to postulate an almost endless cycle of progressing worlds, each one re-enacting the basic scheme of Eden-Fall-Redemption on a higher ontological level than the previous one (on Origen’s concept of progress, see Lettieri 2000). Some scholars argue that a similar scheme was already embedded in the biblical narrative as a result of the Babylonian exile (e.g.: Halvorson/Taylor 2016). For the same cyclical view of history in Ephrem, see §4.1.2.

changed his strategy from one of open enmity, through the persecutions, to one of deception, through internal strife; and yet Gregory fails to pinpoint a precise moment when this change happened. There could be many candidates, from Constantine's conversion, to the death of Julian, who had renewed the persecutions, to the passage from Gregory the Elder's generation, when a bishop could still be a simple man, to Gregory of Nazianzus's own generation, when theology was fundamental, to the accession of Theodosius, ending Valens's persecutions of the Nicene party and enabling those same Nicene, whom Gregory addressed in the council, to take power. However, the vagueness of Gregory's description suggests that, far less than implying a particular moment, the poet is trying to latch on to an archetypal process, one that could be found at work in Scripture but also in Greek doctrines on the cycle of constitutions and the decline of empires.

### 3.1.4.2 A proto-Evagrian list of vices in Gregory (II, 1, 17, 83–88)

For all his attention to the historical process of moral decadence, Gregory spends surprisingly few words to address the type of moral leadership a bishop should exercise. As we shall see (§3.2; §5), much of his reflection on morality is either linked to asceticism and hence to his self-portrait or expressed in a negative way through invective against immoral prelates. The only summary I could find of the kind of moral discipline the bishop should impart is in the elegiac poem on the two forms of life:

Οὐ χόλον αἰχμάσας, οὐ σώματος αἰθομένοιο  
 Λύσσαν ἐπιψύξας, οὐ χέρα μαινομένην  
 Πᾶσιν ἐπ' ἄλλοτρίοισι, λόγου δεσμοῖσι πεδήσας, (85)  
 Οὐ ψευδῇ κραδίης δόξαν ἀποσκεδάσας,  
 Οὐ τύφον οἰδαίνοντα διδάγμασιν ἐς χθόνα ῥίψας  
 Οὐ πηγαῖς δακρύων δάκρυον ἐκκαλέσας.  
 (II, 1, 17, 83–88)

not wounding the rage, not quenching the fury  
 of the burning body, not fettering with reason  
 the hand raging all over other people's property, (85)  
 not scattering false conceit from the heart,  
 not throwing on the floor with teaching swelling delusion,  
 not calling forth tears with floods of tears

The passage occurs as Gregory describes the life of the immoral bishop, a life he is renouncing in order to retreat and live as an ascetic. In so doing, he implies that the other bishops are engaged in precisely such a life. This context explains why the statements in our passage are negative: Gregory lists here the omissions of the immoral bishop faced with his duties<sup>162</sup>.

Six actions are listed, five of which consist in curbing a behaviour or inner disposition, while the sixth encourages another behaviour. The person in whom the behav-

<sup>162</sup> On this peculiar technique of II, 1, 17, see §5.1.1.



iours should be curbed is not specified, and, apart from the sixth action, we could read the passage as a list of self-improvements required of the ascetic bishop. However, the sixth proposition, “calling forth tears with floods of tears” (88), implies a relationship between two or more people, since there would be no point in “calling forth tears” if one were already crying (“with floods of tears”). Hence, it is likely that the five remaining clauses point to the bishop’s relationship with the faithful in his congregation.

Regarding the list of curbed characters, there are details to be noted. First, rage (χόλος) is first in line, a witness to the ever-present fear of this antisocial emotion in a society with steep hierarchies<sup>163</sup>. Second, the list of vices has similarities with Evagrius’s “evil thoughts” (λογισμοί): χόλος corresponds to wrath (ὀργή or θυμός), the “fury of the body” (σώματος λύσσα) to lust and/or gluttony (πορνεία, γαστριμαργία), the “hand raging in what is not ours” (χέρα μαινομένην ἐπ’ ἄλλοτρίοις) to greed (φιλαργυρία). The role of the “false conceit” (ψευδής δόξα) and of the “swelling delusion” (τῦφος οἰδαίνων) is a bit more difficult to assess. In the case of ψευδής δόξα, the difficulty lies in the word δόξα, which can be intended in a doctrinal or in a moral sense. Pertaining to doctrine, ψευδής δόξα would correspond to heresy, but pertaining to morality, it would be a hexametric rewriting of the word κενοδοξία, “vainglory”. In this second sense, the expression would have more or less the same sense as the following τῦφος οἰδαίνων, meaning an ill-founded exaggeration of one’s own worth. If we consider that in Evagrius’s classification “pride” (ὑπερηφανία) and “vainglory” (κενοδοξία), though linked, are distinct, then it is possible that ψευδής δόξα corresponds to κενοδοξία and τῦφος οἰδαίνων to ὑπερηφανία<sup>164</sup>. In this case, five or six out of eight *logismoi* are present in the list; the remaining two, “bitterness” (λύπη) and “despondency” (ἀκηδία), seem more linked to anchoritic life, and therefore unlikely to be the object of the bishop’s action towards laymen<sup>165</sup>.

Another similarity between Gregory’s and Evagrius’s doctrine lies in the remedies. Gregory suggests that the Christian leader should oppose evil tendencies with their contrary: he should “wound” rage (αἰχμάσας, 83), as one wounds an enemy in battle<sup>166</sup>; he should “cool down”, “quench” (ἐπιψύξας, 84) the “burning body” (αἰθομένον σώματος); he should bind with fetters (δεσμοῖσι πεδήσας, 85) the hand of greed, and finally, he

<sup>163</sup> See Brown 1992, 48–58.

<sup>164</sup> See Evagr. Pont. mal. cog. 13–15.

<sup>165</sup> Evagr. Pont. mal. cog. 11. After all, Guillaumont/Guillaumont 1971, 63–84, based on a long discussion, concludes that Evagrius’ list of eight evil thoughts is his original development on a previous tradition, which can be traced through Stoicism, Gnosticism, New Testament and apocryphal Jewish writings until Origen (and, I would add, Gregory), of listing virtues and vices. And, of all thoughts in Evagrius’ list, the most original is indeed ἀκηδία, so that Gregory omitting it from his list here proves this originality. As regards Gregory’s list, maybe the passage nearest to his choice of vices and order comes from Origen: *unde mihi videtur esse infinitus quidam numerus contrariorum virtutum pro eo quod per singulos paene homines sunt spiritus aliqui, diversa in his peccatorum genera molientes. Verbi causa, est aliqui fornicationis spiritus [= σώματος λύσσα], est et irae [= χόλος], spiritus alius est avaritiae [= μαινομένη χεὶρ] alius vero superbiae [= ψευδής δόξη/τῦφος οἰδαίνων]* (Orig. in Jos. hom. 15, 5).

<sup>166</sup> The verb is epic and employed for the “throwing” of a spear (Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 45, s.v. αἰχμάζω).

should “throw on the floor” (ἐς χθόνα ρίψας, 87) the elation of pride. These expressions seem to imply a therapy of the contrary like that proposed by Evagrius, who often advises the monk to “cut” one evil thought with another one that is its contrary (e.g., pride or vainglory is repelled by the shame of lust)<sup>167</sup>.

The concrete mean of the bishop is expressed by two words in these lines: “word” (λόγου, 85) and “teachings” (διδάγμασιν, 87). The term λόγος here should be interpreted with all its different meanings at once, not only as “word” in the sense of a voiced utterance, but as “conversation,” “discourse,” and “reason”: the bishop should try to “talk to reason” his faithful. However, besides these lines and the long discussion on the doctrinal duties of bishops at II, 1, 12, Gregory—like Ephrem—tends to highlight the importance of the bishop’s example for the morality of the congregation, much more than the bishop’s preaching. The insistence on setting a good example is an important argument supporting strict meritocracy in the election of bishops, and therefore the exclusion of hasty consecrations of powerful laymen, like Nectarius<sup>168</sup>.

Gregory concludes his list of vices the bishop should remedy with the sentence “calling forth tears with floods of tears” (88). This clause means that the bishop should elicit repentance in the congregation, and he should do so not with fire-and-brimstone preaching, but by his own penitent attitude and by participation in the repentance of others. Such a short utterance can communicate this complex message thanks to its tight links with famous scriptural passages. The idea of deep participation of the bishop in his faithful’s sorrow is conveyed by the polyptoton δακρύων δάκρυον, which recalls the attitude that Paul commends in Rom. 12:15 (κλαίειν μετὰ κλαιόντων) and that he elsewhere says he himself practices (see 1Cor. 9:22: ἐγενόμην τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν ἀσθενής, ἵνα τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς κερδήσω· τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα, ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω; 2Cor. 11:29: τίς ἀσθενεῖ καὶ οὐκ ἀσθενῶ; τίς σκανδαλίζεται καὶ οὐκ ἐγὼ πυροῦμαι;). After all, Paul was Gregory’s model of the perfect bishop<sup>169</sup>.

“Tears”, on the other side, refer in Gregory’s line to repentance and penance, according to a widespread Christian tradition which saw in tears the primary expression of contrition and a manifestation of repentance, a tradition based on biblical passages such as Ps. 6:7 (in the Septuaginta: ἐν δάκρυσίν μου τὴν στρωμνὴν μου βρέξω) and 41:4 (ἐγενήθη μοι τὰ δάκρυά μου ἄρτος ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός) or Peter’s repentance (Mt. 26:75; Lc. 22:62) and the tears of the sinful woman (Lc. 7:38; 44)<sup>170</sup>. Hence, in this line we find

<sup>167</sup> Sorabji 2000, 360–361; Knuuttila 2004, 142n111.

<sup>168</sup> The necessity of good example has been examined at §2.2.3.

<sup>169</sup> See Greg. Naz. *or.* 2, 7, 52–56, in particular: τίς ἂν ἀξίως διέλθοι τὴν καθ’ ἡμέραν ἐπιστάσιαν, τὴν τῶν καθ’ ἕκαστον κηδεμονίαν, τὴν μέριμναν πασῶν τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν, τὸ πρὸς πάντας συμπαθὲς καὶ φιλάδελφον; Προσέκοπτε τις, καὶ Παῦλος ἡσθένει· καὶ ἄλλος ἐσκανδαλίζετο, καὶ Παῦλος ἦν ὁ φλεγόμενος (53); Elm 2000a, 87.

<sup>170</sup> See Lampe 1961, 331–332, s.v. δάκρυον; in particular: Ἐλθέ μοι, ὦ δακρύων τε καθάρσιε νειόθι πηγὴ (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 46, 27); Οἶδα καὶ πέμπτων [βάπτισμα] ἔτι, τὸ τῶν δακρύων (*or.* 39, 17). The link between tears and baptism is found also in one of our poems: Νῦν δ’ οὐδὲν οἶδα φάρμακον πλὴν δακρύων, / Ἐξ ὧν

the only explicit reference to the bishop's power to accept penance in the poems: as is customary in fourth-century precepts to bishops on this topic, Gregory advises a meek and participatory attitude for the prelate<sup>171</sup>. An indirect recommendation of meekness can be found in II, 1, 12, 423, where Gregory describes the new and bad bishop as apparently ἡμερος, "mild"<sup>172</sup>: this presupposes that mildness is a virtue in the bishop, and since it is mentioned in connection to his function of judge and arbiter and since that function is strongly linked with his penitential task, Gregory presupposes mildness as a virtue for the bishop as minister of penitence, in accordance with contemporary theorisations. However, these remarks remain rather isolated in Gregory's poems, and this theme has significantly less importance than it has for Ephrem.

In general, we must note the conspicuous absence of one of Gregory's favourite themes in relation to priesthood—namely, spiritual direction for individuals. This is clear from the absence of the medical metaphor and the already remarked refusal of a "Protean" bishop, who adapts himself to his target audience. Such a behaviour was admitted in other contexts as a help to different individuals in the different stages of their spiritual journey<sup>173</sup>. This may be due to a difference in the audience: while speeches were addressed to the community at large and described its relationship with the bishop, Gregory's poems are addressed to the other bishops and are more interested in their personal qualifications for the charge; hence the stress on teaching by example.

### 3.1.4.3 The style of leadership in Ephrem

I will now examine Ephrem's views on the moral leadership of the bishop, beginning with meekness or charity, as a kind of bridge from the treatment of Gregory, and continuing with the analysis of modes, or styles, of leadership endorsed (or censured) by the poet. Then, I will close §3.1 with an account of the content of the moral teaching of the bishops according to Ephrem (§3.1.4.4). The poet treats the questions of moral and disciplinary leadership differently in the two different groups of poems on bishops: in the poems composed during Valgash's episcopate (CN 13–16), his main focus is defending Valgash, whereas in the poems for Abraham (CN 17–21) he sets out a more general program for an ideal bishop. Since the main accusation thrown against Valgash was his excessive leniency, Ephrem organises the discourse around this theme differently in these poems than he does in the poems for Abraham<sup>174</sup>. For Abraham, meekness is just

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συνούλωσις μὲν ἔρχεται μόγις (II, 1, 12, 497–498). Tears are described as a "second Baptism" also in the Syriac poems on Abraham Kidunaia (*Abr. Kid.* 4, 1).

171 On the prevalence of meekness as an episcopal virtue in contemporary treatises and canonical writings, especially in connection with penance: Sterk 2004, 62–63; Rapp 2005, 26, 96, 125, 169–171.

172 ὡς ἡμερός μοι σήμερον (II, 1, 12, 423). For this passage, see §5.2.2.

173 See Elm 2000a; Gautier 2002, 118. See §2.2.3.2 and §2.2.4.7.

174 Gregory, too, was accused to be too meek—at least so does he say—because he forgave those who tried to stone him: Τί σκαιὸν, ἢ πρόσαντες, ἢ βλάβην φέρον, / Ἥ εἶπον, ἢ ἐπραξα τοῦτ' ἔτος τρίτον; / Πλὴν ἔν γε τοῦτο, τῶν κακῶν ἐφεισάμην, / Ὅφ' ὧν λιθασθεὶς εἰσόδου προοίμιον / Ἐκατέρησα. Καὶ γὰρ

one virtue among many the bishop must have. For Valgash, on the other side, meekness is a defining characteristic, something he possesses to the utmost degree and that differentiates him from his predecessors. Here, we see a treatment like the one reserved for preaching and teaching: it is true that Ephrem requires any bishop to be meek, as well as that he requires bishops to be sound teachers; but it is also true that he describes Valgash as extraordinarily meek, as well as particularly gifted for the intellectual component of his ministry.

Three passages exemplify Ephrem's discourse on Valgash's meekness:

ܐܬܢܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ	ܐܬܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ 8 ܡܬܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ 175 ܐܬܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ
ܐܬܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܐܬܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ 176 ܐܬܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ (CN 13, 8–9)	ܡܬܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ 9 ܡܬܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܡܬܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ ܕܠܬܐ

εὐσεβέστερον / Παθόντα τὰ Χριστοῦ με οὕτω καὶ φέρειν. / Ὅρᾳς, πένητες οἷα δωροῦνται Θεῷ. / Καὶ τοῦτο δ' ἔγκλημ', εἰ δοκεῖ, ποιῶμεθα (II, 1, 12, 100–107). See §5.1.2.3.

175 Beck prints: *w-'a(y)k lbryt' d-'etgamrat* (Beck 1961a, 35). The first problem is that the particle *'a(y)k* does not take the preposition *l*; therefore, the group of consonants *lbryt'* cannot be construed as *la-brītā* (as Beck proposes in the note to his translation: Beck 1961b, 41n6, translating “Schöpfung”/“Geschöpf”). Either the *l* is to expunge, or the word—though clearly written in the manuscript—must be changed. Expunging the *l* would leave us with Beck's favourite translation, “creation”, “creature”: the end (*šullāmā*) of the sun would be “soft and mild like a creature/the Creation that is perfected/destroyed”, depending on the interpretation of the verb *'tgmrt*, “perfected” is the *etpeel*, *'etgamrat*, while “destroyed” is the *etpaal*, *'etgammrat*. Fraenkel (as per Beck 1961a, 35 *apparatus criticus*) proposes *kebrītā*, meaning “sulphur”, however it is not clear what the expression “sulphur that is perfected/destroyed” should mean. The *apparatus* of Beck's edition gives the *vox nihili šabritā* as Rücker's proposal, whereas the note to the translation has the (correct) *nabreštā*. Beck, agreeing with Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2274, s.v. ܐܬܬܐ (and with the ancient lexicographers he lists) translates this term with *flamma*, whereas Sokoloff 2009, 886, s.v. ܐܬܬܐ (as well as the CAL lexicon: <http://cal.huc.edu>, last accessed: 27/03/21, 15:20) gives the meaning “lamp-stand”, “lamp”, “candelabrum” or “fireplace”. According to Ciancaglini 2008, 211, s.v. ܐܬܬܐ, it is a loanword from Old Persian *\*nibrāšti*, meaning “lamp”. The Syriac word may well have preserved this meaning, however the text passages given by Brockelmann (and repeated by Ciancaglini and the CAL) work way better with the meaning “flame” than with “candelabrum” or “fireplace”. A third possibility would be to correct *lbryt'* in *lmpyd'* and obtain the meaning “lamp”: the corrupted reading, although apparently *difficilior*, would be explained because it gives the ending *-yt'* of a feminine noun, in accordance with the following *'etgammrat*, whereas the word *lampēdā* is normally masculine and only rarely feminine (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1957, s.v. ܐܬܬܐ). The setting sun is compared to a faded lamp, peaceful (*nīh*, 6) because the fire has gone, but also pleasurable (*bassīm*, 6) because the vessel is still slightly warm.

176 “Even the sun shows / three forms in quarters three: // quick and bright his beginning, / strong and harsh his middle, // and like a consumed lamp / soft and mild his end. /// Swift and bright his beginning, / which came to the sleepers to wake them, // hot and harsh his middle, / coming to ripen the fruits, // gentle and mild his end / because it has reached his perfection.”

<p> אָמ אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  אָמ אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ </p>	<p> אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ 18  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ </p>
<p> 177 אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  (CN 14, 18–19) </p>	<p> אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ 19  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ </p>
<p> אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ </p>	<p> אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ 17  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ </p>
<p> אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ </p>	<p> אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ 18  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ </p>
<p> אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  (CN 16, 17–19) </p>	<p> אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ 19  אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ  178 אַזאַנאָ אָמ אַזאַנאָ </p>

These passages treat the same theme in three slightly different ways. The first employs the sustained metaphor of the sun; the second sketches the argument through one of Ephrem's typical tripartite stanzas; and finally, the third develops the theme by devoting a whole stanza to each bishop. CN 13, 8 introduces the theme in two lines (1–2), then devotes one line each for the first and second stages (3–4) and two lines for the third (5–6), amplifying it through a simile. Stanza 9 is almost perfectly symmetrical: oddly numbered lines begin with two adjectives as predicates and the names “beginning,” “middle,” and “end” as subjects; evenly numbered lines are relative clauses, the first two (2 and 4) symmetrically built. CN 14, 18 is similarly constructed, perfectly symmetrical until the last line. The following stanza is much more varied, but its last line is a reprise of the last line of the previous stanza. In CN 16, every bishop has a stanza, and every stanza has a slightly different structure: in stanza 17 the first two lines stand out as the introduction, and the following three are a list of attributes; stanza 18 parallels the first two lines of stanza 17 in its first line, while the remaining four lines are organ-

177 The first, as by a toddler; / was loved and was feared, // the middle, as to a child, / rebuked and brought joy, // the last, as for an educated girl, / for her was relief and kindness. /// Even for Jacob's daughter was set / bait and stick to her childhood, // and to her youthful boldness / was given sword and rule, // until, as chastised and learned, / came to her relief and kindness.”

178 “In rashness and in the age of infancy / I had a feared foster father, // whose stick kept me from jest, / and from vice his terror, // and from delicacy his fear. /// He gave a second father to my youth / and, because I was a bit childish, // he had a bit of toughness, / because I was a bit elderly, // he had meekness. /// When I was lifted from the ages / of infancy and youth, // the former terror passed, / passed the following fear, // and he gave me a mild pastor.”

ised in two contrasting couplets; finally, stanza 19 has the content of CN 16, 17, 1–2 and 18, 1 spread across its first, second, and last lines, while the two lines in the middle parallel and contrast with the list in stanza 17<sup>179</sup>.

Apart from these complex syntactic structures, the argument remains the same, even if the words employed vary, and it can be summarised through a table:

	Stage of the community	Stage of the bishop	Attitude of the bishop
CN 13, 8		Beginning ( <i>šūrāyā</i> ) Middle ( <i>mša'tā</i> ) End ( <i>šullāmā</i> )	Quick and bright ( <i>ḥarrīp</i> , <i>zhē</i> ) Strong and harsh ( <i>'azzizā</i> , <i>qašyā</i> ) Soft and mild ( <i>nīh</i> , <i>bassīm</i> )
CN 13, 9	Sleepers ( <i>damkē</i> ) Fruits ( <i>pērē</i> ) Perfection ( <i>gmīrūtā</i> )	Beginning ( <i>šūrāyā</i> ) Middle ( <i>mša'tā</i> ) End ( <i>šullāmā</i> )	Swift and bright ( <i>qallīl</i> , <i>zhē</i> ) Hot and harsh ( <i>ḥammīmā</i> , <i>qašyā</i> ) Gentle and mild ( <i>rḥīm</i> , <i>bassīm</i> )
CN 14, 18	Toddler ( <i>šbartā</i> ) Child ( <i>ṭlītā</i> ) Educated girl ( <i>malptā</i> )	First ( <i>qadmāyā</i> ) Middle ( <i>meš'āyā</i> ) Last ( <i>'a)hrāyā</i> )	Loved, feared ( <i>mḥabbab</i> , <i>mdaḥḥal</i> ) Rebuked, brought joy ( <i>kāyē</i> , <i>mḥaddē</i> ) Relief and kindness ( <i>nyāḥā</i> , <i>bassīmā</i> )
CN 14, 19	Childhood ( <i>ṭalyūtā</i> ) Youthful boldness ( <i>ḥuṣpā</i> , <i>'laymūtā</i> ) Chastised and learned ( <i>rdītā</i> , <i>malptā</i> )		Bait and stick ( <i>šedlā</i> , <i>šabtā</i> ) Sword and rule ( <i>saypā</i> , <i>nāmōsā</i> ) Relief and kindness ( <i>nyāḥā</i> , <i>bassīmā</i> )
CN 16	Rashness, infancy ( <i>ḥuṣpā</i> , <i>ṭalyūtā</i> ) Youth ( <i>'laymūtā</i> ) Lifted from ( <i>'et'allēt men</i> )	Foster father ( <i>mrabbyānā</i> ) Second father ( <i>'abbā</i> <i>'hrenā</i> ) Pastor ( <i>rā'yā</i> )	Feared, stick, terror, fear ( <i>dḥilā</i> , <i>šabtā</i> , <i>surrādā</i> , <i>duḥḥālā</i> ) toughness, meekness ( <i>qašyūtā</i> , <i>maktkūtā</i> ) Mild ( <i>bassīmā</i> )

Through this table, we can best appreciate Ephrem's artful variations and repetitions. CN 13, 8 and 9 have the same descriptors for the phases of "solar" (= episcopal) activity, but stanza 9 adds also the aims of these activities; each stanza has a pair of predicates for the activity of the sun in the three phases, with stanza 9 repeating one of the two predicates and replacing the other with a synonym with the same vocalic structure (*ḥarrīp* > *qallīl*; *'azzizā* > *ḥammīmā*; *nīh* > *rḥīm*). CN 14, 18 and 19 end with two very similar lines: the first has *hwā l-āh* as predicate, the second has *'etā*. Both describe the last stage for the community as *malptā*, but they reach the same ending differently, and it is particularly remarkable that the root *ṭ-l-y* ("young") is employed for the second stage of the community at CN 14, 18 and repeated for the first stage at CN 14, 19; then again the root *ṭ-l-y* is employed for the first stage, but this time the characteristic of *ḥuṣpā*'s is not given to the second but to the first stage. Moreover, it is to be noted that Ephrem's picture is not always consist-

179 For a look on this kind of rhetorical devices through the lens of discourse analysis, see Stevenson 2016.

ent: at CN 13, he seems to imply that Jacob's episcopate was moderate, Babu's very harsh, and Valgash's mild; the same impression is conveyed by CN 14, 19, where Jacob's "stick" (*šabtā*) is balanced by his "bait" (*šedlā*); in contrast, CN 16 implies that Jacob was the strictest bishop, Babu moderate, and Valgash mild, whereas in CN 14, 18 both Babu and Jacob are moderates and Valgash is mild. This inconsistency can be partly explained by Babu's small importance, but it may be also consciously pursued: on one side, it highlights the most important thing—namely, that after stern discipline, Valgash has brought mildness; on the other, it allows Ephrem to play with synonyms and variations with more freedom. It is likely that this lexical abundance—the repetitions and the skilful variations—had an aesthetic value and was one of the sought-for elements of poetry.

The table demonstrates not only the artful variation and repetition of terms but also that these passages are organised around the same argument: meekness is not associated with the bishop's role in administering penance, but rather with his broader educational and leading tasks; furthermore, meekness is by no means necessary, but rather an attitude which is to be used only if the situation requires it. In particular, meekness is inserted in the scheme of the congregation's spiritual development through its history. According to this, a mild bishop is fit only when the congregation has already progressed in the faith, whereas in her first steps she needs stern leaders. It is remarkable, however, that in these passages adopting a mild or a stern attitude is much less a decision or a conscious approach by the bishop than an invariable part of his character, so that God disposes the succession of bishops with different attitudes according to the growth of the church. In Gregory, it was quite the contrary: the poet presented himself as a moralizing voice *for* the bishop (and, eventually, for the elite faithful who should keep the bishops in check). Ephrem, on the other hand, speaks of the bishops and their attitudes as a given, arguing for the acceptance of this given by the community.

This attitude of Ephrem is clearer at CN 15, 14–15, where this theme is explicitly linked to the conflict between Valgash and the community through a rebuke against the same community:

ܠܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ	ܡܠ ܕܝܐ ܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ 14
ܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ	ܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ
	ܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ

ܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ	ܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ 15
ܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ	ܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ
(CN 15, 14–15)	<sup>180</sup> ܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ

In stanza 14, Ephrem employs a metaphor similar to the simile at CN 13, 8–9, but here the subject is not the sun, symbolizing the bishop, but rather the fruit, symbolizing the

180 "The fruit [*pērā*] is chastised forcibly [*b-ʿuzz-eh*] / at the beginning [*b-šūrāyā*] by the blowing wind, // and in the middle [*ba-mṣaʿtā*] by the force [*ʿuzzā*] of sun, / and when his forcing [*ʿazzizūt-eh*] will be past, // his end will be thick in sweetness. /// It is us, then, whom the beginnings [*qadmāyē*] chastised, /

community. Thus, if the metaphor describes the “natural” course of things through a natural image, then stanza 15 contradicts this natural course in the case of the community, thereby construing the community’s behaviour as unnatural. However, the ideal progress remains the same for the community as well as for the bishop: from a regimen based on chastisement and power to one based on “sweetness” (*ḥalyūtā* here)<sup>181</sup>.

In the poems for Abraham (CN 17–21), the theme of meekness appears among concerns different from those of the poems for Valgash, and, in part, the approach is more general. In one stanza, meekness has a very general significance:

ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܠܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

(CN 21, 22)

Here, meekness serves as a distinguishing point between ecclesiastical authority and secular authority: by “kingship” (*malkūtā*) Ephrem means the authority of the Roman emperor, whereas “priesthood” (*kāhnūtā*) means episcopal authority. It is remarkable that in this stanza he repeats the words that characterised Valgash in the previous poems—in particular, the root *b-s-m* (adjective *bassīm*, verb *bsam*, lines 5 and 8), which was always associated with Valgash (see CN 13, 8, 6; 9, 5; CN 14, 18, 6; 19, 6; CN 16, 5)—and employs them for episcopal authority in general. On the contrary, various words associated with Babu and Jacob are employed for imperial authority, expressing its stern and burdensome quality<sup>183</sup>. One could think that this verbal link implies a parallel between Jacob and the emperors, whereas Valgash and Abraham embody the paradigmatic bishop. This, however, contradicts much of Ephrem’s characterisation of Jacob as a model bishop. Rather, the diachronic contrast between Jacob’s sternness and Valgash’s meekness, as well as the synchronic contrast between the emperor’s forceful authority and the bishop’s mildness, reflects a more basic pattern of Ephrem’s thought. The same pattern can be discerned in his utterances on the relationship between the two Testaments, as some stanzas from CN 16 prove:

and then chided us the middle [*meṣ’āyē*], // the endings [*(‘a)hrāyē*] increased our sweetness,, / but when our taste came, // our loss of flavour was greater.”

181 The theme has already been seen at §2.2.3.3 and will be deeper investigated at §4.1–2.

182 “From kingship the laws [*nāmōsē*] / and from priesthood the atonements [*ḥussāyē*]: // That both should incline is hideous, / that both should be stern [*ne’zān*] is harsh [*qašyā*]; // Let one be stern [*te’az*] and one be mild [*tebsam*] / with sense and with discernment, // may fear [*dehlā*] be tempered with love [*rahmē*]: / may our priesthood be mild [*bassimā*], // as our kingship stern [*‘azzizā*]. / **Blessed is he who tempered our aids!**”

183 *Nāmōsā*: CN 14, 19, 4 and CN 21, 22, 1; *qašyā*: CN 13, 8, 4 and CN 21, 22, 4; root ‘-z-z, realised as verb ‘az (CN 21, 22, 4–5) or as adjective ‘azziz: CN 13, 8, 4 and CN 21, 22, 9; root *d-ḥ-l* (meaning “fear”): CN 14, 18, 2 (*mdaḥḥal*); CN 16, 17, 2 (*dḥil*) and CN 21, 22, 7 (*dehlā*).



ܡܢ ܝܚܝܐ ܠܝܬܝܠܡ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܡܬܝܠܡ ܠܐ	ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܡܬܝܠܡ ܠܐ 6 ܕܝܚܝܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܐܢ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܡܬܝܠܡ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ
ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܡܬܝܠܡ ܠܐ	ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ 7 ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܡܬܝܠܡ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ
ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܡܬܝܠܡ ܠܐ (CN 16, 6–8)	ܕܝܚܝܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ 8 ܡܬܝܠܡ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ <sup>184</sup> ܠܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܝܬܐ

These stanzas bear striking resemblances with the stanzas on the meekness of bishops: the same diachronic scheme of infancy (*ṭalyūtā*) and maturity (*gmīrūtā*; see CN 16, 10, 1), the same expression “bait and stick” (*šedlā w-šabtā*), and the same problem of “rashness” (*huṣpā*) are applied to the passage from the law to the grace. That the theme here is law and grace is made clear by the use of Paul’s very words for these concepts (*nāmōsā*, “law”, and “grace”, *ṭaybūtā*) and by the contrast between “justice” (*kēnūtā*) and “grace”, which is typical of Ephrem’s theology<sup>185</sup>.

The pattern of connotations common to these different themes is this: Ephrem contrasts two states, the first characterised by compulsion, discipline, fear, and relationships based on power; the second marked by freedom, maturity, love, and relationships based on mercy. The archetype of this pattern is the substitution of Moses’s law with the gospel, a concept that, with all its ramifications, plays a central role in Syriac theology—especially in the earlier times<sup>186</sup>. The adherence of our case to the archetype is strikingly clear at CN 21, 22, 1–2: “From kingship the laws [*nāmōsē*] / and from priesthood the atonements [*huṣṣāyē*]. One could substitute “Moses” for “kingship” and “Christ” for “priesthood”, and the result would be something similar to Joh. 1:17 (see also Rom. 3:25). The use of this pattern in comparing emperor and bishops differs from its archetypal use and from the case of the

<sup>184</sup> “Never did a mirror compel / with violence its observer, // nor is the Mercy that came / upon the Justice of the Law // compulsory as the Law. /// Justice [*kēnūtā*] was for childhood [*ṭalyūtā*] / the adorning of compulsion [*da-qṭīrā*]; // for, since mankind was a child [*ṭalyā*], / she adorned it through compulsion [*ba-qṭīrā*], // while not purloining its freedom. /// Bait and stick [*šedlā w-šabtā*] had taken / Justice for that childhood [*kēnūtā šēd ṭalyūtā*]: // whenever she struck her, she soothed her; / her stick [*šabt-āh*] curbed the rashness [*huṣpā*], // her bait [*šedl-āh*] softened the minds.”

<sup>185</sup> For the contrast between grace and law, two examples among the many that could be quoted: “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law [*nāmōsā*], but under grace [*ṭaybūtā*]” (Rom. 6:14); “For the law (*nāmōsā*) was given by Moses, but grace (*ṭaybūtā*) and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Joh. 1:17). The use of the verb *’etā* in the phraseology “the Grace that came” (CN 16, 6, 3) may hint at expressions like *mār-an ’etā* (1Cor. 16:22) and at the Incarnation (see Joh. 1:8, *l-dīl-eh ’etā* [scil. *nuhrā*]). On the importance of the binomial “Justice”-“Grace” (*kēnūtā/ṭaybūtā*) for Ephrem: Martikainen 1981.

<sup>186</sup> On the fundamental role of this concept in Syriac theology, in particular as regards ecclesiology, see Murray 2006, 41. The same paradigm is applied to the contrast between nature and mind: Ephr. Syr. hymn. *fid.* 28, 4.

evolution of the community because the latter is a historical development, whereas the former opposes two orders existing at the same time, the religious and the secular power.

It is true that, in opposing “priesthood” and “kingship” in their respective qualities of mediation of the atonement and giving of law, Ephrem alludes to the biblical distinction of kings and priests; however, the opposition of fear and love that he attaches to biblical categories invites us to read the “atonement” (*hussāyā*) of bishops more broadly than as a reference to purely ritual tasks. The poet wants to stress that ecclesiastical leadership, *because* of its ritual tasks, must move on a plain wholly different from secular power, a plain whose main character is mercy and where relationships rest on the freedom of those involved rather than on compulsion. This means that the bishop should be much more lenient than the imperial official.

This partially contradicts Ephrem’s representation of Babu and Jacob as stern, which suggests that these oppositions (between mildness and sternness) should not be taken as absolute definitions, but as highlighting a dialectical opposition of two terms, without implying that the “sternness” of a Jacob is in the same order as that of a Roman emperor, even though Jacob is sterner than Valgash and even though the poet describes the emperor and Jacob with the same words. On the other side, it is clear that the ideal situation for the bishop is represented by Valgash’s period, where the community has reached maturity. To some extent, the parallel between Jacob and the emperor has merit: the first bishops had to steer a worldly community. Therefore, their leadership had to incorporate elements of worldly rule; thus, the development of a Christian community is its walking away from a worldly regime towards a freer, more peaceful order.

At CN 19, 9, Ephrem again employs the language of meekness, linking it to some other themes of his poetry:

ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

(CN 19, 9)

The markers of the language of meekness are the word *bassīmā*, whose importance has already been noted, and the noun *nyāḥā*, “repose”, “peace”, employed to describe Valgash in the last lines of CN 14, 18 and 19. To these, Ephrem adds here two more terms, *makkikā*, meaning “humble”, and *šaynā*, for “peace”. Such terms describe qualities similar to those indicated by the other terms we have already encountered. It could also be noted that the term *makkikā* appeared in the metaphor of the head and the body

<sup>187</sup> “No one envied your election, / for humble [*makkikā*] is your leadership; // no one bristles at your rebuke, / for peace [*šaynā*] sows your word; // no one shrinks from your voice, / for mild [*bassīmā*] is your commanding; // no one complains about your yoke, / for it itself is wearied instead of our necks, // and lightens the burden of our souls. / **Blessed is he who chose you as our repose** [*nyāḥ-an*]!”

at CN 18, 4, 7, to express the loving relationship that should link the bishop to his community, as well as the bishop's attitude, which should refrain from a top-down exercise of power and rather provide for the members of the community stooping down to their level (§2.1.2.2; §2.2.3.2): another facet of episcopal meekness. The stanza presents these attributes inside Ephrem's habitual structure of symmetric *cola*, with even-numbered lines corresponding to the previous, odd-numbered ones, each pair of lines being like the others, except for the last, which is longer.

The question posed by the stanza is that of legitimacy: Ephrem must explain why everyone obeys the bishop willingly. In this sense, episcopal meekness disarms not only grudges held by people receiving rebukes or orders (3; 5–7) but also the potential discontent over the election of the young Abraham (1). According to Ephrem, the bishop is so authoritative because he is not authoritarian. Furthermore, he seems prepared to lead by example and to first submit himself to the measures he proposes to others (7–9). Yet this ideal representation of episcopal leadership has more than one element that raises suspicion. The insistence on meekness and humility, for one thing, hints at a church conceiving herself as a free society, where people had to be persuaded to act; modern readers may ask themselves if this conception was true in real life and, conversely, if and how much could the bishop compel his faithful without having to persuade them. Second, there is the obvious point that if the author has to write that no one bears grudges towards or envies the bishop, then someone was certainly bearing grudges towards the bishop. This brings us to the third observation: Ephrem presents these questions as statements of fact, but one wonders how much of these statements would have been perceived as rebuke or advice by the bishop *and* the community who were hearing them. Alas, these are questions we will never answer with an acceptable degree of certainty, since the context of these remarks is all but lost to us<sup>188</sup>.

In any case, we perceive that the bishop's decision making was subject to a degree of communitarian, if not public, scrutiny. Furthermore, Ephrem's texts seem to presuppose that the bishop's decision making was disputed, with different people capable of influencing it:

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ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ	ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ
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<sup>188</sup> However, there is more to the second question than this passage: Ephrem's texts preserve other traces of early critics of Abraham (see CN 18, 3–4 at §2.1.2.2 and §3.1.1.1).



CN 17, 8 is similar to CN 19, 9 in structure and themes: odd-numbered lines describe an avoided danger, while even-numbered ones explain how it was avoided, with the last iteration (7–9) occupying three lines instead of two<sup>192</sup>. Here, similarly to CN 19, 9, the bishop is able to avoid negative feelings by way of his meek attitude, promoting “peace” (*šaynā*) and showing “love” (*ḥubbā*) to his parishioners<sup>193</sup>. However, the danger avoided in CN 17, 8 is not a loss of authority by the bishop, but “the slander which brings turmoil” (*mēkal qaršē da-mdawwed*, 7)—namely, a problem of harmony inside the community.

The theme is reprised at CN 21, 12, where Ephrem advises caution in receiving “bad rumours” (*ṭebbā bišā*, CN 21, 12, 1), an expression alluding to slanders or allegations that someone had behaved sinfully<sup>194</sup>. In this case, the bishop is advised to verify the source of the information. And even if the source happens to be reliable, Ephrem’s advice is to pray for the soul of the sinner and to take on his penance in his stead: tears

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led astray by the dissolute, // you shan’t give yourself to anyone, / lest you be downtrodden by the bold, // keep your hand from the false, / lest he gather thorns with your hand: // be both removed and present. / **Blessed is he who’s near even when he is far!**”

<sup>192</sup> Only line 6 deviates from the scheme, presenting the *consequence*, instead of the *cause* of the avoided danger.

<sup>193</sup> The connotations of lines 1–4 of the stanza are partially lost in an English translation: Ephrem employs the same metaphor for the danger and its remedy, so that the remedy appears as a kind of retaliation or homoeopathic cure. Thus, “jealousy” (*ṭnānā*) is “quenched” (*d’īkā*)—a verb employed mostly for flames—thanks to the “burning” (*metgawzal*) of “love” (*ḥubbā*, a word coming from root *h-b-b*, “to burn”); “fury” (*ḥemtā*), a word that can also mean “venom” and “inflammation” (see Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1299, s.v. *ܚܡܬܐ*; I rendered it with “bile”), is rendered void by peace “dripping” (*rāsem*), a verb connected with dew (*rsāmā*), so that peace can be intended either as the water quenching the “inflammation” of fury or as a beneficial fluid instead of poison. Given this parallelism between 1–2 and 3–4, I suggest correcting the *kaf* affixed to the word *ḥemtā* (1) with an *ālap*. In fact, the reading with *kaf*, namely *ḥemt-āk*, makes no sense: in this context the second-person singular of the affix pronoun *-āk* can only be Bishop Abraham; if the possessive were subjective, meaning “the fury *you have*”, then the sentence would contradict line 2, which says that Abraham is completely devoted to peace, and it would also break the parallelism, because it is clear that *ṭnānā* at line 3 can only be jealousy *against* Abraham; but if the pronoun were objective, meaning “the fury *against you*”, then it is difficult to explain why Ephrem would have employed the affix here and not in the case of *ṭnānā*, breaking the nice symmetry of these lines and garbling the sense of the clause (because the subjective meaning would seem more obvious grammatically). After all, even though Beck prints the word with the *kaf*, he still refrains from translating it (“Das Zürnen hat bei dir seine Schärfe verloren“, Beck 1961b, 56). This section of the poems is transmitted in a single manuscript (Beck’s E; see Beck 1961a, 45, *apparatus criticus*); I could not see the manuscript; hence, I cannot be certain of the concrete position of the word in relation to the others on the page; however, it is noteworthy that the first words of the two previous lines (CN 13, 7, 9 and 10) both ended with *kaf* and that the word after *ḥemtā*, *lwāt-āk*, ended with *taw-kaf*, all factors that could have contributed to such a slip of the scrivener.

<sup>194</sup> *Ṭebbā* means “fame”, “rumour”. It is used of the reputation of a person notably in the Peshitta translation of Ruth 2:5, where Greek has τίφος ἡ νεότης αὐτῆς; and Hebrew *lā-mī han-na’ārā haz-z’ot*, whereas Syriac has *mā ṭebb-āh d-’ulaymtā hādē*. The first two give an idea of possession, while the Peshitta is more generic, as if Boaz were asking: “what is known/what does people say about this girl?”.

(*dem'ē*, 3), prayer (*neb'ōn*, 5), fasting (*ṣawmā*, 6) and a contrite countenance (*b-ḥaššā*, 7) define the exercise of penance, which should bring about the sinner's repentance (*d-netpnē ba-tyābūtā*, 9). There is here the same idea found in Gregory's poem, where he imagined the bishop calling forth the sinner's tears through his own tears: the bishop has the power to take on part of the penance of others and should do so<sup>195</sup>. What is different from Gregory, is Ephrem's mention of other people assisting the bishop in this task, people whom he calls "discerning" (*pārōšē*, 5) and "educated" (*yaddū'ē*, 6) and who should be part of the bishop's "pen" (*dayrā*, 7). Since this last word seems to be used as a synonym for "clergy" at *CN* 17, 3, 3 (see §2.2.1.1), and given what we know of Syrian asceticism in the time of Ephrem (§1.2.1; §3.2.1), it is likely that Ephrem advocates for the sharing of information with the clergy and the educated ascetics (such as he was), so that these might shoulder a part of the burden of the sinner and pray for him, being the spiritual elite of the community. In this context, the bishop seems to act as an "ascetic-in-chief", coordinating the spiritual powers of local ascetics with the spiritual needs of the community and fighting the good fight in the first lines.

However, the fact that Ephrem has to advise this course of action presupposes that alternatives were possible. Indeed, two stanzas adjacent to those concerned with slander (*CN* 17, 9 and *CN* 21, 13) betray the presence of alternative viewpoints: Ephrem exhorts the bishop to be careful in accepting advice, choosing the people around him cautiously. The two stanzas are structurally identical: four propositions with the imperfect in the second person, expressing a wish or advice, occupy the odd-numbered lines, while the even-numbered are occupied by subordinates, negative finals in *CN* 21, 13, and a comparative and two relatives at *CN* 17, 9; as usual, the last proposition is one line longer and, at *CN* 17, 9, a bit different. There is even some correspondence in meaning, because lines 1–2 of each stanza refer to the topic of advice, lines 3–4 to "going" with someone, and lines 5–6 to seeing or avoiding someone, and the last three lines warn against giving credit to slanderers. Even if the sense of lines 1–2 of *CN* 17, 9 and *CN* 21, 13 is the opposite, with the former exhorting to *give* advice, the latter to not *receive* bad advice, the verb is the same: the bishop should "give" (*tettel*) advice and not "give" his ear to bad advice. The expression "lend your foot" in *CN* 21, 13, 3 is a metonymy with the same sense as "go with" at *CN* 17, 9, 3: both echo the biblical metaphor of "walking" as "behaving" and "walking with someone" as "imitating someone's behaviour"<sup>196</sup>. The ideas of "avoiding" (*te'rūq*) and "not give oneself to" of lines 5–6 of each stanza are also very similar.

The main difference is that *CN* 17, 9 employs two biblical *exempla*, whereas *CN* 21, 13 uses none. The first, positive example is Jethro, Moses's father-in-law and a "priest" (*kumrā*) of the Midianites (Ex. 18:1), who advised the prophet to give laws and delegate

<sup>195</sup> Rapp 2005, 72–90, where the theme is abundantly analysed, especially for holy men and ascetics. The relevant scriptural passage is Gal. 6:2.

<sup>196</sup> Cf. Gen. 5:24; Lev. 26:27–28; 2Chron. 22:3; Ps. 1:1; 81:12; Prov. 1:15; 4:14; also in Gregory: οὐ μὲν ἐνὶ ὁδοῖς [bad bishops] . . . συνοδίτης (II, 1, 13, 203–204).

judging activities to leaders in the populace instead of sitting himself all day in judgement (Ex. 18). The comparison with a priest is apt, but Ephrem paradoxically compares Jethro's counselling "among the Hebrews" (*bēt-'ebrāyē*) with the bishop's counselling "in his people" (*b-gaw 'amm-āk*), the former being a foreigner and outsider, the latter a part of the community. It remains meaningful that Jethro's counsel is to delegate juridical power, anticipating CN 18, 11. The negative example is Rehoboam: Solomon's heir refused the counsel of elder advisors in favour of younger courtiers, thereby imposing a heavier yoke on the people and bringing about the schism between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, led by the House of David, and the tribes of Israel (1Reg. 12). This story is rich in links with Ephrem's situation: the opposition between elder and younger advisors is played out at CN 21, 10; the theme of hard or meek rule was very relevant, as Valgash demonstrated (see §4.2), and, finally, schism was a very present possibility in Ephrem's time. Since these lines are addressed to the bishop, who probably knew his Bible, it is not to be believed that Ephrem's allusions, though not so evident, went unnoticed; on the contrary, they are carefully chosen to anticipate and defend other propositions he is going to advance.

What this repeated theme implies is that the bishop was frequently assisted in his decision making—though it is not clear if the assistance was actively sought by the prelate or was spontaneous—and also that differing pieces of advice were proposed on the same topics, since Ephrem does care to distinguish "beneficial" (*melkē d-'udrānā*, CN 17, 9, 8) from "envious" (*melkē da-ḥsāmā*, CN 17, 9, 9) advice. Indeed, he goes on to thank God for "discernment" (*buyyānā*, CN 17, 9, 10) in the same stanza: if there is discernment, there must be differences among which to discern. Which real-life dynamics were addressed by Ephrem's remarks is difficult to see. One tends to think that when Ephrem wishes for discerning advisors to the bishop, he is really trying to gain influence on the bishop for the group of the "discerning" and "educated" (*pārōšē, yaddū'ē*, CN 21, 12, 5–6), of which he might have been part. However, this is just a guess, and we cannot infer from the texts the composition and differences of the bishop's advisors: we can only suppose that there were different advisors and that Ephrem endeavoured to be one of them.

To wrap up the theme of influence on the bishop, which in Ephrem takes the form of the contrast between good advice and slander, I mention CN 21, 10: here, Ephrem recommends that the new bishop discipline his congregation as regards language, letting only the elder members speak. The poet's formulation preserves echoes of Paul's polemics with the community in Corinth<sup>197</sup>. This stanza shows a very concrete side of the bishop's spiritual leadership: Ephrem calls the bishop to discipline language, preemptively

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<sup>197</sup> Beck 1961b, 69 correctly points to 1Cor. 14:23 ("If, therefore, the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?") because of the identity of verb between Paul's "come in" (*ne'lōn*) and Ephrem's "who comes to you" (*d-'āyel šēd-ayk*). The verb is quite generic, but the situations of the two passages are remarkably similar: the theme is the proper order in speaking publicly and the argument brought forth is that the community should behave as if an outsider were present. Interestingly, Paul

selecting the voices to be heard and the “order” (*ṭukkāsā*, 4) in which they should be heard. An interesting detail of this stanza is the reference to “the stranger” (*nukrāyā*, 3) observing the order in the community, and this for two reasons.

The first is the clear witness given by this line to Ephrem’s interest in the community’s reputation with outsiders, for the word *nukrāyā* is used not only for “stranger” in an ethnic or linguistic sense (“foreign”) but also for someone or something *outside* the Christian community or the Christian doctrine; therefore, it could here allude to the reputation enjoyed by Ephrem’s community with other communities (pagans, Jews, heretics)<sup>198</sup>. Gregory had the same preoccupation as regards the moral worth of the bishop, while Ephrem employs the argument vis-à-vis the behaviour of the whole community, to stress the bishop’s responsibility in disciplining speech. As for Gregory, so for Ephrem the argument serves to counter intra-Christian opposition: in the case of Gregory, having a good reputation among pagans disarmed those who thought that baptism and ordination were enough to completely cleanse a formerly immoral person, while for Ephrem it serves to underpin traditional social hierarchies (such as the superiority of elder people). The basic mechanism is the same: the occasional reminder of the bishop’s mission to convert pagans (or at least protect the reputation of the church) made the bishop beholden to an authority of sorts, which was neutral to intra-Christian disputes and bound the bishop to a stricter observance than what might be admitted in a purely Christian context. However, if Gregory’s use of the trope was addressed against a relaxed approach to moral scrutiny and the sacraments, Ephrem’s insistence on the good order of the community should imply the presence of disorder. Bearing in mind that any inference from these texts to reality has limited validity in the absence of external sources, one could infer from this stanza that there was a group inside the community perceived to be threatening traditional hierarchies. A good fit for this role may be a group of ascetics with a strong charismatic attitude, defying socially accepted norms of speech.

A second reason for interest in lines 3–4 is that the idea of the stranger “coming” to the community and observing its order seems to imply a context of communal deliberation. For, taken by themselves, the remarks on the correct order of speech may be construed as metaphorical: the question would be not who talks first and who is second, but to whom the bishop gives preeminence in his decisions and whom he chooses to neglect. However, the presence of the stranger suggests a concrete situation. Ephrem seems to refer to occasions on which members of the community may have voiced their opinions in the presence of the bishop, who therefore had the task of regulating such assemblies. Again, all of this is highly uncertain in the absence of other sources, but it is worth formulating hypotheses and taking the texts seriously.

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envisages clearly an assembly context for his remark (“If, therefore, the whole church be come together (*tetkannaš*) into one place”). This could be a clue that Ephrem, too, has an assembly context in mind.

198 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2380, s.v. ܢܟܪܝܐ.



### 3.1.4.4 The bishop as teacher of ascetic virtues

Until now, I have examined texts highlighting the *modes* of the bishop's discipline of the community—namely, meekness and discernment in accepting advice. Yet Ephrem addresses also the content of the bishop's disciplinary actions, the virtues he should help his community to develop. His treatment is much more extended than Gregory's, who devoted only one passage to the theme; both groups of poems (CN 13–16 and CN 17–21) underline always the necessity for the bishop to set an example, but they differ in the specific contents of the bishop's teaching.

Among the poems about Abraham, CN 21 is the most detailed as regards moral discipline: it begins with biblical examples of vices overcome (CN 21, 1–2), then compares Abraham with those examples (CN 21, 3–4). After a stanza reminding the bishop of his duty to lead all categories of the community according to their specific needs (CN 21, 5), Ephrem develops in detail the kind of discipline Nisibis's community requires, partly through a reprise of the biblical examples introduced earlier:

<p>             199              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ           </p>	<p>             ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ           </p>	3
<p>             ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ           </p>	<p>             ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ           </p>	6
<p>             ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ           </p>	<p>             ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ           </p>	7
<p>             ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ           </p>	<p>             ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ              ܐܡܪ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܬ           </p>	8

199 "May gluttony succumb to your fasting, / as with the fasting of Daniel; // May lust be ashamed before your body, / as when it was ashamed before Joseph; // May greed succumb to you, / as when it succumbed before Simon; // you can bind on earth like him, / and you can loose on high in his manner, // since your faith is like his. / **Blessed is he who handed to you his ministry!**"

[illegible]

These stanzas are organised in a chiasmic structure, with the first and last (6 and 9) reprising biblical examples already introduced and exhorting the bishop to remedy the different vices they represent, while the two stanzas in the middle (7–8) focus on the particular vice the bishop should address.

Stanza 6 has a parallel in stanza 3, because they share a similar structure and the same theme, the bishop's victory over vices. Both stanzas are divided into two parts: lines 1–6 present three imperfect verbs wishing for the uprooting of a vice (in the odd-numbered lines, built in parallel in both stanzas) and three biblical examples related to the vice in question (positive examples in stanza 3, negative ones in stanza 6). The last examples are each expanded, and they occupy the remaining lines (7–9), according to Behagel's law of increasing terms<sup>201</sup>. It is also significant that in stanza 3 the last positive example is Simon Peter, praised for his refusal to sell the Spirit to Simon Magus (Act. 8:20), while in stanza 6 the last negative example is Judas Iscariot, who sold Jesus. It is clear that Peter and Judas form a contrasting diptych, signalling the parallel between stanzas 3 and 6. From the point of view of meaning, both stanzas underline that the overcoming of vices in the community is due to the personal virtue of the bishop: it is by exercising virtue that the bishop teaches virtue: lines 1, 3, and 5 of stanza 3 wish for the uprooting of vices "from" (*men*) a virtue of the bishop: "from your fasting" (*men şawm-āk*), "from your body" (*men pagr-āk*), and "from you" (*menn-āk*). The principle is the same at lines 1, 3, and 5 of stanza 6, though here the preposition is "with", "through" (*b-*).

200 “Through your poverty may / the heinous habit [yādā] of the likes of Gehazi end, // through your chastity may / the impure habit [yādā] of the likes of Eli cease, // through your harmony may / the false peace coming from the lips // of the false Iscariot fade. / Remould all over our thoughts, // fashion them from top anew. / **Blessed is he who in your crucible refines us!** /// In your tenure may Mammon be ashamed, / who was master of our freedom, // may fade from us the illness, / to which we were accustomed [a’īd] and consenting: // destroy the causes that preserve / our customs [yādē] full of detriment! // Wickedness acquired us [qnāt-an] by habit [ba-yādā], / may goodness acquire us [teqnē-n] by habit [ba-yādā]: // be, Excellence, the cause of our relief! / **Blessed is he who chose you for our salvation!** /// May bad habits [yādē] be interrupted, / may the church not acquire wealth, // that she may be able to acquire souls, / and if she is able to do this, ’tis a wonder! // Let not the departed be buried, / cutting off hope, as heathens do, // amidst clothes, wails, and mourning, / when the living wears a tunic, // and the departed a whole trunk of clothes. / **Blessed is he who made us return to our dust!** /// Lust is the cause of wickedness, / together with the gluttony of the likes of Eli // and the thievery of the likes of Gehazi / and the insolence of the likes of Nabal. // Block these heinous fountains, / lest they flow abundantly, // and filth come from them, / which might reach with its blurs even you: // aye, Our Lord, shut their flow! / **Blessed is he who dried their sources!**”

**201** See Best 2007, 82.

Stanza 9 reprises the theme, but in a different manner. It reprises the examples of Gehazi and the sons of Eli, symbolizing, respectively, greed and the double vices of gluttony and lust. In this case, Ephrem envisages the opposite process, where it is not the bishop's morality elevating the morality of the community, but the community's immorality that can infect the bishop. The stanza serves as a stern warning after Ephrem has explained in the two previous stanzas what the bishop should do. Taking together stanzas 3, 6, and 9, we have three different lists of vices: gluttony, lust, and greed (stanza 3), greed, lust, and lies (stanza 6), lust, gluttony, greed (i.e., "thievery"), and insolence (stanza 9). That lust should enjoy such a prominence is no surprise, since the weight of Encratite tendencies in Syriac Christianity is generally known to modern scholarship<sup>202</sup>. Gluttony can be linked to the special importance that Ephrem (and, presumably, his community) conferred on fasting<sup>203</sup>. The other item appearing in all lists is greed: its prominence aptly frames stanzas 7 and 8, which deal with facets of this vice.

Regarding the biblical examples employed, it is worth noting Ephrem's moralizing reading of the biblical narrative, attributing merits and sins on the basis of an ascetic moral code. One would be justified in reading Peter's and Judas's behaviour as expressions of a moral success or failure in resisting a passion: Peter refuses to sell the Spirit to Simon Magus, and in this sense he resisted greed. Nabal and Gehazi are clearly characterised by the biblical text as morally reprehensible: Nabal is repeatedly qualified as insolent, unmannered, and violent (1Sam. 25:3; 25); Gehazi's vice is clearly avarice (2Reg. 5:20–27). By contrast, the ascetic reading of Daniel and Joseph—though traditional—is partial, while Ephrem's interpretation of the trespass of the sons of Eli egregiously oversteps the logic of the biblical text. Joseph's reasons for declining the advances of Potiphar's wife are given at Gen. 39:9: he refers to abuse his master's trust, to violate the rights of the husband over his wife, and, finally and generically, to commit a "great sin against God". Daniel refuses the Babylonian king's food "so as not to defile himself" (Dan. 1:8), a clause interpreted as referring either to the rules of *Kashrut* or to the fact that the meat served for the king could have been sacrificed to the idols<sup>204</sup>: in one case we would have a ritual obligation; in the other the rejection of idolatry; and, in both cases, the undertone would be of Jewish particularism in the face of a gentile power; gluttony and fasting are by no means at the forefront of the passage. However, it must be noted that the Peshitta formulation of Dan. 1:8 elides the reference to defilement, leaving more space for a moralistic interpretation. The transgressions of the sons of Eli are narrated at 1Sam. 2:12–17 (eating the fat part of offerings, which was destined to God) and 22 (lying with temple servants). It is true that 1Sam. 2:12 describes the character of Eli's sons negatively, but their transgressions are primarily transgres-

<sup>202</sup> See, for example, Vööbus 1958, 69–73.

<sup>203</sup> Vööbus 1958, 84–85; see the cycle of poems Ephrem devoted to fasting (Beck's *De ieiunio*).

<sup>204</sup> Merrill Willis 2018, 1251.

sions against God, because they disrespected the ritual orders and purity God required (1Sam. 2:12–13; 17; 25). Gregory employs their example in one of our poems:

Ὡς δὲ καὶ Ἡλείδῃσιν ἐπέχραε λυγρὸς ὀλεθρος,  
 Ἡλείδαις, ὅτι μάργον ἔχον νόον. Ἦ γὰρ ἔβαλλον  
 Οὐχ ἱερὰς παλάμας ἱερῶν καθύπερθε λεβήτων. (130)  
 Οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδ' Ἡλεὶ χόλον ἔκφυγεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτόν  
 Οὐχ ὅσῃ γαστήρ παίδων ἐχάλεψε δίκαιον,  
 Καί περ αἰεὶ βρίσαντα ὄνειδείους ἐπέεσσιν.  
 (II, 1, 13, 128–133)

Thus even the Helids seized a baneful fate,  
 the sons of Heli, for their greedy mind. Yea, they'd lay  
 unholy hands on the holy kettles. (130)  
 Nor did Heli escape the wrath, but even him  
 the ungodly belly of his sons vexed, though he was righteous  
 and laden with words of rebuke for them.

Gregory's version clearly states the ritualistic nature of the transgression of Eli's sons (Οὐχ ἱερὰς παλάμας, 130; Οὐχ ὅσῃ γαστήρ, 132), which is the point of his comparing them with unworthy people being elected bishops; but he, like Ephrem, attributes gluttony to them as a motive (ὅτι μάργον ἔχον νόον, 129; Οὐχ ὅσῃ γαστήρ, 132; and see Ephrem, *Jul. Saba* 23, 19).

Stanza 7 clarifies that greed is the main problem of Ephrem's community. Two different metaphors are woven together in this text: on one side, greed, personified as the god Mammon, has captured the Nisibenes and keeps them enslaved (1–2; 7–8), so that the bishop should buy them back from the evil deity; on the other, greed is described as an illness (*kēbā*, 3), whose causes the bishop should cure (5). The stanza also bridges the previous and the next one, which develops the theme of “habit” (*yādā*). In stanza 6 two vices (greed and lust) had already been qualified as “habits” (2; 4), but stanza 7 extensively develops this idea and explains that greed, though an illness, still plagues the community because of habit, which has made the vice even pleasurable (4). However, this habit remains detrimental (6). What is interesting is that the remedy for bad habit is good habits (7–8), in a mutual relationship, which Ephrem describes with the metaphor of commerce. The meaning of the metaphor is that bad habits cannot be simply lost, but must instead be exchanged for good ones, and that the passage from bad to good habits is gradual and proportional—that is, the more one progresses in virtue, the more one loses in vice. Yet if only habit can overcome habit, then the way to virtue, on which the bishop must lead the community, is a way of training and exercise—also known as asceticism<sup>205</sup>.

<sup>205</sup> The conceptualisation of vice as a habit remaining even after purification is employed also by Gregory: see §3.3.2.1. In both cases, it stems from Aristotle's description of virtues and vices as habits that provide virtuous or wicked actions of pleasure or pain, description found at Aristot. *eth. Nic.* 1104a-b.

Stanza 8 addresses two concrete points in which greed should be overcome. First, the church should be poorer, privileging spiritual gains over earthly ones (1–4). Even if the argument seems a case of generic moralism, given Ephrem's insistence on greed in this poem, something else may be at play. It seems reasonable to link the theme of greed in these first stanzas—and especially the remark on the riches of the church in stanza 8—with stanzas 14–15: there, Ephrem expresses the hope that the new emperor (Jovian) will put an end to the “greedy” (*ya'nē*, CN 21, 14, 5). These stanzas allude to plundering (CN 21, 14, 3–4) and thefts (CN 21, 15, 5–9) in the recent past, likely during Julian's time, and Ephrem believes these will end with Jovian. In stanzas 16–17, the poet explains why persecution under Julian was beneficial and why the new era of peace and authority for the church is more detrimental than persecution. In this context, lines 1–4 of stanza 8 might be read as part of Ephrem's admonitions against a “relaxed” peace, “the false peace [*šlāmā nkilā*] coming from the lips / of the false Iscariot” (CN 21, 6, 6–7). The theme of false peace, or “ungrateful” peace, is prominent in the *Carmina Nisibena* proper (CN 1–21): Ephrem developed the theme originally in reference to the Persian sieges, but here it is repurposed for the end of Julian's persecution. The idea is that hard times make for better Christians, while in good times the community shows itself disloyal to the vows made to God in the time of trial<sup>206</sup>. Therefore, Ephrem admonishes the church not to slip into the greedy abuses perpetrated by her enemies during Julian's reign. It is interesting to note that this ambivalent sentiment vis-à-vis persecution, with its ramifications in the desire for a church disengaged from mundane logic, is one of the building blocks of fourth-century monasticism<sup>207</sup>.

The remaining lines of stanza 8 (5–9) deplore excess and luxury during funerals. The immediate model of the passage is 1Thess. 4:13, stigmatizing excessive mourning as un-Christian, specifically because it shows a lack of hope in the resurrection<sup>208</sup>. However, whereas Paul mentions only lamentations among the excessive customs, Ephrem stresses expenditures and luxuries devoted to the dead. This may make us think of the competition between families and the problem of ostentation in ancient cities<sup>209</sup>, but instead of these traditional motives for antiluxury polemic, Ephrem puts forth a characteristically Christian one: dissipation for funerals jarringly contradicts the Christian's duty to help the poor, because, paradoxically, “the living wears a tunic,

<sup>206</sup> See CN 2, 7–9; 14; CN 3, 5–6; 8–12; CN 4, 13–14; CN 5, 15; 17–18; CN 6, 10; CN 7, 1; 7, 8; CN 9, 16; CN 10, 17–18; CN 11, 9–10; 19; CN 13, 16, 5–6; §4.1.2.

<sup>207</sup> For a critical collection of ancient texts (Greek and Latin) on the topic see Malone 1950. Vööbus 1958, 88–90 refers to military imagery in early Syriac asceticism, but the theme of martyrdom is conspicuously absent. See also below, §3.2.

<sup>208</sup> “As the others, who have no hope (*d-sabrā layt l-hōn*)” (1Thess. 4:13); “cutting off hope (*ba-psāq sabrā*), as heathens do” (CN 21, 8, 6). Note Ephrem's metaphorical rewriting through *psāqā* “cut, incision” of Paul's plain phrase.

<sup>209</sup> For luxury and sumptuary laws in Archaic Greece: Van Wees 2018; in ancient Rome, cf. the *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome, Antiquité* 128.1, 2016. For legal limits to ostentation during funerals in Greece: Hauser/Kierdorf 2006.

/ and the departed a whole trunk of clothes” (CN 21, 8, 8–9). Ephrem’s formulation implies, though not explicitly, that it is the bishop’s duty to make sure such displays do not happen. In this regard, the bishop acts almost as an old Roman censor, although with dissimilar motivations.

The bishop’s main instrument in amending his parishioners’ ways is his own example, and CN 21 has already made this very clear. The idea had been employed in the poems on Valgash, too, and with much more insistence, as it constituted an essential part of Ephrem’s argument defending the bishop from criticism:

<p>ܡܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ</p>	<p>ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ 3 ܡܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ</p>
<p>ܡܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܡܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ (CN 15, 3–4)</p>	<p>ܡܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ 4 ܡܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ <sup>210</sup>ܡܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ</p>
<p>ܡܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܡܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ (CN 16, 20)</p>	<p>ܡܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܡܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ <sup>211</sup>ܡܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ</p>

These stanzas, two of which open Ephrem’s defence of Valgash, while the third closes it in the following poem, posit a link between the bishop’s personal conduct and the community, either exhorting the faithful to imitate the bishop (CN 15, 3–4) or stating the aptness of the bishop’s gift to the characters of the congregation (CN 16, 20). The rhetorical function of such expressions—like that of the metaphor of the mirror (§2.2.3)—is to exonerate the bishop from the moral failings of his community, highlighting the role of the faithful in trying to imitate the leader. Through this construct, each instance of praise for the bishop exacerbates the blame on the community, who could not imitate such an outstanding example.

However, I am not treating these stanzas here for the mode of teaching, but for the content, and these texts are in fact a carefully constructed list of virtues, marked out by the reprise-with-variations in CN 16, 20 of the items in CN 15, 3: the binomial “stillness” (*šalyūtā*)-“serenity” (*šapyūtā*) (CN 15, 3, 2) becomes “humility” (*makkikūtā*)-“stillness” (*šalyūtā*) (CN 16, 20, 3); the “kindliness” (*bassimūtā*) and “meekness” (*nīḥūtā*) of CN 15, 3,

210 “O limbs, imitate the head: / acquire stillness [*šalyūtā*] in his serenity [*šapyūt-eh*], // and kindliness [*bassimūtā*] in his meekness [*nīḥūt-eh*], / in his holiness [*qaddišūt-eh*] splendour [*zahyūtā*], // and in his wisdom [*hekmt-eh*] instruction [*yullpānā*]. /// Acquire discretion [*ta’mā*] in his modesty [*rmīsūt-eh*] / and sobriety [*nakpūtā*] in his seriousness [*yaqqīrūt-eh*], // and solitude [*šūḥādā*] in his poverty [*meskenūt-eh*]: / because he is fair all in all, // may we all be made fair by all of him.

211 “Here is his nourishment for my adulthood, / his exegeses for my discernment, // his humility [*makkikūt-eh*] for my stillness [*šalyūt-(y)*], / his kindliness [*bassimūt-eh*] for my meekness [*nīḥūt-(y)*], // his seriousness [*yaqqīrūt-eh*] for my sobriety [*nakpūt-(y)*]!”

3 are inverted at *CN* 16, 20, 4 between bishop and community; “seriousness” (*yaqqīrūtā*) and “sobriety” (*nakpūtā*) from *CN* 15, 4, 2 are reprised identically at *CN* 16, 20, 5. The shared nature of these virtues is their ascetic origin and outlook.

Ephrem mentions two of the three fundamental virtues of the Syriac ascetic, “chastity” (*qaddiṣūtā*, *zahyūtā*, and *nakpūtā*) and “poverty” (*meskēnūtā*); with the addition of sobriety in eating, we would have the three virtues contrary to the vices of *CN* 21 (lust, greed, and gluttony), but, although Syriac Christianity deemed fasting very important, even *CN* 21 gave more importance to lust and greed than gluttony<sup>212</sup>. In addition to these fundamental virtues, others are associated with ascetics. The most important is “solitude” (*šūḥādā*), a word derived from the root *y-ḥ-d*, which gives the keyword of Syrian monasticism, *ihidāyā*, meaning “solitary”, “anchorite”<sup>213</sup>. Comparing this list of virtues with the poems transmitted under Ephrem’s name and dedicated to the anchorites Abraham Kidunaia and Julian Saba, we find even more analogies: not only solitude (*CN* 15, 4, 3 and *Iul. Saba* 2, 13, 2; *Iul. Saba* 23, 22) and chastity (*CN* 15, 3, 4; 4, 2; *CN* 16, 20, 5 and *Abr. Kid.* 8, 15, 2; 23, 3; *Iul. Saba* 2, 15, 5; 16, 2; *Iul. Saba* 23, 24, 2) are associated with the ascetics’ lives, but also wisdom (*hekmtā*, *CN* 15, 3, 5 and *Abr. Kid.* 8, 26, 4; 30, 4; *Iul. Saba* 15, 1, 2; refrain), instruction (*yullpānā*, *CN* 15, 3, 5 and *Abr. Kid.* 8, 7, 1; 11, 3), discretion (*ṭa’mā*, *CN* 15, 4, 1 and *Abr. Kid.* 8, 15, 4), seriousness (*yaqqīrūtā*, *CN* 15, 4, 2; *CN* 16, 20, 5 and *Iul. Saba* 15, 3, 1), humility (*makkīkūtā*, *CN* 16, 20, 3 and *Iul. Saba* 2, 13, 5; 15, 3; the whole *Iul. Saba* 11; *Iul. Saba* 23, 24, 1), and the almost untranslatable virtue of *šapyūtā* (*CN* 15, 3, 2 and *Abr. Kid.* 8, 23, 3; *Iul. Saba* 2, 16, 5)<sup>214</sup>. Even mildness, or meekness (*bassīmūtā*), a virtue so characteristically episcopal, is shared with ascetics (*CN* 15, 3, 3; *CN* 16, 20, 4 and *Abr. Kid.* 8, 10, 3; *Iul. Saba* 2, 15, 4; 16, 3; *Iul. Saba* 15, 3, 2; *Iul. Saba*

212 Vööbus 1958, 84–86, on the importance of fasting and poverty. Aphrahat too stresses the importance of fasting for the ascetic at *dem.* 6, 1 (“let him prepare as offerings for the King desirable fruits, fast and prayer”); 8 (“let him be diligent in fast and in prayer”).

213 On the importance of this word see Griffith 1993.

214 Referred to a surface, the adjective *špē* means “plain”, “smooth”, “flat”; for a liquid, it means “pure”, “limpid”, “clear” both because “unmixed” and because it has not been stirred; therefore, it is “calm”, “peaceful”. Metaphorically, the term is employed of human character, and it can denote a “clear” mind, as antonym of “confused”, “muddled”; it can denote a “peaceful”, “calm” character; it can denote “simplicity” or “sincerity”—that is, absence of deceit and doublethink (see Payne Smith 1879–1901, 4258–4259, 4261–4262, s.vv. ܫܦܝܘܬܐ .ܫܦܝܘܬܐ). Here, I have brought together only passages with words of the same root, but one could multiply the examples taking also synonyms into account (which are the backbone of Ephrem’s poetry), as, for example, the root *p-š-t*, meaning “simplicity” and recurring frequently in the poems on the two hermits; or *šalyūtā* (*CN* 15, 3, 2; *CN* 16, 20, 3), meaning “quiet”, “silence”, which corresponds to the word *šetqā* “silence” (see, for example, *Abr. Kid.* 8, 1, 1).

23, 24, 3)<sup>215</sup>. Finally, the chain of biblical examples Ephrem used at CN 21 to explain the bishop's moral activity is repeated for Julian Saba (*Iul. Saba* 23, 19, 2–4)<sup>216</sup>.

In sum, the content of the bishop's moral teaching should consist, according to Ephrem, mostly of ascetic virtues, which he must teach first and foremost through his personal example. Among the preoccupations of the poet, two have the most importance: greed and the fight for the attention of the bishop. Both problems have the potential to escalate and endanger the community, since greed may arouse grudges in non-Christians or envy internally, whereas if a liar or a slanderer had the bishop's ear at his disposal, he could deal heavy damages to the concord of the community.

### 3.1.5 Conclusion

The Ephremian overlapping of ascetic and episcopal virtues leads us naturally to the next theme—namely, the relationship between bishops and asceticism, especially those monastic experiences which became a force to be reckoned with in the fourth century. But before treating this new theme, it is worthwhile to review the general lines of the survey on episcopal leadership first, then to offer a synthetic picture of the bishops as characters, as they emerge from these poems.

Episcopal leadership is the fundamental theme of our poems, their *raison d'être*: at the basis of the effort to put the bishops in poetry lies the conviction that moulding the bishops means moulding the destiny of the church, since the bishops are entrusted with ecclesiastical leadership. Therefore, this is the main facet of their ministry that concerns our poems. Gregory expresses this interest explicitly, developing a historical analysis of the church: the times of the apostles have passed, and church leaders cannot be simpleminded anymore, because theological disputes and moral decline threaten the faith and require specialised treatment. Therefore, bishops should possess a theological formation, enabling them to teach orthodoxy and dispel heresy. Gregory spends much time defining this formation, which has an ambiguous relationship with pagan philosophy and draws mostly from the example of Origen. On the other side, moral decline requires a stern change of direction, in that bishops should be chosen carefully and after they proved themselves morally worthy. Actually, Gregory does not devote much attention to the kind of moral discipline the bishops should enforce: in a single passage,

<sup>215</sup> These features, more linked with an ascetic attitude than with an ascetic practice, are also stressed by Aphrahat in his exhortation to ascetics: “let us be humble [*makkikē*] and calm [*rmīsē*]” (*Aphr. dem.* 6, 1); “let him [the ascetic] be humble [*makkikē*] and calm [*rmīsē*] and intelligent [*mhawwan*] and let his word be peaceful [*nyāhā*] and sweet [*bassimā*] and let his mind be sincere [*špē*] with everyone” (8).

<sup>216</sup> “Like Joseph you did triumph [*neṣḥat*] even unto your youth / the rust of Giezi did not touch you / the filth of the sons of Eli did not adhere to you” (*Iul. Saba* 23, 19, 2–4). Joseph is mentioned as an example of chastity (see CN 21, 3, 3–4), Gehazi represents greed (see CN 21, 6, 1–2; 9, 3) and the sons of Eli gluttony (see CN 21, 9, 2).



he lists the vices the bishop should fight against and requires a merciful approach to penitence. Mercy and meekness, which feature so frequently in contemporary and previous writings on the bishop, especially in connection to the administration of penance, are conspicuously absent in Gregory.

Ephrem lacks Gregory's historical analysis and differs on some crucial points. From the doctrinal point of view, he too believes that the bishop should be the guarantor of the orthodoxy and unity of the congregation, and he makes a big deal of the defence of orthodoxy—although he is much vaguer than Gregory on the concrete points of doctrine that should be addressed. However, the Ephremian bishop has an ambiguous relationship with teaching: good teaching is appreciated as a personal quality and when the congregation is ready to receive it (as in the case of Valgash), but intellectual preparation is by no means as important for Ephrem as for Gregory; indeed the bishop may want to delegate this task to other people, such as deacons like Ephrem, and he would be wholly right in doing so. Conversely, great effort is given to defining the moral tasks of the bishop. Here, three points are to be particularly remarked: one in analogy with Gregory, one in contrast, and a third partly analogous. On the point of moral leadership, Gregory and Ephrem are absolutely in agreement on the idea that the bishop should lead first and foremost by example; therefore, he should be an outstanding moral character. Partly, this idea comes out of their need to defend or attack the real bishops they speak of, because leadership by example lends credibility and relevance to *ad hominem* attacks (or defences). For Gregory, this idea, combined with the requirement of theological formation, disqualifies both Maximus and Nectarius and obliquely presents Gregory himself as the model bishop. For Ephrem, it ensures that the blame of moral failures in the community is all charged on the community, incapable of following the bishop's example. Gregory and Ephrem are dissimilar in the important space Ephrem gives to episcopal mercy (or meekness, mildness). The Syriac poet does not link it to penance, because for him it has a much wider role to play: mercy—as opposed to justice and discipline—is the binding force of the supernatural order; as such, it characterises the ecclesial community *vis-à-vis* the state (the Roman Empire), the mature congregation, which has progressed from its beginnings, the church coming after the carnal Israel. Therefore, mercy should be the rationale of the bishop's actions, a concept particularly developed as regards rumours and advice in the community. Ephrem's bishop—differently from Gregory's—seems always encircled by people reporting rumours and advising certain kinds of conduct; hence the poet sees it as necessary to admonish the bishop to be careful in discerning good and bad rumours, useful and evil advice. Mercy should guide him in this. Finally, Ephrem is clearly persuaded that, since the bishop has to teach by example, he should adopt an ascetic lifestyle. As we shall see presently, Gregory too is persuaded that the bishop should be an ascetic, even though the transmission of an ascetic lifestyle to the rest of the congregation is less apparent in the Greek poet.

Until now I have reviewed the doctrinal implications of Gregory's and Ephrem's poems. Yet at the beginning I underlined the literary nature of the categories of "liturgy," "teaching," and "charity": one could ask oneself what kind of literary charac-

ters the bishops in Ephrem's and Gregory's poems are. It has already been highlighted how these categories come from the Christian traditions in which Ephrem and Gregory operate, whether as the fruit of theological reflection or as literary commonplaces and imagery (especially from the Bible).

In the case of Gregory, the distinction between theology and literature is more difficult to draw, because the poet describes either the ideal bishop or bad bishops: bad bishops will be examined separately (§5.2), but the description of the ideal bishop tends inevitably to become a reflection on the office of bishop *per se*. The only filter between the generic model of bishop and Gregory's ideal bishop is Gregory's own experience, in the sense that the portrait of the ideal bishop is consciously Gregory's self-portrait. Yet this in a certain sense is an unfiltering filter, because Gregory's aim is precisely to present himself as the ideal bishop, so that deviation from the theological model and individualisation are in no way desirable. In this context, Gregory's construction of an ideal bishop and his construction of a poetic self-portrait are one and the same thing, and distinguishing when the theological ideal influences the autobiography and when autobiography influences the theological ideal is almost impossible (see §5.1). In any case, the bishop of his poetry is most of all a teacher of virtue and a priestly mediator between God and mankind, very similar to the late antique philosopher, uniting theurgy, asceticism, scholarly effort, and public engagement, albeit as an outsider to the society he aims to mould.

A similar phenomenon is apparent in Ephrem's *CN* 17–21, where the new bishop, Abraham, is flooded with the whole range of advice and ideal representations of the bishop that tradition put at Ephrem's disposal. What is said of Abraham here could be said of any good bishop. The only really personal element to Abraham is his young age, which, however, is irrelevant to the present categories of liturgy, teaching, and charity. *CN* 13–16 are totally different: first of all, because they are concerned with three different bishops who were mostly good but also well known by Ephrem's public, which meant that he could simply superimpose an abstract model on their personalities; second, because Ephrem was not a bishop and was not trying to present one particular bishop as *the* ideal bishop, as Gregory does. Therefore, in these poems we see Ephrem engaging with the traditional features of an ideal bishop in order to build three different characters, Jacob, Babu, and Valgash. Babu, who is the least important for the poet, is characterised as the typical charitable bishop, engaged in material relief for the poor and for war prisoners. Jacob emerges as a forceful character, a charismatic yet stern leader for the community, the figure of a founding father. Finally, Valgash is the one we can see most clearly: scholarly and ascetic, a very good public speaker, he seems to have a sweet and merciful character. Ephrem assigns different ideal traits to different bishops in order to represent their individuality to the community: this is a chiefly literary mechanism, which serves—as we will see at §4.1—pragmatic aims, too.

### 3.2 Bishops and ascetics

There is no doubt that ascetics were one of the most important forces the ecclesiastical hierarchy had to reckon with in the fourth century. The vulgate story goes like this: After Constantine's conversion, the church became more and more entangled with the world, because of imperial support and the number of new converts. The end of persecutions spelled also the end of the church as a spiritual elite detached from society because ready to die for the faith. In reaction to this perceived decadence, individual Christians of Egypt seceded from society and went to live in the desert, undertaking a life of harsh renunciation, a daily martyrdom to replace the literal martyrdom of the Christians of old. Since these Christians lived alone, they were called "monks" (from Gr. μοναχός). Later in the fourth century, besides the lonely life of the anchorites, there developed also the communitarian life of the coenobites: traditionally, Anthony the Great was held to be the first anchorite monk, and Pachomius the initiator of coenobitism. A common trait of these monks would have been their indifference, sometimes even their disdain, towards the secular clergy, seen as too entangled in the life of this world. But the suspicion was mutual: the ecclesiastical hierarchy would not accept the autonomy and independent charisma of these monks, since it threatened the hierarchy's hold on the Christian community. Therefore, a variety of conflicts, solutions, and models of coexistence developed, as witnessed, for example, by Athanasius, Basil, and, later on, Cassiodorus, Benedict of Nursia, and Gregory the Great<sup>217</sup>. The conflict between secular clergy and monks would be one of the essential lenses through which to interpret the history of the church in the passage between antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Though not utterly false, this traditional image is partial and incomplete. The scholarship of at least the last fifty years has shown that many points should be corrected or expanded. This has been done along two main lines: scholars have highlighted geographic differences against the Egyptian bias of the common notions, and the importance of Constantine has been somewhat downplayed. Nowadays, the development of Christian asceticism is seen more as a continuum, beginning before the end of the persecutions<sup>218</sup>. Monks and clergy are not seen as two monolithic ranks; rather, we know that a variety of ascetic models as well as many different approaches of the clergy to ascetics existed. Local traditions played a role, with Syria and Mesopotamia having a place of their own beside Egypt as creative spawning ground of holy men and ascetic

<sup>217</sup> Paradigmatic of this traditional reconstruction is chapter 37 of Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. On asceticism substituting martyrdom: Malone 1950; on the trope of the monk refusing ordination: Sterk 2004, 2–3.

<sup>218</sup> This is clear for the Syro-Mesopotamian asceticism described by Vööbus 1958; as regards Egyptian asceticism, the pre-Constantinian *apotaktikoi* have been described and highlighted by Goehring 1999; moreover, Egyptian monasticism—and the entire life of the church for that matter—was to be deeply influenced by the works and thought of Origen, in which there is already an ascetic ideology (see Völker 1931). Finally, an overview of asceticism from the New Testament to Augustine is given by Brown 2008.

models: more than just the Anthonian anchorite and Pachomian coenobite, we better appreciate stylites, vagrant ascetics, extravagant penitents, episcopal circles of ascetics, chaste marriages, educated virgins, aristocratic renunciants, and holy bishops as different, often polemically opposed, models of sanctity<sup>219</sup>. For this reason, even the name of “monk” is too reductive, and I prefer to use the label “ascetic”, so as not to suggest a priori an Egyptian influence for our texts<sup>220</sup>. What remains true of the traditional image is that the secular clergy had to come to terms with these different experiences and that the relationship between the developing asceticism and the hierarchy is one of the defining features of late antique Christianity. This does not imply that the relationship was always one of disdain and suspicion, but rather that different attitudes—both from ascetics and from clergymen—developed, and in many cases the same individual could conciliate both categories. Our very texts offer abundant information on this aspect, which forms one of the central themes for both poets.

The relationship between the bishop and other ascetics is treated only in passing, but it is interesting that both poets presume it to be one of the tasks of the bishop to lead ascetics. Ephrem, perhaps exaggerating, says that the “flock” (*marʿtā*) entrusted from Valgash to his successor Abraham is composed of the fourth and third part of “saints” (*qaddīšā*), a word concretely meaning “virgin” or “celibate”<sup>221</sup>. From two stanzas it is clear that, in Ephrem’s view, the bishop was responsible of the conduct of these celibates, who are also called “virgins” (*btūlē* and *btūlātā*) and “chaste” (*nakpātā*)<sup>222</sup>. This dependence on the bishop is clarified by a line in one of these stanzas, in which the bishop is called to make “the covenant” (*qyāmā*) to shine (CN 21, 5, 8), because this reference to a *qyāmā* in relation to ascetics clearly alludes to the institution of the *bnay qyāmā*. The

219 Beside Vööbus 1958, Goehring 1999 and Brown 2008, one may consult Brown 1971b and Brock 1973 (for the extravagant streak of Syrian asceticism); Sterk 2004 (for the relationship between bishop and ascetics, and in part. 20–25 for Syro-Mesopotamian asceticism and the passage from urban ascetics to extravagant asceticism and 25–32, 41–43 for asceticism in Asia Minor; in particular the model of Eustathius of Sebaste); Griffith 1995 (on Syriac urban ascetics); Harvey 1993 and Harvey 2005 (for the educated and ascetic women of Syria); Giardina 1994 (for Roman aristocratic women); Gautier 2002, again Sterk 2004, Rapp 2005 (for holy bishops).

220 See Griffith 1995, 237–238.

221 “Moses committed to Joshua // a sheepfold whose half was wolves, / whereas to you a flock was entrusted // whose third and fourth part is consecrated [*qaddīšā*]. / **Blessed is he who adorned your flock!**” (CN 19, 6, 6–10). Beck 1961b, 62n15; cf. Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3501, s.v. *ܩܕܝܫܐ*.

222 “Here is your flock, oh blessed, / rise and tend it, oh diligent! // Jacob ordered the sheepfolds, / you order these speaking sheep, // make the chaste [*btūlē*] shine purely [*zakhē dakyāʿt*], / the virgins [*btūlātā*] modestly [*nakpāʿt*], // establish the priests in splendour, / the powerful in humility, // and the people in righteousness. / **Blessed is he who filled you with understanding!**” (CN 19, 3); “Be thou a crown for priesthood/ and through you be glorified the worship, // be thou a brother for the priests, / a chief for the deacons, too, // be thou a master for the infancy, / a staff and help for old age, // be thou a bulwark for the virgins [*nakpātā*], / may the covenant [*qyāmā*] in your tenure be splendid [*netnaṣṣaḥ*], // and the church by your beauty adorned. / **Blessed is he who chose you to be a priest!**” (CN 21, 5). For these terms: Vööbus 1958, 103–106.

“sons (or daughters) of the covenant” differed from Egyptian and later Syrian ascetics in that they did not forsake the city to live in the uncivilised space of the heath or the desert; on the contrary, these Christians took up vows of virginity (and likely poverty) during their baptism and, remaining in the city, served the Christian congregation as deacons or catechists, which meant that they were beholden to their bishop<sup>223</sup>.

Ephrem mentions the bishop’s duty towards ascetics in the context of his description of the bishop’s duties to the congregation, in which he carefully distinguishes different categories of members to stress the different approaches a bishop should adopt in order to help each kind of member become the best possible Christian. Interestingly, he distinguishes different categories in the community only in the poems on Abraham (CN 17–21), whereas in the poems on Valgash—except for a reference to ascetics in CN 13, 21 (see §4.3)—he presents the community almost as a monolith. This reflects two different rhetorical strategies: in CN 17–21 Ephrem wants to present/advise the model of a bishop, an abstract figure encompassing all desirable characteristics of a bishop and engaging every possible task of a bishop, because Abraham, having just been elected, does not yet have a particular profile or personality; he is pure potential. With Valgash (CN 13–16), instead, Ephrem has to take into account the individual gifts and shortcomings of an experienced bishop, and, most of all, he has to defend him before the community. Moreover, avoiding distinction inside the community is in keeping with Ephrem’s strategy for solving its internal conflict (§4.2).

Gregory seems to reference a similar duty to lead ascetics, but his motivations are completely different. Having forcefully presented the argument against the ordination of neophytes because of their lack of preparation (II, 1, 12, 541–569), he adds that such unqualified ordinations are nonsensical because the new bishop would find himself leading people who are much more progressed in the faith and much saintlier (II, 1, 12, 570–574 and again 637–641)<sup>224</sup>. Gregory introduces this argument for its cogency as well as to compare the ascetic (575–609) and the worldly bishop (610–633), a compelling jab against his rival Nectarius. However, it is unclear from the text alone whether this argument refers to a concrete situation in the churches of Constantinople and of Nazianzus or whether the idea of the bishop guiding and teaching the ascetic is derived only from Nectarius’s replacement of Gregory on the episcopal seat.

<sup>223</sup> Griffith 1995, 233; see also Vööbus 1958, 97–103; Nedungatt 1973; Sterk 2004, 20–45; Harvey 2005, 128–130.

<sup>224</sup> Πῶς δὲ σὺ βλέπων κάτω / Τοῦτον μένοντα τοῦ Θεοῦ παραστάτην, / Ὑψαυχενεῖς τε καὶ θρόνων στέργεις κράτος, / Ἄλλ’ οὐχὶ φρίσσεις, οὐδ’ ἐπιτρέμεις θρόνοις, / Μὴ βοῦς ἐλαύνης κρείσσονας βοηλάτου; ... Ὁ δ’ ἐγκρατὴς ἔστηκεν ἡτιμωμένος, / Κάτω νενευκῶς, πρὸς Θεὸν μόνον βλέπων, / Στέργων μαθητοῦ χώραν, οὗ μὴδ’ ἄξιος / Ἰσως μαθητῆς, οὗτος ὁ νῦν διδάσκαλος. / Εἴπερ τὸ κρατεῖν οὐ τόπω γνωρίζεται. Note the nice parallels and contrasts between these two figures: βλέπων κάτω (570) and πρὸς Θεὸν μόνον βλέπων (638), Ὑψαυχενεῖς (572) and Κάτω νενευκῶς (638), θρόνων στέργεις κράτος (572) and Στέργων μαθητοῦ χώραν (639). Similarly to what noted Meier 1989, 143, the entire argument of 541–641 expands on *or.* 43, 26 (see also §2.1.2.1). Moreover, the bishop is defined as σωφρονιστὴς παρθένων at II, 1, 12, 428.

A review of Gregory's other texts confirms the former: the bishop had to deal with ascetics, and this had always been one of Gregory's main problems in leading (or helping to lead) communities. Gregory reconciled his father with ascetics in Nazianzus after the Gregory the Elder had signed the Creed of Rimini-Constantinople, as witnessed by *or.* 6<sup>225</sup>. Around the same period, he acted as mediator in Caesarea between Basil with his ascetic community and the local bishop, Eusebius, as demonstrated *ep.* 16–19 and *or.* 43, 28<sup>226</sup>. As regards the Constantinopolitan period, it is likely that those who tried to stone Gregory in Constantinople were local ascetics<sup>227</sup>. Finally, in his last years in Nazianzus, he had to deal with Apollinarists, who may have been monks<sup>228</sup>. If we bear in mind these past dealings with ascetic groups, Gregory is arguing very compellingly when he says that a neophyte bishop will have a hard time leading ascetics, although he does not say explicitly why: past experiences made him wise on the resistance of ascetics to unworthy clergymen, especially if the latter were also theologically unprepared and of a different dogmatic persuasion from the ascetics; the fact that one could not ignore the pressure of these groups demonstrates that these ascetics were no anchorites isolated from the world, but lived in the community—often at its centre—and claimed a privileged voice in church matters. When dealing with these groups, ascetic credentials were an important asset for the bishop to maintain his authority.

This brings us to the main concern of both poets as regards asceticism: the notion of the bishop as responsible for ascetics is only alluded to, the main preoccupation being the bishop as ascetic himself. Here, however, there is a difference between the two poets: if Gregory presents more than once a well-rounded portrait of his ascetic-bishop, with recognizable traits that mark him as such, Ephrem, partly because he stands in a tradition of which we know less, is not always equally clear with the terminology he employs and often seems to allude to ascetic values without explicitly defining them. There are catchwords and recurring images which may allude to asceticism and are scattered throughout the poems.

### 3.2.1 The ascetics in Ephrem

A constellation of such words gravitates around the figure of Jacob, the first bishop of Nisibis. In the differential descriptions of the three bishops, where Babu is characterised by charity and Valgash by teaching, Jacob seems marked by “labour” (*amlā*) and “triumph” (root *n-ṣ-ḥ*)<sup>229</sup>. The word *amlā*, as recorded also by the dictionaries, is com-

<sup>225</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 105–115, 133; Elm 2000a; Elm 2012, 201–212.

<sup>226</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 131–135, 140–143.

<sup>227</sup> Greg. Naz. *ep.* 77; McGuckin 2001a, 257.

<sup>228</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 389.

<sup>229</sup> “Against the first wrath / fought the toil [*amlā*] of the first” (CN 13, 16, 1–2); “The good toil [*amlā*] of the first / bound the land up in her distress” (CN 14, 2, 1–2); “The first tilled the earth with toil [*amlā*]”

monly used for ascetic endeavour, even by Ephrem (or a poet near to him) in relation to the innovative anchorites of Edessa, a few years after our Nisibene poems<sup>230</sup>. The case of the root *n-ṣ-ḥ* is a bit more complicated. First, the root has no exact correspondence in the English language, because it covers the meanings of “glowing” or “shining”, “flourishing”, “strong”, “glorious,” and “triumphant” or “winning”<sup>231</sup>. In the dictionaries, it seems mostly associated with martyrs, especially the adjective *naṣṣīḥā*<sup>232</sup>. In Ephrem it is found to describe the relics of the apostle Thomas, but also for Old Testament patriarchs and, most of all, for the Edessene anchorites<sup>233</sup>. The occurrences of the word at CN 29 (13, 2; 14, 2; 15, 2) are deeply ambiguous, since they are accompanied by the attributes “chaste” (*nakpē*, 15, 1) and “mature” (*gmīrē*, 13, 2) and by a reference to “fasts” (15, 2), which may suggest ascetics, while the idea that their death is an “offering” to God (*qurbānā*, 16, 5–6) may suggest martyrs<sup>234</sup>. Moreover, in our poems *n-ṣ-ḥ* qualifies all the bishops, and it is also what the *bnay qyāmā* should be<sup>235</sup>. If one had to define a concept to encompass all these occurrences of the word, it would be that of “saint” in its functional sense: *naṣṣīḥā* and derivatives functionally correspond to “sanctity” and

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(CN 14, 3, 1); “Before the One rewarding the wearied, / she [the church of Nisibis] brings the labour [*amlā*] of the first;” (CN 14, 24, 1–2); “To the first siege resisted / the first, triumphant [*naṣṣīḥā*] priest” (CN 13, 17, 1–2); “Like the triumphant [*naṣṣīḥā*] priest Jacob, / with him she [the church of Nisibis] triumphed [*nṣaḥt*] like him” (CN 19, 16, 1–2). Cf. the reference to fasting: “The first priest by hand of fasting / had closed the gates of the mouths” (CN 14, 4, 1–2).

**230** Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2913–2914, s.v. *ܢܨܨܝܗܐ*; Sokoloff 2009, 1110, s.v. *ܢܨܨܝܗܐ*; *Abr. Kid.* 1, 4, 3; 15, 5; 20, 5; *Abr. Kid.* 5, 31, 2; *Iul. Saba* 3, 8, 1; 9, 1; 12, 1. The poems on Abraham Kidunaia and Julian Saba witness the beginnings of a new type of Syriac asceticism, one better known to us thanks to Theodoret’s *History of the Monks of Syria* (Sterk 2004, 24–25); however, they can be useful in tracing the lexicon of asceticism, because we can assume that similar language applied to this new phenomenon and to previous styles of asceticism expresses similar realities, or at least perceptions (Griffith 1995, 237). Therefore, the otherwise generic word ‘*amlā*’, applied poignantly to Jacob and to the Edessan anchorites suggests that the “labour” expressed is not that of ecclesiastical government, but of ascetic practice.

**231** Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2437–2439; Sokoloff 2009, 939–940.

**232** Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2438, s.v. *ܢܨܨܝܗܐ*; Sokoloff 2009, 941, s.v. *ܢܨܨܝܗܐ*. But see Aphrahat *dem.* 6, 1: “let him run in the arena (*b-’agōnā*) as a winner (*naṣṣīḥā*)”.

**233** Thomas the apostle’s relics: CN 42, refrain. Samuel and Joseph’s bones: CN 42, 6, 6; CN 43, 2, 11. Job: CN 18, 7, 3. For ascetics: *Abr. Kid.* 1, 4, 1; 19, 2–3; *Abr. Kid.* 2, 5, 1; 6, 2; *Abr. Kid.* 3, refrain; 3, 1; 20, 3–4; *Abr. Kid.* 4, 1, 1; 5, 5; *Abr. Kid.* 5, 1; 4, 4; 22, 1; 27, 1; 30, 5; 31, 5; *Iul. Saba* 1, 2, 2; 3, 3; 4, 1; *Iul. Saba* 2, 4, 1; 4, 5; 6, 5; 15, 5; *Iul. Saba* 3, 2, 1; 4, 5; 6, 7, 1; 13, 5; *Iul. Saba* 4, 6, 5; 12, 1; 5.

**234** “Lo! My virtuous were abducted / my mature and my triumphant [*gmīray w-naṣṣīḥay*]! ... For each one with his character / honoured me, and with triumphs [*b-neṣḥānē*] ... Where did my chaste ones [*nakpay*] come / triumphant in their fasts [*nāṣḥay b-ṣawmay-hōn*] ... you chose them to be abducted / each one as your sacrifice [*l-qurbān-āk*]” (CN 29, 13, 1–2; 14, 1–2; 15, 1–2; 16, 5–6). *Gmīrē* for ascetics: Murray 2006, 258–259; the term is also prominent in the *Book of Steps*; death of the martyr as sacrifice: Moss 2010, 77–87.

**235** “Three priests dazzling [*naṣṣīḥē*] / in likeness of the two luminaries” (CN 13, 1, 1–2); “in you we see all three of them // glorious [*naṣṣīḥē*] who parted from us;” (CN 17, 11, 4–5); “Without testament departed those / three priests dazzling [*naṣṣīḥē*]” (CN 19, 15, 1–2). “The covenant [*qyāmā*] in your tenure may be splendid [*netnaṣṣaḥ*]” (CN 21, 5, 8).

“saint”, meaning a person worthy of extraordinary reverence because of her merits and inherent value. This is the only category encompassing Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, apostles, martyrs, ascetics, relics, and bishops; and a clear confirmation of this idea comes from the *Poems on Paradise*, where the souls in paradise are divided according to their merit into three categories (*hymn. parad.* 2, 11, 5–6): the “penitents” (*tayyābē*), occupying the ground level, the “righteous” (*zaddiqē*), occupying the middle level, and the “triumphant” (*naṣṣīḥē*), lodged in the “elevation” (*rawmā*)<sup>236</sup>.

Without denying that, in comparison to Babu and Valgash, Jacob is presented as the ascetic bishop, Ephrem describes also Valgash and, later, Abraham as ascetics themselves. The ascetic values underscored by Ephrem for these two bishops are wholly traditional for Syriac Christianity: on a very down-to-earth level, those values are chastity, fasting, and waking. The importance of fasting and continence has already been highlighted. Wakefulness has an equally fundamental role, especially in connection with the concept of *vita angelica*—that is, the ascetic as imitating the angels; this concept can entail different practices depending on the community’s understanding of angelic life. In Syriac, one of the names of the angels is ʾīrē, “the wakeful ones”, derived from the narrative of Daniel 4, so that in Syriac asceticism, where the concept of *vita angelica* is very important, wakefulness and prayer wakes are equally important practices<sup>237</sup>.

The ascetic values are summed up at CN 18, 1, 1–4:

238 ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ  
ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ  
(CN 18, 1, 1–4)

Here, Ephrem remarks that the new bishop Abraham has taken on all the ascetic credentials of the previous bishop, Valgash, which means that both are, at least in Ephrem’s literary portrait, ascetics. The choice of word by Ephrem is very poignant. The new bishop is *kāhnā*, a word which encompasses both the meaning of “priest” and of “bishop”, whereas the old one is *rabbā*, which can mean both “bishop” and “master”, so that the relationship of the two words can be interpreted either as priest and bishop (as it was *before* Valgash died and Abraham was elected) or as “bishop” and “predecessor”, “master” (as it was at the time); but the words are also nearly synonymous, which reinforces the idea

236 Functional and etymological equivalents of *naṣṣīḥā* in Western languages would be μακάριος and *beatus*, terms which express a surplus of vitality and being, whereas the words of exclusion and purity, ἄγιος and *sanctus*, correspond to Syriac *qaddiṣā* etymologically but, at least in Ephrem’s language, not functionally: in Ephrem *qaddiṣā* is not used generically in the sense of “saint”, but it is still linked specifically with virginity and asceticism. A word of meaning and usage similar to *naṣṣīḥā* is *zhī*, which denotes “light”, “splendour” but with a connotation of “purity” (at CN 19, 3, 5 for ascetics; at line 7 of priests; more than once for the liturgy: CN 18, 11, 10; 12, 4 referring to the body of the bishop for the liturgy; CN 21, 5, 2).

237 Bruns 2016.

238 “Lo! As he is priest [*kāhen*] after his bishop [*rabb-eh*], / shining [*zahyā*] after the splendid [*naṣṣīḥā*], // modest [*nakpā*] after the sober [*yaqqīrā*], / vigilant [*šahhārā*] after the fasting [*šayyāmā*].”



of a seamless succession between the two. Similarly, the other couples are synonymous, with slightly different connotations: both *zahyā* and *naṣṣihā* are associated with light, but the first has a connotation of purity, the latter of victory; *nakpā* and *yaqqirā* can both mean “reverend”, “honourable”, but *nakpā* means also “modest”, “chaste”; *ṣahhārā* and *ṣawmāyā*, though they do not describe the same renunciation, are clearly employed so that the application of one to each bishop implies the application of the other too.

Valgash’s ascetic portrait immediately follows the stanzas already examined in §3.1.4.4—namely, *CN* 15, 3–4, in which the community was rebuked for its failure to conform to the bishop’s example. They constitute praise of the contested bishop, while at the same time aggravating the blame on the community—although only implicitly.

<p>ṣawmāyā, ṣahhārā ḥayyā          ṣawmāyā ḥayyā ḥayyā</p>	<p>ṣawmāyā ḥayyā ḥayyā 5          ṣawmāyā ḥayyā ḥayyā          ṣawmāyā ḥayyā ḥayyā</p>
<p>ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā          ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā</p>	<p>ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā 6          ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā          ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā</p>
<p>ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā          ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā</p>	<p>ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā 7          ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā          ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā</p>
<p>ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā          ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā</p>	<p>ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā 8          ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā          ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā</p>
<p>ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā          ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā          (CN 15, 5–9)</p>	<p>ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā 9          ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā          ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā ḥayyā</p>

This praise of the bishop transmits a quantity of invaluable information. First, we note yet again the prevalence of the ideal of chastity, expressed through the ascetic keywords *nakpā* (6, 2; 8, 4; 9, 5) and *qaddīṣā* (9, 3). The concept is conveyed also by the expression

<sup>239</sup> “Look what measure [*kaylā*] and balance [*matqālā*] / is in his words and in his deeds, // Heed that even his paces / possess the metres of peace [*muṣḥātā d-ṣelyā*]! // All of him has the reins [*pgūdē*] of the whole of him. /// He was a master for his youth [*ṭalyūt-eh*], / whose submission was the yoke of sobriety [*nakpūtā*]. // His members did not become wanton, / because they were put under the rod. // His will was a compulsion to him. /// For he anticipated and outpaced his rank / by hurrying and bearing an early fruit of habits; // because he laid his foundation firmly [*taqnā’ūt*], / he became a leader [*rēṣā*] in his youth, // as he was made preacher for the people. /// He was excellent among the preachers, / and he was learned among the lecturers, // and he was eloquent among the sages [*ḥakkīmē*]; / he was chaste [*nakpā*] among his brethren, // and he was venerable [*yaqqirā*] among his friends. /// In two dwellings was he / a solitary [*iḥīdayā*] for his whole life, // being pure [*qaddīṣā*] inside his body / and solitary [*iḥīdayā*] inside his house [*bayt-eh*] // and both inwardly and outwardly chaste [*b-kasyā w-galyā nakpā*].”

“he was a master of his youth” (*mārā l-ṭalyūt-eh*, 6, 1), where youth is the age with the strongest *libido* and therefore the most prone to the opposite sin of lust<sup>240</sup>. Lines 3–4 of stanza 6 have the same meaning. Second, the insistence on the technical term *ihīdāyā* is to be noted, because it guarantees that Ephrem is really talking of a form of institutional asceticism. In this respect, stanza 9 preserves precious information on the life of Syriac ascetics: Ephrem interprets the “singleness” (*ihīdāyūtā*) of Valgash as chastity when referring to the body (*qaddīšūtā*), and solitude in reference to the place where he lived. This can be interpreted in two ways, either as a reference to anchoritic life or as a reference to the phenomenon of *subintroductae* and *agapetae*. Unfortunately, the fact that Valgash resided “in his house” (*b-gaw bayt-eh*, 9, 4) does not help us interpret the bishop’s “singleness”, because the word *baytā* is so generic it need not mean “house”, but can also mean “room”, “cell”, which would not exclude anchoritic life outside the city. However, the external evidence suggests that this *baytā* was in fact Valgash’s house in the city and that his solitude in it refers to the absence of women ascetics. The custom of cohabitation between ascetics of opposite sex was a rising concern in the fourth century, as witnessed by the third canon of Nicaea, and all the more in the Syriac churches: Aphrahat’s *Demonstration 6* is mainly devoted to dissuading ascetics from living together with women and persuading women ascetics to consent to such an arrangement, but the theme is pervasive in Aphrahat’s and Ephrem’s treatments of the *bnay qyāmā*, which suggests a moment of crisis for the institution<sup>241</sup>. In such a historical context, Ephrem’s remark on Valgash living alone in his house acquires much more significance as a rigoristic and not generally accepted choice; moreover, there is no evidence of Ephrem encountering anchorites before his exile in Edessa in 363.

Stanzas 7 and 8 confirm that Valgash did live in the city, because they describe his career in the ranks of the clergy, during which he passed through offices such as “preacher” (*kārōzā*, 7, 5; 8, 1), “lector” (*qārōyā*, 8, 2), “sage” (*hakkīmā*, 8, 3), and also “leader” (*rēšā*, 7, 4)<sup>242</sup>. Moreover, lines 4–5 of stanza 8 strongly suggest that Valgash’s status was shared with a community of “brethren” (*ʾaḥē*) or “friends” (*ḥabbībē*). These two facts are better accounted for if we imagine Valgash’s asceticism as rooted in city life rather than as a renouncing of the city for a vagrant life in the heath, a solitary one in the desert, or even the marginal life of Egyptian monks on the fringes of villages. Much to the

<sup>240</sup> Sin and youth are closely associated, so that the sinful youth is almost a *topos*: “and since in you [Nisibis] sinned my youth [*ṭalyūt-(y)*] / in you may find grace my old age!” (CN 2, 20, 5–6). It is particularly associated with the patriarch Joseph (*Abr. Kid.* 11, 19; *Iul. Saba* 23, 19; CN 43, 2), who is seen as a young man when he was tempted by Potiphar’s wife, making his resistance even more praiseworthy. Note these lines: “[Joseph] put on his youth [*ṭalyūt-eh*] the reins of chastity [*pgūdē d-nakpūtā*]” (CN 43, 2, 5–6); they bear strong similarities to CN 15, 5, 5; 6, 1–2.

<sup>241</sup> Griffith 1995, 235–237.

<sup>242</sup> *rēšā* is the normal term for “bishop” (§2.1.1), but here it could also be referred to other roles of leadership thanks to its general usage. Precise information on Valgash’s career is lost, because Ephrem alludes to it as if the audience was already familiar with the different roles the bishop had in his youth. On the light these lines shed as regards the delegation of preaching duties from the bishop, see §3.1.3.2.

contrary, the “brethren” are at the very centre of the Christian community, since from their ranks the members of the clergy are selected, as was the case for Valgash. Moreover, the offices occupied by Valgash seem to be very public: the tasks of preacher and lector, for example, would have put him before the whole congregation. This passage disproves Elijah of Nisibis’s note in his *Chronography*—supposedly taken from the “stories of the metropolitans of Nisibis”—that Valgash had been a hermit in the mountains around Edessa, presumably on the model of Julian Saba and Abraham Kidunaia, celebrated by Ephrem and his circle in that city. The claim is still repeated by Vööbus and Fiey<sup>243</sup>.

From the point of view of imagery, chastity, the main form of ascetic renunciation, is characterised through metaphors of measure (stanza 5) and of coercion (stanza 6). This choice serves the wider imagery of the poem, in which the different phases of moral growth and the different behaviours they require are linked through the concept of “measure” or “proportion”, and the measure to be applied to the community at its beginning is coercion<sup>244</sup>. This way, the poet casts the community that trespasses measure in contrast with the bishop who applied compulsion to himself during his youth to be able to exercise mercy to others in his old age<sup>245</sup>. As regards the origin of these metaphors, the metaphor of “measure” seems remarkably nonbiblical. I could not find any Bible passage in which “measure” is used as a metaphor of morally good behaviour, nor a passage employing the three terms used here by Ephrem<sup>246</sup>. On the contrary, the image was traditional in Greek culture, even before Aristotle gave it a philosophical foundation. A good example is a line from Hesiod: μέτρα φυλάσσεσθαι· καιρὸς δ’ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἄριστος (Hesiod.

243 Vööbus 1960, 405; Fiey 1977, 31.

244 “Yet even if we, my brethren, / have confused the meters [*muṣḥātā*] // and spoiled the discretion, / and are returned as schoolboys // for the perfection who called us, ... It is us, then, whom the beginnings chastised, / and then chided us the middle, // the endings increased our sweetness, / but when our taste came, // our loss of flavour was greater.” (CN 15, 10; 15). See §4.1.1. The word I translated as “school-boys” (*yālōpē*) means exclusively “disciple”, “pupil” or “recruit” by ancient writers, while Payne Smith 1879–1901, 214 s.v. *ܝܠܐܦܝܐ*, gives also the meaning of “scholar” “learned person”. All other translators take this last meaning and render: “we became master to ourselves of the perfection that was calling us” (Bickell 1866, 104; Stopford 1989, 184; Fhéali/Navarre 1989, 55). Beck however translates the word *yālōpē* as “Schüler”. Considering the following verses, in which the theme of regression is prominent, Beck’s translation, despite its unusual ring (to be a disciple is normally seen as a positive attitude in contrast with the pride of who wants to be teacher), is to endorse. For the bishop as teacher, see §2.2.4.4.

245 “As a leader, both chaste and venerable, / without raging nor grudging, // he didn’t swerve as we had done, / but defined and preserved his measures, // and gave the reins to his reason. ... Hence the mild resisted patiently, / and didn’t use compulsion, // so as to honour greatly our old age; / and since she knew not her degree, // let him be honoured who knew her time.” (CN 15, 12; 17).

246 *Kaylā*; *matqālā*; *muṣḥātā*, the first used mostly for volume, the second for weight and the third for dimension or age; see Lev. 19:35: *b-massa’tā b-matqālā wa-b-kyāltā*, where however the word *muṣḥātā* does not appear and *massa’tā* is present in its stead. The three words of measure are here used in their literal sense, in a ban against dishonesty in financial transactions. Similarly, *kaylā*, *matqālā* and *muṣḥātā* do appear elsewhere in Ephrem (*hymn. fid.* 30, 1–4 and *hymn. haer.* 53, 5) but they have completely different meanings from here, referring in *hymn. fid.* to physics and in *hymn. haer.* to poetry and metre. For a discussion of these terms, see Beck 1983. A possible exception might be Sir. 21:25, where *b-matqālā* describes how the wise man speaks.

op. 694), which resembles “the measure of truth [*muṣḥat-quṣṭā*] / preserved herself [*nāṭrā naps-āh*] in his vessel” (CN 15, 11, 1–2). Aeschylus (*choeph.* 794–799) speaks of imposing μέτρον and ῥυθμός on a horse, which parallels Ephrem’s imagery of *Kayal* (measure of capacity, as μέτρον) and *muṣḥtā* (poetic metre) and of the reins (*pgūdē*) at CN 15, 5<sup>247</sup>. Without posing a direct filiation of Ephrem’s image from the quoted texts, one can rightly infer that the comparison suggests that this imagery was more at home in Greek than in the Bible, so that Ephrem’s employment of it may be a trace of hellenisation.

Shared imagery between the ascetic bishop and the congregation points to another facet of episcopal asceticism, one deeply connected with Ephrem’s view of the episcopal office: teaching by example. Shared imagery expresses the failure or success of the community to conform to the behaviour of its bishop. The importance of example for the bishop had been already pointed out in more than one respect (see §2.2.3; §3.1.4.3), but here its link with ascetic ideals should be highlighted. It is well known that the early Syriac church considered ascetics the ideal Christians and the living sign of what Christians should be; this elite status before their community was heightened by the fact that they lived in the midst of it and served it, differently from anchorites. This ideal is shared by Ephrem, as witnessed, for example, by his remark that the flock Abraham received from his master is composed “for the third and fourth part of virgins” (CN 19, 6, 8–9). If, however, asceticism is the true Christian ideal and if the primary teaching method of the bishop is example, necessarily the ideal bishop should be an ascetic. This train of thought is expressed at CN 15, 3–4 (see §3.1.4.4) and in the first stanzas of CN 16 (1–6; see §2.2.3.3), where the bishop is compared to a mirror and where moral improvement is expressed with the metaphor of “ornament” (*ṣebtā*). In Aphrahat, “ornament” is almost always mentioned in its literal sense; therefore, the writer here is giving it a negative connotation as a sign of vanity<sup>248</sup>. In Ephrem, the image is instead used metaphorically and with positive connotations for the good deeds of the saint, and among these especially ascetic practices<sup>249</sup>. With Ephrem, “adornment” becomes one of the standard expressions for asceticism.

Ephrem also portrays Abraham as an ascetic bishop. Ascetic values, such as chastity and fasting, are mentioned throughout the poems on Abraham, making clear his

247 Other uses of μέτρον as “due measure” in a moral sense can be found at Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1123, s.v. μέτρον. For the double meaning of μέτρον as moral measure and poetic prosody in Gregory see §1.3.2.

248 The exception is *dem.* 6, 10, where Aphrahat says to ascetics: “Jesus does not ask anything else for himself from us but that we adorn (*nṣabbet*) our temple for him”.

249 In particular see: “The diligent [*kāšrē*] carry their own fruits / and now run forward // to meet Paradise / as it exults with every sort of fruit. // They enter that Garden/ with glorious deeds [*neṣḥānē*], // and it sees / that the fruit of the just / surpass in their excellence / the fruits of its own trees // and that the adornment of the victorious [*ṣebtē d-naṣṣihē*] / outrival its own [*l-taṣbīt-āh*]” (*hymn. parad.* 6, 11; tr. Brock 1990, 112–113), a stanza crowded with ascetic terminology. The same idea at CN 13, 11, 4, where Nisibis as “daughter born of vows” (*bartā ba(r)t-nedrē*, CN 13, 11, 3) is said to have received “ornament [*taṣbitā*] corresponding to its beauty [*šupr-āh*]”, meaning that the bishops agreed in the ascetic outlook of the community and reinforced it.

belonging to the same ascetic order, the *bnay qyāmā*, as Valgash<sup>250</sup>. Among these values, the poems on Abraham give pride of place to poverty: in three different stanzas the poet identifies in poverty the most significant legacy of the previous bishops, founding the legitimacy of the new one.

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These stanzas share the same connection of three different themes: episcopal succession, poverty, and teaching. The passage of offices from a bishop to his successor, in two cases exemplified by the biblical paradigm of transmission of charisma—namely, by the narrative of Elijah and Elisha (1Reg. 19; 2Reg. 2)—is played out essentially as

250 CN 17, 4, 7–8 (fasting and prayer, the same values underlined by Aphrahat in *dem.* 6); CN 17, 8, 10 and 12, 5–6 (image of ornament); CN 18, 1; CN 19, 1 and CN 20, 1 (virginity); CN 21, 1–4; 6; 9 (fasting, chastity, poverty and other ascetic virtues).

251 “Helija’s poverty [*meskēnūt-eh*] / loved Elisha more than riches, // the poor [*meskēnā*] gave to the poor / the gift that’s great above all. // Because you loved the misery [*šrīkūt-eh*] / of your master, the innerly rich [*attirā kasyā*], // May the fountain of his words gush from you, / so that you become the Spirit’s lyre, // and he sings to you in you his wills. / **Blessed is he who made you his treasurer!** /// Without testament departed those / three priests dazzling, // but since they meditated on those / two testaments of God, // a big inheritance they left us, / namely the model of poverty [*ṭupsā d-meskēnūtā*]; // without possessing anything / those blessed made us their possession: // their church was their treasure! / **Blessed is he who bought through them his possession!** ///.

252 A great bliss was concealed / in Elijah’s poverty; // Elisha served him and claimed / a double reward for his service, // double virtue she gave him, / as he twice put on her noble deeds [*neṣḥān-eh*]. // Because you loved the poverty / of your rich master, Valgash, // may you inherit the treasure of his wisdom. / **Blessed is he who enriched your teaching!**”.

the transmission of a way of life marked first and foremost by poverty. If the recipient embraces this way of life, he is also endowed with the authority to teach. This is very clear in *CN* 19, 8 and *CN* 21, 2, which showcase the reference to Elijah and Elisha, but less so in *CN* 19, 15, where the nexus between succession in poverty and teaching is not so explicit. However, the puns of the stanza imply a relation with teaching: Ephrem plays with the double meaning of the word *diatēkē*, which can mean either “last will and testament” or any of the two biblical Testaments. The “testament” the previous bishops leave is a *tupsā*, a charged word in Ephrem’s language, because it defines one of the chief procedures of his biblical interpretation<sup>253</sup>. Therefore, in leaving a “model of poverty”, the bishops have also left a model through which to read Scripture; therefore, their testament is the Testaments. The combination of these three themes, poverty, succession, and teaching, is to be understood, as has already been said, in relation to the importance of teaching by example for Ephrem: the bishops transmit not only an office and a charisma but also an example; ideally, the successor is selected in the community, and specifically in its inner circle of ascetics, for his conformity to the example of the predecessor, so that he will be able to transmit to the community at large and to his successor the same way of life<sup>254</sup>.

Such reasoning would work for any particular ascetic value, so that it remains to be asked why Ephrem develops it especially for poverty. A hint may lie in the fact that in *CN* 21 Ephrem singles out greed among the many moral problems a community may face (see §3.1.4.4). If we piece together *CN* 19, 8 and 15, *CN* 21, 2, and 7–8 and 14–15, this picture emerges: the community faced a period of dire necessity and trial (“thirst”, *shē*, *CN* 21, 15, 5–6; “trial”, *nesyānā*, 16, 5; “by force”, “yoke”, *ba-qṭirā*, *nirā*, 17, 1–2), during which people of different social classes (“rich and poor”, 15, 7) resorted to stealing and plundering (14, 3–4; 15); since this period is characterised as a trial of faith (16–17) and is closed by the news of a new emperor (14), it is likely that Ephrem is here referring to Julian’s reign, which is also alluded to in stanza 18 and whose end overlaps with Abraham’s accession in Ephrem’s poetic construction (see *CN* 18, 5–8)<sup>255</sup>. In this context, it is difficult to interpret the identities of the “plunderers” of *CN* 21, 14 and of the “thieves” of stanza 15: Were they the same or different categories? Did they or did they not correspond to the Christians tested by God in stanzas 16–17? If the plundering and stealing are to be brought in relation to the prevalence of greed in the Christian community deprecated at stanzas 7–8, then plunderers and thieves identify with the Christians in their trial. It is conceivable that, with the progressive approach of Julian for the Persian campaign and the presence of the Mesopotamian army in the city, the state of the population at large, and of Christians in particular,

<sup>253</sup> On this word, see Yousif 1986, 42; Bou Mansour 1987, 224–231.

<sup>254</sup> On the tendency in the Syriac churches to have ascetics preach or be ordained, even after asceticism has moved away from the *bnay qyāmā* model towards a more anchoritic way of life: Escolan 1999, 227–346.

<sup>255</sup> On the alleged hardships of this period and its interpretation by Ephrem, see §2.2.2; §4.1.2.

deteriorated<sup>256</sup>. In this fraught situation, more than one Nisibene, maybe even Christians, may well have resorted to theft or pillage, and not always out of necessity. If this were true, Ephrem's insistence on the ascetic poverty of the bishops would be addressed more to the congregation than to the bishop himself, who already practiced various ascetic virtues.

This, however, leaves the role of the church unaddressed, which Ephrem recalls in *CN* 21, 8, 2–4: the church should concentrate on acquiring souls more than money. Although in this context such a remark may seem to imply that the church stole like the individuals, it must be noted that the idea is not even suggested in stanzas 14–17, where the accusations of stealing and pillaging are made. Much to the contrary, stanza 19 implies that the church emerged in disarray from Julian's reign: "May their [the churches'] ornaments return [*net'atpān*]" (line 4). If this is true, then Ephrem's exhortation to the bishop to let the church acquire souls rather than money assumes a concrete meaning: the bishop, in accordance with the ascetic values he received from his predecessors, should waive his claim to redress for ecclesiastical losses during Julian's reign—a redress which would be all too easy to obtain under Christian emperors—and he should be sympathetic to those who, out of necessity, could not refrain from stealing at the time; on the contrary, he should impose on himself and on the rich ones of the community an ascetic behaviour, thereby winning more souls. Therefore, the stress laid upon poverty among the ascetic values in the last poems on Abraham works in two directions: on one side, it exhorts the congregation to imitate the bishop and renounce riches and luxury; on the other, it is a political direction for the bishop, suggesting that he drop some of the church's rights in favour of a more sympathetic attitude towards the population.

### 3.2.2 The ascetics in Gregory

In Gregory's poetry, the relevance of asceticism for the bishop is made clear by the many extensive portraits of the ideal candidate for the episcopate, which are also concrete "rules" of Gregory's ideal ascetic. Furthermore, they are presented as self-portraits,

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256 . . . ilico (ut ante cogitaverat) triginta milia lectorum militum eidem commisit Procopio, iuncto ad parilem potestatem Sebastiano comite ex duce Aegypti, eisdemque praecepit, ut intra Tigridem interim agerent, vigilanter omnia servaturi, nequid inopinum ex incauto latere oreretur; qualia multa saepe didicerat evenisse, mandabatque eis ut (si fieri potius posset), regi sociarentur Arsaci, cumque eo per Corduenam et Moxoenam, Chiliocomo uberi Mediae tractu, partibusque aliis praestricto cursu vastatis, apud Assyrios adhuc agenti sibi concurrerent, necessitatum articulis adfuturi (Amm. Marc. 23, 3, 5): this road would have brought the army through Nisibis (Harrell 2016, chapter 13). Ammianus relates also that Julian celebrated pagan festivities in the different stops of his campaign, particularly in the shrine of the Moon-god Sin in Harran (Amm. Marc. 23, 3, 2 and 7); this may have prompted Nisibis' authorities to conform to the emperor's paganism in order to mollify him to their pleas (see Griffith 1987, 256–257).

so that the definition of an ascetic rule, the plea for a renewed episcopate, and the defence of his credentials and choices in a concrete polemic converge in them. It is not at random that they are often contrasted with the portrait of the worldly bishop: they thereby betray their polemical aim. The passage II, 1, 12, 54–63; 71–75 is part of the larger autobiographical *narratio* of Gregory's invective, in which his story is steadily and allusively compared to Nectarius's background (43–153). II, 1, 12, 576–609 is followed by a portrait of the worldly man, unworthy of leading the ascetic (610–633). II, 1, 13, 107–113 is included in the picture of the throng of candidates approaching the altar to be consecrated bishop, with the stronger (and less qualified) ones jostling away the ascetic (96–115), an image similar to that in *or.* 2, 3, 8<sup>257</sup>. II, 1, 17, 25–40 concludes the first section of the poem (1–40), in which the lives of the bad and good bishop are compared.

This combination of rule, apology, and invective makes these passages centrepieces for our poems. It will be helpful to present them side by side, to notice the differences and the common points

Ἄλλος μὲν ἐξήντησε μοχθηρὸν βίον,  
Στένων, ἀϋπνῶν, δάκρυσιν τήκων μέλη, (55)

Χαμευνίᾳ τε καὶ τροφῇ στενοῦμενος,  
Καὶ νοῦ μερίμναις, ἐν θεοπνεύστοις Γραφαῖς,  
Μάστιξί θ' αὐτὸν ταῖς ἔσω ξαίνων ἀεί.  
Τί μοι παρῆται; μὴ δέον τί τ' ἔδρασα;  
Ἄλλος τὰ τερπνὰ τῶν νέων ἐδρέψατο, (60)  
Ἐπαιξεν, ἦδε, γαστρὸς ἐπλησεν νόσον,  
Πάσαις ἐφῆκεν ἡδοναῖς, αἰσθήσεσιν,  
Κλεῖθρ' οὐκ ἔθηκε, πῶλος ἡνίας ἄτερ.

...  
Ἄνω καθήμενόν με τῶν ὀρωμένων,  
Καὶ νοῦν μόνους μιγνύντα τοῖς νοουμένοις,  
Τρίψαντα δόξαν, κτήσιν, ἐλπίδας, λόγους,  
Τὸ μὴ τρυφᾶν τρυφῶντα, καὶ μάζῃ στενῇ  
Βίον γλυκαίνονθ', ὕβρεως ἐλεύθερον (75)  
(II, 1, 12, 54–63; 71–75)

One endures a life of hardships,  
groaning, sleepless, through tears wasting his limbs away, (55)  
sleeping on the ground and feeding scarcely,  
and with anxious examining of the Divine Scriptures  
and inner scourges mangling himself:

What have I missed? What wrong have I committed?  
Another one has plucked all the pleasures of youth, (60)

257 μεταποιοῦνται τοῦ βήματος, θλίβονται τε καὶ ὠθοῦνται περὶ τὴν ἀγίαν τράπεζαν (Greg. Naz. *or.* 2, 3, 8); θεῖν δὲ περιθλίβουσθε τράπεζαν, / Στεινόμενοι, στεينوῦντες. Ὁ δ' ἄλκιμος ἄλλον ἐλαύνει (II, 1, 13, 106–107). Περιθλίβω is a Gregorian formation, later taken on by Nonnus (*Dion.* 10, 370; 17, 371).



has danced, sung, has satisfied his feverish belly,  
to all sorts of lust yielded, for the senses  
failed to fit a bolt, a colt without reins.

...

I was seated above visible things,  
touching with thought only the intelligibles  
and casting off fame, property, hopes, erudition,  
in not taking delight I took delight, with a scanty loaf  
sweetening life, free from insolence of pride (75)

Οὗτος χαμεύνης, καὶ κόνει βεβρωμένος,  
καὶ σάρκας ἐξέτηξεν ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις,  
ψαλμωδίαις τε καὶ στάσει νυχθημέρῳ,  
καὶ νοῦ πρὸς ὕψος ἐκ πάχους ἐκδημίαις.  
(τί γὰρ τάφοις δεῖ εἰσφέρειν τὸν χοῦν ὅλον, (580)  
σκώληξί τ' εἶναι δαψιλεστέραν τροφήν,  
γεννῶντα, καὶ τρέφοντα τοὺς γεννωμένους;)  
καὶ δακρύων ἔσμηξε πηγαῖς τοὺς σπῖλους,  
εἰ ποῦ τιν' εἶχε καὶ βραχὺν ραντίσματος,  
οἷς βάλλεθ' ὅστις καὶ σοφὸς πηλῶ βίου· (585)  
τύποις τε σαρκῶν ἐσφράγισται τιμίους  
Ἑσκληκότων εὐχῇ τε καὶ πολλοῖς πόνοις  
(οἷς ἡ παλαιὰ γεῦσις ἐτρύχωσέ με  
εἰς γῆν στραφέντα τὴν τιθηνὸν μητέρα),  
ρίγει τε, πείνη, καὶ στενοῖς ρακώμασιν (590)  
ποθῶν λαβεῖν ἐνδυμα τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν,  
καὶ γαστρός ὕβριν ἐνδεεῖ καθύβρισε  
τροφῇ, τὸ θνήσκειν μνώμενος καθ' ἡμέραν.  
τροφὴν γὰρ οἶδεν ἀγγέλων ἀπλὴν Θεόν.  
οὗτος πένης νῦν, ἦν δ' ὅτε ζᾶπλουτος ἦν· (595)  
ἀλλ' ἐκβολὴν ἔστερξε, καὶ κοῦφος πλέει,  
ρίψας πένησιν, οὐ βυθῶ, τὸ φορτίον.  
οὗτος φυγῶν πόλεις τε καὶ δήμων κρότους,  
καὶ τὴν ζάλην, ἡ πάντα τὰν μέσῳ στρέφει,  
τοῦ νοῦ τὸ κάλλος τῷ Θεῷ προσήρμοσεν, (600)  
μόνος τὰ θεῖα καὶ μόνῳ κοινούμενος.  
οὗτος τὸ καλὸν σῶμα (πῶς γὰρ οὐ καλὸν  
τὸ τῶν ἀρίστων) μαργάροις συνέκλεισε,  
δεσμοῖς σιδηροῖς, λαθρίῳ κοσμήματι,  
σφίγξας ἑαυτὸν οὐδὲν ἡδικηκότα, (605)  
ὥς μήποθ' ὑβρίσειεν ὦν ἐλευθερος,  
καὶ συνδέων αἰσθησιν αὐτῷ τὴν πλάνον.  
τούτῳ τὸ Πνεῦμ' ἔδειξε γράμματος βάθη,  
λῦσαν τὰ πολλῶν ἐσφραγισμένα φρεσί.  
(II, 1, 12, 576–609)

This one sleeps on the ground, devoured by ashes,  
and he wasted away his flesh with vigils,  
chanting the psalms and standing night and day,

and exiling his thoughts from the crass to the sublime  
 (for why should one entrust to the graves one's whole dust (580)  
 and be for the worms a more lavish food,  
 begetting and feeding the begotten?),  
 and with springs of tears he wiped clean his stains,  
 if he ever had the smallest of sprinklings,  
 whence even the wise is affected in the mire of life. (585)  
 He was sealed with worthy signs in his flesh,  
 parched by prayer and manifold toils  
 (with them the ancient tasting afflicted me,  
 turning me to earth, our nurturing mother),  
 and he shudders, with his hunger and meagre rags (590)  
 desiring to reach the clothing of incorruption.  
 He did violence to the violence of belly with scant  
 food, wooing death each day:  
 for he knew the only food of angels is God.  
 This one is now poor, but there was a time when he was very rich. (595)  
 He, though, preferred jettisoning and sailing light,  
 casting the load not to the abyss but to the poor.  
 This one, fleeing the cities and the applause of the crowd  
 and the storm that shakes all public things,  
 fitted closely to God the dignity of thought, (600)  
 alone devoted to divine matters with himself alone.  
 This one enclosed his beautiful body (for how can the body  
 of the best not be beautiful?) with pearls—  
 iron chains, a hidden ornament—  
 thereby binding himself though innocent, (605)  
 lest he trespass, even when free,  
 and binding together with himself the erring senses.  
 To such a man the Spirit taught the depths of Scripture,  
 loosening what's sealed for the minds of the many.

Ὁ δ' ἄλκιμος ἄλλον ἐλαύνει,  
 Πολλάκι καὶ τ' ἄριστον, ἐνιδρώσαντα θρόνοις,  
 Γηραιὸν, σάρκεσσι τετρυμένον, οὐρανοφοίτην,  
 Κόσμον ἀτιμάζοντα, Θεοῦ μετὰ μοῖραν ἔχοντα, (110)  
 Καὶ νέκυν ἐν ζωῷσι, θυηπόλον ἐσθλὸν Ἀνακτος.  
 Εἰκὼ μὲν τις ἔγραψεν ἀπ' εἰκόνοσ ἀρχετύποιο,  
 Στησάμενος προπάροιθε, πίναξ δ' ὑπεδέξατο μορφὴν  
 (II, 1, 13, 107–113)

Let the strong drive away the other,  
 often even the better, who sweated in these seats,  
 old aged, worn out in the flesh, conversant with the heaven,  
 despising the world and having his lot with God, (110)  
 a dead among the living and a faithful priest of the King.  
 One paints an image from its model,  
 setting it before himself, and the board takes up its form

Ὡς ζῶει μόνῳ καὶ τέρπεται· ὧς ῥα κεάζει (25)

Θυμὸν ἀπὸ χθονίων ἐνθεν ἀνιστάμενος.  
 Ἀνθρώπων δ' ἀγαθοῖσι διδοῖ φρένα, τοῖς δὲ κακοῖσι  
 Κάμπτεται, ὅσα λίθος ὀκρυβοῖς ἀδάμας·  
 Οὐδ' ὃ γ' ἐπιστρέφεται πλούτου μεγάλων τε θωόκων, (30)

Οὐδὲ δορὴν βασιλῆος ἔχων βριαροῖο λέοντος,  
 Κεῦθαι κερδῶν ἐνδοθι δουλοσύνην,  
 Νεκροβόρος, δολόμητις, ἀτάσθαλος, ἄλλος ἐν ἄλλοις  
 Παντοδαποῖς κακίης εἶδεσι κλεπτόμενος.  
 Ἀλλὰ νόον καθαροῖσι νοήμασιν αἰὲν ἀέζων, (35)

Ἦδη καὶ Τριάδος ἅπτεται οὐρανίης,  
 Ἦς τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἑῆσι,  
 Κῦδος ἐν ἐν τρισσοῖς κάλλεσι δερκόμενος,  
 Καὶ λαὸν θυέεσσιν ἀγνοῖς θεοειδέα τεύχων,  
 Ὑστάτιον ψυχῆς θύματ' ἀναιμα φέρει. (40)

(II, 1, 17, 25–40)

For him alone he lives and rejoices, for him he rips (25)

his heart apart from earthly things, turned away from here.  
 To good people he gives mind; to the evil, however,  
 he bows like a rugged, inflexible stone.

Neither does he turn to riches or important thrones,  
 nor the ephemeral glory that creeps along here, (30)

nor with the skin of the violent king, the lion,  
 does he conceal inside servile self-interest,  
 scavenger, skilled in deceit, wicked, shifting concealer  
 of shifting and various kinds of misdeeds.

Rather, nourishing his mind with pure thoughts, (35)

he already grasps the heavenly Trinity,  
 whose image he fixed in his own senses,  
 beholding one glory in triple beauties;  
 then, making the people Godlike with holy sacrifices,

he will finally bring the bloodless offerings of soul. (40)

My analysis will proceed from the concrete data (§3.2.2.1) to overarching questions of spirituality (3.2.2.2) and the kind of ascetic ideology Gregory is pushing (§3.2.2.3).

### 3.2.2.1 Ascetic practices

First, note that in these portraits the poet does not really highlight virginity. This starkly differs not only from Ephrem but also from many other poems in which Gregory forcefully argues for the superiority of celibacy or virginity over marriage<sup>258</sup>. And yet mar-

<sup>258</sup> Gautier 2002, 29–36. Two notable texts are the praise of virginity at I, 2, 1 and II, 1, 45, which contains Gregory's description of his ascetic initiation by Ἀγνεία and Σωφοσύνη in dream, analysed by McGuckin 2001a, 63–76.

riage, family, and lust feature prominently in the portrayals of bad candidates for the episcopate (§5.2.2–3). It could well be that a recommendation of celibacy goes without saying in this ascetic context and is sufficiently implied by the mentions of family and marriage in the negative portraits. Assuming, however, that this absence is significant, I would explain it in light of some of Gregory's acquaintances and of the question of Encratism: avoiding a strong defence of virginity in this context would safeguard the poet from accusations of holding ideas similar to those condemned at Gangra; it would also prevent indirect criticism against Gregory the Elder, Gregory's father and bishop of Nazianzus, and of Gregory of Nyssa, one of Gregory's allies and a married man<sup>259</sup>. Despite all their links with Gregory's own experience, these portraits are still generic and have a prescriptive function, so that an endorsement of virginity in this context might have sounded like a statement of doctrine contrary to Gangra. Differently, Ephrem is always praising individual bishops when he highlights virginity, so that, even if virginity emerges as strongly advisable, his poems cannot be construed as contradicting Gangra and the current practice of the church. Hence, the absence of virginity in Gregory and its strong presence in Ephrem are more a function of the literary context (disciplinary polemic or praise of an individual) in which the poets present ascetic values than a clue of different positions.

As for the practices endorsed by the poems, waking and sleeping on the ground (χαμευνία) seem to enjoy pride of place<sup>260</sup>. This betrays a Syrian view of asceticism, similar to that held by Ephrem, reinforced by the fact that these wakes should be occupied with liturgies (Ψαλμωδίαίς, II, 1, 12, 578), as in the Syriac writers; on the other side, Aristotle attributed sleeplessness to the godhead, and Plato described Eros—the model of the philosopher—as one who sleeps on the ground (χαμαιπετής)<sup>261</sup>. Fasting is another favourite of Syrian asceticism, and Gregory duly mentions it more than once, sometimes with Cynic language (μάζῃ στενῇ, II, 1, 12, 74–75)<sup>262</sup>, more often connecting it with key ideas of his ascetic theory: poverty (II, 1, 12, 56; 74) and detachment from physical reality, partly as anticipation of death (579–582) and resulting in a veritable

259 Εἴ τις διακρίνοιτο παρὰ πρεσβυτέρου γεγαμηκότος, ὡς μὴ χρῆναι λειτουργήσαντος αὐτοῦ προσφορὰς μεταλαμβάνειν, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω (canon 4 of the Synod of Gangra; canons 1, 9, 10, 13–17 are all in defence of marriage and family). The relevance of Gangra for the Cappadocians, most of all in relation to their links with Eustathius of Sebaste and his asceticism, are examined by Gautier 2002, 24–28 and Sterk 2004, 27–32. On Gregory of Nyssa's marriage, see Daniélou 1956.

260 Αὐπνῶν and χαμευνία (II, 1, 12, 55–56); Οὗτος χαμεῦνης, καὶ κόνει βεβρωμένος, / Καὶ σάρκα ἐξέτηξεν ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις, / Ψαλμωδίαίς τε καὶ στάσει νυχθημέρῳ (II, 1, 12, 576–578).

261 Aristotle on the sleeplessness of the gods: *eth. Nic.* 1178b 18; of the analogy between the waking state and the Prime Cause: διαγωγή δ' ἐστὶν οἷα ἡ ἀρίστη μικρὸν χρόνον ἡμῖν (οὕτω γὰρ αἰεὶ ἐκείνο: ἡμῖν μὲν γὰρ ἀδύνατον), ἐπεὶ καὶ ἡδονὴ ἢ ἐνέργεια τούτου (καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐγγήγορας αἰσθησις νόησις ἡδιστον, ἐπίδεις δὲ καὶ μνήμαι διὰ ταῦτα) (*metaph.* 1072b)). See also: Sprague 1977. Plato on Eros: χαμαιπετής αἰεὶ ὢν καὶ ἄστροτος, ἐπὶ θύραις καὶ ἐν ὁδοῖς ὑπαίθριος κοιμώμενος (*conv.* 203D).

262 Dziech 1925, 105–106 with n. 199; Meier 1989, 83–84; Prudhomme 2006, 401.

battle against bodily functions (592–593)<sup>263</sup>. Another important practice is weeping (55; 583), which, as clarified by 583, has a penitential function. This is a further clue to the Syrian strain of asceticism Gregory subscribes to<sup>264</sup>. Line 587 of II, 1, 12 mentions praying (εὐχή), an activity which plays a central role in Ephrem's view of asceticism, considering the number of times it is mentioned. Here it seems less important, but the first impression is not correct: if we intend prayer as communication with God, as opposed to specific request to the Godhead or liturgies, then we shall see that prayer is the very aim of ascesis<sup>265</sup>.

In the context of this asceticism, which does not exclude civilised life or even explicitly forbids marriage, the practice described at II, 1, 12, 602–607 appears as a foreign body: fastening heavy iron chains on one's person under the clothes (λαθρίῳ κοσμήματι, 604). This kind of spectacular exercise, bordering on self-harm, is normally connected with fifth-century Syrian asceticism, although the language has a long pre-history: the metaphorical use of “pearls” (μαργάροις) for the chains goes back to Ignatius of Antioch (*Eph.* 11, 2, alluding presumably to a necklace of pearls), but the pearl is often associated with virginity and ascetics by Ephrem, and relics of the ascetics are metaphorically treated as jewels and treasures, so that the word *margānitā*, “pearl,” is used both for relics and for virginity<sup>266</sup>. Furthermore, the word κόσμημα for the ascetic object recalls the link between “ornament” language and ascesis already highlighted in the case of Ephrem. If we take into account later examples of the practice, we find that Jacob the Solitary, disciple of saint Maron, is credited with this exercise by Theodoret (*hist. rel.* 21, 8). Similarly, Simeon Stylites is said to have fastened himself with an iron chain to a rock in order not to be able to leave his pillar (Theodrt. *hist. rel.* 26, 10). The biblical model of this practice may be Paul (see, for example, Eph. 6:20) or Samson (Judc.

<sup>263</sup> At 592–594 the practice of fasting relates to death and angelic life. The ascetic imitates the angels, whose sole nutrition is contemplation of God; yet the connection between fasting and the phrase τὸ θνήσκειν μνώμενος καθ' ἡμέραν is more difficult. According to Meier 1989, 138, the Homeric verb μνώμενος here means “to woo” and it is to be intended metaphorically as “to see as an advantage”. This agrees with its governing in this clause, because μνάομαι means “to woo” when it governs the accusative. It could also be linked with the idea of angelic life: the ascetic starves himself desiring to die, because he knows he will be nourished once dead participating in the life of the angels (something similar to what Paul says in Phil. 1:21–23). Similarly, II, 1, 13, 111 characterises the ascetic as “dead among the living”, a reference to his detachment from life through asceticism (for the trope of the living dead: Gautier 2002, 49–50, 77–79). If, however, we consider this “suicidal” use of fasting exaggerated, either because of Gregory's usage of μνάομαι with the accusative (see I, 2, 25, 495 and II, 1, 11, 1669), which denotes a concrete intention or desire, or because angelic life and human death may not be so obviously linked, then the verb must mean “to remember”, “to meditate” (as interpreted by Caillau) and the clause must refer to the spiritual exercise of meditation on death, analysed and explained by Hadot 2005, 49–58.

<sup>264</sup> Griffith 1995, 234–235 discusses the concept of *'abīlā*, “mourner”, which sometimes defines Syrian ascetics. On tears see also §3.1.4.3.

<sup>265</sup> For prayer in the sense of communication with God in Gregory's writings: Gautier 2002, 121.

<sup>266</sup> Ephr. Syr. *hymn. fid.* 81, 3; 82, 2; *hymn. haer.* 42, 9–10; Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2215, s.v. ܡܪܓܢܝܬܐ; Fredrikson 2003; Buck 1999, 123–124.

16:21), but it obviously echoes the condition of martyrs and confessors (Ign. *Eph.* 11, 2; *Smyrn.* 11, 1; Polycarp. *ad Philipp.* 1, 1). One would think that Gregory, in his rejection of excessive and subversive forms of asceticism, did not approve such practices<sup>267</sup>. And yet the oft-repeated expression “wear out the flesh” or “wear out the body” points to this self-harming and visible brand of asceticism<sup>268</sup>.

Both the extreme acts of asceticism and the self-harming aim remind us of another passage from Gregory’s poems which describes the ascetics of Nazianzus to Hellenius, the *peraequator* of Cappadocia<sup>269</sup>. The poem aims to persuade Hellenius to give a tax exemption to some of the ascetics mentioned by Gregory. Yet it is unclear how the description of extreme feats of asceticism relates to this aim, since the ascetics who are mentioned by name seem to belong to Gregory’s social class and to practice a much tamer brand of asceticism<sup>270</sup>. Gautier believes that Gregory is mentioning the extreme feats only to convince Hellenius and not because they were representatives of asceticism in Nazianzus, while McLynn says that these feats refer to ascetics abroad from Nazianzus, whose example is introduced in order to dispel a prejudice against asceticism in his town, a prejudice which could undermine his case<sup>271</sup>. In any event, there

267 On Gregory’s refusal of the extreme acts of Syrian ascetics: Gautier 2002, 95–104.

268 Δάκρυσι τήκων μέλη (II, 1, 12, 55); σάρκας ἐξέτηξεν ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις (577); Γηραιὸν, σάρκεσσι τετρυμένον (II, 1, 13, 109). The simple verb τήκων and the use of μέλη or σάρκας for σῶμα are poetic, whereas the composite ἐκτῆκω is prosaic. In Homer the only part of the body “molten” with this verb is the skin of one’s face, as a metaphor for crying (*Od.* 19, 204–208), while in the absolute sense it is used for someone pining away in sickness (*Od.* 5, 396). Plato uses the verb in this sense with σῶμα (*resp.* 609C) and σάρξ (*Tim.* 82E). The composite ἐκτῆκω is mostly used for pining and crying. This explains why at II, 1, 12, 55 consumption results from tears, whereas the association with sickness may suit better II, 1, 12, 577, where flesh is consumed by night-vigils. A similar expression is used by Theodoret: Τοιούτοις δὲ πόνοις κατατῆκων τὸ σῶμα (*hist. rel.* 17, 7). At II, 1, 13, 109, the participle τετρυμένον sums up many elements of ascetic life, since in Greek one can be τετρυμένος by tears (*Anth. Gr.* 9, 549), by the sun (*Herodt.* 6, 12), by toils (*Plat. leg.* 761D), by poverty (*Anth. Gr.* 7, 336) and, most of all, by old age (*Anth. Gr.* 6, 228; 7, 336), which is mentioned at II, 1, 13, 109.

269 On Hellenius see: Jones/Martindale/Morris 1971, 413, s.v. “Hellenius 1”. Notable in Gregory’s poem are these expressions: Ὦν οἱ μὲν σπήλυξιν ἐρημαίαις τε χαμεύναις / Τέρπονται σχεδίοις, καὶ στυγέουσι δόμους, / Καὶ πτολίων φεύγουσιν ὁμήγυριν ... Ἄλλοι δ’ αὖ θήρεσσιν ὁμοῖα δώμασι τυτθοῖς / Εἰρχθέντες, βροτῆς οὐδ’ ὅπως ἠντίασαν. (II, 2, 1, 55–57; 61–62; retreat from civilised life, but also sleeping on the ground); Οἱ δὲ σιδηρεῖσιν ἀλυκτοπέδαις μογέουσι, / Τήκοντες κακίην σὺν χοῖ τηκομένῳ (59–60; self-chaining and consuming of flesh); Καὶ πού τις λυκάβαντας ὅλους ιερῷ ἐνὶ χώρῳ / Ἑστῶς, καθαρὰς ἐξεπέτασσε χέρας / Οὐδ’ ὄγ’ ἐπὶ βλεφάροισιν ὕπνον βάλε, θάμβος ἄπιστον! / Ἄλλ’ ἐπάγη Χριστῷ, ἔμπνοος ὥστε λίθος. (69–72; privation of sleep and unnatural positions for protracted times, like the stylites).

270 McLynn 2012, 183–185.

271 Gautier 2002, 103n2; McLynn 2012, 180–183. Additional bibliography on the poem: McLynn 2012, 178n1. Lines 85–114 are particularly problematic, because it is not clear whether or in which measure Gregory is endorsing ascetic practices which bring the monk near to or even directly to death (cf. Αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα, νόμου τις ἀπηνέος ἐν μεσάτοισι / Μνήσατο, καὶ τοῖον ἐξερέεινεν ἔπος, / Εἰ καλὸν εὐσεβέεσσι Θεοῦ πέρι πότμον ἐπισπεῖν, / Ἐλκων κρυπταδίοις ῥήμασι πικρὸν ἔπος. / Εἰ δ’ ὄγ’ αἰδρεῖσιν ἐπαινήσειε τελευτήν / Θνήσκουσιν πολλοῖς προφρονέως θανάτοις / Αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ σφετέρης παλάμης, καὶ

seems to be little room for disapproval in Gregory's words about these extreme ascetics, whether or not they were present at Nazianzus. This means that Gregory is not so opposed to the practices of Syrian monasticism as Gautier often makes him to be; the poet even admits an exercise like the self-chaining into his portrait of the ascetic worthy of the episcopate.

### 3.2.2.2 Ascetic attitudes

An important concept underlying these practices is separation from the world. The concept is played out in a variety of directions in these passages. For example, it is implicit in the description of fasting as “exile of thought from the crass” (νοῦ . . . ἐκ πάχους ἐκδημία, II, 1, 12, 579)<sup>272</sup>. More importantly, it is the main reason behind Gregory's insistence on a poor life: poverty is ubiquitous in these portraits, either through the use of terms derived from στένος, “scarce”, or through more elaborated passages<sup>273</sup>. At II, 1, 12, 595–597, for example, the metaphor of the ship is employed to convey three basic messages regarding poverty<sup>274</sup>. First, it links the portrait with Gregory's profile, since a stormy journey by ship triggered his ascetic profession, so that the man discharging the ship alludes to Gregory choosing poverty to avoid shipwreck. Second, the metaphor is denied (οὐ βυθῶ, 597) in order to stress that the renounced wealth should be given to the poor. In Ephrem's frequent calls to poverty, this detail was not touched upon and, moreover, was not so important among the tasks of the bishop. For Gregory, helping the poor seems more connected with the instantaneous renunciation of riches for the sake of the ascetic life than with a coordinated and consistent effort of the church led by the bishop. Finally, the metaphor implies—and the poet states—that the renouncing party was rich before renouncing: the richer one was to begin with, the more spectacular (and the more authoritative) is one's renunciation.<sup>275</sup> Therefore, this portrayal requires from the ideal ascetic that he be from a high-class background before giving himself to asceticism; and even this renunciation of riches for the poor could take on many different forms, not all equally spectacular and absolute<sup>276</sup>. The refusal of riches described at II, 1, 17, 25–32 is less of an ascetic choice than a refusal of

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γαστήρ ἀνάγκη· / Οἱ δὲ κατὰ σκοπέλων, βένθεσί τ' ἡὲ βρόχοις, / Μάρτυρες ἀτρεκίης, πολέμου δ' ἄπο καὶ στονόεντος / Χαίρουσιν βιότου τοῦδ' ἀπανιστάμενοι, 95–104). This in a way parallels the problem posed by the expression τὸ θνήσκειν μνώμενος καθ' ἡμέραν, treated here at n. 263.

272 Gautier 2002, 48–49.

273 For the use of στένος, see II, 1, 12, 55, 74, 590. The expression τὸ μὴ τρυφᾶν τρυφῶντα is a Cynic slogan: Dziech 1925, 9, 121–122 (especially n. 232).

274 On the metaphor: Rahner 1971, 239–564; Lorenz 1979; Kuhn 2014, 72–76. On its use in relation to wealth: Dziech 1925, 1962n98.

275 As deftly noted by Brown 1992, 75.

276 The theme is treated by Rapp 2005, 211–215.

corruption. Anyway, it is striking to note how much attention both Ephrem and Gregory devote to the theme of poverty, especially in leaders<sup>277</sup>.

Separation from the world is not limited to separation from material wealth, for Gregory stresses more than once that the ascetic should part also from “social” goods. First and foremost, the ascetic should renounce δόξα, glory or renown, and, correspondingly, also ambitions (ἐλπίδας), especially towards positions of power (μεγάλων θώκων)<sup>278</sup>. At II, 1, 12, 73, Gregory says that the ascetic has even relinquished education and culture, the λόγοι he himself holds so dear in his writings. One might think that these expressions of refusal of higher offices and of culture imply adherence to an Egyptian model of monasticism, whereby the ascetic seeks to isolate himself from civil society and avoids enrolment in the secular clergy.

This attitude seems confirmed by II, 1, 12, 598–599, where Gregory describes the ascetic as running away (φυγών) from social life (πόλεις) and from the “storm” (ζάλη) of political life<sup>279</sup>. These lines move forward the metaphor of the ship in the sea: the man is the ship, his wealth the shipment, public life the stormy sea, God the safe haven in which the ascetic’s mind will dock (Τοῦ νοῦ τὸ κάλλος τῷ Θεῷ προσήρμοσεν, 600). The imagery is also a common thread in our poems in reference to Gregory’s retreat from Constantinople<sup>280</sup>. A similar function, albeit with slightly different connotations, can be attributed to two biblical images: Noah’s ark (II, 1, 13, 205–207) and Jonah’s three-day stay in the belly of the fish (II, 1, 17, 52–54), both of which imply the metaphor of public life as a storm (the flood or the storm that hit Jonah’s ship), but which bear different connotations in relation to Gregory’s retreat. In fact, the ark has the same value as the idea of God as a safe haven, representing Gregory’s retreat as a search for protection. Jonah’s image implies that Gregory was used as a scapegoat by the other bishop and that his retreat was willing but not desired.

However, note the difference in context: these passages defend Gregory’s choice to resign and retreat as ascetic; thereby, he tries to restore the authority he lost as church leader in the form of ascetic authority. II, 1, 12, 598–599, on the other hand, refers to the ascetic as unjustly subjected to a worldly bishop. This may refer to Gregory’s status as inferior in rank to Nectarius, even though Nectarius had no direct jurisdiction on Gregory and certainly was not Gregory’s bishop, since Gregory lived in Nazianzus. On the other hand, the structure of the passage strongly implies that the two portraits (the

<sup>277</sup> Poverty features prominently in the portrait of the apostles aimed at dispelling the idea that the apostles’ low rank and culture justifies ignorant bishops (see §3.1.3.3): Δός μοι τὸ πιστόν τῶν ἀποστόλων ἐνός, / Ἀχαλκὸν εἶναι, πῆραν οὐκ ἐξημέμενον, / Ἀραβδὸν, ἡμίγυννον, ὡς δ’ ἀσάνδαλον, / Ἐφήμερον, πλουτοῦντα ἐλπίδας μόνας, / Μηδ’ εὐπροσήγορόν τιν’ εἰς δόξαν λόγου, / Τοῦ μὴ δοκεῖν θωπείαν ἰσχύειν πλέον, / Μηδ’ ἀσχολεῖσθαι πρὸς λόγους ἄλλοτρίους. (II, 1, 12, 199–205).

<sup>278</sup> Ρίψαντα δόξαν, κτήσιν, ἐλπίδας (II, 1, 12, 73); Οὐδ’ ὃ γ’ ἐπιστρέφεται πλοῦτου μεγάλων τε θωόκων, / Οὐ δόξης βροτέης ἐνθάδε συρομένης (II, 1, 17, 29–30).

<sup>279</sup> Οὗτος φυγὼν πόλεις τε καὶ δῆμων κρότους, / Καὶ τὴν ζάλην, ἣ πάντα τὰν μέσῳ στρέφει, (II, 1, 12, 598–599).

<sup>280</sup> See II, 1, 10, 29–32; II, 1, 12, 792–795; II, 1, 13, 209–211.



ascetic and the worldly man) are intended as two models of ecclesiastical leadership: therefore, II, 1, 12, 598–599 proposes retreat *before* the taking of office, whereas the other passages present it as taking place *after* the ascetic has left office. Does this mean that Gregory was vying for a reelection? This is unrealistic, although not entirely impossible. After all, his choice not to take the task of bishop of Nazianzus after his resignation from Constantinople might not have been due only to a desire for retreat and asceticism, and maybe it concealed Gregory's hope of being elected to some other and more important see<sup>281</sup>. Yet I find it better to interpret this common imagery as signalling more general concepts. First, although the ascetic portrait is clearly meant also as a criticism to Nectarius and a self-defence, the poet is still speaking in general terms, so that his reflections are of general value and do not need to conform in every detail to Gregory's situation. Second, even though the different contexts in which the image occurs seem to imply different times for ascetic flight from the world, they do not explicitly exclude each other. On the contrary, it is entirely consistent with Gregory's own experience and ideas that retreat be not just one phase in the formation of a church leader, but rather should recur more than once in a lifetime, alternating with active duty. Therefore, as the rich man forsook wealth and world in his forming years, he can also forsake his ecclesiastical position to retreat in later days, and, in general, he should experience retreat and renunciation before each new appointment in the church<sup>282</sup>. Third, as noted, the ascetic portrait of II, 1, 12, 576–609 does not explicitly refer to a candidate for the episcopate. The argument is more like this: asceticism (whereof a part is fleeing from the world) commands spiritual authority even outside of ordained ministry; for this reason, it would be absurd if ordained ministry, which has the right and duty to govern even the ascetics, were to be completely nonascetic; therefore, in order to guide his whole community, the bishop should have the spiritual authority only an ascetic lifestyle can lend. It does not follow that *every* ascetic should also be a candidate for episcopate. In the end, Gregory's representation of himself, in II, 1, 12, 576–609, in the same terms with which he portrays the ascetic need not imply that he is presenting himself for any concrete position as bishop: he is restoring his spiritual authority in a more general sense; he is presenting himself as a reliable counsellor in spiritual matters; he is objecting to Nectarius's election and defending his own appointment in retrospect; and finally, he is offering a general rule for episcopal appointments.

The idea of renunciation of worldly matters is also expressed as a “closing” or “binding” of the senses (II, 1, 12, 62–63; 607). In the first case (62–63), the image refers to the bad man's failure to curtail his earthly pleasures: Meier rightly connects the metaphor of the bolts (κλειῖθρα) to be applied to the senses to analogous metaphors used elsewhere in relation to single parts of the body to signify renunciation<sup>283</sup>. This inter-

<sup>281</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 384–386.

<sup>282</sup> Gautier 2002, 107.

<sup>283</sup> Meier 1989, 82 *ad* l. 63, with a reference to Zehles/Zamora 1996, 66–67 (commenting Greg. Naz. I, 2, 2, 76–77). In that case, the part of the body in question are the ears, which are to be shielded from dam-

pretation is confirmed by the other image employed—that of a racing horse (πῶλος) without reins (ῥηνία)—because of its Platonic echoes<sup>284</sup>. Line 607 (Καὶ συνδέων αἰσθησιν αὐτῷ τὴν πλάνον) comes after the mention of self-enchainment (603–606), and the participle συνδέων describes one of the aims of that practice. This is again a moral limitation on earthly pleasure: the senses (αἰσθησις) are “wandering” (πλάνος), as was the “colt without reins” in 63; the chains are used to keep them still (συνδέων); and the overall idea is to prevent the ascetic from sinning for the sake of his sensual appetites. The ascetic strives to distance his interest and his thoughts from material things, an aim described at II, 1, 12, 71 as “sitting above visible things” (ἄνω καθήμενον τῶν ὁρωμένων) and, in more forceful terms, at II, 1, 17, 25–26 as “cleaving the spirit from earthly things (κεάζειν / θυμὸν ἀπὸ χθονίων)<sup>285</sup>.

Gregory synthesises the meaning of asceticism, of fleeing the world and separating the mind from the senses, in the expression κόσμον ἀτιμάζοντα (II, 1, 13, 110). Asceticism, therefore, strives towards a new relationship with the κόσμος, one of superiority and carelessness. Superiority and carelessness touch different levels of reality, because the word κόσμος embraces both the physical and the social sphere, expressing every system of realities separated from (and sometimes antagonistic to) God<sup>286</sup>. The poet has stressed in these ascetic portraits the “outsider” quality of the ascetic, his otherness from the logic of the social and material world: Gautier rightly identified this concept under the heading of ξενιτεία, “living abroad”, as the central feature of Gregorian asceticism; and, it must be noted, separation from the world is the basis both of the desert ideology of Egyptian anchorites and the almost militaristic conception of Syrian

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aging words (see also II, 1, 45, 15), but the following lines (I, 2, 2, 78–81) apply similar imagery of binding and closing to the eyes and the mouth (Ὅμματα δ' ἐν νυμφῶσι τοῖς βλεφάροις ἐρύχθω, 78; Χεῖλεα ... δέσμια κείσθω, 80). The mouth is the privileged object of this imagery, on the basis of Ps. 140:3: II, 1, 34A, 11; *or.* 6, 1; 12, 1; *ep.* 118, 1; Kuhn 2014, 85–86.

284 Plat. *Phaedr.* 246A–257B, the famous myth of the chariot of the soul. See also the Homeric simile at *Il.* 6, 506–511. For the image in Gregory see: Kuhn 2014, 55–60. Note that Ephrem used the image of the reins (*pgūdē*) to express the same idea of dominating youth through asceticism at *CN* 15, 5, 5.

285 A more epistemological turn is given to the image at *or.* 2, 7 (again describing ascetic life): Οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐδόκει μοι τοιοῦτον οἶον μύσαντα τὰς αἰσθήσεις, ἔξω σαρκὸς καὶ κόσμου γενόμενον, εἰς αὐτὸν συστραφέντα, μηδενὸς τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων προσασπτόμενον, ὅτι μὴ πᾶσα ἀνάγκη, αὐτῷ προσλαλοῦντα καὶ τῷ Θεῷ, ἤν ὑπὲρ τὰ ὁρώμενα, καὶ τὰς θείας ἐμφάσεις ἀεὶ καθαρὰς ἐν αὐτῷ φέρειν ἀμιγεῖς τῶν κάτω χαρακτήρων καὶ πλανωμένων, ὄντως ἔσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον Θεοῦ καὶ τῶν θείων καὶ ὄν καὶ ἀεὶ γινόμενον, φωτὶ προσλαμβάνοντα φῶς, καὶ ἀμαυροτέρῳ τρανότερον, ἤδη τὸ τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος ἀγαθὸν ταῖς ἐλπίσι καρπούμενον, καὶ συμπεριπολεῖν ἀγγέλοις, ἔτι ὑπὲρ γῆς ὄντα καταλιπόντα τὴν γῆν, καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος ἄνω τιθέμενον. This passage parallels most themes touched in the ascetic portrayals of the poems: beside shutting the senses, there is the flight from the world and flesh, the direct relationship with God, the iconographic concept of “characters” imprinted from above and the ascetic as mirror reflecting God, the *vita angelica* and the apocalyptic anticipation.

286 Lampe 1961, 771, *s.v.* κόσμος.

urban asceticism<sup>287</sup>. However, in contrast with Gautier's analysis, our texts seem not to provide the counterbalance of charity to the isolationist tendency of the ascetic that should imprint Gregory's engaged asceticism: not only does the poet defend extreme practices such as flight from the cities and self-enchainment or even renunciation of the λόγοι, but the poems lack the typical discussion of mixed life as a synthesis between *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*<sup>288</sup>. The only passage approaching these themes is II, 1, 12, 709–720, but it attributes all good to the contemplative and stresses the immorality of political life, thereby reinforcing the ideal of an isolated ascetic (§2.2.3.2).

However, even if the mixed life is not directly thematised, the portraits of II, 1, 13 and of II, 1, 17 strongly imply the idea of a priest-ascetic, mixing contemplative and active life. The ideal candidate for the episcopate has “sweated in the thrones”—that is, has had experience in ecclesiastical affairs (ἐνιδρώσαντα θρόνοις, II, 1, 13, 108); he is a priest (θυηρόλον ἐσθλὸν Ἀνακτος, II, 1, 13, 111) and is surrounded by other people (Ἀνθρώπων δ' ἀγαθοῖσι διδοῖ φρένα, τοῖς δὲ κακοῖσι / Κάμπτεται, ὅσσα λίθος ὀκρυόεις ἀδάμας, II, 1, 17, 27–28). Here, incidentally, we find a similarity with Ephrem's stress on the bishop's management of advice and information in the community in CN 21, 10; 12–13 (§3.1.4.3). These characteristics are just as apt to describe Gregory as the more ascetic ones: in referring to the “old man who sweated in the thrones” and who could not bring himself to consent with bad people, the poet clearly means himself, being old, having been bishop in Nazianzus and in Constantinople and having resisted Maximus before that and the party of Diodore and Flavian afterward. He is the weak one jostled out from the chancel by the ἄλκιμος Nectarius (II, 1, 13, 107).

Only II, 1, 12 is totally skewed towards the contemplative side. This may be due to the context in which the two portrayals are inserted and the point of Gregory's argument: in both cases he is contrasting his *curriculum* with that of Nectarius, so that he may have wanted to stress the contemplative side of the mixed life, since the active was in common with the other figure. Indeed, Gregory does not reject λόγοι and civic life so flatly when he is arguing against the uncouth Cynic Maximus<sup>289</sup>. On the other hand, we must bear in mind that both portrayals in II, 1, 12 compare the ascetic to the secular in order to bring out an injustice: the passage at 54–75 complains about the immortal theme of the misery of the just man and the triumphs of the wicked, whereas lines 570–633 argue that it is absurd that a worldly man should be the leader in matters of religion to an ascetic. Granted, the poet wants us to understand that such a man as the

287 On ξενιτεία: Gautier 2002, 9–16 (ξενιτεία before Gregory); 69–77 (in Gregory). On the Egyptian desert: Rapp 2005, 105–125. On Syrian monastic *ethos*: Vööbus 1958, 86–90. In Syrian asceticism in particular, the ascetic signals his separation from the world not through displacement from the city, but through virginity; much more than the Egyptian anchorite, the *bnay qyama* thought of themselves as waging an apocalyptic war against the present world, hence their engagement in communal life, which did not contradict their separation from the world itself.

288 Gautier 2002, 52–53, 56–69; the most dramatic representation of this discussion is II, 1, 11, 277–311.

289 See also Meier 1989, 135.

ascetic of 576–609 would be the better bishop, but, as I already said, not every ascetic needs to be a bishop<sup>290</sup>.

### 3.2.2.3 Ascetic aims

Separation from the world, important as it is, constitutes only the *pars destruens*, so to speak, of asceticism. One wants to liberate oneself from the flesh, but what for? The attention of the Gregorian ascetic goes in three main directions: the end of times, Scripture, and God. Contemplation of the ἔσχατον assumes different forms, combining the philosophical exercise of meditation on death with the apocalyptic awareness of Syrian Christianity. Death is clearly linked with separation from the world, but Gregory introduces Christian content in this intuition—for example, by connecting death and separation from the world to angelic life or the hope in the resurrection. Apart from the already discussed τὸ θνήσκειν μνώμενος καθ’ ἡμέραν, which connects death, fasting, and angelic life (II, 1, 12, 592–594), there is the topos of the ascetic as living dead (II, 1, 13, 111) and the Pauline expression ποθῶν λαβεῖν ἔνδυμα τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν (II, 1, 12, 591). This is laden with cultural implications: “incorruption” (ἀφθαρσία) is not only the term defining eternal life; it also defines virginity in early Syrian asceticism<sup>291</sup>. The idea of “putting on” Christ or incorruption as a dress, though already in Paul, was very prominent in Syrian Christianity, but it was also extensively analysed by Origen as an eschatological formula<sup>292</sup>. However, the ascetic contemplating death and the end is also brought to reflect on God’s judgement and on his own sin: hence the reference to repentance and to the deep stress and preoccupation over the salvation of one’s soul (see II, 1, 12, 48–53; 58). The theme emerges only at the beginning of II, 1, 12, because it highlights the injustice of having the anxious and depressed penitent pursued by misfortune while the wicked enjoys life without remorse; yet, before this contrast, Gregory had hinted at the last judgement. The other ascetic portrayals do not refer directly to the judgement, and, moreover, they tend to highlight the peace of mind and detachment of the ascetic in contrast with the many cares of the man in the world (see II, 1, 12, 611–613).

Regarding meditation on Scriptures, Gregory seems to distinguish two phases: in II, 1, 12, 57 he lists biblical study among the activities consuming the mind and body of the

<sup>290</sup> Finally, even if it forms a comprehensive description of Gregory’s ascetic ideal, the passage at 576–609 is punctuated by the anaphora of οὗτος (576; 595; 598; 602; 608), which may signal different hypothetical ascetics portrayed in the description (Meier 1989, 135). This construction is well grounded in grammar and has a parallel at II, 2, 1, 55–84, where Gregory lists a series of ascetics with their achievements. However, the listing at II, 2, 1 is much more varied than our anaphora of οὗτος. Furthermore, I find the entire passage at II, 1, 12, 576–609 too internally coherent to be split in a series of portrayals of different ascetics. The anaphora of οὗτος may in fact be referred to the same subject, as per Kühner/Gerth 1898, §467.

<sup>291</sup> Vööbus 1958, 86–87.

<sup>292</sup> Syriac Christianity: Brock 1992, 32–33, 39, 42, 46–48, 60–66, 85–97, 107. Origen: Noce 2002; cf. Orig. *princ.* 2, 3, 2–3; c. *Cels.* 7, 32.

ascetic; on the other hand, in II, 1, 12, 608–609, he presents understanding of Scripture as a revelation of the Holy Spirit given to the ascetic. This double facet is to be explained with the idea that correct speculation, and in particular correct interpretation of Scripture, cannot be attained without a moral purification of the person. Bible study is at the same time an instrument of purification among the other, more practical, exercises, and is the aim of asceticism<sup>293</sup>. Therefore, this whole description of asceticism finally ties into the educational program already discussed in §3.1.3.3: Christian learning has to be conceived primarily as biblical hermeneutics. It may be unadorned and “ascetic” in style, but it must be rich in contents. Correct hermeneutics is a gift of the Spirit, so that the recipient should purify himself only through asceticism (of which study is just one aspect). As was noted above for Gregory’s educational program, his ascetic program, as well, is deeply influenced by Origen, maybe not in the concrete practices—which reflect a Syrian milieu—but certainly in its aims, involving a deep engagement with Scripture<sup>294</sup>.

Finally, the ascetic is said to have direct contact with God. The theme is repeated in almost the same terms in each portrayal. These passages are also very similar to the definition of priesthood in II, 1, 12, 751–760 and to Gregory’s description of his activity of “spiritual priesthood” in retreat (II, 1, 10, 31–34; II, 1, 12, 803–808; II, 1, 13, 209–215; II, 1, 17, 101–102)<sup>295</sup>. In this case, Gregory’s technique of rewriting, with slight variations, a common theme across different works seems to be laden with meaning: the poet strongly suggests that the activity of the ascetic and of the priest is the same, with the difference that the priest has to communicate his activity to others; moreover, it seems clear that, once this identity between ascetic and priest has been established, Gregory casts himself as the ideal example of this general portrait. This goes in the same direction as his treatment of biblical learning, since in that case too he required from the bishops a particular kind of learning, which he then attributed to the ascetic. Therefore, parallels and variations on the same theme serve to further the idea that the ideal requisites for the episcopacy are found and fostered in the asceticism Gregory champions. If Gregory avoids too direct a statement on this, perhaps to avoid falling into Encratite positions such as those condemned at Gangra.

As to the contents of this meditation on God, three facets may be highlighted: the organ of meditation, the imagery of “ascent,” and that of “touching” God. In all pas-

<sup>293</sup> Gautier 2002, 120–121, 169, 172.

<sup>294</sup> For Origen the exegete is as inspired by the Holy Spirit as was the sacred writer in the first place: Orig. in Mt. comm. 14, 6; princ. 2, 7, 2; *quo modo opus prophetarum erat haec spiritu praedicere quae videbantur, sic eodem spiritu opus est ei qui exponere cupit ea quae sunt latenter significata* (in Hes. hom. 2, 2). Jerome, who translated in Latin the quoted homily by Origen and who claimed to have studied under Gregory, continues this line of thought: *nullus melior typi sui interpret erit, quam ipse qui inspiravit prophetas et futurae veritatis in servis suis lineas ante signavit* (Hieron. in Ion. praef. 72–74).

<sup>295</sup> Besides II, 1, 17, 25–40, which can be read as the portrait of a perfect bishop as well as of an ascetic, the main differences of the passages on Gregory and on priesthood from the ascetic portraits are the themes of sacrifice (see §3.1.2; §2.1.3.1) and of retreat.

sages (including those on priesthood and on Gregory's retreat), the organ that meditates on and eventually reaches God is the νοῦς. The generalised use of this word and the avoidance of the term ψυχή in this context cannot be coincidental: the poet is implicitly adopting a tripartite structure of the human being, in which the mental faculties are topped by an *apex mentis*, a part or faculty of the mind capable of making contact with the Godhead, namely νοῦς. It is a Neoplatonic idea found also in Origen as an exegesis of Pauline expressions such as "inner man" or "new man"<sup>296</sup>. Iambic passages employ only the word νοῦς and derivatives, whereas in dactylic verses Gregory employs, besides νοῦς, other terms stemming from the epic tradition: θυμός (II, 1, 10, 33; II, 1, 17, 26) and πραπίδες (II, 1, 13, 212; II, 1, 17, 37). Θυμός is the organ rising above material things, and, considering the parallelism between II, 1, 10, 33 and II, 1, 17, 35, Gregory seems to mean θυμός as a synonym for νοῦς<sup>297</sup>. The word πραπίδες, on the other side, has a very specific meaning, since πραπίδες are always mentioned in connection with the "recording" of mystical experiences in the ascetic's mind, so that this must be a poetic term for memory<sup>298</sup>.

<sup>296</sup> Plot. *enn.* 5, 3, 3; Orig. *princ.* 4, 4, 9. Origen and Plotinus share the conviction that man contains something capable of reaching the divine; they both call it νοῦς (among other names); they both see it as something more primordial and original than the ψυχή and the body, which are later additions concealing this kernel (see: Plot. *enn.* 6, 4, 14; Orig. *in Joh. comm.* 20, 22, 183); therefore, they both see the approach to the One or God as a "returning". For the difference of these two models, see Dupuis 1967, 62–65 (for Plotinus the divine is in the soul as an intellectual faculty, for Origen the νοῦς is capable of receiving the divine, but it is not the same as God; participation is mechanical and obtained through reason in Plotinus, founded on Grace and eschatological in Origen; the primacy of νοῦς in Plotinus is ontological, whereas in Origen is also chronological or historical). Gregory's position vis-à-vis these thinkers entails the concepts of θέωσις or οἰκειώσις τῷ θεῷ, his anthropology and the question of the man "made in God's image", all themes deeply studied, and which is not necessary to rehearse here. For some discussions, see Holl 1904, 161–164; Girardi 2001; Russell 2006, 215–225; Maslov 2012a; Maslov 2012b; Elm 2012, 259–265, 413–422.

<sup>297</sup> Ἐνθα νόου καθαροῖσι νοήμασι θυμὸν ἀείρων (II, 1, 10, 33); ἀλλὰ νόον καθαροῖσι νοήμασιν αἰὲν ἀέζων (II, 1, 17, 35). See also: θυμὸν ἀπὸ χθονίων ἔνθεν ἀνιστάμενος (II, 1, 17, 26). Locating in the θυμός the higher faculties, Gregory is employing the Homeric sense of the word, as opposed to later usage, which tends to ascribe to θυμός emotions and appetites.

<sup>298</sup> Αἰεὶ τε πραπίδεσσι νοήματα θεῖα χαράσσων (II, 1, 13, 212); ἥς [scil. Τριάδος] τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἔησι (II, 1, 17, 37). After Homer, πραπίς and πραπίδες were taken as synonyms of φρήν and φρένες, and their range of meanings reduced to intellectual activity, whereas in Homer the term has still a physical sense and an emotional one, while its relationship with φρένες is hard to ascertain (Sullivan 1987). The idea of memory here is conveyed more by the expressions χαράσσων and τύπον, which echo the common idea of memory as a writing support (cf.: δυνάμει δ' οὕτως ὥσπερ ἐν γραμματεῖῳ ὃ μὴ ἐνυπάρχει ἐντελεχεῖα γεγραμμένον, Aristot. *an.* 429B 29–430A 1; Τὴν δὲ φαντασίαν εἶναι τύπων ἐν ψυχῇ, τοῦ ὀνόματος οἰκείως μετενηνεγμένου ἀπὸ τῶν τύπων <τῶν> ἐν τῷ κηρῷ ὑπὸ τοῦ δακτυλίου γινομένων. Zeno *apud* Diog. L. 7, 45). The use of πραπίδες may also be a Homeric rewriting of biblical phraseology: ἐπίγραψον δὲ ἐπὶ τὸ πλάτος τῆς καρδίας σου (Prov. 7:3); φανεροῦμενοι ὅτι ἐστὲ ἐπιστολὴ Χριστοῦ διακονηθεῖσα ὑφ' ἡμῶν, ἐγγεγραμμένη οὐ μέλανι ἀλλὰ πνεύματι θεοῦ ζῶντος, οὐκ ἐν πλαξὶν λιθίναις ἀλλ' ἐν πλαξὶν καρδίαις σαρκίναίς (2Cor. 3:3); διδοὺς νόμους μου ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τῇν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν ἐπιγράψω αὐτοῦς (Jer. 38:33; Hebr. 8:10; 10:16; cf. Jer. 17:1).

Two images define meditation in Gregory's texts—namely, elevation or ascent and touching. Trisoglio has already studied the theme of elevation or ascent in Gregory's spirituality<sup>299</sup>. It is a piece of imagery so widespread in our culture and in the ancient one that it is almost taken for granted. Indeed, it is shared among Gregory's main models for these passages: the Platonic literature, the Bible, and Origen<sup>300</sup>. In the passages on Gregory's retreat, the ascending movement is paired with an introverted movement of the νοῦς: Ὡν ὁδε δεσμὸς ἔχει πλάγκτην νόον ἔνδον ἀγείρας, / Εἴσω πᾶς ὁρώων (II, 1, 13, 209–210). God is looked for with an inward movement, which is also a unifying movement, whereas the normal activity of the intellect is outward and sparse (πλάγκτην). Introspection and unity are not only the basis of Plotinian meditation<sup>301</sup> but also metaphysical categories which describe the activity of the second hypostasis, the νοῦς<sup>302</sup>. In other words, Gregory frames his retreat from politics as the Neoplatonic “conversion” (ἐπιστροφή) of the Soul to its principle, Mind, and of Mind to its principle, the One. The dialectic between “conversion” (ἐπιστροφή) and “procession” (πρόοδος) of the hypostases (which has a Christian counterpart in the call to conversion and in the Son's condescension through incarnation) is imitated by the ascetic-bishop, oscillating between activity and retreat. Through this analogy between Godhead and philosopher, retreat and ascent become the same movement.

The metaphor of touch for mystical contact with the divinity is another commonplace: the sense of touch is the less mediated of the senses, and as such, it expresses the

<sup>299</sup> Trisoglio 1990. In our poems: II, 1, 12, 71; 579; II, 1, 13, 109; II, 1, 17, 26; 35–36. See also II, 1, 10, 33 and II, 1, 12, 753.

<sup>300</sup> As regards Platonism, ideas of ascent in relation to philosophical progress are scattered all through the *Phaedrus* (for example: τελέα μὲν οὖν οὐσα [scil. ἡ ψυχὴ] καὶ ἐπτερωμένη μετεωροπορεῖ, Plat. *Phaedr.* 246C; ἄκραν ἐπὶ τὴν ὑπουράνιον ἀψίδα πορεύονται [οἱ θεοί] πρὸς ἄνακτες, 247B; τῇδὲ τις ὁρῶν κάλλος, τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἀναμνησκόμενος, πτερῶται τε καὶ ἀναπτερούμενος προθυμούμενος ἀναπτέσθαι, ἀδυνατῶν δέ, ὄρνιθος δίκην βλέπων ἄνω, τῶν κάτω δέ ἀμελῶν, 249D) and are also prominent in Plotinus (for example: Τὰ δὲ τοῦ νοῦ ἐνεργήματα ἄνωθεν οὕτως, ὡς τὰ ἐκ τῆς αἰσθήσεως κάτωθεν, τοῦτο ὄντες τὸ κύριον τῆς ψυχῆς, μέσον δυνάμεως διττῆς, χείρονος καὶ βελτίονος, χείρονος μὲν τῆς αἰσθήσεως, βελτίονος δὲ τοῦ νοῦ, Plot. *enn.* 5, 3, 3). In the Bible, God is frequently visualised in heaven or on high (1Reg. 8:27; Ps. 10:4; Jes. 57:15; 66:1; Mt. 5:34; Lc. 2:14), visions may entail the prophet ascending to heaven (Hes. 8:3; 11:24; 2Cor. 12:2) and Jesus himself says that one must be “born from above (ἄνωθεν)” to “see” the Kingdom of God (Joh. 3:3). As for Origen, a relevant passage is in *Joh. comm.* 19, 20, 130–134.

<sup>301</sup> E.g.: Δεῖ τοίνυν, εἰ τῶν οὕτω παρόντων ἀντίληψις ἔσται, καὶ τὸ ἀντιλαμβάνομενον εἰς τὸ εἴσω ἐπιστρέφειν, κάκεῖ ποιεῖν τὴν προσοχὴν ἔχειν (Plot. *enn.* 5, 1, 12); εἰς ἔν αὐτῷ ἐλθῶν, καὶ μηκέτι σχίσας ἔν ὁμοῦ πάντα ἐστὶ μετ' ἐκείνου τοῦ θεοῦ ἀψοφητὶ παρόντος, καὶ ἐστὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ ὅσον δύναται καὶ θέλει (8, 11); πάντων τῶν ἔξω ἀφεμένην δεῖ ἐπιστραφεῖν πρὸς τὸ εἶσω πάντη, μὴ πρὸς τι τῶν ἔξω κεκλίσθαι, ἀλλὰ ἀγνοήσαντα τὰ πάντα, (6, 9, 7).

<sup>302</sup> Εἰκόνα δὲ ἐκείνου λέγομεν εἶναι τὸν νοῦν· δεῖ γὰρ σαφέστερον λέγειν· πρῶτον μὲν, ὅτι δεῖ πῶς εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ γενόμενον καὶ ἀποσφῆζειν πολλὰ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶναι ὁμοιότητα πρὸς αὐτό, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου. Ἀλλ' οὐ νοῦς ἐκεῖνο. Πῶς οὖν νοῦν γεννᾷ; Ἡ ὅτι τῇ ἐπιστροφῇ πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐώρα· ἡ δὲ ὁρασις αὕτη νοῦς (Plot. *enn.* 5, 1, 7).

intimate relationship of the mystic mind with God<sup>303</sup>. Aristotle discusses the sense of touch in *an.* 422b 17–424a 16 and mentions it elsewhere in his biological opus, noting the difficulties this sense poses for his model of sensation passing through a material medium; in effect, in the sense of touch, medium and sensory organ tend to coincide, and the medium is subject to substantial changes from the object of sensation (contrarily to what happens to all other senses), acquiring some of its properties. Moreover, for Aristotle, the sense of touch is the most primal and basic of all senses, the one without which there can be no sense—and therefore no animal—at all<sup>304</sup>. In fact, where Gregory does not use this image, he employs other words, *κοινωνέω* and *μίγνυμι*, expressing not only a direct contact but also a mutual action of the agents, a “coming together”<sup>305</sup>.

The last ideological component of Gregory’s portrait of the ascetic brings both this idea of “coming together” with the Godhead and the practices described to fruition: the ascetic bears the marks of his spiritual progress. This is true not only on the spiritual level, as we have seen the ascetic storing up God’s *τύπος* in his *πραπίδες*, but also on a physical level, as the practices of asceticism mould and mark (again with the word *τύπος*) the ascetic’s body<sup>306</sup>. The insistence on the marks of asceticism, be they physical or spiritual, is a striking similarity with Ephrem’s idea of the *ὑψῶς* (i.e., *τύπος*) of poverty. Granted, Ephrem develops the image in another direction, towards a sort of biblical typology applied to episcopal succession, but the poets share the same approach to ascetic models in visual or iconographic terms. On one side, this approach may be connected with their insistence on the value of example; on the other, I take it to be influenced by the rising devotion to living ascetics. As Bacci has noted, inspecting ascetics was a religious practice of increasing importance in late antiquity, whereby pilgrims visited monks, eager to see their bodies unpleasantly marked by extreme feats of asceticism. The sight alone of these “living icons and statues of virtue”, as Theodoret calls them, was deemed sufficient to transmit a spiritual benefit or a vague idea of the resurrected body<sup>307</sup>. Now, as we have seen (§2.2.3.2), the same idea is applied by Gregory to the bishop as church leader: he too must acquire the marks of God in his soul to radiate and mediate them to the community, in order to effect their salvation. The same acquiring of “marks” is used by Gregory to refer to himself in II, 1, 13, 212 (*αἰεὶ τε πραπίδεσσι νοήματα θεῖα χαράσσω*). As in the case of biblical proficiency, the self-portrait, the ascetic ideal, and the model

<sup>303</sup> See: II, 1, 17, 39. Cf. Plotinus: ἵνα τῷ ὅλῳ αὐτῶν περιπτυσσώμεθα καὶ μηδὲν μέρος ἔχοιμεν, ὥ μὴ ἐφαπτόμεθα θεοῦ (*en.* 6, 9, 9).

<sup>304</sup> Steiner Goldner 2018.

<sup>305</sup> See II, 1, 12, 72, 600–601.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. *τύποις* τε σαρκῶν ἐσφράγισται τιμίους (II, 1, 12, 586) with ἥς [*scil.* Τριάδος] τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσιν ἐῆσι (II, 1, 17, 37). See also *εἰκὼν* μὲν τις ἔγραψεν ἀπ’εἰκόνοσ ἀρχετύποιο, / *στησάμενος* προπάροιθε, *πίναξ* δ’ὑπεδέξατο μορφήν (II, 1, 13, 112–113).

<sup>307</sup> οἷόν τινας εἰκόνας αὐτῶν ἐμψύχους καὶ στήλας σφᾶς αὐτοὺς πεποιήκασι (Theodrt. *hist. rel. praef.* 2); Διέμεινε δὲ μέχρι καὶ τήμερον τόδε τῆς πολιτείας τὸ εἶδος ... ἀμφοτέρω στήλαι τινες ἐμψυχοὶ καὶ εἰκόνες τῆς ἀρετῆς τῆς ἐκείνου γενόμενοι (5, 6; note how the “way” of life of the monks is called a *πολιτείας* εἶδος, with a visual metaphor). See Bacci 2014, 69–72.



bishop tend to be formulated in the same terms. In this particular case, given the relative lack of precedents for the iconographic metaphor applied to the bishops, one could argue that both Ephrem and Gregory transported the metaphor from the cult of ascetics to bishops as they integrated ascetic values into their model of the bishop.

### 3.2.3 Conclusion

Summing up Gregory's and Ephrem's treatments of asceticism in relation to the episcopate, we could say that the two poets develop a common ideal of the ascetic-bishop along slightly different lines, according to their different interests. They both envisage the bishop as leading the ascetics, who are thought of as part of the community; in general, the poems do not address potential or actual conflicts between ascetic circles and the church hierarchy, but they tacitly imply such conflicts as an argument for a bishop having strong ascetic credentials, if not chosen from among the ascetics themselves. In fact, asceticism and church hierarchy are consistently lumped together, whether it be in Ephrem's description of the career of Valgash and in the idea of an ascetic succession bound up with the episcopal one, or in Gregory's (self-)portraits of the ideal ascetic, corresponding with the ideal bishop and the ideal candidate for the episcopate.

Ephrem and Gregory conceive of asceticism in the same Syrian tradition: the ascetic is part of the Christian community, is marked out by virginity and a heightened practice of Christian liturgies (fasts, wakes, prayers, interpretation of Scriptures), and is the perfect candidate for ordered ministry. They also strongly emphasise poverty, as a value that the bishops should bring to their ministry from an ascetic background. In the case of Ephrem, this emphasis can be placed, albeit with some difficulty, in the historical context of a community gaining back imperial favour after the times of Julian, thus risking becoming arrogant in its prosperity. In the case of Gregory, no precise historical occurrence seems to play a role, but perhaps no small part of the episcopal infighting that pestered his career must be attributed to greed.

Two major differences mark out Gregory's treatment of asceticism from Ephrem's. First, Gregory is much more cautious as regards virginity, a choice stemming from his position as son of a bishop and close ally of a married bishop (Gregory of Nyssa), and perhaps also from his taking into account the Synod of Gangra and the experience of Eustathius of Sebaste, whereas Ephrem is rooted in the strongly Encratitic tradition of the Syriac churches. Second, Gregory expresses his view of asceticism from within the Greek philosophical tradition, where Origen and Neoplatonism strongly influence his thought. Therefore, in Gregory we find descriptions of or references to contemplation and mysticism, which are totally absent from Ephrem. The Syrian poet sees asceticism as an ethical enterprise or as a striving for purity, and the insights the ascetic gains are limited to his ability to preach and interpret Scripture. In Gregory, on the other side, the Origenian model places biblical hermeneutics in a deeper metaphysics of the relation between God and man.

### 3.3 Who makes the bishops? Questions of episcopal selection

It is no surprise that our poets, concerned as they are with the behaviour of bishops, should also touch upon the theme of their selection. A number of different concerns and ideas crowd around the selection of candidates and the creation of the new bishop. The characteristics of the ideal candidate, in relation to his future tasks as prelate as well as to the hot topic of asceticism, have been already examined. The point of this section is to lay out the ideas and literary treatment of the formality of episcopal selection, not its material criteria: Who should make the choice? How should he or they decide? What exactly does the process of creating a new bishop, as represented in Gregory's and Ephrem's poems, entail? In practice, the great question, common to Ephrem and Gregory, is fitting together God and the community (or clergy) in the process of selection and legitimation of a bishop. One should not forget that this question agitated the church in the fourth century not only because of the frequent exiles and replacements of Arian and Nicene bishops, posing concrete problems of legitimacy, but also because of communities bearing radical understandings of the question, such as Donatists, Novatianists, Montanists, and Messalianists<sup>308</sup>. Despite the common theme, the two poets parse this process of selection differently, in accordance with their different interests at hand.

At first, I will confront the most glaring difference between the two poets—namely, the agency of the choice of a bishop (§3.3.1). Gregory attributes it to other bishops; Ephrem to God (§3.3.1.1). Then, I will consider the role of the people and of the predecessor in the selection and election process (§3.3.1.2). In the following section (§3.3.2), Gregory's position will be examined with a reading first of his more innovative poem, II, 1, 12 (§3.3.2.1), then of his vaguer call to improvement in the church in II, 1, 13 (§3.3.2.2). I will then compare the different stances and narrations in these two poems (§3.3.2.3), and finally sum up the results of this inquiry in the conclusion (§3.3).

#### 3.3.1 Who chooses bishops? Divine choice and the need for consensus

According to canon law, the bishop was chosen by the community—with special weight placed on its clergy—and approved by the metropolitan and by the other bishops of the diocese. How this process precisely played out in the first centuries of Christianity, taking into account significant regional variations and encroachments by imperial authority, is difficult to determine, although scholarship has described tendencies, single cases, and overarching concerns<sup>309</sup>. Gregory's and Ephrem's approaches to the theme are considerably different.

<sup>308</sup> On the exile of bishops, see Barry 2018; Hillner/Enberg/Ulrich 2016; Kopecek 1974.

<sup>309</sup> Regarding episcopal selection, a first approach with further bibliography can be gleaned from: Gryson 1973; Gryson 1979; Norton 2007; Leemans/Van Nuffelen/Keough/Nicolaye 2011; Leppin 2016; Leppin 2017.

### 3.3.1.1 God and the bishops

Gregory writes with a clear conscience that bishops are coopted by the other bishops, for otherwise his deep concern with criteria of selection would be inconceivable: II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13 address the bishops directly, criticizing the criteria adopted until now and proposing new ones<sup>310</sup>. Moreover, he takes for granted this process of co-optation, so that it is likely his interlocutors shared the same presupposition. Indeed, this is in accordance with the contemporary growth of the influence of bishops in the appointments and the decline in importance of the congregations<sup>311</sup>. Therefore, episcopal authority eschews, as regards the selection of the incumbent, the features of the charismatic type of authority, in which charisma is not conferred upon the incumbent, but is instead *found, discovered* in someone who, by virtue of this charisma, becomes an authority<sup>312</sup>. A different representation of the process is at work in Gregory's autobiographical narration: when he describes his call to Constantinople, Gregory attributes it to God, the Nicene community of the city, and other bishops<sup>313</sup>. This scheme is much more in line with canon law and also more flattering for the elected, since he can count on divine legitimation and popular consensus to defend his position; however, the fact remains that the bishops were still the most important agent, as demonstrated by the fact that sometimes the people are omitted (II, 1, 10, 15), and the agency of the Spirit is advanced with some doubt (Εἴτ' οὖν τὸ θεῖον Πνεῦμα, εἴθ' ἁμαρτάδες, . . . Τὸ δ' οὖν πρόδηλον, σύλλογοί τε ποιμένων / Καὶ λαὸς ὀρθόδοξος, II, 1, 12, 79; 81–82). Granted, we should not take these propositions as theological stances, because they would be contradictory. Rather, the poet highlights a different component of a complex theological idea (i.e., the appointment of a new bishop) in view of his context, aim, and audience; therefore, it makes perfect sense that he would mention all components (God, bishops, and people), stressing divine intervention, when claiming legitimacy for his own episcopate before the same social components that would traditionally accept or refuse that legitimacy. When the poet advances to other bishops concrete criteria for the selection of candidates, on the other hand, there is no need to put forth all components; on

**310** See: Ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντας ῥαδίως καθίζομεν (II, 1, 12, 375); Τοῦτ' οὖν ὁρῶν ἕκαμνες εὐρεῖν ποιμένα; / Ὡς μικρὸν ἐσπούδαζες ἐγκαλύπτομαι. / Ὡσπερ λογιστὴν ἐσκόπεις τὸν προστάτην. / Κόπρων μέλει σοι, μειζόνων δ' ἐμοὶ λόγος. (II, 1, 12, 747–750); Δεῦρ' ἴτε, δεξιτερῇσι νέους κλίνετε τένοντας / Πᾶσι προφρονέως, καὶ μὴ ποθέουσι τέτανται. (II, 1, 13, 90–91); Ἡμεῖς δ' αὖ κακὴν γέρα θήκαμεν (II, 1, 13, 194).

**311** Gryson 1978, 342–345; Leppin 2016, 74–75; *contra* Norton 2007, 6–7, 30–34, 38–45.

**312** Weber 1922, 145. Cf. Leppin 2017, 45–46 (Cyprian reflects the common notion that “elections” of bishops are not meant to balance the interests of the community, but to identify correctly God's will, as already theorised by Weber 1922, 143–144; Origen conceives of charisma separately from episcopal charges: hopefully the two can go hand in hand, but sometimes they will be at odds; see Orig. in *Lev. hom.* 6, 2; 6, 6).

**313** Θῶκον ἐπ' ἀλλότριον, / Οὐ με θεός τ' ἐπέβησε, Θεοῦ τ' ἀγαθοὶ θεράποντες; (II, 1, 10, 14–15); ἔπεμψεν ἡμᾶς ἡ χάρις τοῦ πνεύματος / πολλῶν καλούντων ποιμένων καὶ θρεμμάτων (II, 1, 11, 595–596); Εἴτ' οὖν τὸ θεῖον Πνεῦμα, εἴθ' ἁμαρτάδες, / Ὡς ἂν δίκας τίσαιμι τῆς ἐπάρσεως / Τὸ δ' οὖν πρόδηλον σύλλογοί τε ποιμένων / Καὶ λαὸς ὀρθόδοξος, ἀλλ' οὕτω πλατὺς (II, 1, 12, 79–82). See §2.1.2.1; §5.1.2.1.

the contrary, it is useful to stress the other bishops' role in the selection. However, the novelty of addressing the bishops as agents of the selection should not be understated.

Ephrem's rhetoric is totally different: in his poems, the bishops in their collegiality are not even mentioned, and the choice is wholly ascribed to God. The main rhetorical device used to make this point is the refrain, since almost every single refrain of *CN* 13–21 is a thanksgiving to God for having “chosen” (*gbā*) or “created” (*ʿbad*) the bishop<sup>314</sup>. Here one must recall the issues related to the performance of Ephrem's poems (see §1.2.1): the refrains stand out from the rest of the text for their repetitive character. Yet, while the refrains of *CN* 13–16 consist of a single line repeated identically after every verse, *CN* 17–21 vary the tenth and last lines of every verse, maintaining the same syntactic structure. Although less marked, the tenth lines of these poems still stand out: their structure is that of an acclamation, as is usual for Ephrem's refrains; they repeat more or less the same syntax throughout, with minimal changes; and they are always syntactically independent from the rest of the stanza<sup>315</sup>. It is likely that this peculiarity was mirrored in the performance of the poems, so that scholars usually hypothesise a collective delivery of the refrains.

This view—likely as it is—can be accepted only with some caveats: in the case of single-line refrains repeated identically after every stanza, there is the possibility that they stem from later editors of the manuscripts, in part or in full: the editor may have changed existing refrains or invented new ones where there was none<sup>316</sup>. This idea may be accepted as casting a reasonable doubt on the refrains, but in the absence of concrete clues as to which ones may be interpolated, it must remain only a doubt. Moreover, the addition of these refrains must have had a motive: either there were already refrains, and the editor simply changed them to suit his agenda, or there were no refrains, and the editor added them because the structure and performance of the *madrāšē* had changed in the meantime. I find the idea of changed refrains unlikely for *CN* 13–16, because they present the same focus on divine election as the refrains *CN* 17–21, which—given their variations

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**314** “Glory be unto thee, who chose them!” (*CN* 13, refrain); “Blessed is he who chose those three!” (*CN* 14, refrain); “Blessed is he who chose you, pride of our people!” (*CN* 15, refrain); “Blessed is he who made him our comfort!” (*CN* 17, 1, 10); “Blessed is he who made him the best!” (*CN* 17, 2, 10); “Blessed is he who made him their barn!” (*CN* 17, 3, 10); “Blessed is he who made you our pillar!” (*CN* 17, 5, 10); “Blessed is he who chose you for joy!” (*CN* 17, 6, 10); “Blessed is he who made his gift descend!” (*CN* 17, 10, 10; the gift is the Holy Spirit of the ordination); “Blessed is he who in his stead gave us thee!” (*CN* 18, 1, 10); “Blessed is he who chose you through concord!” (*CN* 18, 3, 10); “Blessed is he who chose you as our pride!” (*CN* 18, 6, 10); “Blessed is he who chose you as our farmer!” (*CN* 18, 8, 10); “Blessed is he who made you our lamp!” (*CN* 18, 10, 10 and *CN* 21, 1, 10); “Blessed is he who made you his treasurer!” (*CN* 19, 8, 10); “Blessed is he who chose you as our repose!” (*CN* 19, 9, 10); “Blessed is he who chose you as our fisherman!” (*CN* 19, 10, 10); “Blessed is he who handed to you his ministry!” (*CN* 21, 3, 10); “Blessed is he who chose you to be a priest!” (*CN* 21, 5, 10); “Blessed is he who chose you for our salvation!” (*CN* 21, 7, 10). The English “choose” always translates Syriac *gbā*, and English “make” translates Syriac *ʿbad*. The majority of other refrains bless God because of the virtues he infused in the bishop and some of them, especially in *CN* 20 and 21, praise God directly for some benefit.

**315** See also Beck 1959, xxi.

**316** Lattke 1989, 41.

and their strong thematic links with the respective verses—can hardly have been interpolated. As for the addition of refrains, there is no reason to believe that the performance of *madrāšē* changed in the time between Ephrem's death and our manuscripts; however, it may have been that some *madrāšē* had no refrain and the editor decided to conform them to the model with refrain. As regards the refrains of *CN* 17–21, one must note that they still present variations, so that, if the probability of later editorial interventions is reduced, the possibility of a collective delivery is equally limited to a prepared chorus; in other words, the congregation at large could not have performed those lines without preparation or a written copy. Even under these limitations, the link between these refrains and the theme of divine election remains significant: in proposing a collective delivery of these lines, the poet involves the voice of the community in the proclamation that the bishop has been chosen by God himself. Even if the chorus was formed by prepared ascetics (as seems to be the case, at least sometimes; see §1.2.1), they still would be representative of the community, since in early Syriac asceticism the ascetics also had a mediating function in respect of the community at large they represented its core.

The involvement of the community that is thereby suggested is not only a powerful expression of the consensus on the bishop's election but also a device reinforcing that same consensus, because in the sheltered space of liturgy, through the predetermined form of Ephrem's poetry, the voices of opposition cannot find a proper outlet, whereas the setting prompts even the reluctant to take part in the acclamation. As noted by Leppin, since the whole procedure of episcopal election aimed at consensus and lacked structured outlets for dissent, the matter could turn very risky very quickly: consensus was sorely needed<sup>317</sup>. To this somewhat cynical analysis, it is to be added that the two sets of poems (*CN* 13–16 and *CN* 17–21) were written in at least two different contexts. The assertiveness of *CN* 17–21 suggests more the celebration of an accomplished fact than a lobbying for a candidate. In this context, these poems should not be seen as insincere propaganda, but as a way to consolidate and express in a structured mode the consensus reached on the candidate, as well as (perhaps) a sense of relief and gratitude towards God, if the selection ran smoothly<sup>318</sup>. As regards *CN* 13–16, the poems engage a crisis in Valgash's authority (§4.2), so that the refrains cannot refer directly to the bishop's election. The refrains of *CN* 13–14 adopt a retrospective view, because they extend divine election on the three first bishops and not only on Valgash, thereby stressing more the continuing providence of God than the moment of election. The refrains of *CN* 15–16 focus on Valgash himself: here, Valgash's divine election may have been evoked to restore the original consensus surrounding his ordination in a time of crisis.

The idea of divine election is also present in the body of the poems, not only in the refrains, though the poet employs it less straightforwardly. For example, the poet argues

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<sup>317</sup> Leppin 2017, 43–44, 49–53.

<sup>318</sup> Similar phenomena are attested for other Christian hymns: Williams 2013; Dunkle 2016, 38 (on Augustine's *Psalm against the Donatists*, see nn. 136–137) and 47–52 (on Ambrose). The idea is best described in relation to the Jewish *piyyutim* by Lieber 2010, 123–127. See also Kantorowicz 1958, 119–121.

that through ordination the bishop received a divine charisma, so that one could say the episcopate was given to him by God:

ܐܕܬܬܝܬ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܡܠ ܕܥܡܡܐ ܕܥܡܡܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

(CN 17, 10)

In this stanza, Ephrem polemicises against a conception of the episcopate as merely a human office, an organisational articulation. On the contrary, the poet clearly defines it as divine charisma, calling it a “gift” (*mawhabtā*, which translates χάρισμα) and clarifying that it was bestowed by God and not by human beings. If, however, Ephrem is led to make such a remark, it must be because someone believed the contrary. Such a belief may have been based on the fact that the new bishop was consecrated by other bishops, so that the form of the liturgy may have given rise to the impression that “’twas men who gave it to you” (line 7). Anyway, it must be noted that here Ephrem defines the episcopate as a divine charisma, without saying that the individual bishop has been chosen by God. The function of these lines is less to defend Abraham as an individual worthy of the episcopate, and more to legitimise the office itself. The rhetoric of the “name” of the episcopate, similar to that of the “name” of the community at CN 20, suggests an antiheretical concern on the part of Ephrem: the pledge of the bishop’s and community’s orthodoxy is their acknowledgement of the divine origin and order of episcopal succession, while those who do not accept this succession or disqualify it as man-made are ipso facto outside of the community. The sacramental character of the episcopate guarantees the apostolic succession; therefore, it is a character of the “true church”<sup>320</sup>.

The idea of divine election is more clearly suggested by the image of the “horn of election seething” (*qarnā d-gabyūtā*, or simply *qarnā*, with the verb *raḥ*) in CN 17, 2, 7 and CN 19, 2, 4. The expression refers to the practice, attested in the Bible, of anointing kings, prophets, and priests. The seething suggests supernatural approval for the candidate, but curiously the detail of the horn as vessel for the oil is attested only for the anointments of Saul and David<sup>321</sup>.

<sup>319</sup> “The gift [*mawhabtā*] that was bestowed upon you / from on high descended floating: // do not name it in the name of a man, / nor hang it on to a different power, // since no one can reach its place. / The cunning Satan can convince, // that ’twas men who gave it to you, / but, since that gift is born free, // let only slavery serve men. / **Blessed is he who made his gift descend!**”

<sup>320</sup> Griffith 1999.

<sup>321</sup> Anointing of Aaron: Ex. 28:41; anointing of Saul and David: 1Sam. 10:1; 16:13; anointing of Elisha: 1Reg. 19:16.

Divine election is even more prominent in relation to the ascetic credentials of a bishop:

<sup>322</sup> <p>ܡܢ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܡܢ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ (CN 15, 11)</p>	<p>ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ, ܡܢ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ, ܡܢ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ</p>
<p>ܡܢ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ, ܡܢ ܕܡܫܚܐ <sup>323</sup>ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ (CN 17, 4, 1–6)</p>	<p>ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ, ܡܢ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ, ܡܢ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ ܕܡܫܚܐ, ܡܢ ܕܡܫܚܐ</p>

These two passages are found in different contexts: CN 15, 11 concludes the presentation of Valgash's ascetic credentials to defend him to his community, whereas CN 17, 4 aims to explain why Abraham's recent election was good and legitimate. The imagery is also different, with CN 15, 11 reaffirming the theme of measure developed in stanzas 5 and 10 (see §3.2.1) and describing Valgash as a container for charisma, and CN 17 employing various biblical images (the vessel, the scent, and the crucible)<sup>324</sup> and a developed vocabulary of trial: in CN 17, 4, for example, Ephrem employs *nesyānā* (2), *bḥar* (3), *bqā* and *bqāyā* (4–5), all to express the ideas of “proof”, “trial”. These sundry expressions highlight that the two bishops were prepared by their asceticism for their office. These differences notwithstanding, both passages envisage the bishops as having been chosen by a supernatural entity, God in the case of CN 17, 4 and “Perfection” (*gmīrūtā*), also called “the measure of truth” (*mušḥat-quštā*), in CN 15, 11. The case of CN 17, 4 is pretty clear; CN 15, 11 may raise some doubt. That Ephrem is referencing Valgash's election and not simply his moral exemplarity is explained by the context, referencing his career at stanza 8 and continuing at the beginning of stanza 12 with the predicative *rēšā*, referring to Valgash. “Perfection” here refers to the third stage of growth in the faith, which the community had failed to reach (stanza 10) but which the bishop, thanks to his asceticism, preserved; for this reason, he was made bishop as third. Hence, “Perfection” choosing Valgash is part of the broader providential project to educate the

322 “Nevertheless, she [Perfection], the measure of truth, / preserved herself in his vessel, // chose him [*gbāt-eh*], seeing that he chose her [*gbā-h*], / preserved in him her scent and taste // from the beginning to the end.”

323 “He chose him [*gbā-y(hy)*] in the multitude of musterers, / because he gave proof of his faith; // Time examined him in the herd, / and long wait proved him as a crucible. // Because of his personal trial, / he made him [*‘abd-eh*] a wall to the multitude.”

324 The idea of a “vessel” (*mānā*) prepared by God to contain charisma is Pauline and the Syriac Peshitta uses the same word for “vessel” as Ephrem at 2Cor. 4:7 and 2Tim. 2:20. The reference to “scent” (*rēḥā*, but mss. have \**r-ḥ*) and “taste” (*ṭāʿmā*) is equally biblical. For “scent” referred to spiritual qualities, see §2.2.3.2 n. 261; for “taste”: Mt. 5:13. The crucible (here *kūrā*) to refine precious metals as metaphor for a proof or trial is a staple of biblical language: Job 23:10; Ps. 66:10–12; Prov. 17:3; Jes. 48:10; Mal. 3:2–3; Zach. 13:9; 1Cor. 3:11–13; 1Petr. 1:6–7; 4:12.

community in Nisibis. Therefore, in both *CN* 15 and 17 Ephrem locates even evaluation of ascetic merit in God, who ultimately chooses the bishop.

The idea that bishops are ultimately chosen by God does not surprise. What is peculiar in Ephrem's position is that in his rarefied language he does not distinguish the process of selection, the liturgy of consecration, and the charisma associated with the office and stemming from God. The creation of a new bishop is represented as a simple act, through which God chooses and consecrates the candidate. Granted, the candidate has been selected from among the ascetics and the members of the clergy, but this selection is very different from the conscious co-optation of bishops addressed by Gregory; it is more the providential fulfilment of an ascetic career. In other words, at *CN* 17, 4 the ascetic life selects the candidate, and the election comes as a divine acknowledgement of that life. Compare that stanza from Ephrem with Gregory's analysis of the problem of bad bishops:

Τὸ δ' αἴτιον· βολαῖς μὲν ἡλίου φασὶν  
 Κρίνειν νεοσσῶν ὄψιν ἀετὸν πανσόφως·  
 Ἐξ ὧν νόθον μὲν καὶ τὸ μὴ γινώσκεται·  
 Καὶ τὸν μὲν ἐξέρριψε, τοῦ δ' ἐστὶν πατήρ.  
 Ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντας ῥαδίως καθίζομεν,  
 Ἐὰν μόνον θέλωσι, λαοῦ προστάτας,  
 Οὐδὲν σκοποῦντες τῶν νέων ἢ τῶν πάλαι,  
 Οὐ πρᾶξιν, οὐ λόγον τιν', οὐ συνουσίαν,  
 Οὐδ' ὅσον ἤχον γνωρίσαι νομίσματος,  
 Οὐδὲ χρόνου πύρωσιν ἐνδεδειγμένους,  
 Ἀλλ' αὐτόθεν φανέντας ἀξίους θρόνων.  
 (II, 1, 12, 371–381)

Here's the reason: they say it is with the rays of the sun  
 that the eagle tries his hatchlings' sight cleverly;  
 through these, the bastard from the legitimate is told,  
 and the one cast forth, the other recognised as son;  
 we on the contrary enthrone easily anyone—  
 provided he wants it—as leader of the community,  
 examining nothing of neophytes nor of older Christians,  
 neither their behaviour, nor any of their words, nor their acquaintances,  
 not even as much sound as suffices to evaluate a coin,  
 and not those conspicuous for the trial by fire of time,  
 but those who there and then appear worthy of the throne.

Gregory's terminology is very similar to Ephrem's: he too uses a wealth of synonyms for "trial," "proof," and "selection" (κρίνειν, 372; γινώσκεται, 373; σκοποῦντες, 377; γνωρίσαι, 379; ἐνδεδειγμένους, 380); he too employs the metaphor of the crucible refining precious metals, referring to time, though in his case the metaphor is condensed in



the word πύρωσις, “trial by fire”<sup>325</sup>. It is interesting that for both Gregory and Ephrem the “fire” is “time” (χρόνου, 380; *zabnā, nuḡrā*, CN 17, 4, 3–4), perhaps a reaction to hasty ordinations of people lacking a proper ascetic or clerical career (in the case of Gregory, Nectarius would be the implicit target).

Gregory employs two extra analogies for the selection of candidates—namely, the legend of the eagle staring at the sun (371–374) and the sounding of coins (379). The sources and significance of these similes are explained by Meier<sup>326</sup>, to whose account I add only two things. As regards the sounding of coins, besides the classical sources mentioned by Meier, there may be a reference to the famous ἄγραφον transmitted by Clement of Alexandria, «γίνεσθε δὲ δόκιμοι τραπεζίται, τὰ μὲν ἀποδοκιμάζοντες, τὸ δὲ καλὸν κατέχοντες (*strom.* 1, 28, 177). As regards Meier’s view that the example of the eagle is demeaning for the bishops, because an animal is seen behaving better than prelates, the commentator has perhaps too literal a view of Gregory’s simile. In the Bible, God and his faithful are often compared to the eagle, and even when the figure describes negative traits, they are rapacity, violence, and pride rather than mere bruteness. In patristic texts, the eagle is interpreted both ways—negative and positive—but it is not a demeaning symbol. In particular, the eagle is associated with kingship in ancient sources<sup>327</sup>. Hence, I would rather see this simile as drawing a parallel between the royal animal, the king of birds, capable of staring at the sun (a christological symbol) and of soaring higher than any other, and the office of bishop, which, according to Gregory, is οὐ κάκιστον (II, 1, 12, 180), a litotes that expresses its very high dignity and would be assigned to those who could contemplate God more deeply.

The formal similarities with Ephrem notwithstanding, Gregory adopts a different attitude here, attributing the agency of the choice to the bishops (ἡμεῖς). The same language of trial with which Ephrem justifies divine choice, presenting asceticism as a selection mechanism, is employed by Gregory to define the (in)action of the bishops, who should probe their candidates actively.

### 3.3.1.2 Other agents: People, predecessor

Although attributing the choice of bishops entirely to God, Ephrem does not obliterate the role of the people. This was already clear from the rhetorical structure by which he affirmed divine election—namely, the choral refrain—since that structure allowed the community, by recognizing divine election, to appropriate the choice. The poet likely does this to enhance and protect consensus in the community. Yet the refrains are not

<sup>325</sup> For πύρωσις as “trial by fire”, Meier 1989, 114, with some of the biblical passages listed in the previous notes.

<sup>326</sup> Meier 1989, 113–114.

<sup>327</sup> Ciccarese 1992, 297 (associated with kingship); 298 (rapacity, violence, pride); 320–333 (in patristic texts).

the only place for this operation, for he also represents consensus and approval of the election in his stanzas:

ܐܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܐܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܐܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܐܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܐܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܐܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܐܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	ܐܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

<sup>328</sup> ܐܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ  
(CN 17, 3)

This stanza falls between a stanza (CN 17, 2) in which episcopal succession is presented impersonally with two passive verbs (*ʿeštammli*, 8; *ʿetʿalli*, 9) and through the image of the horn of anointing seething and another stanza (CN 17, 4) which explicitly says that God chose the new bishop. Framed by this concept, CN 17, 3 represents the popular consensus surrounding the election. As he often does, Ephrem divides the community in subgroups, a rhetorical technique used also in the Bible to express totality<sup>329</sup>. In this case, three groups are distinguished, in an “increasing terms” structure, whereby the third group occupies four lines instead of two<sup>330</sup>: the “fat ones” (*šammīnē*, 1–2), the “musterers” (*ʿallānē*, 3–4), and the “body of the church” or the bishop’s “limbs” (5–8 with 9 as an amplification of the last word of 8). The body of the church and her limbs are clearly the community at large and in general; the *ʿallānē* have been identified as members of the clergy already (§2.2.1.4).

Beck rightly notes that the “fat ones of the herd” (*šammīnē d-ʿānā*) appear also at *hymn. fid.* 59, 12, 1–2, right after the *ʿallānē* (*hymn. fid.* 59, 11, 11). The editor concludes that these two groups must be linked but does not explain how<sup>331</sup>. Palmer suggests a different interpretation, identifying the “fat ones” as powerful laymen, satisfied by the preservation of their privileges guaranteed by Abraham’s election<sup>332</sup>. Such an interpre-

<sup>328</sup> “Even the fat ones of the herd rejoiced, / to keep feeding on the fodder they fed on; // the fold of the musters rejoiced, / seeing the succession of their orders. // He lifted and fixed him as the mind / inside the large body of the church, // and his limbs surrounded him, / to be supplied by him with life, // the new bread of doctrine. / **Blessed is he who made him their barn!**”

<sup>329</sup> For example: CN 19, 3–4; 10; CN 21, 5; see also: CN 2, 6; *Resurr.* 2, 9. Jer. 14:18; 31:13–14; Zach. 8:4–5; Judt. 16:4. The figure of speech in general is called merism and it is used in biblical poetry: Watson 1984, 321–324.

<sup>330</sup> For the law of “increasing terms” (or Behagel’s law): Best 2007, 82; it was known to ancient rhetoricians: ἐν δὲ τοῖς συνθέτοις περιόδοις τὸ τελευταῖον κῶλον μακρότερον χρῆν εἶναι (PsDemetr. *Phal. eloc.* 18); *quare aut paria esse debent posteriora superioribus et extrema primis aut, quod etiam est melius et iucundius, longiora* (Cic. *de orat.* 3, 48); it is prevalent in Indo-European languages (West 2007, 117–119) but not in Hebrew poetry (Watson 1984, 343). A quantitative study of this structure (as opposed to the more biblical parallelism) may shed light on how much of Greek rhetorical culture dripped in early Syriac literature.

<sup>331</sup> Beck 1961a, 54n7.

<sup>332</sup> Palmer 1998, 124.

tation would agree with the negative role of “the fat ones” in *hymn. fid.* 59, 12<sup>333</sup>: if *hymn. fid.* 59 was composed in the period of Valens, “the fat ones” may refer to secular authorities persecuting Nicene Christians in accordance with Valens’s politics. The “fat ones” of *CN* 17, 3, 1–2 would then be another name for the *rēšānē* (*CN* 19, 3, 7–9) and the “stronger” and “rich” sheep of Abraham’s flock<sup>334</sup>. Yet another possibility is to separate the *rēšānē* and the rich from the “healthy,” and “fat” sheep (alluding to Hes. 34), taking *rēšānē* (*CN* 19, 3, 7–9) and “great,” “rich” (*CN* 19, 10, 1 and 3) as literal terms, defining the condition of powerful laymen, while “fat ones” (*CN* 17, 3, 1–2) and “healthy” (*CN* 19, 4, 1) would be metaphorical terms that define the spiritual conditions of different members of the community. In this understanding, the “fat ones” would be the Christians who have progressed more, as opposed to the “weak” ones—namely, laymen. Such a division of the community, rooted in divisions of the Jewish people testified by the Bible and widespread in early Christianity, would, in the case of Syriac Christianity, naturally correspond with the distinction between the *bnay qyāmā* and the rest of the laity, so that our “fat ones” would be the ascetics<sup>335</sup>. This interpretation squares better with line 2, where the “fat ones” rejoice for the continuity of their fodder: instead of interpreting it *in malam partem* as does Palmer, we should take the “fodder” (*re’yā*) as an allegory for the bishop’s spiritual guidance, in particular his interpretation of Scripture. The ascetics, who were very interested in Scripture, could rejoice in the episcopal appointment, because the new bishop was as theologically proficient as his predecessor<sup>336</sup>.

Whatever interpretation of this expression we may accept, the general meaning of the stanza remains the same: Ephrem is representing consensus around the election of the new bishop. Here again we face the underlying problem of these texts: How much of this stanza is truthful representation, and how much of it presents a desirable model to persuade the community to act it out? Lacking precise data, it is impossible to give

<sup>333</sup> “Because those fat among the flock have grown fat and resistant, // The son of Buzi testified that they have gored the weak, // Cast down the sick, scattered those gathered, // And lost those who had been found” (*hymn. fid.* 59, 12, 1–7, transl. Wickes 2015, 299). The source is obviously Hes. 34, in part. verse 4.

<sup>334</sup> see *CN* 19, 4, 1–4; 10 and §2.2.1.3.

<sup>335</sup> The distinction between fat and lean cattle is at Hes. 34:20; Jesus speaks of “lost sheep of the House of Israel” (Mt. 15:24) and distinguishes between the healthy and the sick inside the Jewish people (Mc. 2:17; Mt. 9:12; Lc. 5:31). The Letters suggest more than once a distinction between beginners, “children” in the faith and perfected or mature Christians (Rom. 14:1–4; 15:1; 1Cor. 2:6; 3:1–3; Hebr. 5:13–14; 6:1). These passages were taken on by gnostic ecclesiologies and anthropologies to justify the divide between the normal Christians and the gnostic (for example: Iren. *haer.* 1, 6, 2); gnostic doctrines were then appropriated by Clement of Alexandria and Origen in a more catholic key (Monaci Castagno 2000, 440–443). A layered ecclesiology is not only presupposed by the strong Encratism of early Syriac sources (Vööbus 1958, 96–103), but also explicitly affirmed by fourth-century documents such as the *Book of Steps* (see: Murray 2006, 258–270).

<sup>336</sup> Teaching, in particular of Scripture, is compared to bread at the end of the stanza (9); also: *CN* 17, 5, 1–2 (teaching as “spiritual meadow”); *CN* 14, 16; 21. As regards the parallel expression at *hymn. fid.* 59, 12, interpreting the “fat ones” as ascetics also in that case would not be impossible, considering the propensity of ascetic groups to stir doctrinal and disciplinary unrest in the communities.

an answer, but if we take into account the passages on envy and on the young age of Abraham, the poems CN 17–21 seem to suggest that consensus was not as widespread as Ephrem desired<sup>337</sup>.

Another person important for the creation of a new bishop in Ephrem's poems is the bishop's predecessor. Indeed, Ephrem's representation of the episcopal election is that of a direct handover from the previous bishop to the new one. This representation is clearly outlined in the poems on Abraham:

<p>338          ܡܠ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܠ ܕܥܡܠܐ          ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠ ܕܥܡܠܐ          (CN 17, 6, 1–4)</p>	<p>ܡܠܚܕܐܠܐ ܡܠܚܕܐܠܐ          ܡܠܚܕܐܠܐ ܡܠܚܕܐܠܐ          ܡܠܚܕܐܠܐ ܡܠܚܕܐܠܐ</p>
<p>ܡܠܚܕܐܠܐ ܕܥܡܠ ܕܥܡܠܐ          ܡܠܚܕܐܠܐ ܕܥܡܠ ܕܥܡܠܐ          (CN 19, 6, 1–5)</p>	<p>339          ܕܥܡܠ ܕܥܡܠ ܕܥܡܠܐ          ܕܥܡܠ ܕܥܡܠ ܕܥܡܠܐ          ܕܥܡܠ ܕܥܡܠ ܕܥܡܠܐ</p>

The model of Joshua and Moses is paradigmatic of this kind of succession, partly because the biblical texts join the imposition of hands with shepherd imagery, both very important for Ephrem's representation of the episcopate. Another element which makes it paradigmatic is the fact that Joshua was previously the servant of Moses, and his election is presented as a reward (*'agrā*) for this service<sup>340</sup>. Through this facet of Joshua's story, Ephrem not only reminds his audience of Abraham's credentials and career but also reinforces the connection between the old and new bishop, smoothing out the transfer of power. The same aspect is at work in the other biblical handover Ephrem refers to, that of Elijah and Elisha. Ephrem's mentions of Elijah and Elisha (CN 17, 2; CN 19, 8; CN 21, 2) share with those of Moses and Joshua the idea that serving the predecessor makes one worthy of succession and the idea of a similarity between predecessor and successor. However, the use of Elijah-Elisha seems to be more restricted in signifying the reception of charisma, especially preaching charisma, from God thanks to the imitation of the predecessor. The theme of consecration from the predecessor, the imposition of the hand, and the idea of leadership are absent from the Elijah-Elisha story.

Finally, Joshua's paradigm works in yet another way: in the biblical story, it is God, not Moses, who chooses Joshua; Moses is charged to arrange the transfer of power through the imposition of hands, but it is not up to him to name his successor. Alluding

337 See the analysis of CN 18, 3–4 at §2.1.2.2 and §3.1.1.1; of CN 19, 9 at §3.1.4.3.

338 "He delivered his hand to his own disciple, / the seat to the one who was worthy of it, // the key to the one who was faithful, / the pen to the one who was excellent."

339 "Joshua had served Moses, / and, as a reward for his service, // he received the right hand from him. / As you served the splendid old man, // he too gave you his right hand."

340 Joshua is the paradigm of faithful service also in the poems preserved in Armenian: Marès/Mercier 1961, 45. Curiously, the same idea is expressed in the Medieval Jewish *Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar* 12, 9 ([https://www.sefaria.org/Bamidbar\\_Rabbah.12.9?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Bamidbar_Rabbah.12.9?lang=bi), accessed: 09.06.2024, 18:11).

to this narrative, Ephrem remains consistent in affirming his idea that the bishop is chosen by God, not by humans. This nuance is important, because Ephrem says that the old bishop “gave” (y(h)ab, CN 19, 6, 5) or “delivered” (ʿašlem, CN 17, 6, 1) the office to his successor. Ephrem never mentions other bishops selecting or imposing their hands on the candidate, while the predecessor is framed in this role. If Ephrem’s expression were to be taken literally, we would have the old bishop performing the ordination of the new one, so that the old bishop would be in a very strong position to choose his successor. Yet bequeathing the episcopate through will or ordering one’s own successor is considered inappropriate, if not illegal, by our sources, even though their denunciation of it may respond to an actual practice, albeit not a widespread one<sup>341</sup>. Through the model of Moses and Joshua, Ephrem alludes to the fact that, even if the new bishop stands immediately after his predecessor and is therefore legitimated, it is not up to the predecessor to choose him, but only to God.

This analysis, however, leaves us with no clear path to the episcopate: Ephrem does say that God gets to choose, but how God’s will is determined and what procedures (if any) ferried the community from one leader to his successor are questions that remain unaddressed. The poet does not distinguish selection from ascetic or clerical career, nor election from ordination. Even succession proper is not distinguished: the bishop receives the authority from his predecessor (succession) with the imposition of hands or with anointing (ordination) because God has chosen him (election) as a good ascetic or priest (selection). Finally, the whole community is called to rejoice in the new bishop (consensus). There is no diachronic development; these ideas are presented as independent or synchronous flashes.

It seems clear that the Abraham poems were written *after* the ordination of the bishop in question and that their aim is to praise and legitimise him. In doing so, they stress the theme of *yubbālā*, the apostolic “succession” guaranteed by God’s providence and verified by the approval of and the similarity with the previous bishop. Furthermore, the poems enact various strategies to dramatise and thereby produce consensus: this focus on consensus also explains the legitimizing strategy behind the theme of *yubbālā*, as another weapon to build consensus. Ephrem’s literary strategy is thus consistent with what we know about episcopal elections in the first centuries of Christianity: legitimation did not derive from procedure, but from consensus, because the “election” is not an arbitrary choice of the community sanctioned by the fairness of the proceedings, but a search for truth—in this case, for God’s will. Hence, procedure exists only to build consensus and to forestall dissent<sup>342</sup>. The poet has the same aim, but he works *ex post facto*, so that it is useless for him to remind the audience of the procedures, once the result has been firmly established; it is useless to recall doubt once one has reached truth; rather, the strategy is to repeat truth and make everyone repeat it to

341 Rapp 2005, 196; Norton 2007, 204–214; Leppin 2017, 39.

342 Leppin 2016; Leppin 2017.

reinforce it. In this perspective we can also understand the direct handover from the predecessor to the successor: the aim of the scene is not to represent in any way, shape, or form the actual proceeding, but rather to express in a simple biblical image the idea of an uninterrupted succession of bishops guaranteeing that the new one has the stamp of approval and the same legitimacy as his predecessor had.

The lack of a discussion of the methods of selection and ordination demonstrates that Ephrem did not see a problem in the quality of candidates to the episcopate. On the other hand, the community, perhaps the clergy and the ascetics most of all, must not have been easily pleased or must have been prone to division and disputing episcopal elections, making the transfer of power a delicate matter. In this way we can explain Ephrem's particular focus on consensus and his omission of selection procedures: it is not that ideals on the episcopate and on the kind of candidate who is to be favoured are absent, but they are not presented as criteria for a future selection to those who must select; instead they are given as an accomplished fact in praise of the current bishop. Ideal features do not prompt selection; they confirm its correctness—and bind the recipient before the community for the future.

### 3.3.2 How to choose bishops? Gregory's rationalisation of charisma

The situation is completely different in the case of Gregory. As has already been said, Gregory is wholly aware of the role played by current bishops in the election of their future colleagues. At §3.1.3.1 and §3.1.4.1, I have analysed the historical framework in which Gregory situates his criticism of the episcopate: he was painfully conscious of the challenges posed to prelates and communities by the expansion of the church and her growing relations with the powers that be. The problem of selection is confronted in two of the four poems, II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13, and with two different rhetorical strategies—according to the respective genres of the poems.

#### 3.3.2.1 Episcopate as a profession (II, 1, 12)

II, 1, 12, 371–792 is a discussion of the theme, proceeding through theses, objections, and responses to the objections. This treatment, closer to the structures of prose, is particularly apt for iambs, because this metre was considered the nearest to spoken language, and, through the tradition of iambic and dramatic poets, it lent itself to polemics and dialogue<sup>343</sup>. The pace of the discussion is digressive, in accordance with the canons of late antique poetic style. In his seminal book on late antique Latin poetry, Roberts calls it “jewelled style”, because it enhances and stresses the particular over, and sometimes

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<sup>343</sup> Agosti 2001, 222–223, 231–233. This passage, though seasoned here and there with themes of invective (see §5.2.1 in particular for parallels in iambic literature), is mostly in the style of didactic iambs inspired by the diatribe.

at the expense of, the overarching structure and balance of the parts<sup>344</sup>. In Gregory's poetic argumentation, long-winded lists of similes and *exempla*<sup>345</sup>, powerful one-liners and maxims<sup>346</sup>, ecphrases<sup>347</sup>, and an all-out digression<sup>348</sup> often distract from the line of reasoning, which, however, is for the most part traceable. This is partly thanks to the various framing lines, which isolate the digressions and push forward the argument<sup>349</sup>.

As for its place in the context of the whole poem, the discussion of episcopal selection occupies the most lines: after the *exordium* and *narratio* (lines 1–69 and 70–153) and before the final *peroratio* (793–836), the argumentative core of the poem is mostly occupied with our theme (371–792). The terrain had been prepared by the tirades against the uneducated (154–191) and the immoral bishops (330–370) (see §5.2.1 and 3), and in part the discussion of Christian *paideia* anticipated the main problem of the selection of bishops: the relationship between charisma and credentials. In fact, Gregory's argument against the example of the apostles as uneducated precursors of the bishops is aimed at reconciling a charismatic vision of the office with some form of credentials recognition (192–329; see §3.1.3.3). The most relevant part in this respect is 371–569, after which Gregory reinforces the previous argument with a comparison of the ascetic and the worldly candidate (570–641, already in nuce at 549–554) and a tirade against the hypocritical (642–708) and the wire-pulling bishop (709–791).

I will broadly follow Gregory's argumentation in lines 371–569, highlighting interesting details here and there. Lines 371–396 (see §3.3.1.1) attribute the problem of immoral bishops to the lack of selectivity in the choosing of candidates—in particular, the lack of controls (οὐδὲν σκοποῦντες, 377) on their background from the reigning bishops. Gregory stresses the speed and almost automatic process through which any candidate can make his way to the episcopate<sup>350</sup>. In order to problematise this state of affair, he states three considerations: first, that power (ἐξουσία) tends to corrupt its recipient, so that it is better to closely examine the candidates for power (382–384)<sup>351</sup>; second, that the bishop has a most difficult and important task—namely, to lead the souls of the people in the storms of life, so that the person should be chosen with corresponding attention (38538–8); finally, through a classical *Priamel*, Gregory makes the point that it is absurd to find a good leader effortlessly and rapidly when less important things (like precious stones and race horses) are found with difficulty, especially if the candidate is barely baptised (πρόσφατος, 389–394; see also §2.1.2.1). This last remark, joined with

344 See Roberts 1989.

345 II, 1, 12, 389–394; 402–431; 555–567; Roberts 1989, 59–61.

346 II, 1, 12, 396; 430; 453; 484–485; 491; 511; 521; 568–569; see Roberts 1989, 37.

347 II, 1, 12, 575–633; see Roberts 1989, 39–41.

348 II, 1, 12, 647–746.

349 II, 1, 12, 371; 431–432; 442; 453–454; 501–503; 521–522; 541; 549; 570; 575; 610; 634–635; 658; 676; 696–700; 709–713; 747; 760–763; see Roberts 1989, 37.

350 ῥαδίως καθί(ζομεν (375); ἐὰν μόνον (376); οὐδὲ χρόνου πύρωσιν (380); ἀλλ' αὐτόθεν (381); ῥαδίως εὐρίσκεται . . . πρόσφατος (393–394); ὦ τῆς ταχείας (395).

351 See Plat. *Gorg.* 526A–B for a similar idea.

the pervasive idea of speed, is an oblique allusion to Nectarius's hasty ordination during the Council of Constantinople after Gregory's resignation, since the imperial official had to be baptised and ordained right away. However, when Gregory laments the lack of information on the past life of candidates, he may well be preparing the ground for his criticism of hypocrisy and sudden "conversions" to a saintly life. After all, this was one of the problems Gregory had with Maximus: Gregory lacked information on Maximus and, therefore, relied on his feigned asceticism as a sign of true faith.

The introduction is closed by 395–396, in which Gregory curiously complains that the holy orders are left to chance: this exclamation sets the poet apart from Christian tradition, in which drawing lots was seen (at least sometimes) as a legitimate procedure for choosing church officials. Weber connects this selection procedure to the "routinisation of charisma", in the sense that the procedure originally adopted as a means of revelation of divine will can become, with time, the ground of legitimation for the recipient. The Christian sources that commend the drawing of lots tend to see it still as a revelation of divine will, so that it is not surprising to read Origen approving the practice, since his conception of the church was ideally charismatic<sup>352</sup>. In refusing and belittling the practice, Gregory tends to rationalise selection and, therefore, the office itself: this is, after all, in agreement with previous imagery, requiring from the bishop the expertise of the sailor and noting the scarcity of such expertise.

The first part of the argument is followed by a colourful tirade against those who live a life inconsistent with Christianity and then, suddenly, would seem to become pious and worthy of the episcopate (397–431; see §5.2.2). This section aims at persuading readers—through the artful contrast of worldliness and Christian life—that a thorough examination of the candidates' past is necessary, because it would be ludicrous to think that one might change so completely so quickly<sup>353</sup>. Lines 400–401 (Πολλή τις ὄντως ἡ χάρις τοῦ Πνεύματος, / Εἴγ' ἐν προφήταις καὶ Σαοῦλ ὁ φίλτατος), which would seem, through irony, to limit the grace of the Spirit, are not to be taken too seriously: we would be pushing them too far if we understood them as excluding the possibility that occasionally an unlikely candidate may make a good bishop through the grace of the Spirit. Rather, the meaning of these lines hinges on the commonsensical notion that such cases will be rare and cannot be assumed *a priori* as happening.

Among the inconsistencies between previous life and episcopal office, the pride of place is given to financial ones: from line 432 to 474, Gregory examines the case of the rich becoming bishop. First, he takes on the case of someone who became rich dishonestly (432–441), arguing that such a candidate should take some time between his baptism and his ordination to be proved (442–453). Moreover, he should not be content with settling his score, but should at least add some charity if he wants to purify himself

352 Πισσῶν κυλίσματ' ἐν κύβοις τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ (396). At Act. 1:23–26 the apostles choose to substitute Judas Iscariot with Matthias through the drawing of lots. Origen (*in Jos. hom.* 23, 2) approves of the practice. See: Weber 1922, 143; Leppin 2017, 41–42.

353 Meier 1989, 116–117 describes clearly the structure of the passage.



from his past (454–464). Again, this is related to baptism, in the sense that the sacrament cannot be intended as a blank cheque to do anything one wants (465–474). I have already examined the role of charity and greed in this passage (§3.1.1.3). I will add only that the choice of greed in particular at this point might have been suggested by the nature of Gregory's argument: since greed is, among the vices, the one that leaves the most concrete mark—in the form of wealth accumulated—it is also the perfect vice to demonstrate that baptism, far from being an easy way out, should be the beginning of a serious moral commitment—in this case, renouncing wealth.

The discussion of the greedy candidate introduces the problem of the relation obtaining between sacraments and credentials. The prominence of baptism in this discussion is another signal that Gregory is engaging the council's decision to elect Nectarius. To his protests on the moral unworthiness of the senator, the other bishops may retort that since he is still a catechumen, Nectarius will have baptism right before ordination, resolving the problem of his background. Gregory must demonstrate that baptism under these conditions does not invalidate his point. At first (442–453), the imagined counterpart claims to be purified by baptism, and Gregory retorts that even if his sins are forgiven, he has not lost his old habits, which will continually incline him to sin again. Although this argument may seem to imply that baptism has the sole effect of remitting sins, Gregory is not explicitly excluding that baptism may also have a positive effect on its recipient's faculty of avoiding sin; rather, he is implying that baptism does not override human freedom or the concreteness of acquired habits.

The second round of arguments on baptism (465–502) derives, in its first lines, from the debate on God's justice and mercy—namely, how these two apparently opposing attributes of the divinity may be reconciled, if they could<sup>354</sup>. In its substance, however, the discussion owes a debt to anti-Christian polemics on baptism: in particular, a putative fragment of Porphyry in Macarius Magnes's *Apocriticum* (4, 19) and two passages in Julian the emperor's oeuvre (c. *Galil.* 245C-D; or. 10, 336A-B). These pagan writers objected to baptism because it claimed to guarantee an easy forgiveness, thereby undermining not only the principle of justice and responsibility, on which the political community was founded, but also *paideia*, the hard work and discipline required by culture and philosophy to attain moral excellence<sup>355</sup>. Their approach has more than one similarity with Gregory's: our poet too sees the problem of baptism in the ease (ῥαδίως in Gregory, ῥᾶον in the pagan authors) and speed (αὐτίκα, αὐτόθεν, etc.) with which it is said to forgive sins;<sup>356</sup> he too plays out this ease against an idea of *paideia*

354 See Gregory's use of juridical terms: Πῶς γὰρ δίκαιον, τὴν βλάβην (465); Τὸ μὴ δίκας δοῦναί σε τῶν τολμημάτων (467); νῦν γὰρ οἷδ' ὀφειλέτην (473); and of derivatives of χάρις, especially χάρισμα: σοὶ δὲ τὸ χάρισμα ἔχειν (466); Ἐχεις χάρισμα; (468); ἡνίκ' ἤσθα τοῦ χαρίσματος μέσος (470); Ζήτει χάρισμα (473).

355 All the negative ramifications of baptism in pagan polemics are analysed by Sandnes 2012.

356 On ease: Sandnes 2012, 517–520; μόνον βαπτισθεὶς καὶ ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐλευθεροῦται ῥᾶον (Porph. *adv. Chr. frg.* 88); cf. Ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντας ῥαδίως καθίζομεν (II, 1, 12, 375); ῥαδίως εὐρίσκεται (393). On speed: Sandnes 2012, 510–511; καὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν εὐρώων ἀναστρεφόμενον

and asceticism<sup>357</sup>. Moreover, both Gregory and his pagan counterparts tend to conflate immoral and uneducated people enabled by baptism with the lower classes<sup>358</sup>. Finally, Gregory shares with pagan critics of baptism the metaphor of medicine for the ascetic or moral effort<sup>359</sup>. It is likely that Gregory knew Julian's attacks on baptism—if not even those of Porphyry—and decided to integrate them into his argumentation. Naturally, he could not do this without adapting them. First of all, Gregory is applying the argument specifically to bishops, not to baptism in general, so that the problem is shifted from the moral objections against baptism to the use of baptism to justify immoral bishops. Gregory does not object to the forgiving power of the sacrament, but he wants to define it better to avoid abuses. Second, Gregory's *paideia* has already been defined as a specifically Christian one (see §3.1.3.3), and we are far from the anti-intellectualistic stances accounted for by Sandnes<sup>360</sup>. Third, by adopting and adapting Julian's arguments, Gregory provides an indirect answer to them.

He does so by distinguishing actions from the habits caused by and causing those actions. This enables him to hold, at the same time, that baptism forgives sins (actions) and that it does not relieve one from training to virtue (*habit*)<sup>361</sup>. The classical account of

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καὶ προαγορεύοντα πᾶσιν· «Ὅστις φθορεύς, ὅστις μαιφόνος, ὅστις ἐναγῆς καὶ βδελυρός, ἴτω θαρρῶν· ἀποφανῶ γὰρ αὐτὸν τουτωῖ τῷ ὕδατι λούσας αὐτίκα καθαρὸν, κἂν πάλιν ἐνοχος τοῖς αὐτοῖς γένηται, δώσω τὸ στήθος πλήξαντι καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν πατάξαντι καθαρῶ γενέσθαι» (Julian. *Imp. or.* 10, 336A); cf. Οὐδὲ χρόνου πύρωσιν ἐνδεδειγμένους, / Ἀλλ' αὐτόθεν φανέντας ἀξίους θρόνων (II, 1, 12, 380–381); τῷ χρόνῳ τι δὸς μόνον· / αἰτῶ σε μικρὰν τοῦ ποθοῦ προθεσίαν. / εἰ δ' ἐκκαθαρθεὶς σήμερον... (444–446); Εἰ τῷ θέλῃν ὑπῆρχε τὸ κτᾶσθαι μόνον. / Τὸν δὲ πρόεδρον δεῖ κελευσθῆναι μόνον / Εἶναι καλὸν τε κάγαθόν παραυτίκα. (565–567). Similar to the repetition of *μόνον* in these lines: ἀπαξ ἀπολουσάμενος ὀφθήσεται καθαρὸς ... μόνον βαπτισθεὶς καὶ ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα ... μόνον πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισάμενος (Porph. *adv. Chr. frg.* 88). Both themes (ease and speed) are at work later: Οὐς θάττον οἶμαι τοῦ μύσους τι λαμβάνειν / Ἦ τῆς ἐαυτῶν λαμπρότητος προσνέμειν. / Ῥᾶν κακοῦ γὰρ ἢ καλοῦ μετουσία (II, 1, 12, 509–511). Gregory even adapts as an absurdity a Christian counterexample to the injustice of unconditional forgiveness, namely the idea of the emperor bestowing grace on a condemned person (cf. II, 12, 479–480 with Macar. *Magn. apocrit.* 4, 25).

<sup>357</sup> For the link between baptism and (the lack of) *paideia*: Sandnes 2012, 522–525; αἴτιον δέ, ὅτι τὴν ἐαυτῶν ψυχὴν οὐ παρέσχον ἀποκαθῆραι τοῖς ἐγκυκλίοις μαθήμασιν (Julian. *Imp. ep. frg.* 295D; note that here *paideia* is the true purification); Πλάστης γὰρ ἄλλος ὁ τρόπος καθίσταται, / Ὅν ἐργον ἐκρίψαι τε καὶ πόρρω βαλεῖν (II, 1, 12, 491–492; morality as a job); Ἐστὼ δὲ λουτρόν, εἰ δοκεῖ, καὶ τοῦτό σοι· / Τίς ἐγγυᾶται τὸν τρόπον χρόνου δίχα / Δεικνύντος, ὡς ἐσμηξε καὶ βάθος χάρις (522–524; the classic comparison of the statue follows at 538–540; see §2.2.3.1); Καὶ τοῦτ' ἀφήσω· τὴν χάριν δόξῃ κρατεῖν. / Πάντες τεθήπασ' οὐδ' ὁ μῶμος ἄπτεται. / Εὐθύς μετ' Ἠλίαν σὺ τῷ σεμνῷ λόγῳ. / Πῶς ὦν ἄπειρος κάμαθῆς ἄνω κάθῃ ... (541–544).

<sup>358</sup> Sandnes 2012, 509; see §5.2.1.

<sup>359</sup> Sandnes 2012, 524–525; Νῦν δ' οὐδὲν οἶδα φάρμακον πλὴν δακρύων, / Ἐξ ὧν συνουλώσις μὲν ἔρχεται μόγις (II, 1, 12, 497–498).

<sup>360</sup> Sandnes 2012, 517–522.

<sup>361</sup> The argument, already touched upon at II, 1, 12, 446–450, is then reprised and amplified at 491–500.

this kind of relation between habit, action, and virtue is given by Aristotle<sup>362</sup>. The Aristotelian idea of action shaping habit is taken up by Origen in order to allegorise various animal images in the Bible: for Origen, man through sin degrades the image of God in himself to the point that it becomes the image of an animal; whether Origen meant that the soul could be reincarnated in the body of a brute has been disputed since antiquity, but certainly Gregory's 486–490 are inspired by Origen's idea<sup>363</sup>. Another Origenian theme in this passage (493–496) is the idea of a baptism of fire after death<sup>364</sup>.

In this context, Gregory's insistence on restitution of stolen goods *before* baptism aims at setting prerequisites to access forgiveness, to avoid the objection that any immoral person may find forgiveness easily and without actual repentance. In Weberian terms, the attempt at striking a balance between justice (accountability) and grace (charisma), between forgiveness and moral effort, puts limitations on the charismatic nature of the office, guaranteed by the charismatic cleansing of baptism, in favour of more rational criteria.

It is worthwhile to examine 477–478 more closely: “Do not become now a laughing-stock, / purifying others while you yourself are soiled”<sup>365</sup>. This is the closest Gregory gets to Donatism, because here he objects to the administration of sacraments by unworthy bishops. However, he does not object to the validity of a baptism administered by a bad bishop; he just questions its propriety, pointing out the public scandal of an immoral bishop claiming to administer forgiveness of sins to others while he himself still needs forgiveness. This is precisely the kind of scandals pagans like Julian love to mock in Christianity. The fact that Gregory, albeit adopting pagan objections, takes for granted the validity of the baptism performed by a bad bishop, shows how much of the charismatic aspect of sacraments and hierarchy he maintains, for all his rationalisation of the criteria of succession.

The next argument Gregory dispels (503–521) is that episcopal ordination could perhaps purify the recipient of his sins. Gregory shows scepticism towards this idea, both because there cannot be a second baptism, as he has already said (493), and because Scripture seems to suggest the contrary—namely, that rather than purify their recipient, the holy orders may contaminate those who administer them, if they choose

<sup>362</sup> Aristot. *eth. Nic.* 1103a-b, where however the term for habit is ἔθος, not τρόπος as in Gregory. Τρόπος is used by Aristotle in a passage of the *History of Animals* (“Ενεστι γὰρ ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων ἴχνη τῶν περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τρόπων, ἅπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἔχει φανερωτέρας τὰς διαφοράς· καὶ γὰρ ἡμερότης καὶ ἀγριότης, καὶ πραότης καὶ χαλεπότης, 588a), but in general it seems a less technical, more casual term for “character” or “habit”, as demonstrated by its generalised use by Plato, tragic and comic poets (Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1827, s.v. τρόπος III.2).

<sup>363</sup> Crouzel/Simonetti 1978, 119–125; Crouzel 1956, 197–206; Καὶ τῆς ἀνωθεν εἰκόνας τὴν ἀξίαν / Καθυβρίσαντας ἐρπετῶν ἢ θηρίων / Μορφαῖς, ἀφ’ ὧν ποιούμεθα ζηλουμένων; / Πλάστης γὰρ ἄλλος ὁ τρόπος καθίσταται, / Ὃν ἔργον ἐκρίψαι τε καὶ πόρρω βαλεῖν. / Οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐστὶ δεύτερον καθάρσιον (II, 1, 12, 488–492).

<sup>364</sup> Orig. in *Mt. comm.* 15, 23; Sfameni Gasparro 1984, 214–216.

<sup>365</sup> ἀλλὰ νυνὶ μὴ γελῶ / Ἀλλοὺς καθαίρων αὐτὸς ἐσπιλωμένος (II, 1, 12, 477–478).

an unworthy candidate. To substantiate this, Gregory mentions the classic 1Tim. 5:22, where the bishop who ordains too swiftly an unworthy candidate participates in his guilt, and also Hag. 2:12–13, on the fact that sacred things do not communicate their sacredness, but instead take on the impurity of profane things. In the same manner, the bishops consecrating a sinner partake in the guilt of his sins instead of communicating their charisma<sup>366</sup>.

Then, for the sake of argument (εἰ δοκεῖ, 522), Gregory concedes that either baptism or ordination may purify someone—though, he notes, it would be better to wait some time, in order to verify the depth of the recipient's conversion (522–526). Whereas he previously discussed the inner disposition that allows the sacrament to unfold its fullest powers, without thereby denying the objective power of the sacrament, now he progressively concedes space after space to charisma irrespective of credentials and dispositions: he concedes a complete purification without conditions (527–530), objecting that the bishop's renown would still be tarnished by his past (531–540); he concedes a charisma overriding even human fame (541–543), objecting that all these easily acquired gifts would prevent the bishop from learning, even though he is inexperienced and unlearned (ἄπειρος κάμαθῆς, 544–548); Gregory concedes that the new bishop may well want to learn, but the bishop's task is to teach, so that doing both at the same time would be scarcely feasible (549–554). With this progressive movement, Gregory has reached the point that matters the most: competence. His main problem seems not to be that sinners are ordained bishops, undesirable as this circumstance may be, but that inexperienced people are ordained.

This is demonstrated in the content and forms of Gregory's argument. As regards contents, Gregory never really doubts that baptism may purify even the worst sinner or that penitence may obtain forgiveness. His problem is with considering baptism a mere formality under the pretence of its charismatic power: his problem is not with the sinner per se but with the sinner remaining a sinner. His solution is always the same: time and discipline, which concretely means training, *paideia*. Further proof of this is that he concedes that the sacrament may charismatically grant moral purification and public recognition, but he never concedes that it could grant theological proficiency, ascetic practice, and moral excellence. These, though not wholly independent from the

<sup>366</sup> ῥῶν κακοῦ γὰρ ἢ καλοῦ μετουσία. / Γνώση δ' ἐκεῖθεν, ὡς ἀληθεύει λόγος; / Κρέας γὰρ εἰ ψαύσειεν ἡγιασμένον / Ποτοῦ, Μιχαῖας φησὶν, ἢ βρωτοῦ τινος, / Οὐκ ἂν ποθ' ἀγνίσκειεν οὐ ψαῦσαν τύχοι; / Ἐκ τῶν δ' ἀνάγκων ἀγὰ κοινωθήσεται. / Ταῦτ' οὖν ὁ θεῖος Παῦλος εὖ πεπεισμένος / Ἐν οἷς τυποῖ Τιμόθεον ἐξ Ἐπιστολῆς / Νόμον τίθῃσι, μὴ προχεύειν τὰς χέρας / Ἄγειν ἐπ' ἄλλον, μηδὲ κοινοῦσθαι τρόπον; / Ἀρκεῖν γὰρ ἡμῖν φόρτον οἰκεῖων κακῶν. (II, 1, 12, 511–521); cf. Ἐὰν λάβῃ ἄνθρωπος κρέας ἅγιον ἐν τῷ ἄκρῳ τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄψῃται τὸ ἄκρον τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ ἄρτου ἢ ἐφέματος ἢ οἴνου ἢ ἐλαίου ἢ παντός βρώματος, εἰ ἁγιασθήσεται; καὶ ἀπεκρίθησαν οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ εἶπαν Οὐ. καὶ εἶπεν Ἀγγαῖος Ἐὰν ἄψῃται μεμιαμμένος ἐπὶ ψυχῇ ἀπὸ παντός τούτων, εἰ μιανθήσεται; καὶ ἀπεκρίθησαν οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ εἶπαν Μιανθήσεται. (Hag. 2:12–13); χεῖρας ταχέως μηδενὶ ἐπιτίθει μηδὲ κοινώνει ἁμαρτίαις ἄλλοτρίαις; σεαυτὸν ἀγνὸν τήρει. (1Tim. 5:22). On the false attribution to Micah of the passage from Haggai see Meier 1989, 129.

grace of the Spirit, are always contingent upon the free will of the recipient. By stressing the value of free will even in the face of charisma, Gregory is following in the steps of Origen, who believed that divine inspiration could never override the reason and free will of the inspired human and that any such phenomenon should be related to demonic inspiration<sup>367</sup>.

From the point of view of form, it is of note that the argument is all built to move from the discussion of sacramental theology to the theme of teaching and expertise: the very fact that Gregory kept this argument as his last demonstrates that he deemed it his strongest and most important. Moreover, he expands on the argument in two ways, first through the *Priamel* of highly specialised jobs in 555–569 (examined at §2.1.2.1; §2.2.4.9), then with the diptych of the ascetic and the worldly Christian in 570–634 (§3.2.2). It is also interesting to note that, in the course of the argument and thanks to the digressive pace we have already noted, Gregory's focus has undetectably shifted from the bishops selecting a candidate to the candidate himself. One can demonstrate this by comparing the *Priamel* in 389–395 with that in 555–569—the one treating the leader as a rare object to find, the other treating the leader's work as a profession or art difficult to learn—and by confronting the expressions of 371–399, where the subject (first-person plural) is clearly the body of bishops deciding whom to consecrate, whereas after the digression of 402–431 the subject becomes a second-person singular, the candidate himself. In my opinion, this is admissible because Gregory is consciously addressing both bishops and potential candidates or bishops who were elected hastily (Nectarius); formally, it makes no problem because of the digressive aesthetic Gregory shared with his audience.

The *Priamel* of 555–569 is particularly significant, because it compares the episcopate to a series of highly specialised professions:

Πύκτης μὲν οὐδείς, ὅστις οὐ τὸ πρὶν χέρα	(555)
Προὔβαλλεν οὐδ' ἐσκέψατ' εὐκαιρον στάσιν,	
Οὐδὲ σταδιεὺς μὴ τῷ πόδε προγυμνάσας.	
Αὐλοὺς δὲ τίς ποτ' εὖ φρονῶν αὐθημερόν	
Τέτμηκεν, ἐξήσκησεν, ἠγωνίσαστο;	
Γραφεὺς δὲ τίς ποτ' ἄκρος ἠκούσθη ποτέ	(560)
Μὴ πολλὰ μίξας χρωμάτων μορφώματα;	
Ἐρρητόρευσεν δ' ἡ νόσους τίς ἤλασεν	
Πρὸ πλειόνων λόγων τε καὶ νοσημάτων;	
Μικροῦ γ' ἂν ἦσαν αἱ τέχναι τιμήματος,	
Εἰ τῷ θέλειν ὑπῆρχε τὸ κτᾶσθαι μόνον.	(565)
Τὸν δὲ πρόεδρον δεῖ κελευσθῆναι μόνον	
Εἶναι καλὸν τε κάγαθὸν παραντίκτα.	
Καὶ τοῦτ' ἐκεῖνο· Πράξις ἐστὶν ἡ φάσις.	
Χριστὸς κελεύει, καὶ κτίσις παρίσταται.	
(II, 1, 12, 555–569).	

367 Orig. c. *Cels.* 7, 3–4; in *Hes. hom.* 6, 1.

There is no boxer who hasn't begun by holding forth (555)  
 his hand or by looking for the favourable position;  
 nor a runner not training his feet in advance;  
 which sane human, in just one day,  
 has ever cut, wrought, and played a flute in a contest?  
 Of which consummate painter has it ever been hear (560)  
 that he did not mix many different qualities of colours?  
 Who harangued or healed a disease  
 before many pleas and many diseases?  
 Small indeed would be the renown of art  
 if the bare will sufficed to its acquisition. (565)  
 Yet the prelate is required, and he alone,  
 to be admirable and excellent straightway.  
 But, as the saying goes, "No sooner said than done":  
 Christ orders, and a creature forms.

Athletes, musicians, artists, attorneys, and physicians—the examples here mentioned by Gregory—were not likened to the landed gentry, occupied with leisure and public activities, nor to the *humiliores*, who worked the land. Granted, they worked—differently from the landowners, but their work placed them in the public sphere and, most of all, required a particular knowledge (τέχνη, 564), partially different from the *paideia* of the nobles. Furthermore, this particular knowledge required in some cases (such as that of physicians and attorneys) special institutions—namely, specialised schools or gymnasia—for its transmission, and with school tend to come different styles and disputes internal to the discipline<sup>368</sup>. In this respect, the parallel between physician and orator (562–563) may be baffling, since the orator should be by definition the example of generic *paideia*, the noble engaged in public life through his word. However, the terms (ἐρρητόρευσεν, 562; λόγων, 565) may be interpreted in a more specific sense, as referring to the advocate: these figures, who, like the physicians, were often upper-class, were not exclusively trained in *paideia*, but also had to know Roman law<sup>369</sup>. Law

<sup>368</sup> On Gregory's assimilation of the bishop to ancient professionals, with particular attention to medicine: Elm 2000a. On the legal standing of professions in antiquity: Csillág 1971. For a somewhat dated but still useful overview of the condition of professionals (physicians, architects, visual artists and performers): Jones 1964, 1012–1021 (contrast with the life and condition of wealthy landowners: 557–561). For the athletes as professionals in late antiquity: Remijsen 2016; for musicians: Webb 2013; for physicians: Barton 1994; Cracco Ruggini 2003.

<sup>369</sup> For ῥήτωρ as “advocate”, “barrister”: Lampe 1961, 1217, s.v. ῥήτωρ 2. Among the many meanings of λόγος, there is not only that of “speech”, “harangue” in court (Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1057–1059 s.v. λόγος V.4) but also of “plea”, “case” (III.1.b). Advocates may have had only a cursory knowledge of Latin, but they either studied law in an institutional school or were trained through experience (Cribiore 2007, 205–213; Jones 1964, 988–991). Cribiore 2007, 212n77, on the basis of texts from Libanius, says that in 388 the *praefectus praetorio orientis* Flavius Eutolmius Tatianus promulgated a law binding advocates to the study of Roman Law.

studies, and the Latin language, which was necessary to practice them, often had a difficult relationship with the equally necessary *paideia*, as witnessed by Libanius<sup>370</sup>.

What does this likening of episcopate and professions tell us about Gregory's conception of the episcopate? First, it stresses the importance of preparing for the episcopate, of ἀσκησις—as the ascetic portrayal that follows immediately (570–634) will clarify. In this respect, Gregory is trying to rationalise the selection of prelates, using the institutions closest to the model of rational meritocracy that his world could offer<sup>371</sup>. This does not eliminate the charismatic element of religious leadership, but in Gregory's perspective this element is ingeniously reserved to the sacrament, which acts beyond the individual merits of the recipient, as he admits<sup>372</sup>. Thus, charisma is reified and becomes disposable, in that the reigning bishops may allot it as they see fit. In this context the setting of parameters and requisites for the selection of candidates becomes justified. The rationalisation of the bishop's office proposed by Gregory aims at maximizing the competence of prelates, excluding heretics, uneducated persons, and political grifters.

Second, from a cultural perspective, the link to professionals ties into Gregory's effort to define a specifically Christian *paideia*. If indeed for Plato the world of τέχναι is most of all the model of an institutionalised, teachable, and authoritative knowledge that *works*, and if after him it becomes commonplace to compare it to philosophy, Gregory uses τέχναι as a model because they were not quite *paideia* and yet they shared many features thereof<sup>373</sup>. Christianity, as well as the professions, required *paideia* as an introductory study, but at the same time Christianity and the professions added something to *paideia*, something that was seen as peculiar to their trade, as was Roman law for the attorneys. Furthermore, the practitioners of such τέχναι would have had a less sedentary life than educated landowners, and this agrees with Gregory's ideal ascetic and bishop, a stranger (ξένος) everywhere he goes<sup>374</sup>. As *paideia*, the τέχναι tended to be monopolised by the upper class, and yet they were not so organic to that class as *paideia*.

This brings us to the third reason Gregory chooses the τέχναι as a model: from the point of view of society, the professional was something of an outsider to the network of relations of *paideia*. Granted, he participated in the network and came from the upper class, but he did not participate on the same ground as *curiales* or imperial officials: his

370 Cribiore 2007, 205–213. Some students may have even abandoned rhetorical education after a short time to pursue on-the-field experience as attorneys.

371 Weber 1922, 126–127.

372 See, for example: μηδὲν φοβηθεὶς τοῦ θρόνου τὴν ἀξίαν. / πάντων τὸ ὕψος, οὐχὶ πάντων δ' ἡ χάρις (II, 1, 12, 36–37) and §2.2.4.6.

373 On the professions mentioned by Gregory as commonplaces to characterise the philosopher, see: Meier 1989, 133–134. On Plato and the τέχναι most of all: Cambiano 1991; the significance of the τέχναι for Plato (but not for Plato's reception) is somewhat reduced by Brisson 2000 and Roochnik 1996.

374 For the value of ξενιτεία in Gregory's asceticism, in particular its links with the Syrian institution of moving bishops, see Gautier 2002, 9–16 and in particular 69–77.

role of expert shaped his social position in a way similar to what *parrhesia* did for the philosopher. Indeed, philosophy and τέχνη were linked in rhetoric as well as in reality: some philosophers could see themselves as professionals, specifically as “physicians of the soul”. In this, they differed fundamentally from the approach of more academic philosophers, because the “physicians of the soul”—as well as other professionals—sought not to reach truth by means of reason and debate, but claimed to already possess truth and to apply it. Moreover, the model of the professional—the physician in particular—accounts for the asymmetrical relationship between the bishop and his parishioners. This asymmetry, which is typical of the relationship between craftsmen and pupils or clients, allows Gregory and other Christian authors to reapply the religious imagery of initiation into a profession to the literally religious initiation of the bishop<sup>375</sup>. The ambiguous social position of the professional is perfect for Gregory’s aims, because it allows him to criticise both Nectarius, who has the status but lacks specific expertise, and Maximus, who feigns expertise but lacks status (which invalidates his expertise). Among the three rivals, the only one with a consistent curriculum is Gregory, son of a landowner but devoted since his youth to the specific study of Christianity and to the ἀσκήσις of a future champion.

### 3.3.2.2 A call to action (II, 1, 13)

Though it furthers the same agenda, II, 1, 13 has a different rhetorical approach, one that brings to fruition the whole tradition of hexametric poetry. From the point of view of structure, Gregory’s argument occupies the greater part of the core of the poem, and it is organised as a diptych. It begins inside the herald’s discourse, after the invective (75–88), with a sneering declaration of general indifference (89–99), which devolves into another invective (100–115). Here end the words of the herald, and Gregory produces a series of biblical testimonies cautioning against rash elections (116–138).

After an interlude (139–163), in which the actual behaviour of bishops belies Gregory’s expectations, the poet declares a change of theme, from the leaders to the people (164–165). It follows another bitter declaration of general indifference (166–183) and a series of biblical examples of ritual purity (184–195). This second part is framed with a γνώμη—Τοῖα μὲν ἡγῆτῆρες· ὁ δ’ ἔσπεται ἐγγύθι λαός, / Πρόφρονες ἐς κακίην, καὶ ἡγῆτῆρος ἀνευθεν (II, 1, 13, 164–165)—which signals the change of theme. Furthermore, lines 166–183 seem to refer to a disparity in the bishops’ treatment of the popula-

375 Lyman 2000, 154–155 for Epiphanius and the difference between apology and heresiology; this is precisely the difference between Gregory’s conception of Christian culture and Origen’s: for all their similarities, Gregory conceives truth as a given and culture as a way to propagate, apply, preserve and restore truth, whereas for Origen the task of the Christian intellectual is to look for truth (hence his aporetic method, completely absent from Gregory; see Perrone 2000) and to engage in academic disputes with different understandings of truth. For the philosopher as “physician of souls” and the asymmetry in the relationship with the pupil, see Nussbaum 1994, 494–497. On the religious, initiatory nature of the relationship with a professional: Barton 1994, 82–85, 90–94.



tion (τοῖα δικάσταῖς / εὐαδεν ἡμετέροισι, 173–174) in terms of rewards for morality and moral guidance; but then lines 184–195, with their comparison of roles in the Church with the different services of the Jewish temple, clarify that the failure to draw distinctions based on morality relates to ecclesiastical careers and ordinations. Thus, the difference between the treatment of the theme from the point of view of leaders and from the point of view of the people is slender at best. The parallel sections 89–99 and 166–183 on one side and 116–138 and 184–195 on the other are effectively duplicates, both perfectly apt for the situation of the bishops. Interestingly, while 89–99 together with 166–183 mix and contaminate pagan and biblical examples, the passages in 116–138 and 184–195 are exclusively biblical. Through these references, both biblical and pagan, Gregory reinforces the historical perspective already formulated in the initial *narratio* (see §3.1.4.1). As we shall presently see, however, he institutes two competing models of historical explanation—namely, decadence and desecration. In the next pages, I will treat chiefly these passages, reserving the invectives (75–88; 100–115; 139–163) for another chapter (§5.2).

The first passage on the selection of bishops, 89–99, is inserted in the fictive discourse of the herald<sup>376</sup>. This literary device is significant for many reasons. First, it is a creative use of the rhetorical exercise of the *ethopoeia*, by which the student would speak “in the character” of another person, usually a famous figure of myth or history<sup>377</sup>. In this case, the herald verbalises the actions of the bishops: Gregory’s exercise is to imagine what a herald might say if he had to advertise and explain the behaviour of the bishops. From the point of view of logic, the procedure amounts to setting up a straw man. However, it would be an error to consider this poem only from a logical point of view, because—differently from II, 1, 12—the poet is here more concerned with literary and emotional values than with arguing against an opposing position. The straw-herald is effective precisely because the bishops would *not* verbalise, advertise, or explain their behaviour; no one would openly admit that such behaviour was justifiable, and having a herald proclaim it brazenly should prompt recognition of its absurdity. Furthermore, there is a good deal of satire in the herald’s discourse, the irony being that the character proclaims loudly and proudly exaggerated things—for example, that hideous criminals can be bishops or that everyone can become a bishop. It is conceivable that such a satire had different effects on different hearers: Gregory may have aimed at pressuring his peers to more caution in bishop elections, while powerful laypeople were encouraged to discern between bishop and bishop—to the benefit of committed bishop-ascetics like Gregory.

376 Cf. 73–74: ὡς δοκέω μοι / κήρυκος βοῶντος ἐνὶ μεσατοῖσι ἀκούειν; and at 116: κήρυξ μὲν δὴ τοῖα βριήπιος. Αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε . . .

377 On *ethopoeia*: Amato/Schamp 2005. On the importance of προγυμνάσματα (rhetorical exercises) for late antique poetry and for Gregory in particular see §1.3.1; §5.1.3.

Second, the herald's discourse has a structural function as a framing device<sup>378</sup>. Whereas II, 1, 12 employed the logical passages of its argument as framing lines for digressive descriptions and catalogues, the herald's discourse allows for a framing without logical arguments, which, in a hexametric context and after the dignified *narratio* of 27–71, would have been clumsy. Instead, the herald is introduced and dismissed with epic formulae so that, while the iambic framing was dialectical, we can say that the epic one is narrative<sup>379</sup>.

Third, the device of the public proclamation, especially as an instrument of irony in a polemic, had been employed by pagan critics of Christianity, and Gregory took it directly from them: in fact, Celsus used it and Origen quotes the passage in a chapter of *Contra Celsum* found in the *Philocalia*, a collection of Origenian excerpts probably put together by Gregory and Basil; another instance of the device is found in the passage of Julian's *Symposium* on baptism already recalled (note 356). Celsus and Julian employed this rhetorical device in the frame of their polemics against baptism and the indiscriminated call of Christians to all sorts of people. We have already seen that Gregory employed those pagan talking points in II, 1, 12, employing them for bishop selections rather than simple baptism. In II, 1, 13 the technique is the same: the rhetorical manoeuvre, through which pagans attacked the very concept of Christian baptism, is repurposed to attack a (perceived) bad habit regarding bishop elections<sup>380</sup>.

As regards the contents of lines 89–99, the basic idea is that ordinations are distributed carelessly:

378 Roberts 1989, 37.

379 Cf. some of the framing lines of II, 1, 12: τὸ δ' αἵτιον' (371); σὺ δ' εἰπέ μοι (432) ἔστω δὲ μὴ κακός τις (454) εἶποι τάχ' ἄν τις (503); ἔστω δὲ λουτρόν ἐι δοκεῖ καὶ τοῦτο σοι (522); with those of the herald at II, 1, 13: ὡς δοκέω μοι / κήρυκος βοῶντος ἐνὶ μεσατοῖσι ἀκούειν (73–74); κήρυξ μὲν δὴ τοῖα βριήπουος. Αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε . . . (116). As regards the post-discourse expression, while the adjective βριήπουος is a Homeric hapax (*Il.* 12, 521), the use of τοῖα is an innovation of Apollonius (*Fantuzzi* 1984, 90–92) often repeated thereafter (*Callim. hymn. in Del.* 109; *hymn. in Cer.* 97; *Oppian. halieut.* 5, 565; *Oppian. cyneg.* 2, 362; 373), and the final Adonic αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε is formulaic from Homer onwards (*Il.* 1, 282; 15, 401; 24, 244; *Apollon. Rhod.* 2, 634; *Argonautica Orphica* 572; 945; *Lithica Orphica* 316).

380 τοιαῦτα ὑπ' αὐτῶν προστάσσεσθαι μηδεὶς προσίτω πεπαιδευμένος, μηδεὶς σοφός, μηδεὶς φρόνιμος· κακὰ γὰρ ταῦτα νομίζεται παρ' ἡμῖν· ἀλλ' εἴ τις ἀμαθής, εἴ τις ἀνόητος, εἴ τις ἀπαίδευτος, εἴ τις νήπιος, θαρρῶν ἡκέτω (*Orig. c. Cels.* 3, 44); Οἱ μὲν γὰρ εἰς τὰς ἄλλας τελετὰς καλοῦντες προκηρύττουσι τάδε· ὅστις χεῖρας καθαρὸς καὶ φωνὴν συνετός, καὶ αὐθις ἕτεροι· ὅστις ἀγνὸς ἀπὸ παντὸς μύσους, καὶ ὅτῳ ἡ ψυχὴ οὐδὲν σύννοιδε κακόν, καὶ ὅτῳ εὖ καὶ δικαίως βεβίωται. Καὶ ταῦτα προκηρύττουσιν οἱ καθάρσια ἀμαρτημάτων ὑπισχνούμενοι. Ἐπακούσωμεν δὲ τίνας ποτὲ οὕτοι καλοῦσιν· ὅστις, φασίν, ἀμαρτωλός, ὅστις ἀσύνετος, ὅστις νήπιος, καὶ ὡς ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν ὅστις κακοδαίμων, τοῦτον ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ δέξεται (3, 59); τὸν Ἰησοῦν εὐρὼν ἀναστρεφόμενον καὶ προαγορεύοντα πᾶσιν, Ὅστις φθορεὺς, ὅστις μαιφόνος, ὅστις ἐναγὴς καὶ βδελυρός, ἴτω θαρρῶν· ἀποφανῶ γὰρ αὐτὸν τουτῶι τῷ ὕδατι λούσας αὐτίκα καθαρὸν, κἂν πάλιν ἔνοχος τοῖς αὐτοῖς γένηται, δώσω τὸ στήθος πλήξαντι καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν πατάξαντι καθαρῶ γενέσθαι' (*Julian. Imp. or.* 10 336A–B). Cf. with: Δεῦρ' ἴθ' ὅσοι κακίης ἐπιβήτορες, αἵσχεα φωτῶν / ... Δεῦρ' ἴτε θαρσαλέοι. πᾶσι θρόνος εὐρύς ἐτοιμος (II, 1, 13, 75; 89).

Δεῦρ' ἴτε θαρσαλέοι. πᾶσι θρόνος εὐρύς ἔτοιμος,  
 Δεῦρ' ἴτε, δεξιτερῇσι νέους κλίνετε τένοντας (90)  
 Πᾶσι προφρονέως, καὶ μὴ ποθέουσι τέτανται.  
 Μάννα πάλιν, ξένος ὄμβρος· ἅπας κόλποισι λέγοιτε,  
 Ὅς πλέον, ὅς τ' ἐπιδευῆς, ἴην χάριν. Εἰ δ' ἐθέλοιτε,  
 Μηδ' ἁγίου φείδοισθε θεουδέος ἡματος ἀργοῦ.  
 Ἥ τάχα καὶ παλάμῃσιν ἐν ἀπλήστοισι πύθοιτο. (95)  
 Εὐνὸς μὲν πάντεσσιν ἀήρ, ξυνὴ δέ τε γαῖα,  
 Εὐνὸς δ' οὐρανὸς εὐρύς, ἃ τ' οὐρανὸς ὀμμασι φαίνει,  
 Εὐνὴ δ' αὖ πόντοιο χάρις, ξυνοί τε θόωκοι.  
 Θαῦμα μέγ', οὐδὲ Σαοὺλ χάριτος ξένος, ἀλλ' ὑποφίτης.  
 (II, 1, 13, 89–99)

Come on, here, bold ones, a broad throne is ready for everyone!  
 Come here, bend with the hands the young neck (90)  
 to everyone readily, even to the unwilling 'tis bent.  
 The manna again, a strange rain: everyone, collect  
 in your lap, some more, some less, the same grace!  
 If you want, don't even spare God's holy day of rest,  
 for it may fester in greedy hands. (95)  
 Common to all is air, and common is earth,  
 common the wide sky, and what his eyes illuminate,  
 common is also the bounty of the sea, common the thrones, too.  
 How wonderful! Not even Saul is a stranger to grace, but an oracle.

This single passage is framed by the repetition of the herald's invitation (δεῦρ' ἴτε, 89) and by a beloved maxim (99)<sup>381</sup>. Note how Gregory enhances the idea of carelessness with word choice: the repetition of πᾶσι (89; 91) and the θρόνος that is εὐρύς (89). The concept is developed further through the biblical comparison with manna, because its similarity with rain (ξένος ὄμβρος, 92), its abundance, and its destination—all the people of Israel—express the indifference with which ordinations are distributed, while its divine provenance and its internal consistency (ἴην χάριν, 93) reflect the theological characteristics of episcopal consecration<sup>382</sup>. It is obviously a paradoxical employment of the usual procedure of typological interpretation, because the positive features of the biblical manna are ironically mentioned to express the absurdity of the bishops' behaviour.

As was already mentioned, lines 96–98 feature a pagan theme, the idea of the common property (or, better, the nonproperty) of natural elements. It is one of Gregory's oft-repeated concepts, which he probably took from Euripides and Menander, but read in light of Mt. 5:4–5 and (presumably) of the Cynic diatribe<sup>383</sup>. In all other Gregorian

<sup>381</sup> For the proverb of “Saul among the prophets”, see §2.1.2.1 n. 48 and II, 1, 12, 401 (in the same context).

<sup>382</sup> Biblical sources: εἶπεν δὲ κύριος πρὸς Μωυσήν Ἰδοὺ ὡς ὑμῖν ἄρτους ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (Ex. 16:4); καὶ ὅταν κατέβῃ ἡ δρόσος ἐπὶ τὴν παρεμβολὴν νυκτός, κατέβαιναν τὸ μαννα ἐπ' αὐτῆς (Num. 11:9).

<sup>383</sup> A remote model might be Aeschyl. *Prom.* 1091–1092, but for Gregory Men. *frg.* 481, 4 K.; 531, 8 K.; 611 and Eur. *Hel.* 906 are likelier. Again, the theme is found in Plutarch *Is. et Os.* 377F, 4. Other sources

occurrences, the idea has a positive meaning, and I, 1, 9, 97–99 is particularly interesting because the common property of natural elements is brought up as a foil for the sacrament of baptism—which is also common to all<sup>384</sup>. That is, Gregory is applying a defence of baptism as an ironic attack on ordination, in much the same way as he applied pagan sources' attacks against baptism—this time without irony—to ordination.

A similar combination of biblical and pagan themes is found in lines 166–183:

οὐδέ τις ἔστ' ἀγαθοῖο διάκρισις, οὐδὲ κακοῖο,  
 Οὐ πινυτῆς πολιῆς, οὐκ ἀφραδέος νεότητος,  
 Οὐ μογεροῦ βιότοιο θεουδέος, οὐ μαλακοῖο.  
 Εἷς νόμος ἐστὶ, κάκιστον ἔχειν πλὴον. Ὡς ἀπόλοιτο  
 Κεῖνος ἀνὴρ, ὃς πρῶτος ἀνήγαγεν ἐνθάδ' ἀλιτρούς. (170)  
 Αὐτῶν κόσμος ἔοι, αὐτῶν Θεὸς, ὅσσα τ' ἀρίστοις  
 Ἔσπεται ὑστατίοισιν ἐν ἡμασιν ἀμφιτάλαντα·  
 Οἱ δ' ἀγαθοὶ μογέοιεν ἐτώσια. Τοῖα δικασταῖς  
 Εὐαδεν ἡμετέροισι. Δίκη φυγὰς ἐνθεν ἀπέλθοι.  
 Ἐν δ' ἄρα πάντα πέλοι, Χριστὸς, βροτὸς, ἥλιος, ἀστήρ, (175)  
 Φῶς, σκότος, ἄγγελος ἐσθλός, Ἑωσφόρος οὐκέτι λάμπων.  
 Πέτρῳ δ' ἴσα φέροιτο θεοκτόνος Ἰσκαριώτης,  
 Καὶ Σολύμοις ἱεροῖσιν ἀλιτροτάτῃ Σαμάρεια.  
 Ἴσα δ' ἔχοι χρυσὸς τε καὶ ἄργυρος, ἥδὲ σίδηρος,  
 Μάργαρος ὀκρυόεντι λίθῳ, πηγαῖς δὲ χαράδραι· (180)  
 Πάντα δ' ἅμ' ἀλλήλοισι πεφυρμένα εἰς ἐν ἄγοιτο.  
 Ὅς ποτ' ἔην, ὅτ' ἄκοσμος ἔην πρωτόκτιστος ὕλη,  
 Κόσμον ἔτ' ὠδίνουσα διακριδὼν οὐ βεβαῶτα.  
 (II, 1, 13, 166–183)

There is no distinction between good and evil,  
 nor between hoary sense and reckless youth,  
 nor between a grievous and devout life and an effeminate one.  
 One is the rule: to make much of the worst. Damn  
 that man, who first brought here the wicked! (170)  
 Let them have the world, God, and whatever  
 compensation awaits the good in the last days,  
 let the good fruitlessly toil. Such is the sentence  
 of our judges, and let justice be banned from here.  
 Let everything be the same, Christ, man, sun, star, (175)  
 light, shadow, a pious angel and Lucifer no more shining.  
 Let God-slayer Iscariot be the same as Peter,

are listed by Moreschini/Sykes 1997, 264 and Moreschini/Gallay 1985, 133, 175 connect it without further comment to the diatribe. Gregory employs the concept at I, 1, 9, 97–99; II, 1, 13, 96–98; *or.* 4, 96; 14, 25; 32, 22; 33, 9.

**384** Εὐνὸς μὲν πάντεσσιν ἀήρ, ξυνὴ δὲ τε γαῖα, / Εὐνὸς δ' οὐρανὸς εὐρύς, ἅθ' ὥρια κύκλος ἐλίσσει· / Εὐνὸν δ' ἀνθρώποισι σαόβροτον ἐπλετο λουτρόν. (I, 1, 9, 97–99); the same idea, implicitly, at *or.* 33, 9. The prose passage does not mention explicitly baptism, but the idea of the “two Adams” and of the participation in the death of Christ the Second Adam comes from Rom. 5–6 and 1Cor. 15:21–23, passages that imply a theology of baptism.

and most impious Samaria as Jerusalem most holy.  
 Let gold and silver be worth the same, and even iron,  
 a pearl and a rugged stone, fountains and ravines: (180)  
 let's mix up everything and treat it as the same!  
 Thus 'twas once, as the first-created matter was unadorned,  
 still delivering the unsteadily defined world.

The passage is an expansion and elaboration of its first line, 166: οὐδέ τις ἔστ' ἀγαθοῖο διακρίσις, οὐδὲ κακοῖο, denouncing the absence of a moral criterion in the community (λάος, 164). However, this time there is no irony, because Gregory is clearly decrying this moral indifference. To do so, he constantly alternates biblical and Hellenic expressions. He begins at 169–170 with a traditional curse on the πρῶτος εὐρετής<sup>385</sup>. At 171–172 he rewrites in epic terms of the last judgement: The expression ὑστατίοισιν ἐν ἡμασιν is an epic rewriting of the New Testament ἔσχαται ἡμέραι, with ὑστατίοισιν replacing ἔσχαταις, which is never used of time by Homer and the older, neuter word ἥμαρ<sup>386</sup>. Again, at line 174 he alludes to Hesiod's scene of Nemesis and Aidos fleeing the world of the Iron Age and its reprise by Aratus<sup>387</sup>. Hesiod (*op.* 256–261) has Justice (Δίκη) wandering the earth to check human judgements and presenting herself to Zeus to denounce crooked ones; even more significant are lines 183–201 of the *Works*, a

<sup>385</sup> For an overview of this literary theme, with important examples from Callimachus and Euripides (authors that Gregory knew and appreciated), see Leo 1912, 152–154.

<sup>386</sup> ἔσχαται ἡμέραι: Joh. 6:39; 40; 44; 54; 11:24; 12:48; Act. 2:15; 18; 2Tim. 3:1; Jac. 5:3 and, with a slightly different wording, Hebr. 1:2; 2Petr. 3:3. For the use of ἔσχατος: Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 699, s.v. ἔσχατος I. Ἀμφιτάλαντα would mean “the things *on the brink/poised* that will result for excellent people in the last days” (see, for example: ἡ ὑπὲρ τοῦτον ὁδὸς ἐπικρημνός τε καὶ ἀμφιτάλαντος, Greg. Naz. *ep.* 4, 6; in a figured sense: Πρώτη μὲν Τριάδος καθαρὴ φύσις· αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα, / Ἀγγελικὴ· τριτάτη δ' ἄρ' ἐγὼ βροτὸς, ἀμφιτάλαντος, I, 2, 9, 68–69). I would prefer the reading ἀντιτάλαντα given in note by the edition in the *Patrologia Graeca*, meaning “settlement, compensation”, as in II, 2, 11–12 (the only other occurrence): Τοῖα διδοῖ μερόπεσσι Θεὸς μέγας ἀντιτάλαντα, / Οἷά περ ἀνθρώποις ἐνθάδε μετρέομεν, paraphrasing ὧ γὰρ μέτρῳ μετρεῖτε ἀντιμετρηθήσεται ὑμῖν, Lc. 6:38. In this case, ἀντιτάλαντα may be a reference to the μισθός promised in an eschatological context (for example Mt. 5:12; 6; 10:41–42).

<sup>387</sup> The two virgins in white garments, Aidos and Nemesis, could have inspired Gregory's dream of the two virgins in shining raiments: cf. λευκοῖσιν φάρεσσι καλυψαμένα χρῶα ... Αἰδῶς καὶ Νέμεσις (Hesiod. *op.* 198; 200) with Δοιαί μοι δοκέεσκον ἐν εἵμασιν ἀργυρέοισι / Στράπτειν παρθενικά πλησίον ἰστάμεναι (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 45, 231–232). These two virgins are said to have fled mankind to reach the Olympus during the Iron Age, which could have influenced Aratus' description of Dike fleeing mankind to reach heaven and become the constellation of *Virgo* (καὶ τότε δὴ πρὸς Ὀλυμπὸν ἀπὸ χθονὸς εὐρουδείης / λευκοῖσιν φάρεσσι καλυψαμένα χρῶα καλὸν / ἀθανάτων μετὰ φύλον ἴτον προλιπόντ' ἀνθρώπους / Αἰδῶς καὶ Νέμεσις: τὰ δὲ λείψεται ἄλγεα λυγρὰ / θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποισι: κακοῦ δ' οὐκ ἔσσεται ἀλκή, Hesiod. *op.* 197–201; Καὶ τότε μισήσασα Δίκη κείνων γένος ἀνδρῶν / ἑπταθ' ὑπουρανίη, ταύτην δ' ἄρα νάσσατο χῶρην, / ἥχί περ ἐννυχίη ἔτι φαίνεται ἀνθρώποισι / Παρθένος, Arat. 1, 133–136).

description of the Iron Age, with many themes Gregory borrowed: discord<sup>388</sup>; envy<sup>389</sup>; men do not dread the gods<sup>390</sup>; they disrespect their parents<sup>391</sup>; they sack each other's city<sup>392</sup>; there is no recognition for the good and might makes right<sup>393</sup>. Furthermore, lines 175–176 of II, 1, 13 are an inversion of 1Cor. 15:41, organised in couples of opposite terms (Christ-mortal, sun-star, light-shadow, angel-Satan, Peter-Judas, Jerusalem-Samaria, pearl-rock, spring-ravine), rather than in a list of different categories, so that the confusion more clearly communicates connotations of moral subversiveness<sup>394</sup>. The only exception to the scheme is the triplet gold-silver-iron (184), which may allude to the Myth of the Ages, already evoked in the previous lines. Finally, Gregory evokes the ultimate absence of distinction through the reference to the mythological primordial chaos. This idea enjoyed increased popularity beginning with the first century BC, as the Platonic Academy turned dogmatic; indeed, the fountainhead of this conception for Gregory is probably various interpretations of the *Timaeus*, either Jewish (Philo), Christian (Origen), or pagan (Plutarch, Albinus). This “prosaic” derivation of the theme, as opposed to archaic and Hellenistic poetic models, is demonstrated by the use of the word ὕλη (187), which is not normally found in poetic accounts<sup>395</sup>.

388 οὐδὲ πατήρ παίδεσσιν ὁμοῖος οὐδέ τι παῖδες (Hesiod. *op.* 183); see Greg. Naz. II, 1, 13, 145–148; 151–153.

389 ζῆλος δ' ἀνθρώποισιν ὀϊζυροῖσιν ἄπασι / δυσκέλαδος κακόχαρτος ὁμαρτήσῃ, στυγερῶπης, (Hesiod. *op.* 195–196); the theme of envy, φθόνος, is everywhere in Gregory's poems, and the epithet κακόχαρτος, twice in Hesiod, for ἔρις and ζῆλος, is never used anywhere else until Clem. Alex. *paed.* 3, 11, 75, 4 and Gregory's poetry—see in particular Τόσσος ἔρωσ φαέεσσιν ἐπήγλυσεν ἡμετέροισιν, / Ἡ δόξης κενεῆς, ἡ κτήσιος, ἡ φθόνος αἰνός, / Τηκεδανός, κακόχαρτος, ἐναΐσιμον ἄλγος ἔχουσι! (II, 1, 13, 158–160).

390 σχέτλιοι οὐδέ θεῶν ὅτιν εἰδότες (Hesiod. *op.* 187); see the various allusions to the Last Judgement in our poem.

391 αἰψα δὲ γηράσκοντας ἀτιμήσουσι τοκῆας: / μέψονται δ' ἄρα τοὺς χαλεποὺς βάζοντες ἔπεσσι ... γηράντεσσι τοκεῦσιν ἀπὸ θρεπτήρια δοῖεν / χειροδίκαι (Hesiod. *op.* 185–186; 188–189); see Gregory's self-presentation as a father to the other bishops at II, 1, 12, 813–815.

392 ἕτερος δ' ἑτέρου πόλιν ἐξαλαπάξει (Hesiod. *op.* 189); see II, 1, 12, 797–802, where the bishops play with cities and sees.

393 οὐδέ τις εὐόρκου χάρις ἔσεται οὔτε δικαίου/ οὔτ' ἀγαθοῦ, μᾶλλον δὲ κακῶν ρεκτῆρα καὶ ὕβριν / ἀνέρες αἰνήσουσι: δίκη δ' ἐν χερσὶ, καὶ αἰδώς / οὐκ ἔσται, (Hesiod. *op.* 190–193); see Πρόεδρος ἡ κακία· πονεῖτω μηδὲ εἷς / Κακοὶ γίνεσθε, τοῦτο συντομώτατον, / Καὶ λῶον· ἡ δὲ πρᾶξις ἵσταται νόμος (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 12, 365–367) and Οὐδέ τις ἐστ' ἀγαθοῦ διάκρισις, οὐδέ κακοῦ ... Εἷς νόμος ἐστὶ, κάκιστον ἔχειν πλέον (II, 1, 13, 166; 169).

394 Οὐ πᾶσα σὰρξ ἡ αὐτὴ σὰρξ ἀλλ' ἄλλη μὲν ἀνθρώπων, ἄλλη δὲ σὰρξ κτηνῶν, ἄλλη δὲ σὰρξ πτηνῶν, ἄλλη δὲ ἰχθύων. καὶ σώματα ἐπουράνια, καὶ σώματα ἐπίγεια· ἀλλ' ἑτέρα μὲν ἡ τῶν ἐπουρανίων δόξα, ἑτέρα δὲ ἡ τῶν ἐπίγειων. ἄλλη δόξα ἡλίου, καὶ ἄλλη δόξα σελήνης, καὶ ἄλλη δόξα ἀστέρων· ἀστὴρ γὰρ ἀστéρος διαφέρει ἐν δόξῃ (1Cor. 15:39–41); the initial position of Christ in Gregory's text may harken back to 1Cor 15:23 (Ἐκαστος δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι· ἀπαρχὴ Χριστός, ἔπειτα οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ).

395 Spoerri 1959, 107–111; for ὕλη, see Tornau 2012. The idea of cosmogony as “separation”, “distinction” of pre-existing, mixed and disorderly elements was in any case widespread: it may have had an archaic Greek origin (see: Kirk/Raven 1963, 32–33), it had some biblical appeal and many Near-Eastern predecessors (Gen. 1; Kirk/Raven 1963, 33–34).

It is interesting to note the oscillations between protology and eschatology: the last judgement and the negation of 1Cor 15:41 allude to Christian visions of the end of the world, whereas the curse against the *πρῶτος εὐρετής*, the reference to the Iron Age, and the reference to primordial chaos allude to pagan origin myths. Apparently, all these references are purely ornamental, because no unifying logic governs their mention; rather, the poet employs every reference differently. The curse against the *πρῶτος εὐρετής*, like the reference to Dike fleeing the world, implies historical decadence, with a previous Golden Age now lost. When the poet compares the current state of affairs with primordial chaos, he is giving the current situation connotations of an unnatural regress towards a more primitive age—implying a natural development opposite to that of historical decadence. The same idea of subversion of the order of the universe is suggested by the references to the last judgement and to 1Cor 15:41. Here, two concurrent modes of explanation are at work: on one side, the Greek model of society as an organism naturally deteriorating through time, on the other, the model of a firm hierarchy, where every change is perceived as unnatural and sacrilegious. The mentions are divided accordingly: Christian references point to the hierarchical model, whereas Greek references point to the organicist one, with the idea of primordial chaos, the only pagan idea Gregory might have seriously accepted, reinforcing the hierarchical model. Furthermore, historical decadence in the church is one of the main themes of these poems, as has already been said (see §3.1.3.1; §3.1.4.1).

The subversion of a hierarchical order, on the other hand, is the subject of the two passages exploiting biblical typology (II, 1, 13, 116–138 and 184–195):

Κήρυξ μὲν δὴ τοῖα βριήπυος. Αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε  
Δεΐδια μὲν Μωσῆος ἀγακλέος οἶον ἄκουσα,  
Ὅς μούνοσ νεφέλης εἰσὼ θεὸν ἔδρακεν ἄντην,  
Τοὺς δ' ἄλλους ἐκέλευσεν ὑπὸ προπόδεσσι μένοντας,  
Ἄγνοτάτους ἀγνοῖσιν ἐν εἵμασι καὶ τρομέοντας

(120)

Μούνης εἰσαΐειν θείης ὀπός. Οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον  
Οὐδ' αὐτοῖς θήρεσσι πατεῖν πέδον οὐρανίοιο,  
Μὴ καὶ ῥηγνυμένοισιν ὑπὸ σκοπέλοισι δαμεῖεν.  
Δεΐδια δ' αὖ παίδων Ἀρῶν μόρον, οἳ ῥα θυλὰς  
Θέντες ἐπὶ ξείνοιο πυρός, ξείνως καὶ ὄλοντο

(125)

Αὐτίκα, καὶ θυέων χώρος θανάτοιο τελέσθη,  
Καὶ παῖδές περ ἑόντες Ἀρῶν μεγάλοιο, δάμασθεν.  
Ὡς δὲ καὶ Ἥλειδῃσιν ἐπέχραε λυγρὸς ὄλεθρος,  
Ἥλειδαις, ὅτι μάργον ἔχον νόον. Ἥ γὰρ ἔβαλλον  
Οὐχ ἱερὰς παλάμας ἱερῶν καθύπερθε λεβήτων.

(130)

Οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδ' Ἥλεις χόλον ἐκφυγεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸν  
Οὐχ ὁσίῃ γαστήρ παίδων ἐχάλεψε δίκαιον,  
Καὶ περ αἰεὶ βρίσαντα ὄνειδεῖοις ἐπέεσσιν.  
Εἰ δὲ τόση τοίησιν ἁμαρτάσι μῆνις ἔπεστιν,  
Ὅσσατίης δέος ἐστὶν ἐπὶ πλεόνεσσι κακοῖσι!

(135)

Καὶ σὲ, κιβωτὸν ἄνασσαν, ὃς ἤδρασε χειρὶ βεβήλω

Κλινομένην, θάνεν αἴψα. Θεοῦ δέ τε νηὸν ἔθηκεν  
 Ἀψαυστον παλάμῃσιν, ἐρείσματα τάκτοθι τοίχων.

....

Ἦν δ' ὅτε Μωαβίταις νηὸς μέγας οὐ βατὸς ἦεν,  
 Οὐδὲ μὲν Ἀμμανίτησιν, ἐπεὶ στρατὸν ἤκαχον ἡῦν. (185)

Ἄλλους δ' ὕδροφόροισιν ἐνηρίθμησεν Ἰησοῦς,  
 Καὶ ξυλοφορτηγοῖσιν, ἐπεὶ ῥά μιν ἐξαπάφησαν.  
 Ταῦτα κακοῖς. Λεὺι δὲ γόνον μεγάλοιο γέρηραν.  
 Σκηνῆς γάρ μιν ἔθηκαν ἐπουρανίης θεράποντα·  
 Κάνθάδ' ὄροι θυέων τε καὶ οὐδεος, ἡδὲ πόνοιο. (190)

Ἄλλος γάρ τ' ἄλλοισιν ἀνὴρ χέρας εἶχον ἐπ' ἔργοις,  
 Ὅσσα τ' ἔην νηοῖο καὶ ἔκτοθεν ἐγκονέοντες.  
 Κεῖνοι μὲν τοίοισι νόμοις ἀρετῆς προμάχιζον·  
 Ἥμεῖς δ' αὖ κακίῃ γέρα θήκαμεν· ὦ θανάτοιο!  
 Τίς τάδε θρηνήσειε γόων πολυῖδρις αἰιδός;  
 (II, 1, 13, 116–138; 184–195) (195)

Thus would the herald shout. Yet I do  
 dread such things as I've heard about the glorious Moses,  
 who alone gazed openly in through the cloud to God  
 and ordered the others to remain on the foothills,  
 although most holy in clothes most holy and trembling (120)  
 at the very sound of the divine voice. For 'twas better  
 even for the brutes not to step on God's ground,  
 that they might be not destroyed under bursting stones.

I do dread also the end of Aaron's sons, who, for the offerings  
 put on strange fire, a strange death died (125)  
 and sudden, and the place of their death was sanctified.

Although the sons of the great Aaron, they were destroyed.  
 Thus even the Helids a baneful fate seized,  
 the sons of Heli, for their greedy mind. Yea, they'd lay  
 unholy hands on the holy kettles. (130)

Nor did Heli escape the wrath, but even him  
 the ungodly belly of his sons vexed, though he was righteous  
 and laden with words of rebuke for them.

So, if such sins such a wrath awaits,  
 how much more should we dread before greater evils! (135)

Even thee, kingly ark, he who kept thee with impure hands  
 from falling died forthwith. God's temple too was made  
 to hands untouchable by the pillars outside the walls.

....

Once the great temple was unapproachable to the Moabites  
 and the Ammonites, for they vexed a brave army. (185)

Others were numbered by Joshua among the water bearers  
 and the wood bearers, for they had deceived him.  
 This for the evil, yet they honoured great Levi's seed:  
 indeed, they made him servant of the heavenly tent,  
 and here too there were rules for victims, place and toil. (190)



Each man laid hands on his task,  
to hasten what was of the temple and outside it.  
Those served under such rules of virtue,  
whereas we raffle prizes for the vice: oh, death!  
Is there a bard skilled enough in laments to bewail this? (195)

The first passage is the *minor* of an *a minore ad maius* argument, a logical formula codified also by Jewish scholars of the Bible as *qal w-hōmer*: if the breach of sacred spaces of the old covenant was so terribly punished as the Bible shows us, then how much more terribly will we bishops be punished—says Gregory—since we desecrate the sacraments of the new covenant<sup>396</sup>. In our case, the fact that the premise (biblical punishments) is the *minus* whereas the consequence (threatened punishments for bishops) is the *maius* is left implicit because it presumes a commonly held Christian doctrine—namely, that everything pertaining the new dispensation is much more sacred, important, and even ontologically “real” than its Old Testament type—which is only a shadow of things to come<sup>397</sup>.

The examples chosen from the Old Testament are the archetypes of desecration and the punishment thereof, and the poet sums up the biblical text, adding epic nuances. Lines 117–119 allude to Ex. 19, where Moses enters the cloud while the Israelites stand ordered hierarchically along the mountainside. The passage is the archetype of a hierarchy grounded in purification<sup>398</sup>, but Gregory “epicises” Moses through the adjective ἀγκλῆς, an epithet for heroes in the *Iliad*<sup>399</sup>. The two examples that follow are less emblematic: lines 124–126 allude to Lev. 10:1–11, and lines 128–131 to 1Sam. 2:12–17; 22–25. The sons of Eli are employed as an example of lust and gluttony by Ephrem in CN 21, which, rather than Eli’s sons, uses King Uzziah (2Chron. 26:16–23) as the archetype of profanation<sup>400</sup>. These examples too are paraphrased with epic language: μόρος, ὄλοντο, and λυγρὸς ὄλεθρος (10x in Homer in the same position) replace the biblical ἀπέθανον (Lev. 10:2; 1Sam. 4:11); θυηλαί the biblical θυμίαμα (Lev. 10:1); the epic-sounding patronymic Ἡλεῖδες corresponds to biblical (and prosaic) υἱοὶ/παῖδες Ἠλὶ (1Sam

396 Αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε / Δείδια μὲν Μωσῆος ἀγκλῆος οἶον ἄκουσα ... Εἰ δὲ τόση τοίησιν ἀμαρτᾶσι μῆνις ἔπεστιν, / Ὅσσα τῆς δέος ἐστὶν ἐπὶ πλεόνεσσι κακοῖσι! (II, 1, 13, 116–117, 134–135). The first treatment of the *a fortiori* argument is in Aristot. *top.* 114b 35–115 15; 119b 15–30; *rhet.* 1397b 10–30; as regards the Jewish scholars, see the *baraita* at the beginning of *Sifra* ([https://www.sefaria.org/Sifra%2C\\_Braita\\_d'Rabbi\\_Yishmael?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Sifra%2C_Braita_d'Rabbi_Yishmael?lang=bi), accessed: 06.07.2021, 17:52). A *fortiori* arguments are frequently used by Jesus in the Gospels (for example: Mt. 6:30; Lc. 11:13; Joh. 20:29; see also Rom. 5:9–10; 17; 8:32).

397 The very same line of reasoning in 2Cor. 3:6–9.

398 For the theologian: Greg. Naz. *or.* 28, 2–3; Greg. Nyss. *vit. Moys.* 23, 152–26, 166; Ephr. Syr. *hymn. fid.* 28, 8; a similar line of thought, though with different examples in *hymn. fid.* 8; for the priest in liturgy: Ambr. *off.* 50, 258; for the proper order in Paradise: Ephr. Syr. *hymn. parad.* 2, 12.

399 Hom. *Il.* 16, 738; 17, 716; 23, 529.

400 Ephr. Syr. *hymn. parad.* 3, 14; 12, 4; 15, 9–10; *hymn. fid.* 8, 10–11. On the sons of Eli in Ephrem and Gregory: §3.1.4.4.

2:12; 17; 22)<sup>401</sup>. Finally, Gregory mentions the two most sacred objects of Old Testament religion, the ark of the covenant and the temple (136–138). The man killed by the ark is Uzzah at 2Sam. 6:6–8, whereas the prohibition against touching the temple is nowhere to be found and is probably an extension of the prohibition against touching the tabernacle in the desert (Num. 1:51; 3:10; 38). Here, again, the language is epicised: instead of κιβωτὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ (2Sam 6:6) we read κιβωτὸν ἀνασσᾶν (136)<sup>402</sup>; instead of περιέσπασεν (2Sam. 6:6), κλινομένην (137); instead of ἀπέθανεν ἐκεῖ (2Sam. 6:7) the simple θάνεν αἶψα (137).

The second series of examples (184–195) pertains only to the temple and its orders. Lines 184–187 are a compressed paraphrase of Dtn. 23:4–5 and Jos. 9:21–23<sup>403</sup>. What is notable in this paraphrase is the shifting of meaning with respect to the biblical source. The two expressions ἐκκλησία κυρίου (Hebr. *qahal-yahwāh*) and συναγωγή (*ʿedāh*) are rendered by Gregory as νηὸς μέγας: while the biblical terms refer to a community of people, Gregory's term points to a building. This is possible because of the meaning of ἐκκλησία as church building and with a nod to the prohibition against non-Levites (ἀλλογενής) touching the tabernacle<sup>404</sup>. However, the poet paraphrased these biblical texts so that, coupled with the following reference to Levitical ministry and its rules<sup>405</sup>, the whole passage gives the impression of a meritocratic hierarchy concerned with temple service, even if the original texts on Ammonites, Moabites, and Gibeonites were concerned with the relationship of these people with Israelites in general. The last line before the *peroratio* is one of Gregory's favourite framing devices, consecrated also by the tradition of Greek poetry: Τίς τάδε θρηνήσειε γόων πολυΐδρις αἰιδός; (195)<sup>406</sup>.

The focus on the temple creates a nice contrast with the cosmic indifference decried at 166–183: the Jewish temple is the type of a proper hierarchy, such as the world and the church should be and, because of sin, fail to be. Furthermore, even if they do not state it explicitly, all these biblical images imply Gregory's understanding of the episcopate and of bishop selection. In fact, both when the poet insists on the purity required of Old Testament priests and when he describes temple service as a hierarchy where each has his own function, the knowledgeable reader (as no doubt Gregory's public was) understands purity as signifying superior ascetic practice and the consequent theological insight, a level of spiritual maturity only few could reach, so that by necessity the church will be stratified in a hierarchy of mediating priests and serving laymen. It also

<sup>401</sup> Gregory employs the biblical expression in prose: *ep.* 206, 2.

<sup>402</sup> For the poetic use of ἀνασσα: Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 121, s.v. ἀνασσα.

<sup>403</sup> οὐκ εἰσελεύσεται Ἀμμανίτης καὶ Μωαβίτης εἰς ἐκκλησίαν κυρίου ... παρὰ τὸ μὴ συναντῆσαι αὐτοὺς ὑμῖν μετὰ ἄρτων καὶ ὕδατος ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἐκπορευομένων ὑμῶν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου (Dtn. 23:4–5) and ζήσονται καὶ ἔσονται ξυλοκόποι καὶ ὕδροφόροι πάσῃ τῇ συναγωγῇ, καθάπερ εἶπαν αὐτοῖς οἱ ἄρχοντες, καὶ συνεκάλεσεν αὐτοὺς Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Διὰ τί παρελογίσασθέ με λέγοντες ... οὐ μὴ ἐκλίπη ἐξ ὑμῶν δοῦλος οὐδὲ ξυλοκόπος ἐμοὶ καὶ τῷ θεῷ μου (Jos. 9:21–23).

<sup>404</sup> Lampe 1961, 432, s.v. ἐκκλησία N; Num. 1:51.

<sup>405</sup> Cf. lines 188–190 with Num. 18:1–7 and the various laws of Leviticus.

<sup>406</sup> See Prudhomme 2006, 432–43, 443–445.

helps that the same biblical *exempla* used here in relation to the institutional episcopate are employed elsewhere in Gregory's text for the endeavour of theology, so that the model through which Gregory thinks about the episcopate and the model through which he does theology are practically the same.

### 3.3.2.3 Comparison

I find the competition of the two models (decadence and desecration) significant in relation to the problem of bishop selection. In II, 1, 12, desecration does not seem to play a role, and the poet concentrates on decadence, a narrative which—as we have already seen (§3.1.3.1)—justifies more stringent intellectual requirements for bishops<sup>407</sup>. In this context, the parallels between the episcopate and professions are appropriate. If this model of historical decadence and meritocracy is rationalistic, it still does not doubt the charismatic nature of the office—the question of how charisma would interact with inept and immoral recipients is just not treated.

Even if the rationalistic model is not wholly absent from II, 1, 13, the idea of desecration or trespass is much more prominent here. This is demonstrated in the long *narratio* of the poem (27–58), where the agent of change and disorder is Satan and his current attacks on the church are traced back to the temptation of Adam—the Christian version of the Myth of the Ages and the *πρώτος εὕρετής* of sin. The structural parallels of the Myth of the Ages and Gen. 3 are in the concept of a human condition—located in the past—free from the sorrows and restraints of the present condition of mankind<sup>408</sup>. Both tales move from this “Golden Age” to the current existential conditions of human beings. According to this Gregorian narration, the situation has not changed ever since: Satan tempts humans and humans fall, and under this scheme the failure in selecting proper bishops must be understood. Paradoxically, by putting his narration in the context of sacred and cosmic history, Gregory robs it of its properly historical element, of its novelty; typology and example reduce the current problem to a recurring scheme.

<sup>407</sup> A passage alluding to desecration may be II, 1, 12, 353–354: Ταῦτ' οὐ πρόδηλος ὕβρις; οὐ βλάβη σαφής; / Τούτων ἀνέξεται τίς; ὦ μυστήριον! The word *μυστήριον* is interpreted by Meier 1989, 111, as a reference to 2Ts. 2:7 (τὸ γὰρ μυστήριον ἥδη ἐνεργεῖται τῆς ἀνομίας). Since the general theme of the poem is unworthy bishops and the passage from 2 Thessalonians alludes to desecration, especially of the Temple (2Ts. 2:4), the exclamation ὦ μυστήριον may be taken to mean that the unworthy prelates desecrate the church. However, my interpretation differs from Meier's: first, because there is no clear indication that ὦ μυστήριον refers specifically to Paul's *μυστήριον ἀνομίας*; on the contrary, Gregory speaks in terms of “damage” (βλάβη) and “abuse” (ὕβρις), since he is referring to the bishops' behaviour regarding power (see §5.2.3); moreover, the expression *μυστήριον* cannot refer to these “damage” and “abuse”, because both are “apparent”, “obvious” (*πρόδηλος*, *σαφής*). The word must be read as an answer to the question immediately before it: “who shall tolerate this?” (Τούτων ἀνέξεται τίς;). Gregory answers this (rhetorical) question with a bitterly ironic reference to religious mystery.

<sup>408</sup> The idea of Adam introducing sin into the world is also prominent in Paul's theology, especially as expressed in Romans: Rom. 5:12–19; 1Cor. 15:21–22.

Such a vision is much closer to that expressed by Ephrem in *CN* 20 than the historical approach of II, 1, 12 would be (§3.1.3.1).

The comparison of bad elections with acts of desecration or trespass is closely linked to the idea of the charisma of office: to appoint as bishop someone unworthy constitutes defilement because the office per se is something sacred; and because the office is sacred, one can say that appointing someone unworthy constitutes defilement. In this respect, the narration of II, 1, 13 reinforces and justifies the innovative proposal of II, 1, 12, because it reassures Gregory's readers that he does not mean to deny a certain charisma inherent in ecclesiastical hierarchy when he criticises current bishops or proposes a rationalisation of the office.

However, the reduction of the historical novelty reveals a different rhetorical strategy from II, 1, 12. The iambic poem described a problem and discussed a cultural project to solve it, criticizing perceived antagonists of this project. The hexametric poem denounces the same problem, framing it from different points of view in order to elicit an emotional response from the audience. Even if II, 1, 13 still has the formal features of an oration and even if it explicitly says it aims at persuading its audience, its structure and arguments betray a different conception: persuasion cannot be intended here except in the vaguest of senses, as the communication of the urgency of the matter at hand and the pressing necessity of action<sup>409</sup>; but to understand more properly the content of the poem, one needs to do away with the fictional setting of a persuasive speech and to contextualise the work in the relationships Gregory maintained with influential people in Constantinople and his peers in the empire (see §1.2.2). In such a context, II, 1, 13 is an attack on those Gregory perceived as “bad bishops”—first of all, Nectarius and Maximus: the many biblical and pagan examples, as well as the irony of the herald's discourse, aim at reducing their authority, or at least making it conditional to a course of action already known by other writings of the same poet (such as II, 1, 12), while at the same time enhancing Gregory's own standing as a morally irreprehensible outsider.

Finally, the corresponding differences of metres and attitudes between II, 1, 12 and 13 are noteworthy. Against the scholarship arguing for a poor understanding of differ-

<sup>409</sup> This is clear in a passage towards the end, introducing the final *peroratio* of the poem. Gregory implies he aimed to persuade his listeners: Εἰ μὲν δὴ πεπίθοιμεν, ὀνησόμεθ'· εἰ δὲ καλύπτοι / Μῦθον ἔμὸν πολὺν τε νέων θράσος . . . (II, 1, 13, 198–199). However, the only direct plea to the audience, in the immediately preceding lines, is very generic: Σχέσθε, φίλοι· λήξωμεν ἀτασθαλίῃ μογέοντες / Ὅψέ ποτ' εὐαγέεσσι Θεὸς τίσιτο θυγαῖς (II, 1, 13, 196–197). The material content of this plea is to be deduced from the term ἀτασθαλίῃ, which refers back to the moral shortcomings Gregory has highlighted in his poem; and yet no concrete course of action is suggested, so that this final exhortation is merely stating explicitly the message already implied by the sarcastic and censorious description of current behaviours in the church (if it is bad, it goes without saying that you should not do it). Furthermore, Gregory himself started the poem as more of a vent than a concrete political project (see II, 1, 13, 18–26; §1.3.2; the parallel passage at II, 1, 12, 43–47 works more as a justification of his resented tone than a declaration of intent, a function more clearly performed by II, 1, 12, 8–30).

ent genres by Gregory based on his tendency to treat the same materials in different forms and metres (§1.3.1), the differences of II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13 are a good argument to claim that Gregory had a sophisticated understanding of genres. It is true that the two poems treat the same argument and that in them often there is one passage that paraphrases another or there are two passages that paraphrase a prose passage. This must be attributed to Gregory's working procedure, so deeply influenced by the school practice of paraphrasis, and to a conscious decision to hammer on the same themes for his political reasons. Moreover, many of Gregory's themes are new to Greek poetry, so that it is natural that they tend to oscillate between different genres. On the other side, the iambic and hexametric poems reveal a fundamentally different attitude to the same material and different procedures to contextualise and bring to fruition the same "tiles". The tradition of dramatic poetry advises iambs as the appropriate metre for writing *sermocinatio* (fictional dialogues) in the style of Cynical diatribe; this in turn is the best way to present a reasoned proposal of reform—determining Gregory's approach to criticizing the bishops in II, 1, 12. Similes were one of the main features of epic style, so that a poem trying to plot contemporary issues onto literary or natural precedents may well be written as a digressive epic, all the more so since the literary precedents come from the Bible, deemed "high" as far as subject matter goes, and also because epic allows a writer to alternate narration and discourses<sup>410</sup>.

### 3.3.3 Conclusion

A comparison of Gregory's and Ephrem's texts on the theme of bishop selection reveals deep differences in approach and conceptions, differences similar to those observed for other themes and reflecting different contexts of poetic production.

Ephrem's poems deal with the problems of the local community, so that they tend to treat bishop selection *ex post facto*, aiming at consensus. In this, they appear archaic compared to Gregory's texts, because their problems, strategies, and conceptions are much more similar to those of second- and third-century Western authors, such as Cyprian and Origen. The great novelty of Gregory's texts in respect to his predecessors lies in a new perspective: the focus is much less the community and much more the

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<sup>410</sup> Aristotle says of Homer that he imitates serious actions by excellent men (Ἐπεὶ δὲ μιμοῦνται οἱ μιμούμενοι πράττοντας, ἀνάγκη δὲ τούτους ἢ σπουδαίους ἢ φαύλους εἶναι ..., ἥτοι βελτίονας ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἢ χείρονας ἢ καὶ τοιούτους ... οἷον Ὅμηρος μὲν βελτίους, Κλεοφῶν δὲ ὁμοίους, Ἡγήμων δὲ ὁ Θάσιος <ὁ> τὰς παρωδίας ποιήσας πρῶτος καὶ Νικοχάρης ὁ τὴν Δειλιάδα χείρους, Aristot. *poet.* 1448a 1–2; 5–6; 11–14, he does so sometimes in a diegetic way, sometimes mimetically (καὶ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ μιμεῖσθαι ἔστιν ὅτε μὲν ἀπαγγέλλοντα, ἢ ἕτερόν τι γινόμενον ὥσπερ Ὅμηρος ποιεῖ, 1448a 20–22) and that the hexameter is particularly apt for narration and metaphors, whereas the iamb is more "practical" (τὸ γὰρ ἥρωικόν στασιμώτατον καὶ ὀγκωδέστατον τῶν μέτρων ἐστίν (διὸ καὶ γλῶττας καὶ μεταφορὰς δέχεται μάλιστα: περιττὴ γὰρ καὶ ἡ διηγηματικὴ μίμησις τῶν ἄλλων), τὸ δὲ ἱαμβεῖον καὶ τετράμετρον κινητικὰ καὶ τὸ μὲν ὀρχηστικόν τὸ δὲ πρακτικόν, 1459b 35–37).

universal (or imperial) church. Hence, selection is no longer a problem of consensus on different social and ecclesiastical strata, but is instead a matter administered by a rather homogeneous group of people—the current bishops—with a certain influence from powerful laymen.

In this context, demands and dynamics hitherto barely considered arise, and with them new rhetorical aims and strategies become prominent: these new dynamics and discourses tend to replicate those of late antique aristocracy, in that the group of co-opting bishops disputes new selections along theological (i.e., ideological) lines as well as according to family and friendship ties. This is especially true in Gregory's poetry, because it uses the traditional weapons of *paideia* (as demonstrated by his mastery of different genres and their metres, a concern apparently lacking in Ephrem) and ties together universal aims (e.g., rationalisation of the episcopate) with partisan aims (e.g., defence of his person and attack on Nectarius and Maximus).

This context explains the main new theme found in Gregory's poetry, a theme absent from Ephrem's—namely, rationalisation. When the matter at hand is crafting consensus *ex post facto* for a selection ultimately in the hand of God, one should not speak of requirements or even of a choice; at best credentials may be presented as further proof of divine election, as guarantees, or as signs of charisma. But when the poet addresses a board of peers perceiving themselves as responsible for the choice, then positive features may be properly named requirements or credentials.

Closely connected with the idea of a responsible choice by the bishops is the possibility of error in this choice, which has two implications: first, if one does not want to completely forgo the charismatic nature of the office, then charisma must be located in toto in the abstraction of the office itself or in the rite of consecration, with the recipient either contributing with his personal charisma to the charisma of office or defiling the office with his unworthiness; second, the possibility of error allows for invective and infighting—though it is difficult to determine if the idea of error and responsibility arose from invective and infighting, or vice versa. Both these implications are fully played out in Gregory: the poet never doubts the efficacy of sacraments and, much to the contrary, employs their efficacy and sanctity to highlight the sacrilege perpetrated by those who administer sacraments unworthily. Error is thereby thematised under the category of sin or sacrilege and employed as material for invective; the same mechanism is at work when error is categorised as historical decadence and lack of theological preparation.

Finally, it is interesting to note how much of pagan antibaptism arguments Gregory borrows in his critique of rash consecrations. Such borrowings are nowhere to be found in Ephrem. They are likely due to the aristocratic background Gregory shared with the pagan authors he borrowed from: they all shared the same core values of Greek *paideia*—in particular, the idea that only those who have trained themselves painstakingly may reach moral excellence, which also depends upon a correct understanding of the divine. In a way, this reinforces one of the basic theses of Elm's book on Gregory

and Julian<sup>411</sup>—namely, that the challenge posed by *paideia* and pagan reactions to foundational Christian values (such as grace) contributed strongly to the refinement and clarification of Christian doctrine. Maybe, if we do not observe the same awareness of the complications surrounding bishop selection in Ephrem, it is partly because Ephrem experienced less pressure from elite culture to justify the selection of his community's leaders.

### 3.4 Conclusion

This long inquiry should have equipped us to answer this question: What is a bishop in the poems of Gregory and Ephrem? I do not mean to ask simply what Ephrem and Gregory thought of the episcopal office or what their theology says about it. The question is more particular and concrete and pertains to the meaning and form of the concept of “bishop” and of the particular bishops in the literary construction of the poems; the poets’ theoretical ideas do play a role naturally, but they are just one of the many considerations that go into the composition of a poem. The addressee, the concrete situation, and the pragmatic aims of these texts were also taken into consideration by their authors, who modelled these requirements into the recognised forms of their literature.

If we had to condense Gregory’s and Ephrem’s theoretical models of the episcopate, which are by and large the same, we could define the bishop as the ascetic-in-chief of the community. Such a definition recognises the predominance of the theme of leadership in both poets’ theology; liturgical priesthood is also present, but not so prominent. Asceticism is the other element of the definition, and it summarises the moral code Gregory and Ephrem shared, while also taking into account Gregory’s emphasis on teaching. Morality and asceticism by and large coincide, with Gregory’s asceticism characterised by its engaging with Scripture and its contemplative aims. Asceticism is also the requirement (for Gregory) or the sign (for Ephrem) of a good candidate to the episcopate.

Therefore, the *a priori* model for the bishop is something like the protagonist in the *Life of Porphyrius of Gaza* and unlike the one in the *Life of Epiphanius of Salamis*—to employ the same examples as Claudia Rapp<sup>412</sup>. Or, if we want to reference two more famous bishops, Ephrem’s and Gregory’s model is more Saint Augustine than Saint Ambrose: a bishop with an ascetic background in a community; possibly well educated, according to Gregory; preoccupied with the unity and orthodoxy of his diocese but also with their moral progress; capable of choosing worthy colleagues from among the clergy. The model of the civic bishop represented by Saint Ambrose, always engaged in charitable projects or in administering justice, a great builder of churches and finder of relics, capable of exercising *parrhesia* even before an emperor—this is nearly absent from the poems.

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411 Elm 2012.

412 Rapp 2009.

Interestingly, the Ambrose/Epiphanius model corresponds well with what we know of Basil, whereas the Augustine/Porphyrus model adapts well to Gregory's own profile.

This correspondence between Gregory's profile and his model bishop is no coincidence. The discourse around the ideal bishop, which in II, 1, 12 appears so generic, is really—as I have established more than once—an apology of Gregory himself. Vice versa, apologetic and autobiographical passages attribute to Gregory the same characteristics as he attributes to his ideal bishop. This dynamic will be clearer in my analysis of II, 1, 17 in chapter §5.1.1. In the case of II, 1, 12 what appears as a reasoned proposal for the episcopate in general is really a counter aimed at the poet's critics and political adversaries in the capital. Even the definition of a specifically Christian doctrine, since such a doctrine had to be taught by bishops, is meant to locate the ideal teacher in the social space occupied by Gregory and to sharply differentiate this teacher from the social models of Gregory's competitors, Maximus and Nectarius. Furthermore, the ascetic portrayals in the four poems correspond (often verbatim) to the autobiographical passages on Gregory's own retreat from Constantinople. In II, 1, 12 the model ascetic is always contrasted to a model profligate, clearly meant as an attack to Nectarius.

This literary stance is much less prominent in II, 1, 13, where bishops and candidates for the episcopate are treated as a collective, sometimes even objectified through metonymy (ἔδος, ἔρκος, βῆμα, κιγχλῖς). If II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 17 presented us with contrasting portrayals, II, 1, 13 is a grand historical painting crowded with figures and symbols. The painting also has depth and perspective thanks to its references back to sacred history and to the grandiose narration of how the church came to be after the original sin and how Satan has found a way to fight it now. Gregory introduced a historical perspective also in II, 1, 12, but with a completely different aim: if in II, 1, 12 the change from the past to the present is primarily an argument in favour of Gregory's apparently generic proposal for the episcopate, the multiple references to the past in II, 1, 13 give the impression of a long history of a collective of people (α λαός), in which the bishops appear as real-life actors in the last phases.

It also adds to this sense of reality that already at the beginning of the poem the bishops are put forth as addressees. Again, this device is found also in II, 1, 12, but there it appears only towards the end, and the bulk of the poem speaks to the stock fictive counterpart of diatribe. The fictive partner helps the speaker build the argument and anticipate objections, but the partner has no character or consistency of his own. The bishops of II, 1, 13 (as well as those of II, 1, 10), on the other hand, are at the same time addressed and described, so that they are unmistakably linked to the matter at hand. What is said is said of real, present people, though still treated as a collective and not as outright characters.

The bishop appears as an addressee also in Ephrem's poems, in particular in *CN* 17–21. Here, the poet gives voice to the community to praise the prelate. These poems are the ones that correspond most closely to the genre of the "mirror", in which one speaks to a high official (a king, for example, or a bishop) of the characteristics and duties of an ideal representative of his office, ostensibly to praise those characteristics



in the addressee but allusively to enjoin him to exhibit them. So, if the bishop described by *CN* 17–21 is nominally the addressee Abraham, in reality what is represented is an ideal image at which Abraham should aim. This process, however, is not developed rigidly: moments of Abraham's personal history are indeed told in the poems, which do not lose their link to reality. In this compromise we see the poet's ability to combine the need to express a message with an acknowledgement of the concrete situation of performance which required personalised praises for the addressee. These could, after all, function as a *captatio benevolentiae*.

Finally, *CN* 13–16 present yet another literary strategy. Here, the ideal bishop is divided, so to speak, into the three real bishops of Nisibis: Jacob, Babu, and Valgash. To give a character to each of these and to differentiate them from one another, Ephrem does not rely on the normal instruments of literary characterisation, such as the description of outward looks, direct speech from the character, or description of the inner workings of his mind. The poet is, after all, part of the picture, as he refers to himself at least once here and twice in *CN* 17–21; therefore, he cannot cast himself as omniscient narrator. Instead, each of the three bishop is allotted a set of virtues from the ideal bishop: Jacob is stern and ascetic, Babu is charitable and generous, and Valgash is meek and capable of teaching. Of these three, only Valgash is described with some depth and emerges as a longtime ascetic, sweet and maybe a bit shy, but also a capable preacher. This method results in an admittedly rigid characterisation: Ephrem seems less interested in the human substance of his bishops and more in the historical scheme their threefold succession represents. The impression is warranted by a closer reading of the poems: episcopal succession is indeed the main theme he wants to expound in these *madrāšē*, as we shall see in the next chapter.

## 4 Ephrem's Themes: The Bishop as the March of History Through the Community

### 4.1 *Yubbālā*

Of all the themes treated by Ephrem, the most important is no doubt *yubbālā*, because it is not merely a topic of discussion among others but is the very ideological grid through which all other themes are seen, to the point that the concept even works as a literary or formal principle in Ephrem's discourse. Therefore, it is essential to the comprehension of CN 13–21. First, I will try to define the concept in relation to the word *yubbālā*, the proper term used to express it, and then I will examine its use in legitimising bishops, making sense of historical changes, and, finally, in structuring the whole of CN 13–21 and connecting this corpus with the other poems written on Nisibis (CN 1–12; *hymn. c. Iulian.*). This way, the present research connects with the latest treatment of *yubbālā* in Ephrem, that of Papoutsakis<sup>1</sup>: this was primarily concerned with kingly succession, whereas I will analyse priestly succession in the case of Nisibis; but the two systems of succession are closely linked, as shall be clear at the end of the section.

The term *yubbālā*, used by Ephrem most often to express the succession of bishops, has a wealth of different meanings<sup>2</sup>: the basic idea is that of an orderly augmentation or succession, as demonstrated by the generic meanings “diffusion”, “series, order,” and “course” (especially of heavenly bodies)<sup>3</sup>; this idea is particularly productive in the field of blood ties, taking the meanings of “propagation” (of a race, tribe, or family)<sup>4</sup>, “reproduction,” and “descent, family”; for our aims, it is important to note its more abstract usage as “succession”, “handing down,” and “tradition”, a usage strongly associated with priestly succession. After all, the metaphor of genealogy applied to episcopal succession is common in different Christian cultures<sup>5</sup>. Finally, an interesting meaning is that of an “era”,

1 Papoutsakis 2017, 80–93. Papoutsakis' arguments are discussed in the notes to §4.1.2.

2 *yabbel(w) w-'ašlem(w)* (CN 13, 1, 3); *yubbālēn* (CN 13, 7, 1); *yubbāl-ēh* (CN 13, 10, 3); *yubbālā* (CN 13, 13, 5); *ṭakkes ... 'allāhā yubbālā-y* (CN 16, 14, 1–2); *yubbālā w-ṭeksā* (CN 16, 22, 2; note that in Beck 1961a, 45 the points on these words seem to be inverted: *yubbālā* has a point *above* the *waw* instead of below and *ṭeksā* has a point *below* the *kāf* instead of above); *yubbāl-dargay-hōn* (CN 17, 3, 4).

3 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1549, s.v. ܝܒܒܐܠܐ gives as basic meaning: *ordo, series, successio, consequentia rerum quum alia aliam ordine excipiat*. For the meaning of “course” for the heavenly bodies: Sokoloff 2009, 568, s.v. ܝܒܒܐܠܐ. See also the biblical word *yablā* of the same root (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1539, s.v. ܝܒܠܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 561, s.v. ܝܒܠܐ).

4 The examples related by Sokoloff 2009, 567, s.v. ܝܒܒܐܠܐ, under the meaning “propagation” (§1), are specified by the terms “tribe” (*šarbtā*), “generation” (*dārā*) and “race” (*gensā*).

5 Priestly succession is the first extra-biblical meaning given by Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1540 s.v. ܝܒܒܐܠܐ, §1.a. For the genealogical metaphor applied to episcopal succession, see, for example: *edant ergo origines ecclesiarum suarum ... Perinde utique et ceterae exhibent quos ab apostolis in episcopatum constitutos apostolici seminis traduces habeant. ... tamen in eadem fide conspirantes non minus apostoli-*

“epoch,” or “period” in history, a usage clearly implying a concept of history as composed of different periods of time in succession<sup>6</sup>. Given this semantic profile, Ephrem uses the word very aptly, not only because it is his specialised word for the episcopal succession but also because of its relationship with terms expressing order and movement in time, such as *ṭeksā* (“order”, Gr. τάξις), *dargā* (“degree”, “rank”) and *zabnā* (“time”, “epoch”). These terms appear sometimes together with *yubbālā*, sometimes in contexts implying episcopal succession (see note 1)<sup>7</sup>: if *yubbālā* expresses the succession in time of the episcopal ministry and the ties of succession, these words express the corresponding movement in time of the community or its hierarchical articulation. Note, however, that these terms are more generic, as they can refer to the “steps” in an ecclesiastical career (e.g., *CN* 15, 7, 1) or to phases of growth in the Nisibene church (e.g., *CN* 16, 10, 1; cf. with the synonymic *b-zabn-eh* in 12, 2; 4) or even to the different components of the diocese (e.g., *ṭakkes* in *CN* 19, 3, 3–4; *ṭukkās-āk* and *darg-eh* in *CN* 21, 10, 4; 8). As we shall see, they describe the same phenomenon under two different points of view, that of the bishop and that of the community.

Scholars of Ephrem’s theology have already recognised the fundamental role of apostolic succession in his ecclesiology, especially as regards the legitimization of church hierarchy. In fact, Ephrem develops his doctrine of apostolic succession precisely as a response to claims on the Christian legacy concurrent with and opposed to those of the great church. As pointed out by Griffith, apostolic succession is one of the “signs of the true church” Ephrem mentions against those he deems heretics; in his confrontation with different communities, and especially those that claimed to possess a secret tradition, parallel to that of the Great Church, Ephrem came to appreciate the institutional and visible character of the church, guaranteed by apostolic succession<sup>8</sup>. This argumentative path closely follows problems and solutions already experienced by the church in the West. Moreover, legitimization by διαδοχή is a recurring theme in different cultural institutions that may have influenced or have been influenced by the Syriac church.

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*cae deputantur pro consanguinitate doctrinae.* (Tert. *praescr.* 32, 1; 3; 6); the Greek equivalent of *yubbālā*, διαδοχή, applies indifferently to genealogical and episcopal successions as per Lampe 1961, 346–347, s.v. διαδοχή 3.b and 7.

<sup>6</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1540, s.v. ܐܒܐܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 567–568, s.v. ܐܒܐܐ. My discussion follows more or less Sokoloff’s entry, which gives more prominence to the meanings related to blood ties (§1–4 of his entry) and conflates the senses of “succession” and “tradition” under §5 of his entry, reserving the more generic meanings for the last entries (§6–9). Payne Smith’s approach is the opposite: he distinguishes the two basic meanings of *successio* (§1) and *traditio* (§2), divided into sub-meanings, so that *successio* is distinguished as “priestly succession” (§a), “chronological order” (§β) and “genealogy” (§γ). Payne Smith gives also the meanings of “translation” (*versio*, *translatio*, §3) and “derivation”, “origin” (§4).

<sup>7</sup> *ʿašlem* (*CN* 13, 1, 3; *CN* 17, 6, 1; *CN* 19, 6, 6; *CN* 21, 3, 10); *ṭukkās-eh* (*CN* 13, 10, 4); *durrāg-eh* (*CN* 13, 10, 5); *ṭukkāsē* (*CN* 13, 15, 1); *ba-dreg/b-dargā* (*CN* 14, 15, 1; 3; 5; *CN* 16, 10, 1); *b-dargēn dargēn* (*CN* 14, 17, 2); *darg-eh* (*CN* 15, 7, 1); *darg-āh* (*CN* 15, 17, 4); *dargē* (*CN* 15, 20, 3; *CN* 16, 19, 1); *ṭakkes* (*CN* 16, 14, 1); *dargā* (*CN* 16, 17, 1); *ṭeksā* (*CN* 16, 22, 2); *ʿēšammli* (*CN* 17, 2, 8); *dargay-hōn* (*CN* 17, 3, 4).

<sup>8</sup> The fundamental contribution is Griffith 1999. See also: Murray 2006, 178–187; Bou Mansour 2019, 527–537.

As for other theological themes, the similarities are striking, but it remains difficult to prove a direct influence for lack of material. Anyway, it is worth noting that Ephrem's themes are not an exception but a shared legacy across wide areas of the ancient church and beyond<sup>9</sup>. In the Western sphere, adopting the language of philosophical διαδοχαί, Christians not only shored up doctrinal unity against schismatic attitudes, but they also presented themselves in terms comprehensible to the Greek world, as a philosophical school. The importance of apostolic succession is demonstrated by this: save for one passage<sup>10</sup>, in our poems Ephrem treats episcopal consecration (and especially the imposition of hands) not primarily as the conferring of a charisma from God, but as the transmission of a service, charisma, or title already present in the predecessor; hence, as we have already noted (§3.3.1), in poetry Ephrem represents the predecessor as consecrating his successor, although this would be impossible under canonical law<sup>11</sup>.

#### 4.1.1 *Yubbālā* justifying difference

Yet in our poems the legitimating function of *yubbālā* works differently from this traditional model. Scholars have based their analysis of Ephrem's idea of succession chiefly on the *Poems on Faith* and *Against the Heretics*, in which the poet confronts different religious communities and defends the church as such; but the *CN* have a different audience and function, being addressed to the community and treating internal matters. This different focus is shown also in the fact that most occurrences of *yubbālā* and derivatives (six out of seven) are found in the poems on Valgash (*CN* 13–16), whereas the generic praise of Abraham (*CN* 17–21) is less keen on this theme. In fact, *CN* 13–16 are an apology for Valgash in front of the community for something unexpected and new that the bishop had

<sup>9</sup> For the Christian concept of Apostolic succession, see: 1Clem. 44:1–2; Iren. *haer.* 3, 2, 2-3; 4, 26, 2; Hegesippus quoted by Eusebius at *h. e.* 4, 22, 2–3; Caspar 1926; Klauser 1974. One of the first Greek authors translated in Syriac, Eusebius of Caesarea, gave pride of place to episcopal lists and successions in his *Church History*, as he himself explains in the preface to the same work: Τὰς τῶν ἱερῶν ἀποστόλων διαδοχὰς (*myabblānwātā* in the Syriac version) σὺν καὶ τοῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς διηγουμένοις χρόνοις κτλ. (*Eus. h. e.* 1, 1, 1). The succession of teachers was crucial to many ancient institutions of learning, beginning with Greek philosophical schools (see Glucker 1978, 306–322, 344–373; Lynch 1972, 49, 63, 177–190) and the Musaeum (e.g., the list of librarians at P. Oxy. 1241), to the School of Nisibis in the Syriac sphere (see Becker 2006, 13–15, 51, 107–110, 218n86): so crucial that later adherents to the ideas often invented uninterrupted successions. A correct succession of witnesses becomes even a scholarly principle for ancient Jewish scholars (see Bickerman 2007) and in the transmission of Muhammad's hadiths (see Burton 1994, 106–156; Dickinson 2001, 53–56, 80–126).

<sup>10</sup> “The gift that was bestowed upon you / from on high descended floating: // do not name it in the name of a man, / nor hang it on to a different power; // since no one can reach its place. / The cunning Satan can convince, // that 'twas men who gave it to you, / but, since that gift is born free, // let only slavery serve men. / **Blessed is he who made his gift descend!**” (*CN* 17, 10). Anyways, divine agency and charisma are never excluded, even when they are not at the forefront of Ephrem's representation (see §3.2.1).

<sup>11</sup> See also the discussion on the imposition of hands at Bou Mansour 2019, 365–369.

introduced and that had upset some people in the congregation (see §4.2); in this context, it is understandable that Ephrem wanted to highlight the elements of continuity with the previous bishops. Hence, the poet saw in *yubbālā* a good argument to shore up Valgash's authority *even though* his approach was different from that of his predecessors. As a consequence, the poet does not treat *yubbālā* as something to demonstrate, or even to assert, in the face of those who did not accept it, but rather as an accepted notion useful in building a defence. He explicitly states this in the opening and the closing of Valgash's cycle:

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12 “Three priests dazzling / in likeness of the two luminaries, // in shifting transmitted [*yabbel(w) w-’aslem(w)*] one to the next / throne, hand, and diocese. // Great is our mourning of the two, / but the last is truly our comfort. /// He, who created the two luminaries, / chose for himself these three luminaries // and fixed them in the threefold / dusk of the past sieges. // As that couple of luminaries were quenched, / truly the last blazed. /// Three priests, three treasurers, / who steadfast keep // the key of threeness, / three gates opened up for us, // each one of them with his key / opened his gate in his time [*b-zabn-eh*].”

13 “As much [*luqbal*] as she lacked in her need, / to her need came fulfilment: // her parents apt to [*’a(y)k*] her birth / and her teachers apt to her notions, // her nourishment apt to her growth / and her clothing apt to her stature. /// Grace gave all these things / and weighed [*taqlat*] them as on scales [*b-massa’tā*], // put them in comparison [*b-puḥḥāmā*] / that from them help might come, // extended them in succession [*b-yubbālā*] / that from them perfection might come.”

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ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ (CN 16, 14–15; 21–22)	22 ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ <sup>15</sup> ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

These passages, especially CN 13, 1–3 and CN 16, 21–22, seem to work as a frame, encircling the poem cycle on Valgash (CN 13–16); that they were meant by Ephrem to function thus cannot be conclusively proved due to the accidents of tradition (see §1.1.2), but some literary elements go in this direction. First, these passages treat the theme of continuity among the three bishops explicitly, thereby founding and justifying the discourse of difference developed by the poet *inside* the cycle: for, without these key passages, Ephrem's highlighting of the difference of the bishops would not work as a reinforcement of their continuity, as it does, but would merely confirm the discontinuity perceived by the community. Second, the passages in CN 13 and CN 16 share the same lexicon: not only the word *yubbālā* and derivatives, which occur only here and once in CN 17 (see note 1), but most importantly, the words expressing a proportionality between bishop and community<sup>16</sup>.

From the point of view of content, these passages present a narrative that may be summed up as follows: the three bishops passed their office from one to the other; this happened in accordance with the will of God, who disposed the bishops in time so as to provide the greatest benefit to the growing community of Nisibis, and in this sense

14 “Look then how God / framed my generations [*takkes yubbālā-y*] // through the pastors I had, / and through the teachers he gave me, // and through the fathers he numbered for me. /// For balanced with their times [*tqilīn ‘am zabnay-hōn*] / were the merits of their characters, // through the one who was right [*zādeq*], awe, / through the one who was fit [*phāšeḥ*], consolation, // through the one who was proper [*wālē*], humiliation.”

15 “Blessed is he who, as with a scale [*b-massa’tā*], / weighed [*tqal*] and gave me fathers, // who were my aids according to my ages [*luqbal zabna-y*], / my physicians according [*luqbal*] to my illnesses, // my adornment according to my beauties! /// It is we now, who overthrow/ this beautiful succession and order [*yubbālā w-ṭeksā*], // since in the time [*b-zabnā*] of mildness, / lo!, we are begging toughness, // which may rebuke us as children.”

16 *luqbal* both at CN 13, 12, 1 and at CN 16, 21, 3–5; *tqal b-massa’tā* both at CN 13, 13, 2 and CN 16, 21, 1–2; metaphor of weighing and balance both at CN 13, 13, 3 and CN 16, 15, 1; *zabnā* at CN 13, 3, 6 and CN 16, 15, 1; 21, 3; 22, 3.

it can be said that the bishops were “proportional” to the community. Therefore, the last bishop is not only legitimate but even appropriate for the current situation (see *CN* 13, 1, 5–6; 2, 5–6). This narration serves to justify the differences between the bishops, as already noted, differences that will be highlighted and elaborated in the rest of the poems. A comparison with the poems on Abraham can corroborate this statement. Even though the word *yubbālā* appears only once and in a doubtful context (see §2.2.1.4), the theme of succession is not at all absent in these poems; however, it is treated in a different manner from *CN* 13–16. Ephrem treats the theme with the literary devices of the iconographical metaphor, of the reference to paradigmatic biblical successions, such as that of Joshua to Moses or Elisha to Elijah. Sometimes, he represents the relationship of predecessor and successor as that of teacher and pupil and assigns to the two prelates virtues that are synonymous<sup>17</sup>. As regards biblical models, it is worth noting their different usage in the poems aimed at defending *yubbālā* against the heretics, in particular *hymn. haer.* 22–25: in the poems against heretics, biblical transmissions of power are mentioned as material antecedents of the same transmission of power at work in the church; in the *CN* they have only a paradigmatic function, as a representation of how a transmission of power according to God’s will should look and also as a legitimation by way of analogy (and not of equivalence) of the transmission at work in the particular case of Valgash and Abraham. Anyway, all the aforementioned devices tend to assimilate the successor to his predecessor, and the poet reassures his community that even though the bishop has changed, practically nothing will change. Even when the theme of differences among the bishops emerges, it is limited to the already established narrative of the three bishops Jacob, Babu, and Valgash, whereas Abraham has no distinguishing feature and at most is urged to unite in himself the features of those predecessors<sup>18</sup>. This different approach may be due to the fact that Abraham was freshly consecrated, so that he had not yet had the occasion to show any personal trait in office. Yet, even so, Ephrem’s approach in *CN* 17–21 shows that continuity between predecessor and successor and their tendential sameness were the default expectation for a new bishop, with difference being the exception. In this context, the differences highlighted in *CN* 13–16 may be less an artistic choice by Ephrem and more a matter of fact that the poet endeavours to justify because his audience finds it problematic.

Naturally, this does not exclude the possibility that the differences between Jacob, Babu, and Valgash, as they are represented in Ephrem’s poem, were also the result of an artistic elaboration of the facts. As we have already seen (§3.1.4.3; §3.1.5), the three bishops are each characterised by a peculiar virtue, even though all these virtues should be present in an ideal bishop. It is likely that a good deal of stylisation is at work in those passages, because the whole tenure of a bishop will hardly be reduced

<sup>17</sup> Iconographic imagery: *CN* 17, 11–12; *CN* 18, 1–2; §2.2.3.3. Moses and Joshua: *CN* 19, 6; §2.2.1.3; §2.2.4.6 n. 324; §3.3.1.2. Elijah and Elisha: *CN* 17, 2, 6; *CN* 19, 8; *CN* 21, 2; §3.3.1.2. Bishop as pupil of his predecessor: *CN* 17, 1, 8–9; 2, 5. Synonymic virtues: *CN* 18, 1; §3.2.1.

<sup>18</sup> *CN* 17, 11 (but note the lacuna at line 9); *CN* 19, 15–16.

to one achievement or virtue in reality, but Ephrem's simplification must have taken into account shared perceptions and memories of the community. Indeed, the signs of a literary elaboration of personal differences are very clear, since Ephrem does build a discourse on differences with peculiar forms. These forms have already been partly examined in §3.1.4.3, where I have observed the different moral virtues assigned to the three bishops in relation to the stage of development of the community in *CN* 13, 8–9; *CN* 14, 18–19; *CN* 16, 17–19. However, analogous structures are much more widespread in the poems, especially in *CN* 13–16. In essence, they can be described thus: Ephrem exploits the metrical structure of the stanzas, with their parallel *cola*, to create in each stanza an almost tabular comparison of the three bishops in their relationship with the state of the congregation as they ministered to it. This can be seen better in *CN* 13–14, because the stanzas are composed of three lines, each divided into two *cola* of seven syllables each; the odd-numbered *cola* establish the subject—namely, which bishop is meant—always in chronological order, whereas the even-numbered ones predicate something concerning his tenure. Each even-numbered *colon* responds to its odd-numbered one horizontally, and even- and odd-numbered lines are “vertically” parallel: this structure can be observed in my tabularisation of some stanzas at §3.1.4.3. Within the constraints of this rigid structure, the poet carves a space of variation through word choice, showing off a quantity of synonyms for the same word or piling up terms of the same root but different meaning; sometimes, minimal variations of the pattern are introduced, especially in the last lines. It is likely that what was appreciated as “poetry” was indeed this artful preservation of a rhythmic and syntactic pattern with a continuous variation of words. Furthermore, these stanzas, being similarly built, can also be read (especially in their written form) “vertically” as describing each one of the three bishops. This is what I intend to do with the following table:

	Jakob		Babu		Valgash	
	Odd	Even	Odd	Even	Odd	Even
<b>CN 13, 4</b>	<i>b-qadmāyā</i> <i>ptaḥ-wā</i> <i>tar'ā</i>	<i>l-mardūtā</i> <i>d-'etāt 'alay-n</i>	<i>b-meš'āyā</i> <i>ptaḥ-wā tar'ā</i>	<i>l-malkūtā</i> <i>d-neḥtat</i> <i>šēday-n</i>	<i>ba-(')hrāyā</i> <i>ptaḥ-wā tar'ā</i>	<i>la-sbartā</i> <i>d-selqat</i> <i>šēday-n</i>
<b>CN 13, 5</b>	<i>b-qadmāyā</i> <i>tar'ā</i> <i>ptaḥ-wā</i>	<i>la-qrābā</i> <i>d-kenšē tray-</i> <i>hōn</i>	<i>b-meš'āyā</i> <i>tar'ā ptaḥ-wā</i>	<i>l-malkē d-rūḥē</i> <i>tartay-hēn</i>	<i>ba-tlītāyā</i> <i>ptaḥ tar'ā</i>	<i>d-'izgaddē</i> <i>d-gabbē</i> <i>tray-hōn</i>
<b>CN 13, 6</b>	<i>b-qadmāyā</i> <i>ptaḥ tar'ā</i>	<i>la-qrābā meṭṭūl</i> <i>ḥawbē</i>	<i>b-meš'āyā</i> <i>ptaḥ tar'ā</i>	<i>l-malkē meṭṭūl</i> <i>taktūšā</i>	<i>ba-(')hrāyā</i> <i>ptaḥ tar'ā</i>	<i>l-'izgaddē</i> <i>meṭṭūl rahmē</i>
<b>CN 13, 14</b>	<i>b-yawmāt-eh</i> <i>d-haw</i> <i>qadmāyā</i>	<i>saggī šaynā</i> <i>wa-gmar šaynā</i>	<i>b-yawmāt-eh</i> <i>d-haw</i> <i>meš'āyā</i>	<i>nḥet(w) malkē</i> <i>wa-sleq(w)</i> <i>malkē</i>	<i>b-yawmāt-eh</i> <i>dēn da-(')</i> <i>ḥrāyā</i>	<i>tkeb(w) gaysē</i> <i>wa-psaq(w)</i> <i>gaysē</i>



(continued)

	Jakob		Babu		Valgash	
	Odd	Even	Odd	Even	Odd	Even
<b>CN 13, 15</b>	<i>b-qadmāyā</i> 'law ṭukkāsē	'law 'amm-eh wa-npaq(w) 'amm-eh	<i>b-meš'āyā</i> qgrab w-'etraḥḥaḡ	<i>tāgā d-ḥaddī</i> 'ēdt-an	<i>ba-(')ḥrāyā</i> dēn da-nḥet la-n	<i>ṭaybūtā d-lā</i> metpar'ā
<b>CN 13, 16</b>	<i>luqbal rugzā</i> <i>qadmāyā</i>	'aqreb 'aml-eh <i>d-qadmāyā</i>	<i>luqbal šawbā</i> <i>da-b-ṭahrā</i>	<i>qām ṭallāl-eh</i> <i>d-meš'āyā</i>	<i>luqbal šaynā</i> <i>ṭalōmā</i>	'asgī ('')ḥrāyā zuhhārā
<b>CN 13, 17</b>	<i>la-ḥbāšā</i> <i>qadmā</i> 'er'-eh	<i>kāhnā qadmā</i> w-naššihā	<i>la-ḥbāšā</i> <i>da-trēn</i> 'er'-eh	<i>kāhnā da-trēn</i> <i>raḥmānā</i>	<i>šalwāt-eh dēn</i> <i>da-(')ḥrāyā</i>	<i>sāg tur'āt-an</i> <i>kasyā'īt</i>
<b>CN 14, 2</b>	'amlā ṭābā <i>d-qadmāyā</i>	<i>šamd-āh l-'ar'ā</i> b-'ulšān-āh	<i>laḥm-eh</i> w-ḥamr-eh <i>d-meš'āyā</i>	<i>l-karkā 'ašb-eh</i> <i>ba-tbār-eh</i>	<i>ḥallī mert-an</i> <i>b-'ulšānā</i>	<i>maml-eh</i> <i>ḥalyā da-(')</i> <i>ḥrāyā</i>
<b>CN 14, 3</b>	<i>qadmā plaḥ</i> 'ar'ā b-'amlā	'qar menn-āh <i>ya'rā w-kubbē</i>	<i>meš'āyā</i> 'akrek sāg-āh	<i>ba-priqē syāgā</i> 'bad l-āh	('a)ḥrāyā <i>ptaḥ 'awšar-</i> <i>mār-eh</i>	<i>wa-zra' b-āh</i> <i>mellay-</i> <i>mār-āh</i>
<b>CN 14, 4</b>	<i>kāhnā</i> <i>qadmā</i> <i>b-yad-šawmā</i>	<i>tar'ē d-pūmē</i> 'eḥad-wā	<i>kāhnā da-trēn</i> <i>ba-šbayyā</i>	<i>pūmē d-kisā</i> <i>ptaḥ-wā</i>	('a)ḥrāyā dēn <i>naqqeb 'ednē</i>	<i>w-'armī</i> <i>b-ḥēn ḥešlat-</i> <i>ḥayyē</i>
<b>CN 14, 15</b>	<i>qadmā</i> <i>ba-dreg-</i> <i>tulmādā</i>	<i>maml-eh</i> <i>l-darg-eh</i> 'etdammī	<i>meš'āyā</i> <i>b-dargā</i> <i>da-trēn</i>	<i>sleq turgām-eh</i> 'al-darg-eh	('a)ḥrāyā <i>b-dargā</i> <i>da-tlātā</i>	'ireb <i>maml-eh</i> 'akwāt-eh
<b>CN 14, 16</b>	<i>qadmāyā</i> <i>ba-pšītātā</i>	<i>y(h)ab ḥalbā</i> <i>l-yallūdūt-eh</i>	<i>meš'āyā</i> <i>b-dalīlātā</i>	<i>y(h)ab-wā</i> ṭ'ūmā l- šabrūt-eh	<i>tlītāyā</i> <i>ba-gmīrātā</i>	<i>y(h)ab 'uklā</i> <i>la-gmīrūt-eh</i>
<b>CN 14, 17, 4–6</b>	<i>šabrā hwāt</i> 'am-qadmāyā		<i>pšītā hwāt</i> 'am-meš'āyā		<i>'etgamrat ba-tlītāyā</i>	
<b>CN 14, 18</b>	<i>qadmāyā</i> 'a(y)k <i>la-šbartā</i>	<i>mḥabbab-wā</i> <i>wa-mdahḥal-wā</i>	<i>meš'āyā</i> 'a(y)k <i>la-ṭlītā</i>	<i>kā'ē-wā</i> <i>wa-mḥaddē-wā</i>	('a)ḥrāyā 'a(y) <i>k da-l-mallptā</i>	<i>hwā l-āh</i> <i>nyāḥā</i> <i>w-bassīmā</i>
<b>CN 14, 19</b>	'āp rmā šēd <i>ba(r)t-ya'qōb</i>	<i>šedlā w- šabtā</i> <i>l-ṭalyūt-āh</i>	<i>wa-l-ḥuṣpā</i> <i>wa-'laymūt-āh</i>	<i>šawtep saypā</i> <i>w-nāmōsā</i>	<i>w-'a(y)</i> <i>k la-rdītā</i> <i>w-mallptā</i>	'etā l-āh <i>nyāḥā</i> <i>w-bassīmā</i> <sup>F</sup>
<b>CN 14, 20</b>	<i>qadmā</i> <i>d-īled</i> <i>mar'ītā</i>	ṭ'en 'ubbā <i>yallūdūt-āh</i>	<i>meš'āyā pšīḥ-</i> <i>paršōpā</i>	<i>našsar</i> <i>w-'apšar</i> <i>ṭalyūt-āh</i>	('a)ḥrāyā <i>yaqqīr-</i> <i>paršōpā</i>	<i>hā mankep</i> <i>la-'laymūt-āh</i>
<b>CN 14, 21</b>	<i>kāhnā</i> <i>qadmāyā</i> <i>d-īled</i>	<i>y(h)ab ḥalbā</i> <i>l-yallūdūt-āh</i>	<i>kāhnā</i> <i>meš'āyā</i> <i>targem</i>	<i>wa-y(h)</i> <i>ab ṭ'ūmā l-</i> <i>šabrūt-eh</i>	<i>kāhnā</i> <i>da-tlātā tarsī</i>	<i>w-y(h)</i> <i>ab 'uklā</i> <i>la-ḥlīmūt-āh</i>

(continued)

	Jakob		Babu		Valgash	
	Odd	Even	Odd	Even	Odd	Even
<b>CN 14, 22</b>	<i>'abā kaššīrā</i> <i>w-qadmāyā</i>	<i>sām sīmātā</i> <i>l-šabrūt-āh</i>	<i>meš'āyā</i> <i>la-gmīrūt-āh</i>	<i>'asgī zwādē</i> <i>l-mardīt-āh</i>	<i>tlītāyā zaytā</i> <i>hdīrā</i>	<i>'asgī mešhā</i> <i>b-mān-ēh</i>
<b>CN 14, 23</b>	<i>mā da-mṭāt</i> <i>šēd-'attīrā</i>	<i>mḥawwyā</i> <i>gazz-eh</i> <i>d-qadmāyā</i>	<i>mā da-mṭāt</i> <i>šēd-pārōqā</i>	<i>mḥawwyā</i> <i>priqē</i> <i>d-meš'āyā</i>	<i>mā d-nepqat</i> <i>l-'ura'-ḥatnā</i>	<i>mḥawwyā</i> <i>mešhā</i> <i>d-nahhīr-ēh</i>
<b>CN 14, 24</b>	<i>qdām-haw</i> <i>pāra' l-le'yā</i>	<i>mqarreb</i> <i>'aml-eh</i> <i>d-qadmāyā</i>	<i>qdām-haw</i> <i>rāhem-</i> <i>yāhōbē</i>	<i>mqarreb zedqē</i> <i>d-meš'āyā</i>	<i>qdām-</i> <i>haw dā'en</i> <i>yullpānē</i>	<i>mqarreb</i> <i>drāšē da-(')</i> <i>ḥrāyā</i>
<b>CN 16, 16, 2–5</b>	<i>l-ṭalyūt-(y)</i>	<i>'asrah surrādā</i>	<i>'āp la-'laymūt-(y)</i>	<i>duḥḥālā</i>	<i>l-hakkīmūt-(y)</i> <i>wa-l-</i> <i>pārōšūt-(y)</i>	<i>'asrah y(h)ab</i> <i>lāh mukkākā</i>
<b>CN 16, 17–9</b>	<i>b- ḥūspā</i> <i>w-dargā</i> <i>d-ṭalyūtā</i>	<i>mrabbyānā</i> <i>dḥilā hwā l-ī</i>	<i>'abbā 'ḥrēnā y(h)ab</i> <i>la-'laymūt-(y)</i>		<i>kad 'et'allēt</i> <i>men dargē</i>	<i>d-ṭalyūtā</i> <i>wa-'laymūtā</i>
	<i>šabt-eh zagr-an(y)</i>	<i>men šebyā</i>	<i>d-'īt hwā b-ī</i> <i>men ṭalyūtā</i>	<i>'īt hwā b-eh</i> <i>men qašyūtā</i>	<i>'bar surrādā</i>	<i>qadmāyā</i>
	<i>w-men surḥānā</i>	<i>surrād-eh</i>	<i>d-'īt hwā b-ī</i> <i>men saybūtā</i>	<i>'īt hwā b-eh</i> <i>makkikūtā</i>	<i>'bar duḥḥālā</i>	<i>tinyānā</i>
	<i>w-men punnāqā</i>	<i>duḥḥāl-eh</i>			<i>y(h)ab l-ī rā'yā</i>	<i>bassimā</i>
<b>CN 17, 11, 6–8</b>	<i>tehwē l-an šūrā</i>	<i>'a(y)k ya'qōb</i>	<i>wa-mlē-rahmā</i>	<i>'a(y)k babū</i>	<i>w-gazzā d-mellē</i>	<i>'a(y)k</i> <i>walgaš</i>
<b>CN 19, 16</b>	<i>kāhnā ya'qōb</i> <i>naššīḥā/</i> <i>'amm-eh</i> <i>nšaḥt</i> <i>'akwāt-eh</i>	<i>d-šawtep</i> <i>ḥubb-eh</i> <i>la-ṭnān-eh/</i> <i>dehlā w-ḥubbā</i> <i>'et'ṭept</i>	<i>b-babū</i> <i>rāhem-</i> <i>zedqātā</i>	<i>b-kespā praqt</i> <i>l-šebyā</i>	<i>b-walgaš</i> <i>sāper-</i> <i>nāmōsā</i>	<i>lebb-āh ptaḥt</i> <i>la- ktābē</i>

The table makes clear the artful variations of the basic scheme of triple “call” (odd-numbered lines) and “response” (even-numbered lines), with the indication of time period and bishop in the odd-numbered and the predication in the even-numbered lines: the structure is firmly established by CN 13, 4–6, the most regular stanzas, and then reprised and constantly varied until passages like CN 16, 17–19 and CN 19, 16, where the structure is still recognizable but very different. The regular structure of CN 13, 4–6 is enhanced by the similarity of all the odd-numbered lines, employing constantly the same lexical material (*b-qadmāyā/meš'āyā/(a)ḥrāyā; ptaḥ; tar'ā*). The even-numbered lines, though lexically more diverse, are structurally identical, with the exception of CN 13, 4, 2, which

also has sounds similar to those in lines 4 and 6 of the same stanza (*‘etāt* vs. *neḥtat-selqat*; *‘alay-n* vs. *ṣēday-n* x2). Furthermore, the “call and response” structure of the couplets is often enhanced by repetitions (*‘law*, CN 13, 15, 1–2; *qadmāyā*, 16, 1–2; *qadmā*, 17, 1–2; *da-trēn*, 2–3; *ḥallī/ḥalyā*, CN 14, 2, 5–6; *pūmē*, 3, 2; 3, 4; *dargā*, 15, 1–5; *pārōqā/prīqē*, 23, 3–4; *ḥubbā*, CN 19, 16, 3–4). In the following stanzas, either the first couplet or the third tends to deviate from the scheme. This happens already in CN 13, 5, 5, different from 5, 3 and 6, 5 and with the *d-* for *l-* in CN 13, 5, 6. The deviation can be a minor one. Among the varied third repetitions, for example, we find *dēn* instead of *d-haw* at CN 13, 14, 1; 3; 5, and we find a passive verb and the bishop as agent instead of a nominal predicate and the bishop introduced by *‘am* in CN 14, 16, 4–6; *nepqat l-‘ura* is a variation of *māt ṣēd* in CN 14, 23, 1; 3; 5. Among variations in the first iteration are the relative clause instead of participle at the construct state in CN 14, 20, 1; 3; 5 and *sām* instead of *‘asgī* in CN 14, 22, 1; 3; 5. Sometimes, the first or third long line has a completely different structure. Among third iterations, in CN 13, 16, 6, the bishop is the subject and not the specification of another noun as in the other even-numbered lines; in CN 13, 17 the last couplet does away with the vocabulary of the preceding couplets and has the bishop as modifier instead of subject; CN 14, 2, 5–6 inverts the habitual content of the odd- and even-numbered lines; CN 14, 4, 5–6 passes from the “mouths”, *pūmē*, of the previous lines to the “ears”, *‘ednē*, and doubles the predicates of the subject; CN 14, 15, 6 does not repeat the word *dargā* as do the other cases in the same stanza; CN 14, 19, 6 has two adjectives and a copula instead of the two participles each of lines 2 and 4; CN 16, 16 has one line each for Jacob and Babu, whereas Valgash alone has two lines. Among first repetitions, CN 14, 19, 1–2 differ from the other couplets in the number and order of complements; at CN 19, 16, Jacob’s lines are four; and Babu’s and Valgash’s two for each. In one case, Babu, the second bishop, is described with a different structure—namely, one line and two couplets at CN 16, 18—as opposed to the single couplet with three lines of CN 16, 17 and 19. These groupings are created by repeated structures such as *w-men* at CN 16, 17 and *‘it hwā b-... men* of CN 16, 18. Other times the poet compresses the structure from three couplets to three one-liners (CN 14, 17, 4–6; CN 16, 16, 2–5; CN 17, 11, 6–8); otherwise, he can invert the order, placing the predication in the odd-numbered lines and the subject (the bishops) in the even numbered (CN 13, 16–17; CN 14, 23–24). Finally, we must note the repetition of whole lines, deliberately always with a little change (CN 13, 4–6, 1; 3; 5; CN 13, 16, 2 and CN 14, 24, 2; CN 14, 16, 2; 4; 6 and CN 14, 21, 2; 4; 6). The gamut of possible variations is rich and sophisticated.

Besides syntax and metre, another important aesthetic parameter is vocabulary. One obvious device is repetition throughout different stanzas. Jacob is called *qadmāyā* fourteen times (once as *kāhnā qadmāyā*, CN 14, 21, 1) and *qadmā* five (twice *kāhnā qadmā*, CN 13, 17, 2 and CN 14, 4, 1). Babu is *mes’āyā* seventeen times no less (once *kāhnā mes’āyā*, CN 14, 21, 3), and only twice *kāhnā da-trēn*. Valgash, similarly, is (*‘a*) *ḥrāyā* thirteen times, *tlitāyā* four; only once *kāhnā da-tlātā* (CN 14, 21, 5) and *nahhīr-ēh* (CN 14, 23, 6). The greater uniformity of Babu’s names show him to be less significant than Jacob and Valgash. The situation changes in CN 16, where the bishops are either

only hinted at through their features (CN 16, 16: *surrādā*, *duḥḥālā* and *mukkākā*) or identified through unique expressions (CN 16, 17–19: *mrabbyānā dhīlā* for Jacob; *'abbā 'hrēnā* for Babu; *rā'yā bassīmā* for Valgash). Here, the antithesis is clearly between the “dreadful” (*dhīlā*) Jacob and the “sweet” (*bassīmā*) Valgash, whereas Babu finds himself only as “the other one” (*'hrēnā*). Finally, it seems relevant that the bishops are called by their personal names only in the poems on Abraham (CN 17 and 19). This may be due to a change in perspective: whereas in CN 13–16 (and CN 13–14 most of all) the three bishops were mostly seen in their historical succession, in CN 17–21 they are mostly seen as three equally valid models for Abraham, and their being one *after* the other is not thematised as relevant to their being one *different* from the other.

Apart from repetition of the “names” of the bishops, we may distinguish the terms predicated of them—namely, those that define their features and achievements—from the terms signalling the context in which those achievements have matured. Among the latter, a distinction must be drawn between CN 13 and CN 14, 2–4 on one side and the rest of the stanzas on the other, because while the rest of the stanzas put the succession of bishops in relation with the spiritual progress of the community, the first occurrences, and in particular CN 13, relate episcopal activities to the military and political history of Nisibis. Indeed, in CN 13, 4–6 and 14–6 the context of each bishop is very clear: the war for Jacob (*qrābā*, also *marḏūtā*, *ṭukkāsā*, *gmar šaynā*), the coming of the two emperors (the Persian and the Roman) for Babu (*malkūtā*, *malkē*, *tāgā*), and the peace embassies for Valgash (*sbartā*, *'izgaddē*, *psaq(w) gaysē*, *ṭaybūtā*, *šaynā*). In CN 13, 17 and CN 14, 2, instead, the reality of the Persian sieges involves all three bishops: in CN 13, 17, 1 and 3 with the word *ḥbāšā* (cf. also CN 13, 2) and in line 6 with *tar'ā*; in CN 14, 2 *b-'ulšānā* of line 5 answers to *b-'ulšān-āh* of line 2, and the word is varied with *ba-tbār-eh* in line 4. The difference in time is less clear for the terms identifying stages of development in the community. If *yallūdūtā* and related terms are reserved to Jacob, who, after all, “bore” (*īled*) the community, in CN 14, 16, 4, *šabrūtā* seems to describe a more progressed state than *yallūdūtā* (CN 14, 16, 2), but then is applied to Jacob thrice. In CN 14, 18, where Jacob relates to *šbartā*, and in CN 14, 20 with Jacob's *yallūdūtā*, Babu has *ṭlītā/ṭalyūtā*; however, the latter terms are found in relation to Jacob in CN 14, 19; CN 16, 16–17. And in this case Babu's couplet answers with *'laymūtā*. The same contrast, *ṭalyūtā/'laymūtā*, is found in CN 14, 20, this time between Babu and Valgash. With the latter, the terms *gmīrūtā/gmar* are mainly found, although in CN 14, 21, 6 Ephrem employs the synonym *ḥlīmūtā* and in CN 14, 22, 3 *gmīrūtā* accompanies Babu (with no corresponding term for Valgash). Finally, *pšītā* and cognates are repeated twice for Jacob and Babu, though they are not, strictly speaking, terms of age like the others. All these words may well be employed freely by the poet to achieve variety, and yet there seems to be a rule: terms of age form a sequence, whose order may not be inverted (although some terms may be left out). The sequence (from younger to older age) is *yallūdūtā-šabrūtā-ṭalyūtā-'laymūtā-gmīrūtā/ḥlīmūtā*. Ephrem employs the terms only as relatively different, but his use of more than one of them for the same bishop demonstrates that he does not care to create a univocal chronology. The result is that sometimes the community remains always a child (CN 14, 20),

sometimes it is already an adult under Babu (CN 14, 22), and most of the time it remains a child under Jacob and Babu, becoming sage and mature under Valgash (CN 14, 16–19; 21; CN 16, 16). Finally, CN 14, 23–24 represent yet another context, this time an eschatological one: the features of each bishop, acquired by the community in his time, are presented and put in relation with corresponding attributes of Christ in the time of judgement.

A “vertical” reading of Ephrem’s text, therefore, offers three portraits of the three bishops—something I have already sketched at §3.1.4.3. Jacob, for example, emerges as a stern but simple leader, with a strong focus on asceticism (*‘amlā*; see §3.2.1) and discipline enforced through reverence (*surrādā*, *duḥḥālā*). These features are tempered by the love he enjoyed from the community (*hubbā*): this may be connected with the traces of his preaching (*maml-eh*) preserved by Ephrem, a ministry described as simple and rudimentary (*ḥalbā*) but groundbreaking and caring, as expressed by the recurring metaphor of “birthing” (*īled*) the community. On the contrary, Valgash stands out for two main characteristics: first, he is of mild and sweet temper (*ḥalyā*, *nyāḥā*, *bassīmā*, *mukkākā*), and, second, he is a gifted preacher (*maml-eh*, *mellē*), differing from Jacob, in that he is more refined and deep, as symbolised by the metaphor of the whole food (*‘uklā*) as opposed to Jacob’s milk, by the metaphor of precious things (earrings: *ḥešlat-ḥayyē*; oil: *mešḥā*; treasures: *gazzā d-mellē*), and by the vocabulary of learning (*yullpānē*, *drāšē*). Between these two well-defined characters, Bishop Babu tends to fade. His one certain feature is almsgiving (*zedqē*, *zedqātā*), exemplified by his ransoming (*pārōqā*, *prīqē*) of prisoners of war (*šbāyyā*) from the Persians and expressed with words from the root *\*r-ḥ-m* (see §3.1.1.2). As regards his preaching, the only information available is delivered by Ephrem’s repeated metaphor of weaning (CN 14, 16; 21), where Babu’s teaching is described as *ṭ’ūmā*, as opposed to the “whole food” (*‘uklā*) of Valgash and the “milk” (*ḥalbā*) of Jacob. The term suggests something related to the act of tasting, as if Babu introduced only partially what was to come wholly with Valgash, like a “fore-taste”; however, it could also simply mean “food” or “meal”, without further connotation. In this sense, there would be no contrast with the term *‘uklā*<sup>19</sup>. The choice of a translation depends on whether we want to assign semantic significance to a lexical variation like *ṭ’ūmā/‘uklā*, and on which logical structure we see in those stanzas: if *ṭ’ūmā* were just a synonym for *‘uklā*, then Babu’s preaching would be assimilated to Valgash’s and Jacob would stand out, whereas if *ṭ’ūmā* means “foretaste”, then the idea is of a gradual progress from Jacob’s to Valgash’s preaching, with Babu preserving characteristics of both.

The same problem surfaces when we consider descriptors of Babu’s temperament all together. If sometimes the idea of a gradual ascent from Jacob’s methods based on fear to Valgash’s based on love is warranted by a description of Babu incorporating elements of

19 Cf. at Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1496, s.v. ܬܘܡܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 539–540, s.v. ܬܘܡܐ with cognate words such as *ṭa’mā* and *ṭ’amtā* at Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1497–1498; Sokoloff 2009, 543–544 and Payne Smith 1879–1901, 180, s.v. ܬܠܐܡܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 15, s.v. ܬܠܐܡܐ.

both, other times Babu tends to assimilate to one or the other bishop, and in a couple of occurrences the very order from a sterner to a more lenient style of leadership seems to be subverted. The idea of a gradual progress is suggested by expressions such as those at CN 13, 8–9. These can be compared to the following: “Grace . . . extended them in succession / that from them perfection might come” (CN 13, 13, 5–6); “She, too, growing daughter, / step by step ascended” (CN 14, 17, 1–2). Note in particular CN 16, 16–19, where stanza 16 contrasts the *ṭalyūtā* (2) under Jacob and the *ʿlaymūtā* (3) under Babu with *ḥakkīmūtā* and *pārōšūtā* under Valgash (4). In the following stanzas, Babu’s *ʿlaymūtā* (CN 16, 18, 1) entails a part of Jacob’s *ṭalyūtā* (2, cf. CN 16, 17, 1) and a part of old age (*saybūtā*, 4), being the middle step between infancy and Valgash’s maturity, in which both *ṭalyūtā* and *ʿlaymūtā* are overcome (CN 16, 19, 1–2). In these same stanzas, Babu is first described with a word strongly associated to Jacob, *duḥḥālā*, and then with one used for Valgash, *makkīkūtā*. Earlier, in CN 16, 15, 3–5, Babu represented “consolation” (*lubbābā*) after Jacob’s “fear” (*duḥḥālā*) and before Valgash’s “humility” (*mukkākā*). In the simile of the sun in CN 13, 8–9, Babu represents noon, the “strong and harsh”, “hot and harsh” (*ʿazzīzā*, *ḥammīmā*, *qašyā*, CN 13, 8, 4; 9, 3) moment, and so he is associated with midday (*šawbā da-b-ṭahrā*) in CN 13, 16, 3–4, but this time as relieving shade (*ṭallālā*). The most puzzling sequence of attributes, however, is in CN 14, 18–20: in stanza 18, both Jacob and Babu are partly stern and partly sweet (*mḥabbab-wā wa-mdahḥal-wā*, 2; *kāʿē-wā wa-mḥaddē-wā*, 4), and Valgash is completely sweet (*nyāḥā w-bassīmā*, 6); in stanza 19, Jacob is still balanced (*šedlā w- šabṭā*, 2), and Valgash still sweet (*nyāḥā w-bassīmā*, 6), but this time Babu is only stern, giving “sword and law” (*saypā w-nāmōsā*, 4); in stanza 20, Jacob acquires an almost maternal sweetness (1–2), Babu is presented with glad countenance gladdening the church (*pšīḥ-paršōpā / naṣṣar w-ʿapṣar*, 3–4) and Valgash inspires awe (*yaqqīr-paršōpā / hā mankep*, 5–6).

As we shall see (§4.2), the idea of a growth or evolution of the community, with a corresponding evolution of its leaders’ style, is crucial for Ephrem’s case, so that we would not want to do away with it on the basis of some divergent occurrences. I imagine two alternative solutions to this conundrum: either Ephrem represented more truthfully than has previously been acknowledged the complex personalities of the three bishops, adding shades to his tripartite scheme, or he lacked personal knowledge of Babu and went back and forth in his description. But if Ephrem did not know Babu well, he must have known Jacob even less. If this is the case, his detailed knowledge of Jacob’s features could derive from local traditions, given the importance and fame of this bishop for Nisibis and Syriac Christianity (see §4.3). Yet the choice of one explanation over the other depends on information we do not ultimately possess: first, we would need an alternative source on Babu’s character to compare it with Ephrem’s notions; second, we would need to know how well the memory of these bishops (especially Babu) was preserved in Nisibis, because before all rhetorical constructions and schematisations, Ephrem had to reckon with the shared memory of his community, so as not to contradict it blatantly, but rather subtly rectify or systematise it.

### 4.1.2 *Yubbālā* as theological history

As has already been said, this prolonged discourse on difference would be damning for Ephrem's case—the defence of Valgash's innovative behaviour—were it not for the framing concept of *yubbālā* and the affirmation of a “proportionality” between bishop and community. In this respect, the meaning of “epoch”, “era”, “time-period” for *yubbālā* comes in handy. The progress of the church, as well as the ebbs and flows of history, requires and therefore legitimises changes in leadership. The progress of the Nisibene community will be treated later (§4.2); here I am chiefly concerned with the relationship of ecclesiastical leadership and secular history; hence the focus will lie on the passages of *CN* 13.

Here, the succession of bishops apparently works as a frame in which military events can be ordered, as the “tabular” stanzas show very well. During Jacob's tenure, Ephrem informs us, there was peace in the beginning (*saggī šaynā*, *CN* 13, 14, 2), but then peace ended (*gmar šaynā*), and the Persian and Roman armies went to war (*qrābā d-kenšē tray-hōn*, *CN* 13, 5, 2; *tukkāsē* / *ʿlaw ʿamm-eh*, *CN* 13, 15, 1–2). More precisely, it was a siege of the city (*ḥbāšā qadmā*, *CN* 13, 17, 1). Luckily, the armies also retreated also under Jacob (*wa-npaq(w) ʿamm-eh*, *CN* 13, 15, 2), who seems to have had a part in saving the city (*CN* 13, 16, 1–2; 17, 1; *CN* 14, 2, 2; 4, 1–2). As usual, information on Babu is scanty: Ephrem highlights the presence of the two emperors, Constantius and Shapur II, in Nisibis because of the war (*CN* 13, 4, 4; 5, 4; 6, 4; 14, 4; 15, 4) and a second siege (*CN* 13, 16, 3; 17, 3; *CN* 14, 2, 4). These events probably spurred Babu to ransom the prisoners of war. Valgash was equally witness to a siege (*CN* 13, 17, 5–6; *CN* 14, 2, 5–6) and to raids (*tkeb(w) gaysē*, *CN* 13, 14, 6), but also to the end of the raids (*psaq(w) gaysē*) and, most of all, to embassies for peace between Persians and Romans (*sbartā*, *CN* 13, 4, 6; *izgaddē d-gabbē tray-hōn*, *CN* 13, 5, 6; 6, 6). As can be seen, the three bishops share, each in his time, the experience of the siege, and Ephrem explicitly draws a parallel between the three sieges and the three bishops (*CN* 13, 2)<sup>20</sup>.

The correspondence between bishops and sieges is not merely a material coincidence but becomes, in Ephrem's poems, the occasion for a reflection on history, whose plot can be read in *CN* 13. Indeed, observing the “column” of Jacob, we see that in *CN* 13, 4, 2 the term “war” (*qrābā*) of *CN* 13, 5, 2 and 6, 2 is paralleled by *mardūtā*, “instruction” but also “chastisement”, in the same metrical position. In *CN* 13, 6, 2, the poet draws a causal connection (*meṭṭūl*) between war and “sins” (*ḥawbē*). Furthermore, the “first siege” (*ḥbāšā qadmā*) of *CN* 13, 17, 1 is paralleled by “the first wrath” (*rugzā qadmāyā*) in *CN* 13, 16, 1<sup>21</sup>. On the other hand, the cause (*meṭṭūl*) of the peace embassies under

<sup>20</sup> On the sieges (often with reference to Ephrem and the three bishops): Lightfoot 1981; Burgess 1999; Bundy 2000; Bundy 2002; Russell 2005; Harrell 2016.

<sup>21</sup> The word *rugzā*, though it can be used for any kind of rage, has a strong connotation of “divine wrath”, “retribution”, hence it is customarily employed for general calamities (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3808, s.v. 𐤓𐤂𐤗𐤀; Sokoloff 2009, 1444, s.v. 𐤓𐤂𐤗𐤀; see in particular the occurrence at Rom. 2:5).

Valgash is “mercy” (*rahmē*), and “peace” itself (*šaynā*, CN 13, 16, 5) is paralleled by “grace” (*ṭaybūtā*, CN 13, 15, 6). All these terms have a clear religious connotation, implying that the sieges and the wars occurred as a punishment for the sins of the Nisibene congregation and as a form of instruction, so that, when peace returned under Valgash, the event is attributed to God’s mercy and grace. This scheme corresponds to the educational path symbolised by the course of the sun in CN 13, 8–9, where heat and light, even though they tire the fruit, bring it to maturation too, so that the warmth of the setting sun comes as a prize (see §3.1.4.3); similarly, Valgash, the mild and sweet pastor, follows the stern Jacob, when the community is already matured. Yet, though all this is well, it does not end well: as war chastised and purified the community, so the ease of peace may spoil Christians. This is the sense of Ephrem’s references to a “grace without fruits” or an “ungrateful peace” (*ṭaybūtā d-lā metpar’ā*, CN 13, 15, 6; *šaynā ṭalōmā*, CN 13, 16, 5). And indeed, the community has already betrayed the high hopes of peace, when its opposition to Valgash has been punished by the ravages of the year 359 (see §3.3; CN 15, 19–20).

The cycle represented in CN 13 can be schematised thus: sin, chastisement, conversion, mercy, and sin again. The very same cycle, once more connected with episcopal succession, is at work in the poems on Abraham. Clearly, the Nisibene community did not behave itself, Ephrem’s wishes notwithstanding, because in the last years of Valgash and the first of Abraham the threat of Julian and the pressure caused by his Persian campaign came to bear on Nisibis. The events are treated in two sequences of CN 18 and CN 21:

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(CN 21, 14–18)	

I have already demonstrated (§2.2.2, note 95) how CN 18, 5–8 has imagery similar to that found in the *Poems against Julian*, so that it is safe to presume that these stanzas refer to the apostate emperor<sup>24</sup>. That the same applies also to CN 21, 14–18 is demonstrated by the word *hanpūtā*, strongly associated to Julian's paganism and present in CN 21, 18, 3 and 7. Furthermore, Ephrem speaks of a “new king” (*malkā ḥatā*) as good news in stanza 14 and describes heathenism as a sickness involving “the whole world” (*‘ālmā kull-eh*, 18, 1): the ecumenical nature of the threat of paganism, together with its rapid disappearance and the celebration of a new king, prompts us to set these lines against the succession of Jovian to Julian. The two passages treat their subject from a slightly different point of view, with CN 18, 5–8 focused on Julian's defeat and the merits of Bishops Valgash and Abraham in resisting the emperor; whereas CN 21, 14–18 reflects in hindsight on Julian's reign and expresses hopes and fears for the accession of Jovian. In the latter passage, the usual script of redemption through punishment is explicitly outlined, and yet it is not quite clear what the moment of punishment should correspond to. CN 21, 18 speaks of the end of paganism, and CN 21, 14 of a new king, but both

23 “Here, the news of a new king / goes thundering through the lands: // for the plundered ’twas a comfort, / and for the plunderer terror. // The vomit of the greedy came, / when they threw up everything swallowed. // There was fright even because of you, / lest between priest and righteous king // the former habits be smothered. / **Blessed is he who was wroth [rgez] and again merciful [rahḥem]!** // There is one who, if he can, dares, / and there is one who resists and curbs his bent; // one is thoughtful of the waiting judgement, / and the other doesn't even think there is one; // there is one who stole and quenched his thirst, / and there is one who stole and thirsted to steal; // stole the rich and stole the poor, / but stole the hungry with moderation, // while the sated stole without measure. / **Blessed is he who tests all designs!** // Yet lately he gave a chance, / and each unveiled his own intent, // how he was and whom resembled / and what he favoured above what. // He removed the trial from everyone, / lest anyone who didn't hate him deny him. // He gave us a chance to consider, / that better than the current authority // humiliation helped, by far. / **Blessed is he who, aiding, rebukes us!** // For not willingly did he impose / his yoke on our neck by force. // He gave us a chance and we boasted, / since, when we resisted and suffered, // we've been loving his light yoke, / we've been preferring his sweet sceptre, // while our pleasure increased our grief, / since by his force comes serenity, // and by his yoke facility. / **Blessed is he whose toil is delight!** // The whole world, like a body, / had fallen to a great disease— // namely, the fever of heathenism [*hanpūtā*]: / it was hot and sick and fell. // The power of mercy touched it, / and its soul was revived through grace. // Heathenism [*hanpūtā*] stopped forthwith, / for there was the cause of the disease. // So with sweat was cleansed anew. / **Glory to the hand that healed it!”**

24 So also Papoutsakis 2017, 124–131, who analyses in detail only CN 18, 5, 8–10, linking it to other anti-Julian passages. The dependence of the lines from 2 Thess. 2:8 and Ps. 68:1–2 seems convincing, Ephrem's knowledge of the Greek patristic trope of Julian as Typhon less so.

in this latter stanza and in the following one the poet describes a situation of disorder, in which everyone was brought to steal or plunder (*bāzōzā*, *CN* 21, 14, 4; *gnab*, *CN* 21, 15, 5–8), either by necessity (*meskēnē*, *CN* 21, 15, 8; *kapnā*, *CN* 21, 15, 9) or by greed and taking advantage of the situation (*CN* 21, 14, 5–6; *CN* 21, 15, 2; 4; 6; 9).

I suppose that this description, connected as it is to Julian's reign, refers to the consequences of the emperor's Persian campaign for the population in Nisibis: the presence of the army must have brought scarcity and an uncertain situation in the city and its countryside, thereby compelling the population (or, at least, a plurality of people) to steal<sup>25</sup>. If the presence of Julian and his "pagan" army<sup>26</sup> meant also unfavourable treatment for Christians (especially the more visible and influential ones), then the poet's censure of rich people stealing and pillaging may refer to rich pagans taking advantage of the situation to strike Christian rivals. For all the hardships Ephrem describes, it is difficult to surmise whether the reality underlying the description was a true persecution: Christian authors were prone to exaggeration on this account, especially as regards Julian's reign. The passage from Julian to Jovian is perhaps better described by the poet's antithesis of "humiliation" (*quppāhā*) and "authority" (*šultānā*) in *CN* 21, 16, 8–9: under Julian, the Christian community likely suffered a loss of standing in the larger civic community, maybe some political and financial handicaps vis-à-vis its pagan counterparts and a broader atmosphere of hostility; Jovian's reign, on the contrary, returned it to the prestigious social position it enjoyed under Constantine and Constantius. In this context, the spiritual battle of the bishop described in *CN* 18, 6 must have been an endeavour to keep Christians inside the community, against the temptation to flow with the tide of apostasy and theft. This is confirmed by the sower imagery of *CN* 18, 8: the conflict between emperor and bishop is a conflict between two preachings, two narrations, so to speak.

The word *quppāhā* expresses not only how the world treated Christians under Julian but also how divine providence ordained Julian's reign in order to correct the church, because this word also means "reproof," "reproach," or "confounding"<sup>27</sup>. Indeed, the whole stanza 16, as well as the following stanza 17, gives a theological interpretation of the hardships described in the previous stanzas. They are first of all a "chance", or literally, a "space" (*'atrā*, *CN* 21, 16, 1; 7; 17, 3), to show one's true allegiance—whether it is with God or with the world—and to observe a paradoxical phenomenon—namely, that peace had had negative effects for the church, whereas persecution enhanced its moral status (*CN* 21, 16, 7–9; 17). This is another occurrence of the theme of "ungrateful peace", already found in *CN* 13 to explain the sieges and the raids and already anticipated in

<sup>25</sup> A similar situation, with the same "greedy" (*ya'nē*) as *CN* 21, 14, 5, is described at *CN* 7, 1, a poem written in consequence of the destruction brought by the Roman army to Nisibis (see *CN* 7, 3; 7, 3–4). There too was a question of "ingratitude" (*CN* 7, 8, 5).

<sup>26</sup> Suggested but not stated by: Amm. Marc. 23, 3, 5; Zos. 3, 12, 3–5. In any case, the army led by Sebastianus and Procopius must have been near Nisibis, in Northern Mesopotamia eastward from Harran.

<sup>27</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3690, s.v. ܩܘܦܗܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 1339, s.v. ܩܘܦܗܐ.

Ephrem's evaluation of Julian's reign in the poem [*De Ecclesia*] (stanzas 11–15). Ephrem suggests also in *CN* 18 that Julian's humiliation of Christians was divinely ordained: the poet calls it “violence perfecting heathenism” (*qṭīrā da-mlā ḥanpūtā*), using a verb with religious connotations, *mlā*, employed for the fulfilling of prophecies in another form<sup>28</sup>.

Moreover, the expression “in its [infancy's] time” (*b-zabn-āh*) looks back at the system of succeeding “times” (*zabnē*), each with its age for the community and with its bishop, which Ephrem established in *CN* 13–16. Note, however that, whereas *CN* 13–16 envisaged a natural growth from infancy to adulthood for the community, thereby underlining the positive role of Valgash as the bishop entrusted with the grown-up community, here Ephrem employs the idea of rejuvenation, Bishop Abraham being still very young at the time. The youth of the prelate, likely raised by the community as a reason for calling into question his qualification for office (§2.1.2.2; §3.1.1.1; §3.1.4.4), was thus justified both by the suggestion of renewal it brought and by the paradox of its triumphing over such a danger as Julian. Furthermore, even if the agency of Julian's apostasy is attributed indirectly, through the biblical examples referring to the devil (*CN* 18, 7, 7–9), the reversal of Julian's plans demonstrates that God allowed things to happen for a higher good. Thus, *CN* 18 adds to the interpretation of Julian's reign as a chastisement—an interpretation presented in *CN* 21—the idea that it was also an occasion for the new bishop to showcase his spiritual strength and for God to demonstrate his power by winning through an unexperienced prelate. Here, the new bishop's succeeding the previous one ties, first, into the passage from peace to proof, and then into the new emperor's succeeding the previous one, hence from proof to new peace.

The correspondence between episcopal and imperial succession is not a coincidence. Indeed, it was already anticipated in the confrontation in *CN* 18, 8 between the “apostate farmer” (*ʾakkārā d-ʾaḥnep*) and the “righteous farmer” (*ʾakkārā kēnā*)—namely, Julian the emperor and Abraham the bishop. The common metaphor, apart from its inspiration in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt. 13:24–25; see §2.2.2), suggests that the authorities of the bishop and of the emperor somehow overlap. Furthermore, in two passages the opposite happens, and Ephrem uses kingly imagery to speak of Bishop

28 On the word *mlā*: Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2117–2118, 2121–2122, s.v. ܡܠܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 769, s.v. ܡܠܐ. Older translations here present a problem: “vis idolatriae” (Bickell 1866, 111); “die von Heidentum erfüllte Übermacht” (Beck 1961b, 58); “la violence du paganisme” (Fhégal/Navarre 1989, 65). Bickell, followed by Fhégal/Navarre, simply ignores the word *da-mlā*, translating as if the line sounded *qṭīrā d-ḥanpūtā*. Beck, on the other side, interprets the sequence *m-l-* as a *mlē*, passive participle, with the agent connected through the construct state. The grammar is sound, but rare (see: Nöldeke 1880, 196–197, §284; no examples under Duval 1881, 316, §331e; 328, §344c; 331, §351) and the clause feels convoluted, all the more so because the same idea might have been expressed writing simply *mlāt* (perfect third-person singular feminine, with subject *ḥanpūtā* and object the relative pronoun *d-*) instead of *mlē*. I took the writing *m-l-* not to be the passive participle *mlē* but the perfect third-person masculine *mlā*, hence with subject *d-* (referring to *qṭīrā*) and object *ḥanpūtā*: it is not paganism that fulfils violence, but violence that completes, perfects paganism. A similar idea is found in the *hymn. c. Julian.*: the paganism of the Apostate is allowed power for it to be rebuked and thwarted (see Forness 2021, 147).

Abraham. In CN 19, 4, 9, he pronounces the following blessing on Abraham: “May be justice [*quštā*] peace [*šlāmā*] for you!,” an allusion to Isaiah’s prophecies concerning King Hezekiah (2Reg. 20:3; 19; Jes. 38:3; 39:8). In CN 17, 2, 7 and CN 19, 2, 4 Abraham’s anointing involves a horn, a detail that, among anointings narrated in the Bible, is found only in kingly anointings<sup>29</sup>. This overlap may be explained as an undue usurpation of the spiritual tasks of the bishop by the secular power, or it may imply a genuine area of imperial concern, in which Julian did not perform well. Some clarity on the issue is provided by the end of CN 21, in which Ephrem treats precisely the relationship between bishop and emperor, a theme he had anticipated as a cause for concern in CN 21, 14, 7–9:

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<p>             22              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ           </p>	<p>             ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ           </p>
<p>             23              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              (CN 21, 21–23)           </p>	<p>             ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ              ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ           </p>

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the anointing of Aaron at Ex. 28:41 and of Elisha at 1Reg. 19:16 with the anointings of Saul and David at 1Sam. 10:1; 16:13. See §3.3.1.1 n. 321.

<sup>30</sup> “Since, like the first priest and king, / who were as if painted one in the other // and as if balanced on scales, / so were Valgash and the king’s son, // who were humble and serene, / then may the last ones resemble each other: // May the priests be luminaries, / and may the kings be lightning, // And may the judges too be flashes. / **Blessed is he who enlightened our souls!** /// From kingship the laws [*nāmōsē*] / and from priesthood the atonements [*hussāyē*]: // That both should incline is hideous, / that both should be stern [*ne’zān*] is harsh [*qašyā*]; // Let one be stern [*te’az*] and one be mild [*tebsam*] / with sense and with discernment, // may fear [*dehlā*] be tempered with love [*rahmē*]: / may our priesthood be mild [*bassimā*], // as our kingship stern [*‘azzizā*]. / **Blessed is he who tempered our aids!** /// Let the priests pray for the kings / that they may be a bulwark for humanity: // On the part of kings, victory, / and from priests faith, // victory to preserve the bodies / and faith to preserve the souls. // May the kings stop the battling, / may priests stop the inquiring: // Let dispute and war cease! / **Blessed is the Offspring of the All-Appeaser!** /// Glory be unto thee for thy gift!”

These stanzas are of utmost interest, in that they express a rather precise doctrine of the relationship between secular and spiritual power. The basic idea is that of a difference in functions. It is already apparent in the word choice: Ephrem calls the bishop *kāhnā* throughout, highlighting his religious function at the expense of his leadership (§2.1.3.2), in order to leave space to the emperor; moreover, the contrast between *kāhnā* and *malkā* (“king”, but here referred to the emperor) makes clear that Ephrem is reasoning in theological—that is, biblical—terms. Thus, priests (bishops) and kings (emperors) have a different purview according to stanza 23: kings are concerned with wars (*taktūšā*, *qē'rsā*, 7; 9), and their purpose is to end them through victory (*zākūtā*, 3; 5), so that the physical welfare (*pagrē*, 5) of the people is guaranteed; priests, on the other hand, are concerned with doctrinal disputes (*'uqqābā*, *drāšā*, 8; 9), which they should end through faith (*haymānūtā*, 4; 6), in order to preserve the spiritual welfare (*nepšātā*, 6) of the people. Ephrem's attention to war as kings' field of action can be understood in light of his experience in Nisibis, where imperial protection from the Persians was paramount, most of all for the preservation of the Christian community<sup>31</sup>. However, the purview of kings is not limited to war, for, as stanza 22 shows, kings are also the source of law (*nāmōsē*, 1), whereas the priests provide forgiveness (*hussāyē*, 2). Given these two different functions, bishops and emperors must employ two different leadership styles, respectively love and fear (*rahmē*, *dehlā*, 7). As has already been said (§3.1.4.3), this dialectic between secular and religious power traces the dialectic between old and new covenant, because Ephrem sees the ecclesiastical authority as working in a more spiritual and perfected economy than imperial authority.

Yet for all his distinctions Ephrem still envisages some interference between priesthood and kingship, even beyond the “praying for” kings by priests (23, 1–2). The reference to a “tempering” (*mazzeg*, 22, 7; 10) of the mere power of the state by religious mercy implies first that the two authorities work on the same community with a similar function and, more importantly, that they are complementary. The poet has already expressed the desire for harmony between the two powers after the conflict of Julian's reign (CN 21, 14, 7–9), but stanza 21 of the same poem links emperors and bishops more closely. Lines 1–6 establish a double relationship between these two authorities, on one side describing each emperor as similar to his contemporary bishop, on the other envisaging a similar succession for bishops and emperors. Indeed, the term *yubbālā* is fundamental for Ephrem's thought on kingship too, as demonstrated by Papoutsakis<sup>32</sup>. There, too, the notion of “order” (*tukkāsā*) and of “transmission” (expressed by the verb *'ašlem*) plays an important role, as well as the provisional nature of the Roman Empire and the Davidic reign in relation to Christ, which is mirrored in the bishop's intermediary nature between the church and Christ (§2.2.1.4; §2.2.4.2–3). From the point of view of content, this literary

<sup>31</sup> Forness 2021, though cautioning against a rigid interpretation of Ephrem's utterances on emperors, in view of the different concerns of his community in different occasions, still recognises a constant in the poet's idea of the imperial office, namely the protection of the territory and the guarantee of peace for the (especially Christian) inhabitants.

<sup>32</sup> Papoutsakis 2017, 80–93.

construction requires some tweaking with history. The most important measure required is the omission of Babu from the sequence<sup>33</sup>. Ephrem likely starts from a real coincidence, the death of Constantine and Jacob in the same year (337)<sup>34</sup>. The two characters had a similar significance for Nisibis. Constantine was the founder of the Christian empire, and Jacob the founder of the Christian Nisibis. Both literally founded basilicas and took part in the Council of Nicaea. Furthermore, both protected Nisibis from the Persians, at least according to tradition (see §4.3). After Constantine and Jacob, the successions of bishops and emperors is not coincidental anymore: Constantius reigns during both Babu's and Valgash's episcopates, and Valgash must have reigned during at least part of Julian's reign (note 20), and Abraham acceded while Julian was still emperor. In order to make all the pieces fall in place, Ephrem simply omits Babu and Julian from the sequence. The omission of Babu is yet another proof of his scarce relevance for Ephrem, whereas the omission of Julian between Constantius and Jovian signals the usurping nature of Julian's reign.

From the point of view of form, it is noteworthy that Ephrem chose the metaphors of painting and the scales to express the similarity between the first bishop of Nisibis and the first emperor; for, as I already said, Ephrem habitually employs the metaphor of painting to express the relationship between old and new bishops (§2.2.3.3), whereas he uses the language of balance and proportionality—of which the metaphor of scales is an example—to express the relationship between a bishop and the period of his tenure (§4.1.1). This means that between bishop and emperor there should be a harmony like that between bishop and community, successor and predecessor. Such a harmony is exemplified by the relationship between Valgash and Constantius, where the emperor takes on the habitual features of the bishop. Valgash and Constantius (“the king's son”) are defined as *makkīn* ... *wa-bhīlīn* (“humble and serene”). This characterisation of Constantius may seem to contrast starkly with the contemporary witness on the emperor's temper, even taking into account a positive bias from some Christian sources after Julian<sup>35</sup>. However, if it is true that *makkīkā* had already been used for Valgash (CN 16, 16, 5; 20, 3) and that therefore it is a characterising word for the bishop, *bhīlā* appears only here. In sixth-century texts, the word translates Greek γαληνότης, an imperial epithet<sup>36</sup>. The style is already found in Greek texts of the fifth century, whereas the Latin *serenitas* is attested in the *Codex Theodosianus* for Constantine, Constantius, and Julian, but only from the fifth century in Greek (γαληνότης)<sup>37</sup>. The coincidence of two adjec-

<sup>33</sup> Less apparent, but much more discussed in the literature, is Ephrem's utterly positive judgement of Constantius, whose Arianism seems not have concerned the poet. Apart from the difficulty of interpreting univocally Constantius' religious politics, all informed by the research of compromise, Ephrem's positive judgement is perfectly understandable in the context of anti-Julianic polemics and of his theological constructions: Papoutsakis 2017, 88; Forness 2021, 146–156.

<sup>34</sup> Burgess 1999; §4.3.

<sup>35</sup> Elm 2012, 31–32, 339, 367–368, 371–373; Griffith 1987, 251–252.

<sup>36</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 457, s.v. ܡܚܠܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 121, s.v. ܡܚܠܐ.

<sup>37</sup> Theodt. *ep.* 140, 16; *AConcOec* 1, 1, 7, 129; *Cod. Theod.* 1, 22, 2; 2, 16, 2; 4 (Constantine); 5, 13, 2; 6, 29, 3 (Constantius); 8, 5, 14, *pr.* (Julian).

tives characterising a bishop and an emperor, one adjective being typically ascribed to the bishop and the other coming to be typically ascribed to emperors, strongly suggests that Ephrem took the word *bhīlīn* from the imperial address; if this were true, then *CN* 21, 21, 5 would establish a parallel between imperial ideology and episcopal features, justifying the likening of Valgash to Constantius. This assertion of their similarity seems to contradict the distinction in leadership style required by stanza 22.

The wish for a similarity of bishops and secular authorities is reiterated also at lines 7–9 of stanza 21, where the three categories of priests, kings, and judges share the same light imagery. In Syriac the categories are called *kāhnē*, *malkē*, *dayyānē* (*CN* 21, 21, 7–9). If *kāhnē* means “bishops” and *malkē* “emperors”, it is not clear what *dayyānē* may mean. Like *kāhnē* and *malkē*, the category is biblical, sometimes translating Hebr. *šōpəṭīm* or even *ʿēlohīm*. However, it is also used for Roman officials<sup>38</sup>. Indeed, laws and inscriptions employ the term *iudex* generically for a provincial governor or those he appoints to help him administer justice<sup>39</sup>. If the word *dayyānē* means “governors”, then Ephrem’s exhortations to the emperor, implicit in his prayers for harmony, may have been concretely addressed to the local governor or imperial representative.

This contradiction between similarity and division of imperial and episcopal tasks can be understood as distinguishing the different targets of stanza 21 and stanzas 22–23. The latter present a general reflection on the distinction between the two authorities, while the former is a meditation and a prayer directed towards the concrete situation of the community. Hence, while stanzas 22–23 are keen on delimiting the areas of purview and numbering the differences, stanza 21 demonstrates that history had a providential course, thereby binding God to continue providing for the community. From this perspective, the painting and scales metaphors signal that in the succession of both emperors and bishops, as well as in their relationship with one another, providence is at work; even the light imagery signals back to the first stanzas of *CN* 13, where the succession of bishops was ordained “as the luminaries” to help the community in the three sieges<sup>40</sup>. It is at this point that the general reflection on the differences comes in the form of a prayer<sup>41</sup>: it serves both to explain how the harmony of stanza 21 may concretely be realised and to exhort bishop and emperor to enact such a behaviour.

<sup>38</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 842–843, s.v. ܡܠܟܐ.

<sup>39</sup> Sootjes 2006, 32; the same situation Ephrem foresaw for the bishop at *CN* 18, 11, 1, with the same word *dayyānē*; see §3.1.1.1.

<sup>40</sup> cf. “Three priests dazzling [*naṣṣīṭhē*] / in likeness of the two luminaries [*naḥhīrē*]” (*CN* 13, 1, 1–2); “He, who created the two luminaries [*naḥhīrē*], / chose for himself this three luminaries [*naḥhīrē*] // and fixed them in the threefold / dusk [*ḥuškā*] of the past sieges. // As was quenched that couple of luminaries [*naḥhīrē*] / truly the last blazed [*zallīqa-w*]” (*CN* 13, 2); with “May the priests be luminaries [*naḥhīrē*], / and may the kings be lightning [*zallīqē*], // And may the judges too be flashes [*zahrīrē*]. / **Blessed is he who enlightened** [*ʿanhar*] **our souls!**” (*CN* 21, 22, 7–10). If the poems have been arranged by the author, this could be considered a kind of *Ringkomposition*.

<sup>41</sup> As signalled by the imperfect tense of the verbs: *taʿez*, *tebsam* (22, 5), *tetmazzag* (22, 7), *tehwē* (22, 8), *nṣallōn* (23, 1), *nehwōn* (23, 2), *tnaṭṭar* (23, 5), *neṣlōn* (23, 7–8), *netbaṭṭal* (23, 9).



The texts examined amply demonstrate the importance of the theme of *yubbālā* in the poems on bishops. Furthermore, if we put these poems in the wider context of the *CN*, this theme will reveal another point. The chief function of *yubbālā* is to justify differences between bishops by integrating those differences into a more general historical succession of epochs (another meaning of the word *yubbālā*). In order to justify difference in leadership, the poet must distinguish these epochs not by mere dates, but as qualitatively distinct one from the other. This partly explains the necessity to characterise differently the different emperors, who could otherwise have been used as mere names to establish a chronological grid. Two historical schemes seem to emerge from the analysis. One is the incremental progress inspired by and represented as the growth from childhood to maturity. This is prevalent in the poems on Valgash because, interpreted through the lens of supersessionist theology, it explains Valgash's behaviour well (see §4.2). Yet already in these poems, and especially in *CN* 15–16, the other scheme interferes with the idea of growth: it is a cyclical view of history, in which the church repeatedly falls from grace, is punished, is reformed and then favoured by God, only to fall again. The decisive moment of the cycle is what Ephrem calls “ungrateful peace” (*šaynā ʔalōmā*, *CN* 13, 16, 5), a favourable situation which breeds sins, restarting the whole cycle. Such a concept, and the cyclical scheme it implies, is employed frequently by Ephrem in *CN* 1–12 in order to explain the three sieges and the raids Nisibis had to suffer<sup>42</sup>.

Therefore, though apparently divided by two different subject matters, *CN* 1–12 and *CN* 13–21 share not only the same view of history but also its application to events in Nisibis; both cycles of poems propose a Christian reading of current affairs for the same public. It is true that they must have been composed at different times, with *CN* 1–12 being composed at least as early as 359 and *CN* 13–21 being composed as late as 363, and that they can be divided into smaller subcycles; however, they still retain the same overall theme of Nisibis's fall and salvation, expanding on a general theology of history. For this reason, it is tempting to think that the author arranged *CN* 1–21 as a unit, albeit with different chapters, in order to illustrate his thought on history. It is even conceivable that the text as it stands does not faithfully reflect the first performances of these poems in the '50s and '60s of the fourth century, but a later work of collection, revision, and standardisation to produce a more didactic and theologically learned cycle. Against this hypothesis is the exclusion in our tradition of the poems on Julian, which espouse the same view of history and the same focus on Nisibis as *CN* 1–21 and would have been aptly inserted in the collection<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> See in particular: “He came to us with hardness / we were afraid for a moment. // He came in gentleness / and we rejoiced for an hour. // He turned and left us for a little / we wandered without end; // like a beast of prey which is trained // by blandishments and by fear, / but if so be that men turn *from it* // rebels and strays and becomes / savage in the midst of peace [*b-šaynā*]” (*CN* 2, 7; trans. Stopford 1898, 169). Also: *CN* 1, 4, 1–2; 5; *CN* 2, 7–9; 11; *CN* 3, 4–5; 8–12; *CN* 4, 13–14; *CN* 5, 9; *CN* 6, 17; *CN* 7, 1; 7, 7; *CN* 9, 18; *CN* 10, 15–18; *CN* 11.

<sup>43</sup> On the centrality of Nisibis and the cyclical view of history: Griffith 1987, 248–251, 256–258; on the relation between *CN* and *hymn. c. Julian.*, see Beck 1961a, I.

It is interesting to note that Gregory too employs two historical schemes, one of decadence and the other being the same “biblical” cycle as Ephrem (see §3.1.3.1; §3.1.4.1; §3.3.2.2). In their common historical hermeneutic we see their common fidelity to the Bible, whereas the difference between Gregory’s decadence scheme and Ephrem’s growth scheme witnesses to their different attitude towards culture and the church in the empire: Ephrem joins Constantine and Jacob, thereby contextualising Nisibis’s growth inside the growth of Christianity in the empire; he still has a triumphalist attitude in this regard and sees Julian’s reign or Valgash’s crisis only as an interruption of this growth. Gregory, on the other side, assimilates the very Greek idea of decadence, because his confidence in a triumphant Christian empire is already cracked. One must not forget that he writes not only after his forced resignation but also after Julian, after Valens’s persecutions, after the growing discord inside the Nicene clergy (schism of Antioch, Pneumatomachists, Apollinarius, the conflict between Alexandria and Constantinople), and after the defeat of Adrianople.

Finally, the cyclical scheme of *yubbālā* may be examined in the wider context of early Christianity. Indeed, such a scheme was already the basis of many Greek and Roman reflections on history, especially as regards the changing forms of the states<sup>44</sup>. This must not mean that Ephrem knew those reflections, because he may have simply extracted this scheme from the biblical narrative, which in itself is already organised in cycles of fall and redemption (§3.1.4.1). Origen did something similar, projecting this basic script of the story of Israel onto the metaphysical realm; he too, like Ephrem, pinpointed the initial thrust of the cycle in ungratefulness and laziness<sup>45</sup>. However, Ephrem does not employ this scheme “vertically” to explain the relationship between metaphysical and historical realm as does Origen; rather, he employs it “horizontally” to judge history, in the conviction that the history of the Christian community is the direct continuation of the history of Israel<sup>46</sup>. Moreover, Ephrem’s two schemes (progress and cycle) are always jux-

<sup>44</sup> See Plat. *resp.* 8–9; Aristot. *pol.* 1301a-1316b; for the story of the theory of *anacyclosis* from Polybius to the Renaissance: Trompf 1979, 4–249.

<sup>45</sup> On laziness see: *Semper enim similis est finis initiis; et ideo sicut unus omnium finis, ita unum omnium intellegi debet initium* ... [rational creatures] *tunc sunt in beatitudine, cum de sanctitate et sapientia ac de ipsa deitate participant. Si vero ab huiusmodi participatione neglegant atque dissimulent, tunc vitio propriae desidiaie alius citius alius tardius plus alius vel minus, ipse sibi causa sui lapsus vel casus efficitur* (Orig. *princ.* 1, 6, 2); on ingratitude: *possibile enim uidetur ut rationabiles naturae, a quibus numquam aufertur liberi facultas arbitrii, possint iterum aliquibus motibus subiacere, indulgente hoc ipsum deo, ne forte, si immobilem semper teneant statum, ignorent se dei gratia et non sua uirtute in illo fine beatitudinis constitisse* (Orig. *princ.* 2, 3, 3). The theme may have come to Ephrem already applied to history by way of Eusebius: Ὡς δ' ἐκ τῆς ἐπὶ πλέον ἐλευθερίας (*men sug'ā da-šlāmā*) ἐπὶ χαυνότητι καὶ νωθρίαν τὰ καθ' ἡμᾶς μετελλάττετο ... ἡ μὲν δὲ θεία κρίσις, οἷα φίλον αὐτῇ, πεφεισμένως, τῶν ἀθροισμάτων ἐτι συγκροτουμένων, ἡρέμα καὶ μετρίως τὴν αὐτῆς ἐπισκοπὴν ἀνεκίνει (Eus. *h. e.* 8, 1, 7).

<sup>46</sup> On this supersessionist view: §4.2; Yousif 1981; Murray 2006, 243–249. See the continuity between Prophets and Apostles at CN 20, 7 (also §3.1.3.1): “Look to the prophets and the apostles [*ba-nbī'ē w-ba-šlīḥē*], / how much they resemble [*dāmēn*] each other! // 'Twas the Name of God the prophets / gave to God's people // and 'twas the Name of Christ the apostles / gave to Christ 's church; // even forgers [*zēpānē*] resembled [*dmaw*] each other; / since by their names were called // the churches that whored

taposed: Ephrem does not come to a “spiral” scheme, in which each redemption brings the community to a higher state than it was in before its fall, whereas such a scheme was espoused by Origen<sup>47</sup>. As for other theological themes, Ephrem’s attitude towards history proved influential in Syriac culture. A clear example is provided by the church historian Theodoret, who employs Ephremian concepts to explain his own view of history<sup>48</sup>.

## 4.2 Valgash

In the previous pages, I have often mentioned a breach in the authority of Bishop Valgash, and I have employed this circumstance as a hermeneutic key to understand Ephrem’s strategies in various passages, especially from the poems *CN* 13–16, written under Valgash’s tenure. Here, I will apply the reverse procedure, trying to consider Valgash’s crisis on the basis of the texts. Such a procedure has clear limits: first, one always runs the risk of speculating in a circle, from the (presumed) meaning of the text to the (presumed) real-life events, then back to the meaning of the text. Moreover, what, in the best occurrence, the procedure extracts from the texts is not the event as it happened, but its biased representation, and the more the texts are allusive and rarefied—as Ephrem’s poems surely are—the less reliable they are for the historian. Therefore, even if the link of this research to history is clear and partly fruitful for history, my analysis is still mainly a literary one, with the aim of determining the content of difficult and cryptic texts.

The existence of the crisis has—to my knowledge—never been doubted. Previous readers of *CN* 13–16 have recognised that the texts hint at a real situation, yet they never described it except in most general terms<sup>49</sup>. In treading this new ground, I must draw a distinction: *CN* 13–14, though clearly linked to the crisis, do not address it directly; these poems defend Valgash with other arguments (see §4.3), whereas *CN* 15–16 are explicitly

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with them. / **Blessed is he in whose name we’re sanctified!**”. Ephrem traces even the model of growth to the Bible: “Is it to the daughter of Abraham [=Israel/the synagogue] alone / that these images are applied, // or even unto you, daughter born of vows [Nisibis]?” (*CN* 13, 11, 1–3); “Even for Jacob’s daughter was set/ bait and stick to her childhood...” (*CN* 14, 19, 1–2).

47 Lettieri 2000, 380–381.

48 For Theodoret’s rooting in the Syriac world, see Leppin 2009. E.g.: καὶ αὐτὰ δὲ ἡμᾶς διδάσκει τὰ πράγματα ὡς πλείονα ἡμῖν τῆς εἰρήνης ὁ πόλεμος πορίζει τὴν ὠφέλειαν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἄβρους ἡμᾶς καὶ ἀνειμένους καὶ δευλοὺς ἀπεργάζεται, ὁ δὲ πόλεμος τὰ τε φρονήματα παραθήγει καὶ τῶν παρόντων ὡς ῥεόντων παρασκευάζει καταφρονεῖν (Theodt. *h. e.* 5, 39, 26); οἶμαι δὲ τῶν ὄλων τὸν πρύτανιν, τὴν ἡμετέραν διελέγχοντα πονηρίαν, καὶ δεικνύναι ἡμῖν τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ τούτων ἡμᾶς πάλιν γυμνοῦν καὶ δ’ ἐκείνου μὲν διδάσκειν ὡς μάλα εὐπετῶς παρέχειν ἃ βούλεται δύναται διὰ δὲ τούτου καὶ διελέγχει ὡς οὐκ ἄξιους τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν ἀμείνω βίον προτρέπειν (4, 5, 2). Cf. δ’ ἐκείνου μὲν διδάσκειν ὡς μάλα εὐπετῶς παρέχειν ἃ βούλεται δύναται with Ephrem’s “since everything is easy for You” (*CN* 2, 3, 5); “For in that it does things easily it resembles Deity, who easily creates everything” (*ad Hypatium* 1, 18, transl. Mitchell 1912, ix).

49 See Bickell 1866, 105 (Arianism and disobedience as a problem); Beck 1961b, III, 47, 51 (reason of the crisis is “Vologeses’ Sanftmut”); Fiey 1977, 31–32 (the rebels may be Arian heretics); Palmer 1998, 124 (Valgash is “spineless” and Ephrem’s defence is insincere); Bou Mansour 2019, 360.

concerned with this issue and offer all the information available. Furthermore, Beck has recognised an important lacuna of around 7 stanzas between stanzas 8 and 9 of CN 16, in a passage that seems very important for defining the nature of the crisis<sup>50</sup>; hence, the interpreter must also confront this lack of information. Anyway, it is possible to isolate two passages from CN 15 and CN 16 that offer most of the relevant information (parallels found elsewhere will be given in note):

<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	15
<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	16
<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	17
<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	18
<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	19
<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ (CN 15, 1–3; 19–20)</p>	<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	20
<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	<p>ܐܡܪܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ</p>	6

<sup>50</sup> Beck 1961a, 44. See n. 51 in §1.1.2.

<sup>51</sup> "It is us, then, whom the beginnings [*qadmāyē*] chastised, / and then chided us the middle [*meṣ'āyē*]. // The endings [*(a)hrāyē*] increased our sweetness, / but when our taste came, // our loss of flavour was greater. /// Indeed, we came to maturity, / that we may restrain children from sport // to bring them to earnestness. / Yet our old age sorely needed // that we be chided as kids. /// Hence [*badgūn*] the mild resisted patiently / and didn't use compulsion, // so as to honour greatly our old age; / and since our age knew not its degree, // let him be honour'd who knew its time. /// And if one should say that people / are driven only with force and the stick, // well, even fear drives the thief, / and threat the plunderer; // and shame the fool. /// If with the head as first / the limbs had run as second, // they would have led the third, / and all the whole body would have // followed them. /// But the second neglected the first, and the third the second, // the rank were despised one by the other. / It's because the citizens neglected each other // that the strangers too trod them down."

7  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ

8  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ

*A 7 stanzas lacuna must be assumed here*

9  
 [lacuna]  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ

10  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ

11  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ

12  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ

13  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ  
 כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ כִּי־חִשְׁבָהּ לְמִלְכָּהּ  
 ...

52 “Never did a mirror compel / with violence its observer; // nor is the mercy that came / upon the justice of the law // compulsory as the law. /// Justice [kēnūtā] was for childhood [ṭalyūtā] / the adorning of compulsion [da-qṭīrā]; // for, since mankind was a child [ṭalyā], / she adorned it through compulsion [ba-qṭīrā], // while not purloining its freedom. /// Bait and stick [šedlā w-šabṭā] had taken / Justice for that childhood [kēnūtā šed ṭalyūtā]: // whenever she struck her, she soothed her; / her stick [šabṭ-āh] curbed the rashness [huṣpā], // her bait [šedl-āh] softened the minds. /// [lacuna] that today it may be adorned, my brethren: // for the new tidings it was an infant, / in the time of greatness of mind // it had no mind. /// For in the degree of maturity, / it descended to infancy, // and that slaves’ law it loved, / which in return for audacity strikes it, // and in return for boldness slaps it. /// No ornament through compulsion / is true, because it is a mockery: // this is important to God, / that man adorns himself by himself; // therefore, he lifted compulsion. /// For, as prudently / as he gave compulsion in its time, // so prudently / he lifted it in the time when // meekness was necessary in its stead; /// for, as much as it is meet for infancy / to be running under the stick, // it is even more hideous that under the stick / wisdom gets enslaved, // so that compulsion becomes her master.”

ܠܬܠܡܕܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ  
ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ  
(CN 16, 6–13; 22)

ܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ 22  
ܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ  
53 ܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

Four linked themes may be isolated from these stanzas: first, the perversion of *yubbālā* by the Nisibenes (CN 15, 15, 4–5; 17, 4; CN 16, 9; 10, 1–2; 22)<sup>54</sup>; second, the relationship between compulsion and freedom (CN 15, 17, 2–3; 18; CN 16, 7–8; 11–13); third—and this is only apparent in the passage from CN 15—the Nisibenes, once matured, were expected to teach others (CN 15, 16; 19–20); fourth, the relationship between Old and New Testament, which is examined most of all in CN 16 (stanzas 6; 9–10)<sup>55</sup>. In the interplay of these four themes, we observe the same rhetorical strategy already examined for the theme of *yubbālā* (§4.1.1): each theme is defined by two opposing groups of concepts, and the opposing groups are then distributed into different time periods, so that analogies are created between concepts belonging to different themes. This texture of analogies and antitheses is then expressed through the skilful variation of words. Here, too, a tabular representation of Ephrem's plot can be useful:

<i>yubbālā</i>	<i>ṭalyē</i> (CN 15, 16, 5; CN 16, 7, 3; 22, 5) <i>ṭalyūtā</i> (CN 16, 7, 1; 13, 1) <i>ḥūspā</i> (CN 16, 8, 4) <i>šabrā</i> (CN 16, 9, 3) <i>yallādūtā</i> (CN 16, 10, 2)	<i>gmīrūtā</i> (CN 15, 16, 1; CN 16, 10, 1) <i>yaqqīrūtā</i> (CN 15, 16, 3) <i>saybūtā</i> (CN 15, 16, 4; 17, 3) <i>ḥakkīmūtā</i> (CN 16, 13, 4) <i>rabbūt re'yānā</i> (CN 16, 9, 4)
theme of compulsion	<i>rdā</i> (CN 15, 15, 1) <i>k'ā</i> (CN 15, 15, 2; 16, 5; CN 16, 22, 5) <i>qṭīrā</i> (CN 15, 17, 2; 18, 2; CN 16, 6, 2; 5; 7, 2; 4; 11, 1; 5; 12, 2; 13, 5) <i>dbar</i> (CN 16, 6, 1) <i>šabṭā</i> (CN 15, 18, 2; CN 16, 8, 1; 4; 13, 2–3) <i>mḥā</i> (CN 16, 8, 3; 10, 4) <i>qappah</i> (CN 16, 10, 5) <i>qašyūtā</i> (CN 16, 22, 4)	<i>bassimā</i> (CN 15, 17, 1) <i>makkikūtā</i> (CN 16, 12, 5) <i>rmīsūtā</i> (CN 16, 22, 3)
theme of law and grace	<i>kēnūtā</i> (CN 16, 6, 4; 7, 1; 8, 2) <i>nāmōsā</i> (CN 16, 6, 4–5) <i>nāmōs-'abdē</i> (CN 16, 10, 3)	<i>ṭaybūtā</i> (CN 16, 6, 3) <i>sbartā</i> (') <i>ḥrētā</i> (CN 16, 9, 3)

53 "It is we now who overthrow / this beautiful succession and order, // since in the time of mildness, / lo!, we are begging toughness, // which may rebuke us as children."

54 See also the following: "Yet even if we, my brethren, / have confused the meters [*mūšḥātā*] // and spoiled the discretion, / and are returned as schoolboys [*yālōpē*] // for the perfection who called us" (CN 15, 10); "he [Valgash] didn't swerve as we had done" (CN 15, 12, 3); "it'd been fit for us to know our time [*zabn-an*]; / but we ourselves alienated from our time [*zabn-an*], // losing savour in the time [*ba-zban*] of taste" (CN 15, 13, 3–5). Add the use of *dargā* at CN 15, 17, 4 and at CN 16, 10, 1, of *zabnā* at CN 16, 9, 4, of *yubbālā* and *ṭeksā* at CN 16, 22, 2, and compare with the analysis of the language of *yubbālā* at §4.1.

55 The link of this theme with that of compulsion has been anticipated at §3.1.4.3, with n. 185 for the biblical passages involved.

The table shows clearly the many similarities between this rhetoric and Ephrem's narrative of the story of Nisibis under the three first bishops, all of which may be summed up with one consideration: Valgash's crisis is incorporated in the ascendent/incremental scheme of *yubbālā* (§4.1.2)<sup>56</sup>. Hence, the apologetic function of that scheme is made clear: Ephrem in *CN* 13–16 insists on the spiritual growth of Nisibis precisely to highlight its failure to live up to that growth, at the same time sparing Valgash's attitude from critiques regardless of its difference from the attitudes of his predecessors.

However, it is noteworthy that the four themes (*yubbālā*, compulsion, teaching others, and the contrast between grace and law) are unevenly distributed between the two poems, so that the two pieces seem to depict two different situations. In *CN* 15, Ephrem says that the Nisibenes failed to behave according to their collective maturity and that *as a consequence* Valgash refused to treat them harshly: the consequential relationship of these two ideas is explicitly stated through the conjunction *badgūn* in 17, 1<sup>57</sup>. The poet then proceeds to defend Valgash's choice. On the contrary, *CN* 16 depicts the community as asking for thoroughness instead of Valgash's mild approach, implying that precisely this request for a stern leadership is the sign of the community's immaturity<sup>58</sup>. Ephrem describes the request in both cases as a regression to infancy (*CN* 16, 10, 1–2; 22, 5), but regression to infancy was precisely the language used at *CN* 15, 16, 4–5 (see also 10, 3) to describe the sin of the community to which Valgash responds only with mildness. I think that, in order to solve this conundrum, it is necessary to interpret the community's "requests" for severity as literal requests, and not as a necessity manifested by their behaviour—as does Bickell—because the text of *CN* 15 implies that it was precisely with these requests of severity that the community agitated against Valgash for his mild behaviour<sup>59</sup>. Take, for example, the beginning of stanza 18, right after the description of Valgash's meekness in response to the Nisibenes: "If one should say [*w-'en 'nāš nēmar*] that people / are driven only with force and stick..." (*CN* 15, 18, 1–2). This beginning clearly introduces a possible objection to Val-

56 As regards the definition of the two (at *CN* 15, 15, 1–2 three) periods of the *yubbālā*, Ephrem employs the same terms of age as for the succession of the three bishops: *ṭalye/ṭalyūtā* (cf. *CN* 14, 18, 3; 19, 2; 20, 4); *šabrā* (cf. *CN* 14, 16, 4; 17, 4; 18, 1; 21, 4; 22, 2; *CN* 16, 16, 2; 17, 1; 18, 2; 19, 2); *yallūdūtā* (cf. *CN* 14, 16, 2; 20, 2; 21, 2); *ḥuṣpā* (cf. *CN* 14, 19, 3; *CN* 16, 17, 1); *gmīrūtā* (cf. *CN* 14, 16, 5–6; 17, 6; 22, 3); *saybūtā* (cf. *CN* 16, 18, 4); *ḥakkīmūtā* (cf. *CN* 16, 16, 4). The keyword of sternness *šabtā* is associated with Jacob (*CN* 14, 19, 2=*CN* 16, 8, 1–2; *CN* 16, 17, 3) and *qašyūtā* describes once Babu (*CN* 16, 18, 3). Valgash's characterisation in our stanzas is consistent with the other poems: *bassīmā* (cf. *CN* 14, 18, 6; 19, 6; *CN* 16, 19, 5); *makkikūtā* (cf. *CN* 16, 16, 5). In one case, the word *nāmōsā* had been used by Ephrem to describe Babu's attitude (*CN* 14, 19, 4), but other than that, the Pauline language of Grace and Law is found only in *CN* 16.

57 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 682, s.v. ܡܕܥܝܢܐ; Nöldeke 1880, 98, §156; Sokoloff 2009, 118, s.v. ܡܕܥܝܢܐ. Bickell 1866, 105: "itaque"; Stopford 1898, 184: "accordingly"; Beck 1961b, 50: "also"; Féghali/Navarre 1989: "aussi".

58 The idea of the community "requiring" or "asking for" severity is conveyed by the verbs *raḥḥem* (*CN* 16, 10, 3) and *bāʾn-an* (*CN* 16, 22, 4).

59 Bickell 1866, 106: "in fine denique carminis conqueritur, quod Nisibeni hanc Dei intentionem frusterint, cum per peccata sua Deum ad iteratam castigationem impulerint." From the point of view of language, the expressions *nāmōs 'abdē raḥḥem* (*CN* 16, 10, 3) and *bāʾn-an qašyūtā* (*CN* 16, 22, 4, cf. Sokoloff 2009, 169, s.v. ܡܕܥܝܢܐ) do not pose any problem to this interpretation.

gash's behaviour in order to confute it. Yet if the poet sees fit to introduce and confute such an objection, his public must have thought something similar to that objection; and since the objection is precisely the necessity of compulsion for successful leadership, someone among Ephrem's public must have thought compulsion necessary—something which is confuted anew at *CN* 16, where it is said that the community loved and requested such compulsion. Moreover, if Ephrem accepted that the Nisibenes objectively deserved stern treatment, then his defence of Valgash's meekness would be weakened, although not completely invalidated, for, as Bickell notes, the punishment was imposed by God himself in the end through the raids of 359 (see §4.3): the poet may well have believed that it was not the bishop place to punish the old community, even though they deserved to be punished.

According to Bickell, the clergy disobeyed bishop Valgash, so that his strategy of correction did not work<sup>60</sup>. Bickell says so on the basis of *CN* 15, 19–20 (see §4.3), where Ephrem distinguishes between the “first,” the “second,” and the “third,” taking the “first,” also called *rēšā*, as a reference to the bishop, the second as a reference to the clergy, and the third as a reference to the population at large. This is better than Beck's reconstruction, which interprets the three terms as three different generations<sup>61</sup>; the same interpretation, perhaps, should be applied to *CN* 15, 16, where those who grew had to discipline “children”, so that those who grew are ascetics and clergy, and the children are the laypeople. Bickell also says that the clergy had Arian sympathies, on the basis of *CN* 7. However, *CN* 7 does not clearly refer to Arianism. Bou Mansour mentions doctrinal disputes, but on different grounds—namely, the expression “measure of truth” (*mūšhat-qūštā*) in *CN* 15, 11, 1<sup>62</sup>. That Nisibis knew Arianism cannot be doubted, since *CN* 3—probably written in the aftermath of the third siege—begins with a discussion of theological themes normally connected with anti-Arian polemics, and in stanza 4 Ephrem explicitly says that this discussion should put an end to the disputes in the city. Yet it is doubtful that Arianism is relevant in the situation of *CN* 13–16, since the expression “measure of truth” may refer to any other doctrinal problem.

In my view, the problem lies in the double criticism of the community: for its behaviour deserving punishment *and* for its request of punishment. One solution may be to suppose that the community was divided into two parts, with some deserving punishment and others calling on the bishop to act accordingly. However, this hypothesis seems countered by the lack of explicit distinctions in the texts. Here I propose a speculative reconstruction of the situation and of Ephrem's rhetoric: given the allusive language of the texts and the important lacuna of *CN* 16, I do not think research can reach much more than hypothetical interpretations. Assuming that the community was divided between “sinners” and “judges”, Ephrem's language not only confutes both without distinguishing between them but also draws an interesting parallel between the current situation and the relationship of

<sup>60</sup> Bickell 1866, 105.

<sup>61</sup> Beck 1961b, 50n9.

<sup>62</sup> Bou Mansour 2019, 360.



the law and the gospel (CN 16, 6–10). It is true that, as I already said (§3.1.4.3), this contrast is a central point of Ephrem's theology and that it is employed to describe the peculiar nature of the church as an association. Yet the regression of the community from the gospel to the law may be interpreted in a literal sense, too: as Shepardson has amply demonstrated, Ephrem's community must have been far from distinct in its Christian identity from the Jewish one<sup>63</sup>. Therefore, it is well possible that a part of the Nisibene community, even many years after Nicaea, lapsed into Jewish practices. In such a case, as Shepardson's book demonstrates, Ephrem would have normally deployed his most vitriolic rhetoric to rebuke the sinners<sup>64</sup>. But what if the reigning bishop chose to adopt a soft line with the Judaizers?

On one side, it is reasonable that some in the community would have been unsettled by his behaviour and would have desired concrete measures. On the other, if Ephrem wanted to defend his bishop, he could not launch his customary onslaught on the Judaizers. His choice is smarter: he extends the accusation of Judaizing to the critics of the bishop and avoids highlighting the dissent in the community by obliterating the distinction between accused and accusers. This way, he was likely in agreement with the bishop, wanting to preserve the unity of the congregation; he surely made out the bishop to be the only one innocent in the community. Moreover, he can attack Judaism even as he defends a soft line against Judaizers.

There is no way to conclusively demonstrate this reconstruction; however, some poetic choices may point in this direction, if they are evaluated against Ephrem's reflections on Judaism and the passage from the Old to the New Testament. Already the characterisation of the community's beloved law as a "law for slaves" (*nāmōs 'abdē*, CN 16, 10, 3) corresponds to Ephrem's evaluation of the Old Testament law<sup>65</sup>. Similarly, the contrast between justice, represented by the law of Moses, and mercy, coming with Christ, is a fundamental element of the theme of Old and New Testament<sup>66</sup>. Less common but still attested is the idea that the old law was primarily driven by coercion (keyword *qṭīrā*), whereas the church is guided by freedom<sup>67</sup>. All these themes are found in a passage of Ephrem's *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, in which he comments on the "turn the other cheek" (Mt. 5:38–39) saying:

63 Shepardson 2008, 41–46. A literal interpretation of the contrast between Law and Grace was already proposed by Beck 1961b, 52n5, but without connecting it with the other themes.

64 Shepardson 2008, 29–68.

65 E.g.: "The shackles chains and bonds / fashioned for his [of the Jewish people] slavery // propagates to him whom removed them / in the freedom of the love of his Lord" (*serm. fid.* 3, 297–300).

66 See, for example: CN 39, 10–14. On this theme: Martikainen 1981.

67 At *comm. in diatess.* 2, 6 and 10 chastity before Christ was *ba-qṭīrā*, whereas after him it's free; at *hymn. parad.* 4, 1 the specular movement, with Adam being free and treated mildly by God at first, and then being compelled to leave Paradise and live under a sterner law. At CN 16, 7, 1–2, the expression *mšabbtānītā da-qṭīrā* can be interpreted two ways: if we take the genitive as subjective, it means an adorer employing compulsion; if we take it as objective, it means someone who brings ornament to violence. Maybe this ambiguity signals a correspondence between the violence of the first men and the violence that the Law had to adopt. A curious case is that of the word *šabtā*, "stick", "rod", associated at

Once then the times [zabnē] set for a measure [muṣḥat] of growth ended [ʿeštallam], so the whole food [mekūltā ḥlīmā] was announced. For times of restraint were disposed at first, because firstly it was necessary to separate from evil. When justice [kēnūtā] reached its completion [gmīrūt-āh], then mercy [ṭaybūt-āh] too instituted its completion. “An eye for an eye” is the completion of justice, and “To the one who strikes your cheek turn the other cheek” is the perfection [mšallmānūt-āh] of mercy. And since both exist always, they give away their taste through the two testaments.... So, one of them was the beginning [šūrāyā], the other the end [šullāmā].... Our Lord came to the world and like unto children [l-šabrē], he incited them through material gifts, but he did not perform any of the blows [mḥawātā] given by those who came before to the People. After he had baited them to come to him.... And since he was more perfect [gmīr] than those teachers, that fruit [pērā], which step-by-step [b-mūṣḥān mūṣḥān] was grown by the hand of the predecessors, when he came to it, became perfect [mšallmānā] in its taste [b-ṭaʿm-eh].... Indeed, Moses raised from the degree [dreg] of iniquity [ʿawwālūtā] and established in the degree of justice [ba-dreg-kēnūtā].... Our Lord then raised from the degree of justice and established in the degree of mercy [ba-dreg-ṭaybūtā]. (*comm. in diatess.* 6, 11–12; 14)

Here, we can find not only the themes of mercy and justice and of violence and mildness, already mentioned<sup>68</sup>, but also another important concept for CN 15–16, *yubbālā*. In the passage of the *Commentary*, it is expressed as a double or triple subdivision of “degrees” (*dargē*), “measures” (*muṣḥātā*), or “times” (*zabnē*)—all meaningful words for the theme of *yubbālā*<sup>69</sup>. These words suggest that we should trace their parallels in the whole cycle of CN 13–16, since, as already seen, the theme of *yubbālā* has the same structural function in all these poems. The result of this comparison is that Ephrem employs the same schemes of *yubbālā* for the growth of the Nisibene community from Jacob to Valgash as he employs for the growth of humanity from Israel to the church: the tripartite scheme applies both to the sequence from Adam to Abraham (or from Moses to Christ) and to Jacob–Babu–Valgash. For example, here, at the end (par. 14) we find the three degrees (*dreg*) of ‘*awwālūtā*’ (“iniquity”), of *kēnūtā*, initiated by Moses, and of *ṭaybūtā*, initiated by Christ. Normally, the first degree, corresponding to Noahic law, is seen positively as a time in which human beings followed God’s commandments naturally, whereas the introduction of Moses’s law is explained by Israel’s adoption of idolatrous customs and their hardness of heart. Other times, the initiator of the second period is Abraham<sup>70</sup>.

Dropping the first or the second step of salvation history, one obtains a more antithetical, bipartite scheme, setting justice and mercy in opposition to each other. The

CN 13–16 with a strong government and at *comm. in diatess.* 8, 2 set against *ḥuṭrā* to symbolise the mild government of the Apostles as opposed to Moses’ forceful lead.

<sup>68</sup> Beside the use of the words *kēnūtā* and *ṭaybūtā* throughout, note that the educators of the time of Justice employed “blows” (*mḥawātā*), a term of the same root as the verb *mḥā*, employed at CN 16, 8, 3; 10, 4, to describe the punishments desired by the Nisibenes.

<sup>69</sup> See §4.1 for the different terms and §4.1.1 for the language of proportionality and measure.

<sup>70</sup> See: Yousif 1981–1982, 14–15, 26; Shepardson 2008, 76; Ephr. Syr. *comm. in Gen.* 44, 3; *serm. fid.* 3, 183–187; *hymn. haer.* 26, 4–5; *comm. in diatess.* 4, 14–15; 5, 13. For the three periods in Nisibis’ history see §4.1.1.

bipartite scheme is prevalent in the quoted passage from the *Commentary to the Diatessaron*. Indeed, at its core the motif of the different periods is bipartite, distinguishing a before and an after Christ, in order to justify the retention of the Old Testament in the church and the distinction between Christianity and Judaism. It is likely that the tripartite scheme emerges from an anti-Marcionite intent, to give a positive value to the law of Moses, distinguishing it from pure and simple paganism. Similarly, the core of Ephrem's discourse on bishops is bipartite, with a stern past represented by Jacob and a mild present represented by Valgash: as has already been said (§3.1.1.2; §4.1.2), Babu is sometimes left out since Jacob is emblematic enough of the congregation's beginnings.

In such a scheme, the first step is characterised as the infancy, whereas the second step corresponds to maturity, while important images, like that of the fruit and that of weaning, are shared by the two situations. In fact, the Jews in *comm. in diatess.* are "like children" (*šabrē*), and Jesus is "mature" or "perfect" (*gmīr*) (11–12). The same image is also found for the community of Nisibis in *CN* 14, 16–17; 22. This language is rarely applied to the contrast between Judaism and Christianity, but Ephrem does something similar (albeit more aggressively) when he characterises Jews as foolish and blind<sup>71</sup>. The words *šūrāyā* and *šullāmā*, which in the passage of *comm. in diatess.* are used for Moses and Christ, justice and mercy, correspond to the episcopates of Jacob and Valgash in the sun metaphor of *CN* 13, 8–9. In the same *CN* 13, 9, as well as in *CN* 15, 14, the community is compared to a ripening fruit (*pērā*); the same metaphor is found for (presumably) the Jewish people in *comm. in diatess.* 4, 12. Finally, the growth from the Old to the New Testament is described in *comm. in diatess.* 4, 11 as a weaning and a passage to solid food (*mēkūltā ḥlīmā*): the same biblical metaphor is employed for the succession of the three bishops (*CN* 14, 16; 21; §2.2.4.4).

Given this scheme's general import and its similarities with other Christian analyses of the relationship between Testaments, it was probably elaborated as an exegetical tool and applied to the history of Nisibis in *CN* 13–16, rather than being induced from the Nisibene experience and then applied to the interpretation of Old and New Testament. This would mean that the whole cycle of *CN* 13–16 was composed in defence of Valgash (see §3) and framed the episcopal succession of Nisibis through the Pauline contrast between law and grace in order to accuse both the Judaizers of the community and those espousing a hard line against the former. Indeed, Ephrem twice compares the Nisibene community to Israel (or the synagogue) in order to establish this parallel-

<sup>71</sup> For example, at: "his strength perfected (*gmar*) the types ... his persuasion the dumb (*ʿaṭlē*)" (*hymn. virg.* 8, 8, 1; 5); "O ye Gentiles, may not your mind be childish (*ṭlē*) / like the People, whose intelligence never grew up (*rabbā-wā*)" (*CN* 62, 21); "God's very Wisdom (*ḥekmtā*) / descended among the fools (*saklē*)" (*Azym.* 1, 15, 1–2, cf. *ḥakkīmūtā* at *CN* 16, 13, 4); Shepardson 2008, 47–50.

ism between the changing attitudes of bishops and the passage from Old to New Testament:

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ܡܨܚܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܨܚܬܐ ܡܨܚܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܨܚܬܐ ܡܨܚܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܨܚܬܐ (CN 13, 10–11)	ܡܨܚܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܨܚܬܐ 11 ܡܨܚܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܨܚܬܐ ܡܨܚܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܨܚܬܐ
ܡܨܚܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܨܚܬܐ ܡܨܚܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܨܚܬܐ ܡܨܚܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܨܚܬܐ (CN 14, 19)	ܡܨܚܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܨܚܬܐ 19 ܡܨܚܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܨܚܬܐ ܡܨܚܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܡܨܚܬܐ

CN 13, 11 asks rhetorically whether the images (*demwātā*) mentioned in the previous stanza are applied only to the “daughter of Abraham” (*ba(r)t-eh d-’abrāhām*), clearly meaning Israel or the synagogue, or whether they can be applied also to the “daughter born of vows” (*bartā ba(r)t-nedrē*), meaning the church of Nisibis (see §4.3)<sup>74</sup>. This means that the images of CN 13, 10, even though they are assigned to the “daughter born of vows”, must refer back to a biblical image of Israel, which Ephrem then translates onto his community in stanza 11. I take stanza 10 to hearken back to Cant. 6:10: “Who is she [*man-āy*], who looks like dawn, beautiful [*šapīrā*] as the moon, shining as the sun, fearsome as the greats [*rawrbātā*, v.l. “ten thousand”, *rebbūtā*]<sup>75</sup>. Ephrem interprets the beauties of the woman in the Song of Songs as references to Israel’s story and leadership, employing three important terms for the theme of *yubbālā*—namely, *yubbālā* itself (3), *ṭukkāsā* (4), and *durrāgā* (5). In much the same way, at CN 14, 19, the poet says that Israel (Jacob’s daughter) had followed the same educational path as Nisibis,

72 “Who is she [*man-āy*], daughter born of vows, / enviable by all females, // whose generations flowed thus / and whose ranks increased thus // and whose degrees rose thus, / and whose chiefs [*rabbān-ēh*] shone thus? /// Is it to the daughter of Abraham alone / that these images are applied, // or even unto you, daughter born of vows? / For her ornament corresponds to her beauty [*šupr-āh*], // because her help is like her time, / and her servant is like her help.”

73 “Even for Jacob’s daughter was set / bait and stick to her childhood, // and to her youthful boldness / was given sword and rule, // until, as chastised and learned, / came to her relief and kindness.”

74 On the equivalence of “daughter of Abraham/Jacob” with Israel or the synagogue: Bickell 1866, 99, *ad* stanza 11; 102, *ad* stanza 19; Beck 1961b, 41n8; 46n19.

75 Translation mine from the Peshitta text at <http://cal.huc.edu> (accessed: 30.09.21, 22:29). The two texts have the same beginning (*man-āy*), the same paratactic structure pointed by comparative adverbs (“thus”, *hākan*; “like/as”, *’a(y)k*), they end with words of the same root (*rabbānē* and *rawrbātā*). The envy of the other females (CN 13, 10, 2) may be a reference to the praise of concubines and other girls for the woman of the Song at Cant. 6:9. Both texts are interested in the beauty (*šapīrā/šuprā*) of their feminine subject. On the somewhat problematic stance of the Song of Songs in Syriac literature, see Salvesen 2005.

from sternness to mildness. This parallelism implies (but Ephrem never says it explicitly) that, just as the Jews failed to accept the last step of their education—represented by Christ—so the Nisibenes risk rejecting their new course—represented by Valgash. Ephrem's explicit rebukes of the people are then reserved for CN 15–16.

The hypothesis of a community divided between the Judaizers and their stern censors against the will of bishop Valgash is also productive in interpreting CN 14, 5–14. This is a long digression on Aaron and the Golden Calf:

<p>ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܢ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ</p>	<p>ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܢ 5 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ</p>
<p>ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܢ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ 76 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ</p>	<p>ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܢ 6 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ...</p>
<p>ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܢ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ</p>	<p>ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܢ 12 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ</p>
<p>ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܢ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ 77 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (CN 14, 5–6; 12–13)</p>	<p>ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܢܝܫܒܝܢ 13 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ</p>

I chose to highlight only the beginning and the end of the digression because they contain more relevant information for Valgash's defence, as opposed to the development of the theme in stanzas 7–11, already analysed at §1.1.2. Aaron is portrayed at the moment in which he helped create the golden calf (Ex. 32:2–4): it is a very meaningful point in sacred history for Ephrem, because the golden calf is the gravest sin of Israel, sealing its destiny of rejection<sup>78</sup>. In this sense, it is a foundational moment for Jewish identity in Ephrem's eyes. The fact that Aaron is contrasted with Valgash may thus be read as an attack on the Judaizers, who presume to avail themselves of both priest-

76 "Aaron had stripped the ears / of earrings [*qdāšē*], to make a calf, // a dead calf which mysteriously, / once cold, killed the encampment, // those who forged his horns / with his horns ripped up. /// Yet our third priest / pierced the heart's ears // and put earrings [*qdāšē*] forged / from the nails that were fixed // to the Cross where his Lord was crucified, / thereby saving his fellows."

77 "As the babies fought inside the womb, / hurried to spring forth the elder, // but put his hand on the other's heel, / the younger, desiring primogeniture, // and, not getting it through birth, / he got it through pottage. /// In this very manner latter deeds / now are opposing the former // to gain by birth primogeniture. / But let us bring forth the deeds of our fathers, // for truly the Cross's deeds / are the firstborns of creation!"

78 Shepardson 2008, 80–91.

hoods, the corrupt one of Aaron and the life-giving one of Valgash. Even the curious comparison of Ephrem's themes with Esau and Jacob may go in this direction, since the selling of primogeniture was interpreted as a type of the Jews (Esau) being replaced by the church (Jacob); so the comparison would obliquely suggest to Judaizers that the practice of the church supersedes the practice of Judaism.

To sum up, I propose to read *CN* 13–16 as a unified cycle of poems, concerned with the defence of Bishop Valgash to his community. In these poems, the main theme of *yubbālā*, the succession of the first three bishops, is consistently mapped onto the history of Israel, as a progress from a religious attitude founded upon justice and compulsion towards a spontaneous acceptance of God founded on mercy and freedom. Given the inconsistency of *CN* 15 and *CN* 16, accusing the Nisibenes of being at the same time worthy of punishments and of expecting a punishment that does not conform to their mature state, I postulated a rift in the community, dividing a group of Judaizing Christians and a group of strong censors of the Judaizers, with the bishop—possibly in contrast to a sterner attitude of his predecessors—adopting a soft line against the Judaizers and being criticised by the censors. This would explain why Ephrem denounces both the sin deserving punishment and the request for that punishment as a regression in the progress of *yubbālā*. The poet effectively extends the accusation of Judaism to the “hawks” in the community: this way, he avoids representing and thus enabling the division, and he can criticise the Judaizers, albeit more softly than he is used to, without going against the soft line of his bishop. The bishop in this context is the only person without guilt, as the responsibility of the crisis is completely pinned on the community. The mapping of Nisibis's development onto Israel's history serves both to remind Judaizers of the Jews' failure to accept the new epoch ushered by Christ and to implicate the censors in that refusal; at the same time, it expresses—or is in accordance to—a more general theological truth—namely, that the history of Israel is a type of the history of the church, even at its local level.

### 4.3 Jacob

Verses 19 and 20 of *CN* 13 mention the burial of the first bishop of Nisibis, Jacob, and the beneficial effect it had on the community. This information should arouse the interest of the scholar, and the following discussion will highlight its peculiarity. In order to offer a full picture, I will analyse verses 18–21 of the poem:

ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܒܝ ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	18
ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	
ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	
ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	19
ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	
ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ	

<p>         ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ          ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ          ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ       </p>	<p>         ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ 20          ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ          ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ       </p>
<p>         ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ          ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ          ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ       </p>	<p>         ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ 21          ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ          ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ       </p>

(CN 13, 18–21)

CN 13 is part of the group of poems concerned with Valgash's episcopate, with CN 15–16 explicitly defending the bishop from critics inside the community (see §4.2) and CN 14 comparing him favourably to Aaron because of his preaching skills. In this context, CN 13 seems like an outlier, because instead of focusing on Valgash, it devotes its final stanzas to Jacob, the first bishop of the community. On the other side, it shares with the other poems the theme of *yubbālā*, upon which it elaborates at length (see §4.1). This clarifies partly why Ephrem focuses on Jacob: through the theme of succession, he can legitimise Valgash by highlighting the authority of his predecessor. This is exactly what happens in CN 13, where Jacob is praised only after the theme of episcopal succession is already well established, so that the authority commanded by Jacob reflects implicitly on Valgash. This, however, prompts the question of why Jacob was so important and why Ephrem chose this particular strategy in CN 13.

First, it is useful to know the date of CN 13. The poem mentions Valgash as if he was still alive—which, if we trust later chronographers, posits a *terminus ante quem* in the year 361/362<sup>80</sup>. Moreover, the poem mentions “marauders” (*gaysē*) in the time of Valgash, but also peace with the Persians, who had besieged Nisibis in the past<sup>81</sup>. This means that the marauders are not a full-fledged siege against the city; hence, they must correspond to the Persian raids in the countryside of Nisibis before the siege of Amida in the summer of 359, an event precisely narrated by Ammianus, who was in Nisibis at the time<sup>82</sup>. So, the *terminus post quem* for the poem is the spring/summer of

79 “Nisibis is planted upon waters, / waters hidden and waters apparent: // living springs are inside her, / a proud river outside her; // the outer river cheated on her, / the inner source protected her. /// The first priest, her vintner, / grew her branches to the sky, // and lo! Dead and buried inside her, / he brought fruit inside her bosom; // therefore, when came the hewers, / the fruit inside her protected her. /// The time had come of her hewing, / it came in and took away her vintner; // because he was no more to entreat for her, / she swiftly turned to cunning, // placing in her bosom her vintner / that she might be delivered by her vintner. /// Imitate Nisibis, / O eloquent daughters of Nisibis, // which placed the body inside her, / and it was a wall outside her: // put in yourselves a living body, / which may be a wall for your life.”

80 “Great is our mourning of the two / but the last is truly our comfort.” (CN 13, 1, 5–6); Fiey 1977, 33.

81 “Then, in the days of the last / marauders [*gaysē*] thronged and marauders left.” (CN 13, 14, 5–6); CN 13, 4–6 (in particular, lines 5–6 of each verse).

82 Amm. Marc. 18, 4–19, 9 (see also Harrell 2016, chapter 11). In part.: *Nisibin propere venimus, utilia paraturi, ne dissimulantes obsidium, Persae civitati supervenirent incautae. Dumque intra muros maturanda perurgerentur, fumus micantesque ignes assidue a Tigride per Castra Maurorum et Sisara et colimitia reliqua ad usque civitatem continui perlucebant, solito crebriores, erupisse hostium vastatorias*

359. *CN* 14 mentions damages to the villages surrounding Nisibis<sup>83</sup>; since the two poems were written likely in the same period of time, due to their using the same metre and treating similar topics, *CN* 13 should be dated near the summer of 359 (*terminus post*) rather than near Valgash's death (*terminus ante*). Moreover, *CN* 15, 19–20 connects the Nisibenes' offence against Valgash with their being "trodden down" (*dāš(w)*) by "outsiders" (*barrāyē*)<sup>84</sup>. Since the antithesis of "insider" and "outsider" (*gawwāyā/barrāyā*) is routinely employed by Ephrem in the poems on the sieges to describe the besieged Nisibenes and the besieging Persians, it is sensible to link this passage to some recent attack from the Persians, which (at this date) can only be the 359 raids<sup>85</sup>: in order for Ephrem to present Persian attacks as retribution for the Nisibenes' disobedience to Valgash, disobedience and attack must have occurred roughly at the same time. Therefore, I propose to date *CN* 13 and 14 to the year following the summer of 359.

The unifying theme of stanzas 18–20 is the comparison of Nisibis to a vine. The word is never explicitly stated, but the constellation of metaphors clearly points to the vine, particularly through the word *pallāhā*, applied to the bishop (*CN* 13, 19, 1; 20, 2; 5–6), a word that, while having also the generic sense of "worker", properly means "vintner"<sup>86</sup>. That Ephrem employs the word in this proper sense, especially when related to a bishop, is demonstrated by stanzas 27–28 of *CN* 31: stanza 27 calls the bishop Vitus a *pallāhā* and represents him treating a "plant" (*neṣbtā*), whereas stanza 28 calls him a 'akkārā, "farmer" or "ploughman" and mentions a "barn" ('awsrā). From the parallelism between these two stanzas, it is clear that *pallāhā* refers to the cultivation of the vine, and 'akkārā to that of grain. Obviously, this metaphor is a staple of biblical language, especially in discourses on the community—its origins, its sins, and its destiny<sup>87</sup>. This is true also for Ephrem and can be seen in the constellation of metaphors: if Nisibis is a vine, her foundations are that which she is "planted upon" (*nṣibat 'al*, *CN* 13, 18, 1); she needs water as nourishment (*CN* 13, 18); she has a vintner in her bishop; her enemies, the Persians, are "hewers" (*pāsōqē*, *CN* 13, 19, 5), and the sieges

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*manus superato flumine permonstrantes* (18, 6, 8–9); *Extemplo igitur equites citi mittuntur ad Cassianum, Mesopotamiae ducem, rectoremque provinciae tunc 1 Euphroniam, compulsuri agrestes cum familiis et pecoribus universis ad tutiora transire, et agiler deserere Carras, oppidum invalidis circumdatum muris; super his campos omnes incendi, ne pabulorum suppetere copia. ... ut ad usque Euphraten, ab ipsis marginibus Tigridis, nihil viride cerneretur* (7, 3–4). Ephrem himself testifies these raids: *CN* 5–12.

83 "Three shepherds / had many musterers, // one mother in the citadel / had many daughters in every region: // since wrath ruined her folds, / may peace restore her churches!" (*CN* 14, 1).

84 "If with the head [*rēšā*] as first/ the limbs had run as second, // they would have led the third, / and all the whole body would have/ followed them. /// But the second neglected the first, / and the third the second, // the rank were despised one by the other. / It's because the insiders [*gawwāyē*] neglected each other, // that the outsiders [*barrāyē*] too trod them down." (*CN* 15, 19–20). For other interpretations of this passage, see §4.2.

85 See, for example, *CN* 1, 10–11; *CN* 2, 5, 8–11; 5, 15; *CN* 9, 4–5.

86 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3151, s.v. ܥܠܬܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 1197, s.v. ܥܠܬܐ.

87 Murray 2006, 195–199.



are “hewing” (*psāqā*, *CN* 13, 20, 1)<sup>88</sup>; and, finally, she has boughs and brings fruit (*CN* 13, 19, 2; 4–6). Through this metaphor, Ephrem expresses the defining features of collective life in Nisibis: its place near the River Mygdonius, the “living water” which nourishes its spiritual existence; the foundational role of the first bishop, Jacob; and the existential threat of the Persians<sup>89</sup>.

What is especially striking in these stanzas is the attribution of supernatural powers to the body of the dead bishop. This is presented in the terms of the vine metaphor: the former vintner, buried below the vine, brings fruit, almost as a fertilising principle (stanza 19). In Ephrem’s presentation of this belief, we may recognise some features of, or at least some conditions for, a cult of the dead: first, he talks indeed of a dead man (*mīt*, *CN* 13, 19, 3); second, the focus is clearly on the corpse and its burial place, not on the soul or the name of the bishop (*qbīr*, *CN* 13, 19, 3 and also 20, 5); third, the relics are explicitly located *inside* the city walls, contrary to contemporary practice<sup>90</sup>; and finally, the buried corpse is endowed with a protective power, continuing the bishop’s power as

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<sup>88</sup> My translation differs both from recent translators in German and French and from older ones in English and Latin. Beck 1961b, 42 and Feghali/Navarre 1989, 49 translate \**p-s-q* with the root of “destroy” (“die Zerstörer”/“Zerstörung” and “les destructeurs”/“la destruction”). Bickell 1866, 100 and Stopford 1898, 181 render the two words as “pruners” and “pruning” (*amputatores/amputatio*). Neither meaning of the root is listed in the lexica, but “to prune” goes in the right direction preserving the plant metaphor of stanzas 18–19. My translation with “hew” retains the metaphor too but is also attested by the lexica and in the Peshitta (cf. *Dtn.* 19:5; 20:19; *Iudc.* 9:48–49; Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3192; Sokoloff 2009, 1212). Moreover, it has a better figurative meaning than “pruning”: while pruning is beneficial for a plant, though arguably painful, and hence God and Jacob may not have wanted the Nisibenes to avoid such a treatment, “hewing” means the utter destruction of the plant, something Nisibis has really risked during the Persian sieges, and avoidance of which was clearly positive. A problem common to all these translations is the scarce attestation of the word “hewers” (*pāsōqē*). The majority of occurrences listed in the lexica is metalinguistic: a *pāsōqā* is a section or a chapter in a longer text, the διάψαλμον in the *Psalms*, a reading from the Gospels, the Hippocratic aphorisms, a punctuation mark, a kind of accent and the indicative mode (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3196, s.v. ܦܥܣܩܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 1208, s.v. ܦܥܣܩܐ). As an attribute with the word “teeth” (*ṣenē*), it means “incisive”. Three occurrences in the Syriac translation of Origen’s Hexapla are worth mentioning: at *Prov.* 30:14 the jaws of a wicked generation are said to be “knives”; at *Sap.* 5:20 God’s wrath is “unrelentless” (Gr. ἀπότομος); and at *Iudc.* 5:26 Jael grabs with her right hand “javelins of the strikers”. Neither “destroyer” nor “pruner” nor “hewer” is an attested meaning of *pāsōqā*. However, the occurrence of the term at *Iudc.* 5:26, although in a very confused context, suggests that the term can be used as a *nomen agentis*. This is confirmed by its morphology: names formed with *ā* after the first radical and *ō* after the second are normally *nomina agentis* in Syriac (Duval 1881, 217, §232; Nöldeke 1880, 64, §107). Therefore, it is not a long stretch to assume that even here the word can be a *nomen agentis*.

<sup>89</sup> The metaphor is nicely anticipated by the metaphor of the sun at stanzas 7–9, where the bishops are compared to three phases of the sun and the community to the fruits progressively ripening. Through these stanzas, which function as a hinge, Ephrem transitions from the initial metaphor of the bishops as celestial bodies (stanzas 1–2) to the final metaphor of the community as vine and the bishop as vintner (stanzas 19–20).

<sup>90</sup> The practice of burying the dead outside the city, derived from the belief of their impurity, is discussed by Brown 1981, 3–10.

intercessor (*ba'āyā*, CN 13, 20, 3) before God, so that the relics are essentially connected with the holy man's *parrhesia* with God. This is, incidentally, a testimony to the importance of intercession as an episcopal function for Ephrem and his community<sup>91</sup>.

Besides these features of a cult, however, the text lacks any reference to concrete cultic actions, liturgies, or festivities associated with the corpse, except the act of burying it inside the city. Moreover, contextual considerations may further limit the importance of Ephrem's words. The cult of dead bishops is unattested in this period, and the first hagiographical accounts on bishops, as well as the first witnesses to such a cult, all come from the end of the fourth century onwards<sup>92</sup>. Even admitting such a precocious cult, one could explain it away as something else. For example, Gennadius of Massilia in his short biography of Jacob of Nisibis relates that the bishop had been a confessor during the persecutions of Maximinus Daza, while Theodoret devotes most his biography of the saint to Jacob's ascetic endeavours<sup>93</sup>. Since martyrs, confessors, and ascetics were the object of cult and hagiography before bishops, one could argue that Jacob was revered primarily as a confessor or ascetic, not as a bishop<sup>94</sup>. However, the accounts of Theodoret and Gennadius were written much later than Ephrem's poem, with Gennadius writing in a totally different context from Syria. It is true that Jacob had the fame of an ascetic or a martyr, since Ephrem seems to characterise him in this way elsewhere in the poems<sup>95</sup>. Yet, even admitting this fact, the text describing the power of his relics does not mention anything of this, and, much to the contrary, it clearly depicts Jacob as

91 On *parrhesia* and the cult of the dead: Brown 1981, 59–66 (we can see a similar projection of earthly links on the patron saint as the senatorial *amicitia* of Paulinus and Felix in Ephrem's self-styling as a disciple of the first three bishops of Nisibis at CN 14, 25–26); on *parrhesia* as an episcopal virtue: Rapp 2005, 267–274; §3.1.1.3; §3.1.2.

92 Brown 1981, 8; Cracco Ruggini 1998, 11–12; Lizzi Testa 2009, 537–538; Soz. 5, 3, 8 writes of a μνείας τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς γενομένων ἱερέων kept at Gaza and Maiuma.

93 *Jacobus cognomento Sapiens Nisibinae nobilis Persarum modo civitatis episcopus, unus ex numero sub Maximino persecutore confessorum* (Gennad. vir. ill. 1; PL 58, 1060); εἰς τὴν τῆς ἀρχιερωσύνης ἔλκεται λειτουργίαν καὶ τῆς πατρίδος λαγχάνει τὴν προστασίαν. Ἐναλλάξας δὲ τὴν ὄρειον ἐκείνην διατριβὴν καὶ τὴν ἐν ἄστει διαγωγὴν οὐ κατὰ γνώμην ἐλόμενος, οὔτε τὴν τροφὴν οὔτε τὴν ἀμπεχόνην ἐνήλλαξεν (Theod. hist. rel. 1, 7; chapters 1–6 are devoted to Jacob's ascetic exploits).

94 On hagiography in particular: Rapp 2005, 294–296. Forms of cult of the martyrs are attested since the second century, as witnessed by the *Martyrdom of saint Polycarpus*.

95 See §3.2.1. Some texts proving this: “Against the first wrath / fought the toil [*amlā*] of the first” (CN 13, 16, 1–2); “The good toil [*amlā*] of the first / bound the land up in her distress” (CN 14, 2, 1–2); “The first tilled the earth with toil [*amlā*]” (CN 14, 3, 1); “The first priest by hand of fasting / had closed the gates of the mouths” (CN 14, 4, 1–2); “Before the One rewarding the wearied, / she [the church of Nisibis] brings the labour [*amlā*] of the first;” (CN 14, 24, 1–2). For the word *amlā* referring to ascetic labour: §3.2.1 n. 230. “To the first siege resisted / the first, triumphant [*naṣṣiḥā*] priest” (CN 13, 17, 1–2); “Like the triumphant [*naṣṣiḥā*] priest Jacob, / with him she [the church of Nisibis] triumphed [*nṣaḥt*] like him” (CN 19, 16, 1–2). For the word *naṣṣiḥā* and derivatives: §3.2.1 nn. 231–236.

a bishop, calling him *kāhnā* (CN 13, 19, 1) and positing a supervising relationship with the community of Nisibis through the persistent metaphor of the vintner<sup>96</sup>.

Even if a cult of the dead bishop in this context may seem far-fetched, we can at least produce examples from Ephrem's immediate surroundings which are similar to our case. If on one hand Ephrem criticises the pageantry of funerals, on the other he is well aware and approves of the contemporary cult of the saints, particularly mentioning the cult of Thomas's relics in Edessa<sup>97</sup>. Similar references multiply if we consider poems of doubtful authenticity. A stanza in the poems written in Edessa mentions relics of John the Baptist and of three local martyrs, Gurya, Shamona, and Habbib (CN 33, 13), though Beck suspects this stanza was appended to the poem at a later date<sup>98</sup>. Much more material is extant in the poems on the Edessan ascetics Abraham Kidunaia and Julian Saba, whose relics were believed, at least by Ephrem, to have supernatural powers<sup>99</sup>. These practical examples are often defended, by Ephrem as well as later authors, on the basis of two biblical precedents—namely, Moses bringing the bones of Joseph out of Egypt in contradiction to the biblical interdiction against touching the dead or keeping them inside the city and the miracle of Elisha's bones resurrecting a dead man<sup>100</sup>. This biblical argument, as well as the Edessene examples, is markedly Syrian<sup>101</sup>. It is wholly

<sup>96</sup> See §2.2.2.

<sup>97</sup> CN 21, 8 analysed at §3.1.4.4; CN 42–43 are devoted to the cult of Thomas in Edessa.

<sup>98</sup> “Through the bones of John / some of which are in our region // prophets came to our land / through Gurya and through Shamona // and through their fellow, Habbib / martyrs came to visit us” (CN 33, 13); see Beck 1961b, 98, 100.

<sup>99</sup> Clear examples at *Iul. Saba* 2, 17 and *Iul. Saba* 4, 1–7.

<sup>100</sup> CN 42, 3; 8, 8; CN 43, 1; 3; 12; *hymn. virg.* 19, 7; *hymn. haer.* 42, 10, 3.

<sup>101</sup> The combination of Elisha and Joseph in defence of the cult of relics is found at *Const. apost.* 6, 30, 2–6 (ἀπαρτητήτως δὲ συναθροίζεσθε ἐν τοῖς κοιμητηρίοις ... “Τίμιος” γὰρ “ἐναντίον κυρίου ὁ θάνατος τῶν ὁσίων αὐτοῦ” ... οὐκ οὖν τῶν παρὰ θεῷ ζώντων οὐδὲ τὰ λείψανα ἄτιμα. Καὶ γὰρ Ἐλισσαῖος ὁ προφήτης μετὰ τὸ κοιμηθῆναι αὐτὸν νεκρὸν ἤγειρε πεφονευμένον ὑπὸ πειρατῶν Συρίας: ἐψαυσεν γὰρ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ τῶν Ἐλισσαίου ὁστέων καὶ ἀναστὰς ἔζησε: οὐκ ἂν δὲ ἐγεγόνει τοῦτο, εἰ μὴ ἦν τὸ σῶμα Ἐλισσαίου ἅγιον. Καὶ Ἰωσήφ ὁ σώφρων περιπλέκετο τῷ Ἰακώβ μετὰ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν ὄντι ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης καὶ Μωσῆς καὶ Ἰησοῦς ὁ τοῦ Ναυῆ ἐπεφύροντο τὰ λείψανα τοῦ Ἰωσήφ, μολυσμὸν οὐχ ἠγούμενοι τοῦτο) and at Hieron. *ep.* 109, 2 (*Si non sunt honorandae reliquiae Martyrum, quomodo legimus: Pretiosa in conspectu Domini mors Sanctorum ejus? Si ossa eorum polluunt contingentes, quomodo Elisaeus mortuus, mortuum suscitavit, et dedit vitam corpus quod juxta Vigilantium jacebat immundum? Ergo omnia castra Israelitici exercitus et populi Dei fuere immunda, quia Joseph et Patriarcharum corpora portabant in solitudine: et ad sanctam Terram, immundos cineres pertulerunt? Joseph quoque, qui in typo praecessit Domini Salvatoris, sceleratus fuit; qui tanta ambitione, Jacob in Hebron ossa portavit; ut immundum patrem, avo et atavo sociaret immundis, et mortuum mortuis copularet?*). Conversely, other Latin texts defending the cult of relics (Ambr. *ep.* 22, Aug. *cur. mort.* and *civ. D.* 22) do not mention these biblical passages, which suggests Jerome drew from oriental sources. John Chrysostom mentions both Joseph's and Elisha's bone, but separately (Elisha: Joh. Chrys. *paneg. Ign.* PG 50, 595; Joseph: *paneg. Bab.* 1. PG 50, 532; *paneg. Dros.* PG 50, 689–690). Among the Greek homilies translated in Leemans/Mayer/Allen/Dehandschutter 2003 only Chrysostom's homily on Babylas mentions Joseph, Elisha is nowhere to be found. The theme of Joseph's bones in particular, and their favourable contrast with the riches of Egypt,

possible that Edessa influenced Nisibis and that the latter felt the need for such a supernatural protection as that of Jacob, in order to differentiate herself from the prestigious Edessa. The model of Edessa, however, does not obliterate the originality of Jacob's cult, which anticipates fifth- and fourth-century developments in two major aspects: first, because it sanctifies a bishop and not a martyr or an apostle, and second, because the saint is conceived mainly as defender of the city, a "wall" (*šūrā*) against her enemies<sup>102</sup>. The link between defence and relics began to develop in the fifth century in cities at the border of the Roman Empire, in a time when the *limes* was less safe and manned than it had been in the previous century<sup>103</sup>. Similar conditions may have prompted a similar response in fourth-century Nisibis: the city sustained the hardest pressure from the Persians in the first half of the century, because of its strategic position on the border, which may explain why the Nisibenes developed such an exceptional belief<sup>104</sup>. It is true that the three sieges did not conquer Nisibis, but one should not underestimate the stress that such operations put on the populace, both in material and in psychological terms, especially if we suppose that the inhabitants recognised the significance of their position on the border of two hostile empires and thus recognised the strategic importance of their city, which made it the primary target of Persian operations. Ammianus surely understood the significance of this situation, and if it is true that troops were stationed in the citadel at the time, such information would hardly have escaped the notice of the inhabitants<sup>105</sup>. For all these reasons, if a full-fledged cult of the dead bishop cannot be

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is common to early Syriac writers (Aphraat. *dem.* 8, 8; Ephr. *Syr. comm. in Ex.* 13, 1; *hymn. haer.* 42, 10, 3) and Jewish literature (Sir 49:15; Kugel 1990, 125–155; Goldman 1995, 119–143; Ginzberg 1998, 181–184).

**102** "Against the first wrath [*rugzā*] / fought the toil of the first" (CN 13, 16, 1–2); "To the first siege [*hbāšā*] resisted / the first, triumphant priest" (CN 13, 17, 1–2); "therefore, when came the hewers, / the fruit inside her protected her." (CN 13, 19, 5–6); "be for us a wall (*šūrā*) as Jacob" (CN 17, 11, 6). This specialisation continues in later sources on Jacob: Τότε πάντες ικετεύουσι τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀνθρώπων φανῆναί τε ἐπὶ τοῦ τείχους καὶ ἀραῖς κατατοξεῦσαι τοὺς πολεμίους. Ὁ δὲ ἐπείθετο καὶ ἀνῆει καί, τὰς πολλὰς αὐτῶν θεασάμενος μυριάδας, σκνιφῶν αὐτοῖς καὶ κωνώπων ἐπιπέμψαι νέφος ἰκέτευσεν τὸν θεόν. Καὶ ὁ μὲν ἔλεγεν, ὁ δὲ ἔπεμπε, Μωϋσῇ παραπλησίως πειθόμενος. ... Χρόνου δὲ διελθόντος καὶ τοῦδε τοῦ ἁστεως ὑπὸ τοῦ τῆνικάδε κρατοῦντος τῇ περσικῇ βασιλείᾳ παραδοθέντος, ἐξήεσαν μὲν ἅπαντες οἱ τὴν πόλιν οἰκοῦντες, ἔφερον δὲ τοῦ προμάχου τὸ σῶμα, ἀσχάλλοντες μὲν καὶ ὀλοφυρόμενοι τὴν μετοικίαν, ἄδοντες δὲ τοῦ νικηφόρου ἀριστέως τὴν δύναμιν. Οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐκείνου περιόντος ὑπὸ βαρβάρους ἐγένοντο. (Theodt. *hist. rel.* 1, 7; 11; 14); *Moritur hic vir Constantii temporibus, et juxta praeceptum patris eius Constantini juxta muros Nisibe sepelitur, ob custodiam videlicet civitatis. Nam post multos annos ingressus Julianus Nisiben, et vel gloriae sepulti invidens, vel fidei Constantini, cuius ob id domum persequeretur, jussit efferrī de civitate sacri corporis reliquias. Et post paucos menses consulendae licet causa reipublicae, Jovianus imperator, qui Juliano successerat, tradidit barbaris civitatem, quae usque hodie Persarum ditioni cum suis subiecta servit.* (Gennad. *vir. ill.* 1; PL 58, 1062).

**103** Fowden 1999, 45–48.

**104** Russell 2005, 214–217; Lightfoot 1981, 106.

**105** *Orientis firmissimum claustrum* (Amm. Marc. 25, 8, 14). On the possible presence of a legion in Nisibis: Russell 2005, 215; Dodgeon/Lieu 2002, 399nn35, 38 and 41; Lightfoot 1981, 107–109.

conclusively inferred from Ephrem's text and must remain at best a hypothesis, on the other side text and context clearly point to a local memory or tradition surrounding Jacob's burial. This tradition may in turn be seen as the first seed of a later cult or of a monumentalisation of the same burial by the community. In any case, Ephrem testifies to a unique importance ascribed to the bishop in Nisibis as founder and supernatural defender of the community and the city.

In the constellation of metaphors relating to vine imagery, the metaphor of irrigation and water is explored in stanza 18. I contend that this stanza, with other elements of the poem, alludes to baptism. Stanza 18 is structured by an antithesis concerning two kinds of water. The antithesis can be summarised within a table:

Baptism	River Mygdonius
Hidden ( <i>kasyē</i> )	Apparent ( <i>galyē</i> )
Springs ( <i>neb'ē/mabbu'ā</i> )	River ( <i>nahrā</i> )
Living ( <i>hayyē</i> )	Proud ( <i>ga'yā</i> )
Inside ( <i>l-gaw</i> )	Outside ( <i>l-bar</i> )
It protected ( <i>nṭar</i> )	It betrayed ( <i>daggel</i> )

The elements summarised in the righthand column allude to the River Mygdonius (today, the Jaghjagh), which ran on the eastern side of Nisibis, slightly lower than the city, so that it is literally true that Nisibis was “planted *upon* (*'al*)” the Mygdonius's waters (CN 13, 18, 1–2)<sup>106</sup>. It is also true metaphorically, since the river was the main source of irrigation for the countryside near the city, whose products in all likelihood fed the inhabitants<sup>107</sup>. Moreover, the river ran along but outside (*l-bar*) the walls of the city, as stated by Ephrem in line 4. The idea that the river “betrayed” (*daggel*, 5) Nisibis alludes to the Persians damming the river during their third siege of the city (350) in order to use the mass of water, suddenly released, as a battering ram against the city walls<sup>108</sup>. Hence, the indication of the river flowing “outside” (*l-bar*) the city, though perfectly accurate in a literal sense, can be also intended metaphorically, as the river helped the Persian besieger (*barrāyā*) instead of the Nisibene besieged (*gawwāyā*). Yet there is more to this antithesis between “inside” and “outside”, since these two spatial determinations are normally used in Syriac theological language to contrast the rational, immaterial, invisible, or mysterious side of things with their sensorial, material, visible, and obvious features<sup>109</sup>. The dictionaries make clear that the opposition of *bar* and *gaw*

<sup>106</sup> But cf. *nṣibin nṣibat 'al mayyā* (CN 13, 18, 1) with *'ilānā da-nṣib 'al 'appā d-mayyā* (Ps. 1:3).

<sup>107</sup> Palermo 2014, 457–458 (with extensive bibliography in the notes); Keser Kayaalp/Erdogan 2014, 138–139; Russell 2005, 186–188.

<sup>108</sup> On the Persian sieges see: Harrel 2016; on the first siege: Burgess 1999; on the last: Lightfoot 1981.

<sup>109</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 577–578, 667–668; Sokoloff 2009, 188, 214.

has many more meanings: not only besieger/besieged (CN 1, 10–11; CN 2, 5, 8–11; 15) and material/spiritual (CN 9, 4–5; 8, 4–5; CN 11, 14) but also stranger/citizen and pagan/Christian (the church of Edessa and the heretics: CN 26, 2, 3–4). All these oppositions apply to the situation of the sieges in Nisibis, at least according to Ephrem's narration: a community of Christians and Roman citizens is besieged by a host of pagan strangers. Therefore, the river's defection to the Persian side is not only a political/military treason but also an act of apostasy. The same opposition connotes the binomial "hidden"/"apparent" (*kasyā/galyā*) in Ephrem's poetry, so that, when he contrasts the river outside with the hidden and living springs inside, the connotation is that, while the river has only physical uses, such as irrigation and drinking, the water inside the city has a more mystical meaning<sup>110</sup>.

This mystical meaning should be linked with baptism, because of Ephrem's language: in fact, the idea of "living springs" (*neb'ē ḥayyē*, 3) echoes the language of Joh. 4, the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, especially in the Peshitta version. Jesus's promise of a "living water" (*mayyā ḥayyē*, Joh. 4:10) "springing" (*d-nāb'īn*, Joh. 4:14) for eternity is expressed with the same roots as the living springs of water in CN 13, 18. But we know from other texts, preserving a similar language, that Ephrem interpreted Jesus's promise as a reference to baptism; hence, in employing the same language as the Gospel passage, he may well be hinting at baptism<sup>111</sup>. Moreover, when Ephrem—and indeed writers in the Christian tradition of the first centuries at large—refer to the concept of "living water," and even when they mention the most straightforward references to water in the biblical texts, they ordinarily do so in connection with baptism<sup>112</sup>. It is true that the metaphor of water is applied in two other relevant contexts by Ephrem—namely, episcopal preaching and the power of relics. In CN 19, 8, 7, Ephrem speaks of a "fountain of words" (*m'īn-mellē*) transmitted from one bishop to his successor<sup>113</sup>. CN 43 is particularly interesting because it combines many metaphors

110 Den Biesen 2006, 120–121, 141–142, 198–199; Cerbelaud 2001; Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1779–1780, s.v. *ܡܝܐ*. See *Epiph.* 9, 5, where the water of baptism is its "revealed" (*galyā*) aspect, and its sacramental force its "mystical" (*kasyā*) one, the first perceived by the body and the second by the mind.

111 "He [Jesus] said to her: My water descends from the sky; it is a doctrine from above and it is a celestial drink. Those who drink it will never thirst again: for it is one the baptism [*ma'mōdītā*] for the faithful" (*comm. in diatess.* 12, 17); "whoever drinks the water I will give him / shall not thirst again in eternity: / of this holy baptism [*mādā qaddīšā*] / were you thirsty, my beloved; / never again will you thirst / until you reach the last baptism [*mādā*] (*Epiph.* 7, 21); "baptism is a well of life [*b'ērā d-ḥayyē ma'mōdītā*]" (*Epiph.* 12, 5, 1).

112 *Περὶ δὲ τοῦ βαπτίσματος, οὕτω βαπτίσατε, εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐν ὕδατι ζῶντι. Ἐὰν δὲ μὴ ἔχης ὕδωρ ζῶν, εἰς ἄλλο ὕδωρ βάπτισον* (*Did.* 7, 1–2); *Quoetienscumque autem aqua sola in Scripturis sanctis nominatur, Baptisma praedicatur* (Cyp. *ep.* 63, 8; cf. Seppälä 2011, 1172).

113 "Because you loved the misery / of your master, the inwardly rich, // May the fountain of his words gush from you, / so that you become the Spirit's lyre, // and he sings to you in you his wills. / **Blessed is he who made you his treasurer!**" (CN 19, 8)

present also in *CN* 13: the relics as a “wall” for the people, the vine metaphor, the idea of “running” (*rhet*) to relics, the metaphor of the source<sup>114</sup>. However, these passages do not employ such a baptismal expression as “living springs,” they do not insist on water images as much as *CN* 13, 18, and they are written at a later date, during the episcopate of Abraham and when Ephrem was in Edessa, so that they might be inspired by this previous poem. Even if these occurrences were entirely comparable, this would not exclude a reference to baptism in *CN* 13; to the contrary, it might point to a habit of associating relics, bishops, and baptism.

Another reference to baptism appears in stanzas 19 and 20, when Ephrem says that the community buried Jacob “in her bosom” (*b-’ubb-āh*, *CN* 13, 19, 4; 20, 5). At face value, this means that the city has put the relics at its very centre: literally, this echoes the lines with the preposition *b-gaw* (*CN* 13, 19, 3; 19, 6; 21, 3) and confirms that Jacob was buried inside the walls; metaphorically, it could express the high honour in which the relics were held. Yet, and more importantly, the word for “bosom”, or “womb” (*’ubbā*), is used figuratively in Syriac to mean “baptism”<sup>115</sup>. The tenor of this metaphorical usage is clear: as the womb contains the body of the child before giving birth to it, so the

<sup>114</sup> “A wall [*šūrā*] was Joseph / for himself in the country // Moses carried his bones/ that they may be for his encampment // a wall in the desert” (*CN* 43, 1, 1–5); “Moses left the living / and ran [*rhet*] towards the dead. // They were his worker / and closed the breaches [*tur’ātā*] of the people. // The vineyard [*karma*] breached / its pen for the trampers // yet that blest grape [*tōṭitā*] / endured in the midst of the vine” (*CN* 43, 3, 1–8); “amazing is the sickness of the saints // which is a source of healing [*neb’ā d-ḥulmānā*] / for the body of those visiting” (*CN* 43, 9, 7–9). The word *mabbū’ā* instead is found at *Abr. Kid.* 4, 10, 1; *Iul. Saba* 4, 5, 1; 11, 4–5.

<sup>115</sup> Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2823, s.v. ܐܘܒܐ. The lexicon quotes Ephrem, *Epiph.* 7, 25, 4 (*’ubbā d-ma’mudītā*, “the womb of baptism”; the variant reading of *mayyā* instead of *’ubbā* is clearly *facilior*); 9, 2, 7 (*b-’ubbā d-ma’mudītā*); *Crucif.* 3, 8, 5 (*b-’ubbā d-mayyā*); *hymn. eccl.* 36, 3–6. See also *CN* 27, 13, 5–6: “You are sons of the Spirit, / and children born from water (*bnay-mayyā*)”; “I [Mary] am handmaid and daughter// of the blood and the water / through which You purchased and baptised me” (*Nat.* 16, 10). In *hymn. virg.* 7 all this theology of the second birth is particularly clear: “Bodies totally stained / and already hoary, when not destroyed // Sink with their sins like filth / and emerge pure like newborn babies // for baptism [*ma’mudītā*] was for them / a new womb [*karsā*] ... It is priesthood [*kāhnutā*] that ministers / this womb (*karsā*) with its promise” (*hymn. virg.* 7, 7, 3–8 and 8, 1–2). Here it is clear how the bishop (*kāhnā*, here with the abstract *kāhnutā*, a customary rhetorical figure in Ephrem), the womb and baptism are linked (see also the typological passage of Maruthas of Maypherkat quoted by Murray 2006, 181). The imagery of womb is widespread in other authors: Nars. *hom.* 21, p. 46–47, 341–342; pp. 52–53, 346–348; 32, p. 166, 148; Joh. Chrys. *comm. in Gal.* 4, 28; in *Joh. hom.* 1–88 26, 1; Theod. Mops. *Catechetical Homilies* 14, p. 55; Procl. *Cpol. hom.* 7, 3, 4; Aug. *serm.* 56, 5; Zeno of Verona 1, 55; 2, 28; Chromat. *serm.* 18, 3; Leo M. *serm.* 24, 3; and especially Pacian. *bapt.* 6, 2 (*Atque ita Christi semen, id est Dei spiritus novum hominem alvo matris agitatum, et partu fontis exceptum, manibus sacerdotis effundit, fide tamen pronuba*, note the role of the priest in this account). More discussion of this metaphor can be found at Ferguson 2009, *passim*.

water of baptism (*ma'mōdītā*, a feminine) contains the catechumen, who, once he has emerged, is born to a new life. The metaphor can be expanded to include the bishop: if the individual man and the church as a collective represent the newborn and if baptism represents the womb, then the parent is the bishop, by virtue of his role in administering baptism. And this is all the truer—in Ephrem's poetry—of Jacob, because he was the first bishop of the community, or at least the first our poet records<sup>116</sup>. Not by chance, Ephrem introduces him at stanza 19 as *kāhnā qadmā*, “the first priest”, underlining his foundational role. Yet in this context the father metaphor is not spelled out explicitly as elsewhere; rather, Ephrem keeps the imagery consistent with the vine metaphor and, instead of a father, describes the bishop as a vintner.

If one accepts that stanza 18 and the expression *b-ubbā* in stanzas 19–20 allude to baptism, other expressions can be interpreted in a consistent structure. The last stanza of the poem addresses some “eloquent daughters of Nisibis” (CN 13, 21, 1–2). Taken by itself, the expression “daughters of Nisibis” has nothing special, being a standard Semitic idiom to name the inhabitants of a city<sup>117</sup>. However, the attribute *mallālātā* is difficult

116 “Of the first [Jacob], who begot the diocese, / his bosom [*ubb-eh*] kept her infancy” (CN 14, 20, 1–2); “The first priest, who begot” (CN 14, 21, 1). Not much is known of Christianity in Nisibis before Jacob, beside the famous inscription of Abercius. However, all witnesses testify that Jacob's tenure represented a foundational moment for Christianity in Nisibis: the bishop ferried the community through the last persecutions to the Constantinian age, took part in the Council of Nicaea, built the first basilica and was in charge as the episcopal seat of Nisibis became also a metropolis (Fiey 1977, 19–25).

117 The idiom, found in Hebrew, is translated identically in the Peshitta, both when it identifies all the inhabitants of a city (Jes. 1:8; 10:32 (*varia lectio*); 16:1; 62:11; Mich. 4:8; 4:10; 4:13; Jer. 6:2; 6:23; Zeph. 3:14; Zach. 9:9; Ps. 9:15 (*varia lectio*); Lament. 1:6; 2:1; 2:4; 4:22) and when it refers only to the women (Jes. 3:16–17; 4:4; 49:22; 60:4; Lament. 3:51; Cant. 1:5; 2:7; 3:5; 3:10–11; 5:8; 8:16; 8:4; Judt. 21:21). The dictionaries do not report this idiom; however, they refer to another idiom shared with the Hebrew, namely *bnāt*- to indicate villages dependent upon a city (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 579, s.v. *بنات*; Sokoloff 2009, 192, s.v. *بنات*). Even in this case, all text passages quoted come from the Bible and reflect a similar Hebrew idiom (Payne Smith: Judc. 11:26 (Hexaplaric); 1Macc. 5:8; 5:65; Sokoloff: Jes. 16:2; Lament. 3:48; Ps. 48:12; Hes. 16:46; 16:48). Now, the first two Hebrew idioms are always rendered in Syriac through the same idiom, but as regards the sense of “village” the Hebrew idiom is often rendered through the word *kaprā*, “village” (Num. 21:25; 21:32; 32:42; Jos. 15:45; 15:47; 17:11; 17:16; Judt. 1:27; 11:26; Jer. 49:2; Neh. 11:25–31; 1Chron. 18:1); this suggests that the first two idioms were understood in Syriac, whereas the third was less acclimatised, prompting sometimes a word-for-word rendition, some other times a true translation. Moreover, the idiom is normally used differently from here, either at the construct state with the name of a region (*Mo'ab*, Jes. 16:2; *Yihūdā*, Ps. 48:12) or after the name of a city with the suffix-pronoun, but never to the construct state governing the name of a city, as is the case for the idiom meaning “inhabitant”. Ephrem's use of *bnātā* at CN 14, 1, 2–3 is not comparable because it is not clear whether the relationship between city and village is implied, or that between metropolitan and suffragan churches and, more importantly, the word “mother” (*emmā*) referred to Nisibis makes clear that here Ephrem is not employing an idiom but literally personifying the city/church (as he does at CN 34, 3).



to interpret in its most usual sense of “endowed with speech”, “speaking”, because it would be redundant<sup>118</sup>. Considering the context, it is also unlikely that the adjective here has its negative connotation of “garrulous”, “talkative”<sup>119</sup>. It retains the meaning “eloquent”. In this sense, the attribute defines a particular group inside the community of Nisibis, a group marked by its linguistic qualities. I propose that it refers to a group of women ascetics like the *bnāt qyāmā*, because we know that Ephrem served as their teacher and that part of his teaching consisted in his poems. Hence, eloquence and a certain literary competence were part of the values he intended to transmit them<sup>120</sup>. The outstanding place reserved for the ascetic in the poem is confirmed by the address to Nisibis as the “daughter born of vows” (*bartā ba(r)t-nedrē*) in a previous stanza (CN 13, 10, 1), which refers obliquely to the vows taken on by these ascetics. In early Syriac Christianity, baptism was reserved for the ascetics, and this privileged link between asceticism and baptism continued well into the fourth century<sup>121</sup>. The texts examined by Vööbus strongly suggest that the very rite of baptism was preceded by a call to religious vows on the part of the catechumens<sup>122</sup>, and in Ephrem’s poem—albeit in an allusive fashion—one can see the same structure that this rite possesses: at CN 13, 10 the poet refers to the community by way of the many vows it comprehends; at CN 13, 18 he explains how baptism is the foundational element of the community; and finally, at CN 13, 21, he directly exhorts the baptised ascetics to put inside themselves a “living body” (*pagrā hayyā*, 5), probably a reference to the Eucharist. This tripartite structure of vows, baptism, and Eucharist echoes many other sources, suggesting a common litur-

<sup>118</sup> The word *mallālā* is normally found in the CN coupled with herd-images, as a kind of oxymoron: “I [Ephrem] am a speaking lamb [*emrā mallālā*]” (CN 17, 12, 7); “you [the bishop] order these speaking sheep [*erbē mallālē*]” (CN 19, 3, 4). In these cases, the denotative meaning of the word is sufficient, because the corresponding noun denotes a creature normally not endowed with the faculty of speech, and the adjective clarifies that the noun has been used metaphorically to mean a human being. However, the connotation of literacy and eloquence could also be present, especially in the case of *emrā mallālā*, which Ephrem refers to himself: in fact, he presents his being a “speaking lamb” as the motivation of his praising poem; therefore, the expression has clearly a meta-poetic connotation.

<sup>119</sup> Brockelmann 1895, 387, s.v. *حلال*, on the basis of this occurrence, introduces the meaning of “prudent”. However, there are no other texts witnessing it, normally it is the form *mlilā*, not *mallālā*, which takes the sense of “logical”, “rational”, “reasonable”, whereas *mallālā* means “endowed with speech”, and then “talkative” or “eloquent”, without bearing on the intellectual qualities (see Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2115, s.v. *حلال*): maybe Brockelmann thought that here Ephrem was alluding to the parable of the ten virgins (Mt. 25:1–13). It is preferable to employ a sense attested elsewhere, rather than introducing a new one.

<sup>120</sup> Wickes 2018, 45–48; Palmer 1998, 133–134. A similar usage at CN 31, 35, 5, where the ascetics are metaphorically named “rational boxwood” (*eškrā’ā mlilē*), though the adjective *mlilā* is more apt for this use than our *mallālā*.

<sup>121</sup> Vööbus 1958, 90; Brock 1973, 7.

<sup>122</sup> *Epiph.* 8, 16; *Epiph.* 13, 14; Vööbus 1958, 90–95; Murray 1974; Beck 1984; Aydin 2017. Comparison with Jerusalem rite: Day 2007, 60–61, 63.

gical reality underlying all these<sup>123</sup>. Therefore, the setting the poem implies with its address and its structure is a baptismal rite.

To sum up the results of the textual analysis: *CN* 13 is to be read in the broader group of poems *CN* 13–16, testifying to a crisis in Valgash's leadership, but, differently from the other poems of the same group, the crisis is not thematised explicitly here. *CN* 13 is likely dated to the year 359/360, so that the Persian raids of the summer of 359 are its historical background. In order to defend Valgash in this context, Ephrem concentrates on two themes, *yubbālā* and Jacob. He does so because, as his text makes clear, Jacob's relics were the object of a tradition in Nisibis, and were particularly linked with protection against Persian sieges; therefore, the close link between Valgash and his charismatic and powerful predecessor, guaranteed by the concept of *yubbālā*, was a compelling argument in favour of Valgash's authority, especially in the immediate aftermath of siege that the city had narrowly escaped (359). In light of my analysis, three questions can be asked: first, Which meaning could Jacob's relics take in Ephrem's time, especially for bishop Valgash, and how could this meaning be made evident for the community at large? Second, what is the significance of baptism imagery, so prominent in the last stanzas of the poem? And third, why does Ephrem structure the poem as a baptismal rite and address ascetics?

Lacking more internal clues to answer these questions, I propose to look at external evidence. In doing so, I will base my argument on the most recent scholarship, which, however, is still hypothetical. I consider the analysis of the poem up to this point to be sound, but the links I am going to trace with archaeological data depend upon the interpretations currently given to those data, and since those data are not yet conclusive, the reconstruction must by necessity remain a hypothesis. However, this hypothesis has clear-cut parameters of falsifiability (which I will indicate), so that I am confident that new excavations will shed more light on the question.

The object of inquiry is the building traditionally known as the church of Mor Yakup in Nusaybin. The analysis and identification of this structure is highly problematic, in particular because of the different strata of building activity and uses the structure was subjected to. However, a Greek dedicatory inscription offers important clues as to the origins of the building<sup>124</sup>. The inscription transmits three pieces of information. First,

<sup>123</sup> This structure lies at the foundation of Day 2007 and can be traced in Cyrill. Hieros. *catech.* 18, 33: πρῶτον μὲν περὶ τῶν πρὸ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εὐθὺς γενομένων, ἔπειτα δὲ πῶς ἑκαθαρίσθητε τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ κυρίου τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι, καὶ ὅπως ἱερατικῶς τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ προσηγορίας γεγόνατε κοινωνοὶ καὶ ὅπως ἡ σφραγὶς ὑμῖν ἐδόθη τῆς κοινωνίας τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐν θυσιαστηρίῳ τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης μυστηρίων.

<sup>124</sup> The complete text was first given in Sarre/Herzfeld 1920, 337: ἀνεγέρθη τὸ βαπτιστήριον τοῦτο καὶ ἐτελέσθη ἔτους αοχ' ἐν χρόνῳ Οὐολαγέσου ἐπισκόπου σπουδῆι Ἀκεψύμα πρεσβυτέρου γενήτε αὐτῶν ἡ μνή[μη...ᾶ] πινόντο[ς...] θυ. A slightly different version is published in Keser Kayaalp/Erdogan 2013, 148, with minor variations by Cyril Mango.

it gives the year of construction, 671 *Anno Graecorum*, which corresponds to the year between autumn of AD 359 and summer 360. Most scholars agree that at least parts of the current building go back to this time, although Gaborit—based on the decorations—advances the hypothesis of a fifth-to-fourth-century date, with the inscription interpreted as the memorial of a previous, today irretrievable, phase<sup>125</sup>. Anyway, this does not invalidate the information transmitted by the inscription. A second, precious piece of information is the expression “in the times of the bishop Valgash, by the care of the priest Akepsyma” (ἐν χρόνῳ Οὐολαγέσου ἐπισκόπου σπουδῇ Ἀκεψύμα πρεσβυτέρου). Such expressions are common in late antique dedicatory inscriptions for churches in the Oriental provinces<sup>126</sup>. The mention of the bishop could be just an indication of time, but it could also mean that the prelate was somehow involved in the project<sup>127</sup>. The mention of the priest Akepsyma as a curator for the project opens up the difficult theme of delegation and responsibility in episcopal expenditures, a theme of which Ephrem was conscious of (§3.1.1.1): on one side, bishops tended to concentrate in their person or office all expenditures in the diocese; on the other side, the growing workload compelled them to delegate management to other figures, mostly members of their clergy. From the text of the inscription, it is impossible to assess if the project was executed by Akepsyma alone and Valgash has been mentioned only as a matter of epigraphic habit, or if the bishop ordered and delegated the work to his priest. However, in view of the centrality of the bishop witnessed by the habit of mentioning him so often in dedicatory inscriptions, it is hard to doubt that the project had a relevance for Valgash’s episcopate. This might be hinted at in the text of the inscription, if the integration of μνή[μη] is to be accepted, since the genitive pronoun of this “memory”, αὐτῶν, is a plural, referring to both Akepsyma and Valgash. The third piece of information disclosed by the inscrip-

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<sup>125</sup> In favour of fourth-century sections: Sarre/Herzfeld 1920, 342; Falla Castelfranchi 1980, 76; Keser Kayaalp 2021. *Contra*: Gaborit/Thébaud/Oruç 2014, 320–329. Gaborit’s hypothesis would explain some peculiarities of the Greek inscription: (a) the writing is too small and the inscription too high to be easily read (Keser Kayaalp 2021, 35), which, together with its south-facing position, is atypical for dedicatory inscriptions, which are normally over the entrance of the church (Haensch 2017, 539); (b) the word βαπτιστήριον in the Christian sense was employed generally later (Brandt 2011, 1588–1589) and, if the inscription were really from the fourth century, this would be one of the first witnesses to such a usage (Keser Kayaalp 2021, 35); (c) the last words of the inscription, though incomplete, seem to mention ἡ μνήμη, which would agree with a memorial inscription better than with a dedicatory inscription; (d) if it is true that Jacob’s relics were lost or translated after 363, as Theodoret and Gennadius say, Faustus of Byzantium implies (3, 11, 29; he says that his bones were translated to Amida in the time of the wars between Persians and Romans) and Ephrem in 359 cannot yet know, then those who had the memorial inscription made in the fifth/fourth century could have omitted this ceased usage of the building. However, it must be stressed that, in all other respects, this inscription is a perfectly normal dedicatory inscription for this time and geographic space (see Haensch 2017).

<sup>126</sup> Haensch 2017, 539, 542.

<sup>127</sup> Haensch 2006, 54n55.

tion is the nature of the building, a βαπτιστήριον. The choice of this typology is partly explained by the fact that Nisibis already had a basilica, built by our very bishop Jacob between 313 and 320, and whose groundwork and part of whose pillars have been found northwest of the Mor Yakup building.

There is the possibility that this baptistery enshrined also the relics of Jacob. As regards primary sources, Ephrem, Theodoret, and Gennadius, albeit perhaps not independently from each other, relate that Jacob was buried inside Nisibis until at least 363 and that his burial was the key to Nisibene resistance to the Persians; yet they do not indicate the burial place precisely. A local tradition, attested at least since 1644 as first reported by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, holds that the crypt of the building—used as a church—contains Jacob's relics in a sarcophagus; however, the sarcophagus is presently empty, and local traditions are admittedly not very reliable<sup>128</sup>. In the past, most scholars concluded that the fourth-century baptistery could not also have contained Jacob's relics, on a plurality of grounds, both archaeological and typological<sup>129</sup>. However, the two most recent contributions on Mor Yakup, written after new excavations by Gaborit and Keser Kayaalp, differ from previous scholarship on this point<sup>130</sup>: both offer solid reasons against the arguments excluding an original burial of Jacob inside the baptistery. It must be noted that they have thereby not proved this burial, but only removed current objections against it; Keser Kayaalp admits it as a concrete possibility, and Gaborit accepts it in one of her two hypotheses of reconstruction of the original site<sup>131</sup>. The two most plausible burial places are the baptistery and the basilica;

<sup>128</sup> Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Voyages en Perse* II, 4 (1644); see also Gaborit/Thébaut/Oruç 2014, 292.

<sup>129</sup> Against: Bell 1913; Sarre/Herzfeld 1920; Khatchatrian 1957; Falla Castelfranchi 1980. For: Grabar 1946.

<sup>130</sup> Until the restoration works of the municipality of Nisibis in 2000–2006, a mound of dirt and rubble covered the southern wall as high as the lintels of the doors (compare the images at Sarre/Herzfeld 1920, 340, fig. 316 and Keser Kayaalp/Erdogan 2013, 143, fig. 9; see the pictures at Gaborit/Thébaut/Oruç 2014, 291, 294, figg. 1 and 3). This prevented previous scholars from noticing that the building continued with a southern wing closed by an apse on the eastern side, and that the western half of the central (previously southern) wing of the building stood on a higher level than the eastern part. Due to the Kurdish uprisings of 2014–2015, no new excavation or study of the site has been endeavoured or is foreseen since 2006, and the proceedings of the French expedition, as well as Gaborit's monograph on the church, are still due to appear.

<sup>131</sup> Keser Kayaalp 2021, 40; Gaborit/Thébaut/Oruç 2014, 314–319. The arguments against Jacob's presence are: (a) the crypt with the sarcophagus is an addition of the eighth century (Sarre/Herzfeld 1920, 343–344), but the relics could have been stored in another space (Gaborit/Thébaut/Oruç 2014, 308, 314–319) and the latest excavations, discovering a tripartite structure, make necessary that the crypt be contemporary with the oldest extant phase (Keser Kayaalp 2021, 39–40); (b) the coupling of baptistery and martyrium is unheard of in the fourth century according to Sarre/Herzfeld 1920, 344, yet Keser Kayaalp/Erdogan 2013, 151–152 (also Keser Kayaalp 2021, 40–41) gives ample testimony to the contrary, with theological reasons for the coupling (see also Jensen 2011, 1685–1689; Everett Ferguson 2013, 819–820; Gaborit/Thébaut/Oruç 2014, 318); (c) the inscription does not mention Jacob's relics (Sarre/Herzfeld 1920, 344), but they might have been already disappeared if the inscription were memorial and not dedicatory (Gaborit/Thébaut/Oruç 2013, 328), and in any case the position and writing of the

it is less plausible but possible that the saint was buried somewhere in the vicinity of these two buildings. Extensive excavations of the basilica are yet to be made, and the whole area is still to be closely examined: any sign of Jacob's burial or cult in any place other than the baptistery would thus disprove current hypotheses. Such signs are the test of falsifiability of my argument.

Anyway, based on current scholarship, I dare to advance this hypothetical reconstruction. The very important bishop Jacob died in 337 during the first Persian siege, which failed to conquer the city<sup>132</sup>. Thus, the bishop was buried inside the city walls, and a reverent memory developed around his burial place, because it was believed that he had the power to protect Nisibis from sieges. Such belief was corroborated by two following and failed Persian sieges. In 359 two events coincide: the community and its bishop Valgash are in conflict, and, in the spring/summer, the Persians cross the Tigris, with the Roman command quartered in Nisibis. The Persians cut Roman resources with a scorched-ground strategy in the Nisibene countryside, and the Romans try to do the same. Then, Persians avoid a siege of Nisibis and go on to besiege and conquer Amida, so that at the end of the war season the Nisibene has been raided, but not besieged<sup>133</sup>. In light of these events, Valgash decides to monumentalise the burial place of his predecessor Jacob, in order to thank him for the avoided siege and to also bolster his own authority before the community. He has a baptistery built, because there is already a cathedral in the city and for its symbolic associations with the dead bishop. The novelty of the belief explains the experimental and unusual nature of the project. The bishop entrusts the task of explaining his program to the learned man of his clergy, Ephrem.

Such a defence was probably carried out on a public occasion, a liturgy, considering Ephrem's kind of poetry; it is conceivable that, to maximise the effect, Ephrem sang during the inaugural liturgy inside the new baptistery, and no other liturgy would better suit the inauguration of a baptistery than a baptism, especially the baptism of the Christian aristocracy, the ascetics. In this context, Ephrem recited CN 13: the poem alludes to the structure of the liturgy performed, with its sequence of vows, baptism, and Eucharist; it prepares the defence of Valgash through the theme of *yubbālā*; it showcases the power of Jacob, whom the building honoured, remembering the past sieges and the marauders of the same year; it illustrates the links between baptism and bishop, in particular the first bishop, as, respectively, the mystical and historical beginnings of the community, the forces protecting the city from external threats, and nourishing the inner faith, so that it also justifies Valgash's project. If the fourth-century dating of the

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inscription lead one to doubt that this was the only dedicatory inscription on the building, leaving the argument *e silentio* considerably weaker.

<sup>132</sup> Burgess 1999.

<sup>133</sup> Amm. Marc. 18, 4–19, 9; CN 5–12 (see also Harrell 2016, chapter 11).

surviving decorations is accurate, there would be yet another link between building and poem: the poet alludes to the otherwise common decoration featuring vine plants and vases sprouting with flowers when he uses the vine metaphor for the Nisibene church and talks of baptism as “sources of life” (*neb’e d-hayyē*), a concept ordinarily represented in art through a vase of flowers<sup>134</sup>.

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**134** Pictures of the vine-frieze: Gaborit/Thébault/Oruç 2014, 312–313, figg. 29–31; Keser Kayaalp/Erdogan 2014, 148, fig. 18. Pictures of the vine framing the door: Gaborit/Thébault/Oruç 2014, 311, fig. 27; 313, fig. 31. Cyrill. Hieros. *catech. myst.* 2, 7 connects the vine image with baptism. The other doors are framed by different plant motives (see Gaborit/Thébault/Oruç 2014, 311, figg. 26, 28; Keser Kayaalp/Erdogan 2013, 147, fig. 15), and the architraves are decorated with spirals of flowers (Gaborit/Thébault/Oruç 2014, 302–303, figg. 14–16; 305, fig. 18; 313, fig. 32; 322, fig. 37; 326, fig. 42; Keser Kayaalp/Erdogan 2013, 147, fig. 15). The westernmost door on the southern facade is framed by pinecones, a symbol of eternal life according to Hall/Puleston 1996, 155, s.v. “Pinecone”. The floral spirals on the lintels are similarly signs of water, eternal life or fertility: Hall/Puleston 1996, 5–6, s.v. “Spiral”. Vase-representations: Gaborit/Thébault/Oruç 2014, 302, fig. 14; 311, figg. 26–28; 312 fig. 30. On the baptismal value of these representations: Gaborit/Thébault/Oruç 2014, 316–317. The river Jordan in the scene of Christ’s baptism was represented with a vase or urn: Hall/Clark 1974, 40, s.v. “Baptism”; the vase or urn as attribute of a river-god: Hall/Clark 1974, 265, s.v. “River”; 316–317, s.v. “Urn”; Hall/Puleston 1996, 93, s.v. “Urn”; 106, s.v. “River”. On the vase as a representation of the womb (see n. 115 for the comparison of baptism to a womb) or a container of “the water of life”, hence a sign of rebirth and life: Hall/Puleston 1996, 93–94, s.v. “Vase”. I would not use these references to read into the artists’ intentions, but only to highlight how these images might have been interpreted by a contemporary such as Ephrem; whether these baptismal associations were also intended by the artist is outside the scope of my research. I am thankful to Dr. A. Varela for suggesting me this possible link between vine-imagery and vine-friezes at Mor Yakup.

## 5 Gregory's Themes: Self-Portrait with Enemies

Τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἐκεῖθεν, ὦ φίλοι, λελέξεται·  
Πλὴν ἐξιτήριόν τιν', εἰ δοκεῖ, λόγον  
Βραχὺν μὲν, ἀλλὰ χρήσιμον, δέξασθέ μου  
Ὡς οἱ πατρώας λαμβάνοντες ἐν τέλει  
Φωνάς ἐπισκήψεις τε μνήμης ἀξίας· (815)  
Μεθ' ἃς λόγος τις οὐκέτ' ἐξακούεται,  
Ὡ καὶ πλεόν μένουσιν ἐν βάθει φρενός.  
Ἄλλον τιν' εἰ λάβοιτε Γρηγόριον, φίλοι,  
Φείδοισθε μᾶλλον· εἰ δὲ μὴ, τὸ δεύτερον,  
Εἴητε καλοὶ κάγαθοι τοῖς πλησίον (820)  
Ὑμῖν τε αὐτοῖς, οἱ τέως ὁμόφρονες,  
Ἐως κρατεῖσθε τοῖς ἴσοις παθήμασιν·  
Ἦν τ' αὐτὸς ἐσπούδαζον εἰρήνην ἀεὶ,  
Στέργοιτ' ἀφέντες τὰς ἰδίας ἀρρωστίας,  
Ὑφ' ὧν τὸ κοινὸν ἐκταράσσετ' ἀθλίως. (825)  
Κάγῳ παρήσω τοῦμόν, εἴτε τι πλεόν  
Ἄλλων φρονοῦμεν, εἴτε μ' ὁ μακρὸς χρόνος  
Ποιεῖ τραχὺν τε καὶ τὰ πλείω δύστροπον,  
Εἴτ' οὖν πεπληγὼς ἐκ μέθης τὸν νοῦν μόνος  
Μέθη τετρωσθαι τοὺς αἰόνους οἶομαι. (830)  
Νομίζεθ' ὡς βούλεσθε· πλὴν μέμνησθέ μου  
Τοῦ πολλὰ μοχθήσαντος ἐν φίλων τρόποις,  
Καλὸν δ' ἔχοντος τὸν λογισμὸν προστάτην  
Τό τ' ἐκλύον με τῶν κακῶν γῆρας τόδε. –  
Οὔτω τάχ' ἂν μοι τῶν φίλων σπείσαιτό τις, (835)  
Πάλης θανούσης, ἢ φθόνος συνέρχεται.  
(II, 1, 12, 811–836)

All the rest, my friends, will be brought up in the end;  
however, please accept from me a valediction  
which, although brief, is still useful,  
like those who receive the last, fatherly  
words and commands, worthy of remembrance (815)  
because not a word more will be ever heard again,  
so that they remain even more deeply in the heart.  
If you should receive another Gregory, my friends,  
be more careful with him; if not, then  
be ye gentlemen with your neighbours (820)  
and with yourselves, you that agree just as long  
as you are possessed by the same passions;  
and that peace that I always earnestly served  
you should love, giving up your weaknesses,  
by which the community is miserably troubled. (825)  
I too shall let go of mine, be it that I think  
myself better than others or that my old age  
has made me harsh and peevish for anything,

or finally that I, the one high in spiritual drunkenness,  
 believe the sober to be dead drunk. (830)  
 Be it as you prefer, but remember me,  
 who has suffered much for the behaviour of friends,  
 but keeping reason as a good guide  
 and this old age, which delivers me from these sorrows.  
 In this way maybe a friend could make peace with me (835)  
 after the strife has died, with which envy goes along.

With these heartfelt lines Gregory closes the longest poem on bishops (II, 1, 12) and, with it, his experience in Constantinople. The occasion is momentous, and the poet underlines it with different devices: this passage comes after a line which seemed to close the poem (811) and is introduced almost as an afterthought (πλὴν, 812); it is explicitly named and classified in a genre by the poet, who calls it ἐξιτήριοις λόγος (812); these lines are compared to the last words of a dying father (814–815); they are said to be worthy of memory (815), the last and final (816), and again destined to be established in the depths of the heart of the hearers (817). Gregory repeats his plea to remember him once more towards the end of the speech itself (831). This insistence, together with the other framing devices, signals that this passage must stay with its readers.

Another clue to the passage's importance is that Gregory mentions his name in the first line of the speech (Γρηγόριον, 818). It is the only time, in the long II, 1, 12, that the poet mentions his own name, which makes it even more relevant. In all of our poems, Gregory writes his own name only three times: here, at the end of II, 1, 10, and in the middle of II, 1, 17. Even though towards the end of II, 1, 13 the poet speaks of himself, in that epic narration his name is rightly omitted. When he does write it, it seems to increase the pathos of the sentence, usually in relation to his removal from Constantinople<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, in II, 1, 10, too, the mention of the name relates to the memory thereof the addressee should preserve.

The insertion of the name, as well as the idea that these are Gregory's last words, suggests the real-life frame in which we should imagine II, 1, 12 pronounced (see §1.1.1). This fictive frame lends his historical glamour to our poem: if we imagine these to be Gregory's last words in Constantinople, before the whole congregation of the bishops of the empire, they weigh much more than the private venting of an old man. On the other hand, we do know that these are not Gregory's last words; indeed, he had still many lines to write. Therefore, the interpreter must ask himself what is the reason behind Gregory's insistence on the memorability and importance of these words. The occurrences of his personal name, above all here at II, 1, 12, 818, where he speaks of ἄλλον τινα Γρηγόριον, seem to suggest the danger of being forgotten and erased by his substitute: not only formally on the episcopal seat but also in the hearts and minds of

<sup>1</sup> Τούνεκα καυχάλων φθόνον ἐκφυγον... Οὗτος Γρηγορίοιο λόγος, τὸν θρέψατο γαῖα / Καππαδοκῶν, Χριστῷ πάντ' ἀποδυσάμενον. (II, 1, 10, 31; 35–36); Οὐ θνητοῦ βασιλῆος ὁμέστιος, ὡς τοπάροιθεν, / Γρηγόριος... (II, 1, 17, 59–60; here the enjambement gives even more prominence to the name).



the city congregation and of the court. Therefore, in these last lines Gregory distills his political stance vis-à-vis all the questions relating bishops.

Strangely enough, these are also the lines in which Gregory elaborates the most on his personal feelings. He does talk about himself in other passages, as we shall see, and he employs his feelings as an excuse to write our poems (§1.3.2). Here, however, he seems to confess them for their own sake, neither as part of a narration nor as an argument to reach a conclusion. In this respect, the ἐξιτήριοις λόγος has something of the letter, which was thought of as a “living image” of its sender and his soul<sup>2</sup>. After all, these poems were published and enjoyed in much the same way as letters (§1.2.2). The prevailing mood here is bitterness, and not only because the poet confesses it openly as he refers to himself as δούτροπος (828), abases his own character as that of a drunken old man (827; 829), and acknowledges his estrangement from the other bishops (829–830), but because he also conveys bitterness through the tone, as he violently criticises the bishops and at the same time addresses them as φίλοι (811; 818; 832; 835).

However, this self-portrait is not completely disinterested. Indeed, Gregory advances it as a confession of his own weaknesses, in exchange (Κάγω, 826) for other bishops' renouncing theirs (τὰς ἰδίας ἀρρωστίας, 824): the two verbs “give up/give in” (ἀφίημι/παρίημι, 824; 826) institute this exchange. Yet the exchange is far from equitable, since the poet gets to define his own weaknesses *and* those of his addressees. Furthermore, Gregory's weaknesses are such only in the context of the argument, as they are really meant to convey a positive image of the poet. His old age should inspire reverence and, formulated as ὁ μακρὸς χρόνος (827), contrasts with the short time or the absence of time between baptism and ordination of current bishops<sup>3</sup>. Physical and psychological weakness are ascribed to the pains (μοχθήσαντος, 837) Gregory took in treating with the other bishops; thus, Gregory shifts the blame to them and reinforces the image of himself as a reluctant yet engaged bishop<sup>4</sup>.

Precisely this reluctance, deduced from Gregory's dramatic descriptions of his public ministry (§1.3.2), is the main trait of his autobiography. This is also the meaning behind his self-description as old and inebriated (827–830). He was indeed quite old, and he likely felt that he bore a divine charisma granted by his asceticism and his holy orders, which would be the easiest interpretation of his μέθη in light of Act. 2:13. In this sense, the attributes are true, and there is a similar row of attributes in *or*: 26, 14, for example<sup>5</sup>. However, though old he was not senile, and clearly he was not literally intoxicated. The audience would

2 Storin 2019, 13n82.

3 Οὐδὲ χρόνου πύρωσιν ἐνδεδειγμένους, / Ἄλλ' αὐτόθεν... (II, 1, 12, 380–381); τῷ χρόνῳ τι δὸς μόνον / αἰτῷ σε μικρὰν τοῦ ποθοῦ προθεσίαν. (444–445); Τίς ἐγγυᾶται τὸν τρόπον χρόνου δίχα / Δεικνύντος, ὡς ἔσμηξε καὶ βάθος χάρις (522–523); cf. Εἰ μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲν εἰσιν οἱ γεγραμμένοι / Λόγοι, τοσοῦτον πῶς ἐπαιζόμεν χρόνον (288–289). On this theme: §3.3.2.1.

4 On this theme: §1.3.2.

5 Αἰπαίδευτον ὀνομάσουσιν;...Πενίαν ἐγκαλέσουσι...Φυγόπατριν ἀποκαλέσουσιν...Γῆρας δὲ οὐκ ὀνειδίσαις ἡμῖν καὶ τὸ νοσῶδες;... (*or*: 26, 14).

have been aware of the layer of conventional fiction in this portrait and would have been capable of decrypting its political connotations: these not-quite-metaphors express Gregory's alienation from the world and its conventions. The specular image is provided by the bishop "well-versed in the business" (εὖστροφος ἐν τοῖς πράγμασι) whom Gregory criticises in II, 1, 12, 709–746 (see §2.2.3.2). If we trace this self-portrait to Gregory's ascetic ideals (§3.2.2) and his insistence on time and experience for the newly elected bishop (§3.3.2.1), we will find that, here as there, the ideal bishop and the self-portrait coincide.

On the other side, Gregory's advice to the bishops coincides with the themes of his invective against them. He advances three requests: first, that they treat the "other Gregory" well (818–819); second, that they avoid strife (819–821.823–824); third, that they give up their weaknesses (ἀρρωστίας, 824)—namely, their passions (παθήμασιν, 822). The first request corresponds to the many times in which Gregory laments the bad treatment he received during his tenure in Constantinople, beginning with this very passage (832; 836). Discord and moral unworthiness are the two major themes of Gregory's invective against the bishops, and they are here rapidly recalled. They are immediately contrasted with the correct approach represented by Gregory: he is the one who loved peace above all (823) and whom reason (λογισμὸν, 833), not passion (822), guides<sup>6</sup>.

If this is Gregory's final pitch to his audience in Constantinople and in the empire, then it nicely summarises the mechanisms of his poetry against bishops. These poems offer a portrait of Gregory as the ideal bishop, of the ideal bishop as similar to Gregory, of Gregory's opponents as the opposite of the ideal bishop. Every description of Gregory's character is at the same time an ideal for the prelates and an attack on his adversaries; every projection of the ideal bishop is an attack on his adversaries and a defence of Gregory's character; every attack on the adversaries reaffirms the portrait of Gregory as the ideal bishop. Since what pertains to the ideal bishop has been already analysed at §3, I will explore here the passages more explicitly autobiographical and the outright invectives against the bishops, in order to confirm what is in nuce already in II, 1, 12, 811–836 and to see how it takes different literary garments in different contexts.

Taking autobiography as my point of departure (§5.1), I would like to demonstrate this mechanism of mutual implication of autobiography, theology, and invective in extended form—namely, in the poem II, 1, 17, which is based on this mechanism (§5.1.1). Then, I will reflect on autobiography proper, comparing the narratives of different poems (§5.1.2). Finally, I try to determine the role of the "I" in the poems and the genre conventions that helped to shape it (§5.1.3). Things get spicy in the second part of the chapter (§5.2), where I will closely read the invectives against bishops, in particular Gregory's rivals Maximus and Nectarius. The discourse moves from the most concrete criticism—namely, Gregory's dissing of the bishops' social background (§5.2.1)—to

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the line is similar to a preceding one on the "political" bishop: Καλὸν δ' ἔχοντος τὸν λογισμὸν προστάτην (II, 1, 12, 833); Ὡσπερ λογιστὴν ἐσκόπεις τὸν προστάτην. (749). The καλὸς λογισμὸς is different from the crude reasonings of the λογιστής: the latter is concerned with *Realpolitik*, the former is the result of asceticism and purification.

the most abstract, which is the problem of discord in the college of bishops (§5.2.5). In between I will devote a section specifically to Nectarius (§5.2.2), bringing together social and moral critiques, one to the strictly moral criticisms (§5.2.3) and one to Maximus, characterised by his duplicity and deceit (§5.2.4).

## 5.1 The self-portrait

The most obvious difference in content between Gregory's and Ephrem's treatment of bishops is the role of autobiography in Gregory's poetry. At first glance, the reader notes that Gregory speaks often of himself and his personal experience, whereas Ephrem only rarely drops information on his person, and he presents himself in the highly stylised role of the poet-panegyrist or the pupil of the holy bishops<sup>7</sup>. Yet the difference goes deeper than this: self-writing<sup>8</sup> is not only a choice of content for Gregory; it constitutes and permeates his whole approach to the bishops in these poems. In this first part of the chapter, I will inquire into the structural role of this theme as well as into the contents it adds to our poems. I begin with a prime example of its structural role, even in absence of an explicit autobiographical narrative—namely, the poem II, 1, 17 (§5.1.1). Then, I will explore the autobiographical narratives proper (§5.1.2) and finally give an assessment on self-writing in these poems (§5.1.3).

### 5.1.1 II, 1, 17 as self-writing

Nowhere is the structural role of self-writing in the poems more clearly to be seen than in II, 1, 17. The whole poem is based on Gregory's self-portrait and its contrast with the profile of his adversaries, so that invective and autobiography are reflected in each other. Furthermore, Gregory formulates parts of this contrast in a generic way, thus reflecting on the ideal bishop and its counterpart, the *a priori* bad bishop, so to speak. Not casually, the title of the poem is *περὶ τῶν τοῦ βίου διαφορῶν*, "On the differences in life": difference (*διαφορά*), in the sense of divergence, is the theme.

Divergence is a structural principle, because the whole poem is built around the contrast between two fundamentally different attitudes, so that Gregory oscillates continually between the description of one and the other; moreover, the framing device of these descriptions is always the same (often with literal repetitions), and we know from

<sup>7</sup> Ephrem as pupil: *CN* 14, 25–26 (here the poet speaks of himself in the third person); *CN* 17, 1–2; 11–12 (the poet-panegyrist).

<sup>8</sup> I take this more generic term (instead of the limiting "autobiography") from the analysis of Gregory's epistolary in Storin 2019, esp. 13–17.

Roberts's work how important framing devices are for late antique poetry<sup>9</sup>. In this case, a tabular representation of the poem's structure may clarify the analysis:

	The good bishop	The bad bishop
<b>Priamel</b> (1–10)		
1–2	ζωγράφος ἐστὶν ἄριστος, ὃς . . .	
3–4		. . . οὐχ ὃς
5–6		νῆα . . . ἐπήνεσα οὐ . . .
7–8	. . . ἀλλ' ἦν	
9–10	summary	
<b>Argument</b> (11–40)		
11–13	ὁ μὲν ἄμβροτος, ὃν τινα . . .	
13–16		. . . ὃς δὲ κάκιστος
17–20		ὁ μὲν . . .
21–28	. . . αὐτὰρ ὃ γε	
29–34		οὐδ' ὃ γ' ἐπιστρέφεται . . . οὐδὲ . . .
35–40	. . . ἀλλὰ νόον . . . ἀέξων	
<b>Autobiography</b> (41–58) τῶν μὲν ἐγὼ . . .		
<b>Invective</b> (59–94)		
59–82		οὐ θνητοῦ βασιλῆος ὁμέστιος, ὥς τοπάροιθεν . . . οὐχ ἔδρη τίσει με . . . οὐδὲ χέρας . . . οὐδ' ἱερὴν . . . οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδὲ πρόεδρος...
83–88	. . . οὐ χόλον αἰχμάσας . . . οὐ σώματος . . . οὐ χέρα . . .	
89–94		. . . ἀλλ' ἐν φάρμακον . . . οὐδὲ τί . . .
<b>Peroration</b> (95–108)		
95–96	τῶνδε γὰρ εἵνεκ' ἔγωγε . . .	
97–101		. . . οὐ γὰρ ἐμῆς πολιῆς . . .
102–108	. . . αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ . . .	

Structurally, the poem has similarities with the other pieces against bishops. They all begin with a classical rhetorical structure, in this case a *Priamel*, in the case of II, 1,

<sup>9</sup> Roberts 1989, 37. See §3.3.2.1.

13 and 10 a long apostrophe<sup>10</sup>. The endings always express Gregory's will to abandon public life in favour of ascetic retreat, as we can see here at 95–108<sup>11</sup>. As in II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 12, Gregory recalls his parable in Constantinople in the first half of the composition (here 41–58), in order to examine it in the second (59–94). However, this common grid is played out here as a contrasting structure, with alternating descriptions of the good and bad bishop. Framing devices sustain the dialectic between the two models: among the most obvious devices are the correlation of *μὲν* and *δὲ* (11–13) and strong adversative conjunctions (*ἀλλὰ*, 7; 35; 89; *αὐτὰρ*, 21; 102). A peculiarity of this poem is its use of negations in this sense: what the good or bad bishops *do* and *not do* is neatly divided into two sections, so that the section of the *do not*s can be read as a description of the opposite model. This device, evident beginning with the *Priamel* and continuing through the first presentation of the two kinds of life (21–34), goes so far that Gregory nests a series of negations (83–88) inside a series of negations (59–94), thereby describing the moral tasks of the good bishop inside the description of the bad bishop.<sup>12</sup>

Οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδὲ πρόεδρος ἑὼν ἱεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις, (75)

Ἦ μόνος, ἢ πλεόνων εἰς ἓν ἀγειρομένων,  
Φθέγγομαι οὐασι τερπνὰ, τὰ Πνεύματος ἔκτοθι ρίψας,

Ὡς κεν ἔοιμι πρόφρων, φίλτρον ἔχων πλεόνων,  
Τερπόμενός τε κρότοις, καὶ ἐν θεάτροις χορεύων,  
Κρημνοβάτης ἐπέων ἀντικορυσσομένων, (80)

Ἀθλοφόροιςιν ὁμοῖα, πολυγνάπτουσί τε λώβαις,  
Ἦ καὶ μαινομένοις ἀντίπαλ' ἡνιόχοις·

Οὐ χόλον αἰχμάσας, οὐ σώματος αἰθομένοιο  
Λύσσαν ἐπιψύξας, οὐ χέρα μαινομένην  
Πᾶσιν ἐπ' ἄλλοτρίοις, λόγου δεσμοῖσι πεδήσας, (85)

Οὐ ψευδῇ κραδίης δόξαν ἀποσκεδάσας,  
Οὐ τύφον οἰδαίνοντα διδάγμασιν ἐς χθόνα ρίψας

Οὐ πηγαῖς δακρύων δάκρυον ἐκκαλέσας,  
Ἄλλ' ἐν φάρμακον αἰνὸν ἔχων, θηρήτορα τιμῆς  
Θυμὸν, καὶ θανάτου φάρμακον ἀτρεκέως. (90)

(II, 1, 17, 75–90)

Nor, presiding in the holy places, (75)

be I alone or with many gathered as one,  
Shall I utter something pleasant to hear, excluding the Spirit,  
that I may be prudent and loved by the majority,  
enjoying the applause and dance in the theatres,  
a tightrope walker of fighting speeches, (80)  
the like of winning athletes and much-modulating disgraces,

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of the argument on painting in this *Priamel* §2.2.3.2; for similar structures, comparing the bishop to ancient professionals, see §2.1.2.1; §2.2.4.9 and §3.3.2.1.

<sup>11</sup> For this recurring structure at the end see §3.1.2.

<sup>12</sup> On this description of moral tasks: §3.1.4.2.

or even the mad antagonist charioteers:  
 not wounding the rage, not quenching the fury  
 of the burning body, not fettering with reason  
 the hand raging all over other people's properties, (85)  
 not scattering false conceit from the heart,  
 not throwing on the floor with doctrine swelling delusion,  
 not calling forth tears with floods of tears,  
 but using just one terrible drug, a heart hunting  
 glory, and really a deadly drug. (90)

In this breakneck sentence, the negative clauses οὐ . . . αἰχμάσας (83), οὐ ἐπιψύζας (83–84), οὐ . . . πεδήσας (84–85), οὐ . . . ἀποσκεδάσας (86), οὐ . . . ῥίψας (87), and οὐ ἐκκαλέσας (88) are not coordinated with οὐδὲ . . . φθέγγομαι (75–77) but with the series of participles subordinated to the latter (ἔων, ῥίψας, ἔχων, τερπόμενος, χορεύων, and again ἔχων at 89). Therefore, the negative clauses do not describe how Gregory was compelled to behave as bishop and what behaviour he can finally discontinue, as is the case for οὐδὲ φθέγγομαι and the coordinate verbs in the preceding lines. Instead, the negative participles express the behaviours Gregory culpably neglected as bishop. Since, however, neglect is culpable, this means these behaviours are to be taken as duties of a good bishop, so that the double negation (οὐδὲ φθέγγομαι . . . οὐ αἰχμάσας) equals an affirmative.

The description of the bad bishop in 59–94 not only follows the autobiography (41–58) but uses it as a foil in a very significant way: adding to the negation of despised behaviours the indication ὡς τοπάροιθεν (59) and his own name (Γρηγόριος, 60), the poet equates the refusal of those behaviours with his retreat, thereby showing how he acted consequently on his convictions. The same nexus can be found in II, 1, 10, 34–35: Θύσω καὶ σιγὴν, ὡς τοπάροιθε λόγον. / Οὗτος Γρηγορίοιο λόγος. Here, too, the ὡς τοπάροιθε alludes to Gregory's public life, and the insertion of his name highlights Gregory's consistency in refusing a world he saw as corrupt. In fact, the negative behaviours of II, 1, 17 are presented in the first-person singular, enhancing this link between reflection on the condition of bishops and his own autobiography<sup>13</sup>.

The same message emerges if we consider how Gregory frames the second half of the poem in terms of his drifting away from the bishops. He introduces himself in line 41 saying that he desired to become a good bishop (τῶν μὲν ἐγὼ ποθέων εἷς ἔμμεναι). Then, in 59–60 he explains what kind of life he abandoned. In case someone should think he only abandoned the bishopric of the capital, he forcefully clarifies in 91 that he will not take part in synods (οὐδέ τί που συνόδοισιν ὁμόθρονος ἔσσομ' ἔγωγε) and, with the same reinforced pronoun ἔγωγε, that he will live the humble life of a pastor (τῶνδε

<sup>13</sup> τίσει με δικασπῶλος (63); Οὐδὲ χέρας φονίους προσπτύξομαι, οὐδὲ γενείου / Δράξομαι (64–65); Θήσσομαι (70); Ἐλξω (72); Φθέγγομαι (77); ἔοιμι (78). Gregory's recurring ὡς τοπάροιθε recalls the recurring ὡς τὸ πάρος περ in the poem *Vision of Dorotheus* (see Hurst/Reverdin/Rudhart 1984, 16), with the difference that the "before" of Dorotheus corresponds to a positive task he performed, whereas Gregory relates it to negative behaviours (see below, §5.3).

γὰρ εἵνεκ' ἔγωγε μέσος χθαμαλοῖσι κάθημαι, 95). In the last passage from invective to autobiography, as he presents his ascetic choice, Gregory frames it with a strong disjunction followed by the first-person singular (αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ Χριστοῦ πλήσσομαι ἀτρεμέων, 102). These strong first-person statements are to be understood against the tacit foil of “the others”, those bishops who did not make the same choice of retreat as Gregory.

Together with the “horizontal” contrast between good and bad bishops, the other structural axis of this poem is the “vertical” correspondence between abstract and concrete—namely, between the ideal good bishop (and the ideal bad bishop) and the concrete cases of Gregory’s retreat and of his life in Constantinople. What makes a good bishop can be best examined in the context of the other poems on the bishops, since they all present a cohesive picture. Ascetic credentials, linked to the idea of a spiritual priesthood, have been examined at §2.1.3.2 and §3.1.2, whereas the function of moral guidance is analysed at §3.1.4.2. Here, I will give more space and consideration to the negative contents, what constitutes a bad bishop. Moreover, my interest is to show the structural role of the contrast between abstract and concrete: I called it “vertical” because, whereas the contrast between good and bad traverses every passage of the poem (as shown by the table at the beginning of this section), the contrast between abstract and concrete develops throughout the poem, from more abstract considerations to more concrete: the *Priamel* (1–10) suggests the abstract principle guiding the comparison of the ideal bad and good bishop in the argument of the poem (11–40), and these in turn form the mould to describe Gregory’s retreat from Constantinople (41–95).

The *Priamel* functions as an authentic preparation of what follows, in that many concepts introduced by its similes are then applied to the two models of bishops: truth, steadfastness, and life are inherent to the good bishop, while the opposite is true of the bad bishop. This might seem banal, but Gregory is careful to connect these contrasting attributes to concrete behaviours:

	<i>Priamel</i> (1–10)	Argument (11–40)
<b>Truth/Life</b>	Μορφὰς ἀτρεκέας, <b>ἐμπνοα</b> δερκομένας (2)	Ὁ μὲν <b>ἄμβροτος</b> ... πλεκτῆς ἀλλότριον κακίης (11–12)
<b>Falsity</b>	Οὐχ ὅς χρώματα <b>πολλὰ</b> καὶ εὐχροα μάψ ἐπιμίξας (3)	<b>Παντοίης</b> κακίης οὐκ ἄκος, ἀλλὰ τύπος (20) ἄλλος ἐν ἄλλοις <b>Παντοδαποίς</b> κακίης εἶδеси κλεπτόμενος (33–34)
<b>Inward / Outward</b>	Νῆα δὲ ποντοπόρειαν ἐπήνεσα, οὐ παρασήμοις Κάλλεσιν, οὐ πρύμνης ἄνθεσι λαμπομένην (5–6) Καὶ στρατός ἐστιν ἄριστος, ἀρήϊος ἀντὶ καλοῖο (9)	Ὅς δὲ κάκιστος, <b>Ἐνδοθεν</b> ἀδρανέων, <b>ἔκτοθε</b> κάρτος ἔχων (13–14) Οὐδὲ δορὴν βασιλῆος ἔχων βριαροῖο λέοντος, Κεύθει κερδῶν ἐνδοθὶ δουλοσύνην (31–32),

(continued)

	<i>Priamel</i> (1–10)	Argument (11–40)
<b>Stability</b>	Ἄλλ' ἦν <b>ναυπηγοῖο</b> χέρες γόμφοισιν ἄριστα Δῶκαν <b>πηξάμεναι</b> κύμασι θαρσαλέην (7–8) Καὶ δόμος αἰγλήεις δεύτερος <b>εὐπαγέος</b> (10)	<b>Ἐμπεδον, ἀστυφέλικτον</b> , ἀπενθέα (13) Κάμπεται, ὅσσα λίθος ὀκρυοῖς ἀδάμας (28), τύπον <b>ἐστήριξεν</b> ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἐῆσι (37)
<b>Volubility</b>		φρενοπλήξιν ὁμοῖον, οἷσιν ἅπαντα Δινήεντα πέλει ἀστατέουσι νόον (14–15), Κλινόμενος καιροῖσι, δόναξ πολύκαμπτos αἰήταις (19) ὃ γ' ἐπιστρέφεται πλούτου μεγάλων τε θωώκων (29)

The table shows that, even though the scheme is not always fully developed with a contrast between positive and negative both in the *Priamel* and in the argument, nonetheless every theme introduced in the *Priamel* gets its spot in the argument proper. The words are never quite the same, but the concepts are clearly repeated. This shows the importance of the abstract/concrete dialectic in the poem, which institutes a correspondence between the ideal bishop and Gregory's self-portrait. As for content, this first part of the poem (1–40) closely follows the polemic against the shape-shifting bishop of II, 1, 12, 709–760 (see §2.2.3.2): the bad bishop is focused on his outward side, fickle and essentially untrue, whereas the good bishop, though lacking in appearance, is true and reliable and impervious to change.

In the argument, the bad bishop is often described in relation to other human beings, whereas the good bishop is in relation only with Christ and the Trinity<sup>14</sup>. The bad bishop's flexibility, which Gregory interprets as untruth and confusion, is necessary to accommodate other human beings, but the good bishop lives almost exclusively linked to God, disregarding the logic of the world. As a result, the bad bishop appears powerful and is really miserable, whereas the contrary applies to the model bishop. Naturally, these characterisations are also *pro domo sua*, because they recall Gregory's failure to find a compromise during the council, thereby accusing those who had him removed of duplicity and ambition. If he had been accused of diplomatic cluelessness, he owned up to those accusations and found a way to turn them back on his accusers<sup>15</sup>.

This basic contrast is repeated after Gregory's autobiography (41–54). The poet describes himself always in relationship with Christ, with broad use of the word νοῦς, already important in the description of the good bishop. The life Gregory abandoned,

<sup>14</sup> Bad bishop: Ὁ μὲν βροτέου λάτρης αἰσθενέος (18); ἐπιστρέφεται...δόξης βροτέης ἐνθάδε συρομένης (orig. negative, 29–30). Good bishop: Ὁ μὲν ἄμβροτος, ὃν τινα Χριστῷ / Τάρβος ἄγει (11–12); Χριστοῦ σαρκὶ χαρίζομενος (22); Θεὸς... Ὡς ζῶει μούνῳ καὶ τέρπεται (23; 25); Ἡδὴ καὶ Τριάδος ἅπτεται οὐρανίης (36).

<sup>15</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 314, 359.



on the other side, repeats the fundamental features of the bad bishop: it is true that it introduces new and specific elements, but they all agree in the hectic search for recognition from worldly powers. The correspondences are best shown in tabular form:

	Argument (11–40)	Biography and Invective (41–94)
<b>Good</b>	Χριστοῦ σαρκί χαριζόμενος (22) <b>Θεός</b> ... Ὡς ζῶει μούνῳ καὶ <b>τέρπεται</b> (23; 25); Ἀλλὰ νόον καθαροῖσι νοήμασιν αἰὲν ἀέξων, Ἦδη καὶ <b>Τριάδος ἀπτεται</b> οὐρανίης (35–36)	Τοῦτ' ἀγαθῶν μόνον ἔσται ἐλεύθερον, οὔτε καθεκτόν, Οὐθ' ἐλετόν, <b>Χριστῷ</b> νοῦς ἀναιρόμενος (57–58) Αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ <b>Χριστοῦ πλήσομαι</b> ἀτρεμέων (102).
<b>Bad</b>	Ὁ μὲν βροτέου λάτρις ἀεισθενέος <sup>16</sup> (18) Ἐπιστρέφεται... δόξης βροτέης ἐνθάδε συρομένης (orig. negative, 29–30)	Οὐ θνητοῦ βασιλῆος ὁμέστιος... Κείμενος ἐν μέσσοισι, κατηφιῶν καὶ ἄναυδος, Ἄπνοον ἄσθμα φέρων, δούλια δαινύμενος ... Οὐδὲ χέρας φονίου προσπύξομαι, οὐδὲ γενείου Δράξομαι, ὥστ' ὀλίγης ἀντιτυχεῖν χάριτος (59; 61–62; 65–66) Ἄλλ' ἐν φάρμακον αἰνὸν ἔχων, θηρήτορα τιμῆς Θυμόν, καὶ θανάτου φάρμακον ἀτρεκέως (89–90)

In this further case of dialectic between abstract and concrete, we have closer similarities between the two parts. For example, the description of the good bishop's asceticism through the usage of the word νοῦς and through the reference to an ascending and perceptible relationship with God (see §3.2.2.3), is expressed in almost the same terms for the ideal good bishop and for the retiring Gregory. Similarly, the bad bishop's hectic search for fame has similarities with the invective against the life of a bishop in the capital, beginning with the relationship with powerful men (18 and 59). Interestingly, earthly fame is metaphorically described as a wild animal: in 30, it is a snake slithering on the ground (συρομένης), whereas in 89 its desire is a hunt, and the heart that desires it is, consequently, a hunter (θηρήτορα)<sup>17</sup>. The θυμός is compared to a φάρμακον in relation to the previous lines (83–88), where the poet describes the bishop's duty to improve the morality of others. Here, however, the theme of duplicity is less apparent, if we exclude the paradox of having Gregory as truly free when “shut in the dark bowels of some beast” (53) and as enslaved when dining in the presence of kings<sup>18</sup>. The dominant

<sup>16</sup> Ἀεισθενέος is *vox nihili*, so it must be read something like ἐρισθενέος according to PG 37, 1263, which in this case anticipates the reference to the emperor at 59.

<sup>17</sup> Another passage on the “hunt” for glory, though not verbally related: Φθέγγομαι οὐασι τερπνὰ, τὰ Πνεύματος ἔκτοθι ρίψας, / Ὡς κεν ἔοιμι πρόφρων, φίλτρον ἔχων πλεόνων (77–78).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Σῶμα μὲν ἐν σπλάγχχοισι· νόος δ' ἀδέτοισιν ἐρωαῖς / Βήσεται, οἳ κ' ἐθέλει, καὶ περ ἐεργόμενος, / Τοῦτ' ἀγαθῶν μόνον ἔσται ἐλεύθερον, οὔτε καθεκτόν, / Οὐθ' ἐλετόν (55–58) with Κείμενος ἐν μέσσοισι, κατηφιῶν καὶ ἄναυδος, Ἄπνοον ἄσθμα φέρων, δούλια δαινύμενος (61–62).

note, not absent even from the first half of the poem, remains the ambition of bishops, which also justifies the polemics against discord during the council in 91–101<sup>19</sup>.

In the end, at the core of all these problems lies a question of authority: Gregory's model bishop answers only to God, and every deviation is considered treason, no matter the cost; on the other side, the "bad bishops" seek compromise either with their colleagues or with popular consensus or with secular powers<sup>20</sup>. Gregory's position, expressed in harsh tones in this poem, may seem to contradict his positive stance towards the emperor and the capital city in his autobiography (§5.1.1.3). In those narratives, he praises the equability of the emperor and presents himself as his faithful associate, whereas here he casts his relationship with powerful people in the most humiliating colours. It is impossible to extrapolate from these contradictory texts how he really behaved in Constantinople, but it is possible to decipher what he wants us to understand of it. As was already said, positioning the humiliating behaviour of II, 1, 17 in the past, Gregory wants to attribute it in the present to his rival Nectarius, while distancing himself from the political arena. In this sense, we can observe a shift in his rhetoric from II, 1, 10–13 to II, 1, 17: the first group of poems is still concerned with the hot topics and aims at defending Gregory directly, whereas II, 1, 17 is already moving towards Gregory's new self-presentation culminating in his renunciation of the word so poignantly described by Storin<sup>21</sup>.

If, however, his description of reality seems contradictory, the underlying ideas remain consistent: both the emperor's equability and Gregory's refusal of self-humiliating behaviours suggest the idea that the bishop should always be independent of secular powers. Ideally, the emperor should encourage and sustain good bishops, but never force the hands of prelates nor require humiliation from them. Bishops, on the other side, should preserve their independence and not behave like courtiers. In the part on invective, we will see that according to Gregory matters ran much differently: the bishops, in comparison to the emperor, held too little leverage to be really independent, and too much to be left alone by imperial power. Moreover, they often were already notable people before becoming bishops, so that their participation in public ceremonies and their need of public consensus, as described by Gregory, were taken for

<sup>19</sup> The θυμός "hunting for glory" (θηρήτορα τιμῆς, 89–90) precedes the description of councils: Οὐδέ τί που συνόδοισιν ὁμόθρονος ἔσσομι' ἔγωγε / Χηνῶν ἢ γεράνων ἄκριτα μαρναμένων / Ἐνθ' ἔρις, ἔνθα μόθος τε καὶ αἰσχα κρυπτά πάροιθεν / Εἰς ἓνα δυσμενέων χώρον ἀγειρόμενα. / ... Οὐ γὰρ ἐμῆς πολιῆς παίζειν, καὶ λάτριν ἀεικῶς / Ἑμμεναι ἀντὶ θρόνων, ὧν πέρι μαρνάμενοι / Σχίζονται, καὶ κόσμον ὅλον τέμνουσιν ἀθέσμως. / Αἰ αἰ τῶν μεγάλων ἡμετέρων ἀχέων! / Ταῦτα μὲν, οἷσι φίλον, καὶ κερκῶπων κράτος εἶη (91–94; 97–101). Note the expression λάτριν ἀντὶ θρόνων, which recalls the βροτέου λάτρης αἰσιθενέος of 18: the same slavish mentality of ambition of the bad bishop is the cause of division in current councils.

<sup>20</sup> As regards the colleagues: Οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδὲ πρόεδρος ἔων ἱεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις, / Ἡ μόνος, ἢ πλεόνων εἰς ἔν ἀγειρομένων, / Φθέγγομαι οὐασι τερπνὰ (75–77); as regards the consensus of lay people: Ὡς κεν ἔοιμι πρόφρων, φίλτρον ἔχων πλεόνων, / Τερπόμενός τε κρότοις, καὶ ἐν θεάτροισι χορεύων (78–79).

<sup>21</sup> Storin 2011.

granted<sup>22</sup>. In this conflict of authorities there must be a good deal of truth, in the sense that the condition of a bishop at the time was probably not conducive to the expression of personal religious or moral persuasions. It is also a convenient representation of Gregory's own failure to lead the council in Constantinople: he is here claiming that his program was directly inspired by God, that a good bishop prefers removal over compromise (which was precisely his condition), that his adversaries had no good reason to oppose him other than cowardice and ambition. Again, herein appears the consistency of Gregory's rhetorical strategy of presenting himself as the good bishop, who is the removed outsider challenging societal conventions thanks to his superior ascetic charisma, whereas the other bishops are relegated to represent the exact opposite model, the lackeys of public opinion and powerful people, precisely because their intemperance can be held over them.

### 5.1.2 Autobiographical narrative in the poems

Even though Gregory's personality and experience permeate every line of our poems, some passages are more specific than others: as already anticipated, Gregory includes narratives of his time in Constantinople. In such passages he is explicitly writing of himself, and in fact he does so often in the first person. I will examine these passages, whose content corresponds to the narrative of the famous poem *On His Own Life*. There, the poet offers his version of the facts, which, as Storin rightly points out, should not be confused with the facts themselves<sup>23</sup>. The similarities between *On His Own Life* and our poems is explained by the fact that these poems are part of the same reaction by Gregory to the Constantinopolitan events as *On His Own Life*; therefore, it is only natural that the poems should dwell on and manipulate the same facts.

However, before treating the texts directly, it is useful to briefly recall the events related to the poems—namely, Gregory's mission in Constantinople, the council in the city, and the retreat of the poet to Nazianzus. The first source for these events is Gregory himself, in his much-studied poem *On His Own Life* and in a wealth of other texts. Scholarly accounts are given by Gregory's biographers, most recently McGuckin and Bernardi<sup>24</sup>. The exact circumstances of Gregory's arrival in Constantinople in 379 are not wholly clear, but they must have been linked to Theodosius's accession to the throne and the Synod of Antioch in the same year: either the Nicene community of the capital invited Gregory to prepare the arrival of the emperor, or the bishops in Antioch, headed by Meletius and representing the coalition of prelates animated by Basil, sent Gregory

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<sup>22</sup> On the status of bishops: Rapp 2000; Rapp 2005, 164–171, 180–207.

<sup>23</sup> Storin 2017.

<sup>24</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 229–398; Bernardi 1995, 175–228; see also: Gautier 2002, 354–408; Elm 2000b; Simonetti 1975, 527–552; Gallay 1959. In the next paragraphs I generally follow McGuckin 2001a and Bernardi 1995, providing the most important differences in note.

there for the same reason<sup>25</sup>. The Nicene congregation in Constantinople must have been small and mostly upper-class, and Gregory had links in the court and capital through his cousin Theodosia, wife of a senator Ablabius. Gregory's task must have been to prepare the passage of Constantinople from its Arian majority to the new course imposed by the emperor.

In the capital, things did not always run smoothly for Gregory: the discontent of the Arian majority, possibly led by ascetics, resulted once in the storming of Gregory's church, the Anastasia, during a celebration and his attempted stoning. The fact is oft and gladly recalled by the poet as a credential of his holiness. The next event to consider is Maximus's attempt upon the see of Constantinople in 380. Maximus, who presented himself as a Cynic ascetic, came to Constantinople from Alexandria and was backed by Peter, the Egyptian patriarch. At first, Gregory's relationship with the man seemed idyllic, with Gregory even writing an encomium about Maximus as a model philosopher (*or*: 25). Then, Maximus tried to get consecrated as bishop of the city by some Egyptian bishops, only to be stopped by an angry mob of Constantinopolitan people. The attempt may have matured from the trust Maximus enjoyed and Gregory's hesitancy to assume the role of bishop, but in hindsight Gregory condemns it and distances himself as far as possible from Maximus. However, the episode not only discredited Gregory to the Alexandrians, but it must have also challenged his reliability and authority vis-à-vis the court and the Antiochene faction that brought him to Constantinople. Moreover, the Egyptians did not drop Maximus's claim to the see until 381, with the Cynic accruing the support of Ambrose of Milan, too<sup>26</sup>.

Finally, after Theodosius had entered the city at the end of 380, a council met in Constantinople in May 381. Though in many ways the council had to be a rerun of the Antiochene Synod of two years before, it did not turn out the same way. As in Antioch, the president was Meletius, and most of the bishops came from the regions of Syria and inner Anatolia. One of the chief ends of the assembly was to establish the compromise reached in 379 regarding the schism in Antioch<sup>27</sup>: Meletius, backed by the coalition of Asiatic bishops gathered by Basil, would have reigned as first, and after his death Pauli-

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25 Bernardi 1995, 175–176 attributes Gregory's mission to the Nicene community in Constantinople, McGuckin 2001a, 236–238, to the Synod of Antioch, possibly even to Basil, Gautier 2002, 354–355 stresses also the role of Theodosia, his cousin, in arranging the summons.

26 On the dispute over the seat of Constantinople: Simonetti 1975, 450–451, 533–535, 548–550. The endorsement of Maximus from Ambrose and the Westerners (even though Damasus had condemned his election) is witnessed by Ambr. *ep.* 13, while the Orientals backed Nectarius, as demonstrated by the synodal letter preserved by Theodrt. *h. e.* 5, 9.

27 Other purposes were the reaffirmation of the Nicene faith and the appointment of a new bishop for Constantinople after Demophilus' ousting and Maximus' failed attempt (Simonetti 1975, 529). The doctrinal motivations have a great import in McGuckin's narration of the events; I have left them out, because they are barely treated by Gregory in our poems. In a nutshell, the emperor and bishops wanted to simply reaffirm Nicaea with the broadest consensus possible; Gregory wanted to assert his innovative doctrine of the divinity and consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit, which was bound to create conflicts.

nus, backed by the Alexandrians and the Latins, would have become bishop. However, Meletius died suddenly during the council, and the presidency over the assembly passed on to Gregory, as senior member and prospective bishop of the capital: the council had explicitly rejected Maximus's claim and was to confirm Gregory in the position. In his capacity as president, Gregory pushed to enforce the 379 compromise and therefore to endorse Paulinus, but Meletius's faction was not satisfied and proposed to order Flavian as bishop. Gregory was in the minority and resorted to one of his favourite tactics: retreat; he abandoned the works of the council. While he was away, the bishop of Alexandria, Timothy, together with bishops from Egypt and the Illyricum, joined the council. It is doubtful whether the invitation came from the emperor or even from Gregory, but it is certain that they were summoned to support Paulinus<sup>28</sup>. The move backfired against Gregory, since the Egyptians and Westerners still held a grudge against him for the Maximus affair. They cast doubts on the canonicity of Gregory's election, because he had been already consecrated bishop of Sasima by Basil, and under canon 15 of the Canons of Nicaea bishops were forbidden to change see. At this point, it was clear that the only thing that could bring together emperor and bishops, East and West, Antioch and Alexandria, Flavian and Paulinus, was Gregory's head. He resigned and set sail for Nazianzus. Meletius's faction, likely led by Diodore of Tarsus, proposed the unbaptised civil servant Nectarius for the see of Constantinople: the man was harmless enough not to worry Timothy; was well linked to the Asiatic bishops, being of Tarsus like Diodore; and obviously ready to satisfy imperial desiderata. The schism of Antioch remained unresolved.

In the year following the council, Ambrose still backed Maximus. Therefore, when Gregory wrote our poems, he had to defend himself not only from Nectarius but also from Maximus, whose affair still projected a shadow on the poet. Gregory had to justify the fact that he was duped by Maximus, while at the same time highlighting the latter's flaws. On the other side, he had to recover his face after being replaced by a man without baptism, without ascetic credentials, and without any particular gift in the realm of *paideia*, as a consequence of a clear and known failure on Gregory's part. Little is known of Gregory's relationship with the court, but certainly he had lost his standing as an active politician before all bishops, the remote Egyptians and Westerners as well as his former allies in Asia. Their power plays were—in his eyes—the true reason of his downfall. With these targets in mind, Gregory elaborated his poems on the bishops.

Coming to our texts, it is interesting to note *where* these events are recounted by Gregory: they are briefly mentioned in II, 1, 10, 8–24; an extensive summary is found in II, 1, 12, 71–154; the second half of II, 1, 17 (from line 41) presupposes that narration but

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<sup>28</sup> McGuckin 2001b, 166–167 hypothesises that Gregory himself may have called the Egyptians, even though in his longer biography (McGuckin 2001a) he attributes the call to the emperor alone. For Bernardi 1995, 215, the Egyptians were simply late. Gautier 2002, 397–398 considers both the idea that they were called since the beginning but came late, and the idea that they were called by the emperor to solve Gregory's impasse.

does not engage it directly. Finally, II, 1, 13 lacks references to many of these events. This confirms the fictional settings of the poems described in §1.1.1. The hexametric poem II, 1, 13, with its strong links to the conciliar speech of II, 1, 11, 1600–1682, is less concerned with Gregory's personal position and more with the discord among bishops, and, being set in the heat of the council, it could not host a comprehensive reflection on Gregory's time in Constantinople. Moreover, this is the most epic poem, in which the voice of the poet is most detached from the matter at hand, as demonstrated by the fact that it is the only one out of four in which the poet does not mention his name. On the other hand, the reflection on the mission in Constantinople finds its natural place in the formalities of Gregory's farewell to the other bishops and the community, represented respectively in II, 1, 12 (and *or.* 42) and in II, 1, 10. Here, Gregory has the best opportunity to present as one comprehensive narrative his time in Constantinople in order to defend it, purportedly at the very moment in which it is defeated and concluded. II, 1, 17 preserves its character of meditation even as it presents the autobiographical materials, which are arranged less as a narration than as a declaration of intents and as a strong contrast between Gregory's character and that of his colleagues.

Before analysing how Gregory treats the single episodes of his political biography, I must to outline how these single episodes are organised in the different texts. In the analysis, I have followed the order of II, 1, 12, but both II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 17 and the other important texts on the argument (II, 1, 11 and *or.* 42 mainly) present different structures. II, 1, 12, 71–153 is the easiest to analyse, because the poem introduces the narrative as a distinct section of its argument, reviewing the events in the form of a cohesive story. Indeed, as already noted (§1.1.1), this autobiographical passage corresponds perfectly to the *narratio* of a public speech: it bridges the preamble, which puts forth the theme of bad bishops, with the invective (see §5.2) and the argumentative part (§3.1.3.1 and 3) that form the centre of the poem. Gregory's story is presented as an example (70) not only of the damages caused by bad bishops but also of the more generic moral statement that the wicked tend to have an easy life, whereas the pious is often unlucky (64–69; see §3.2.2). However, it is clear that the story has much more than an exemplary value; the very formulation with which Gregory expresses the concept hints to more: λόγου δὲ μάρτυς αὐτὸς, ὃς λέγω τάδε (70). The word μάρτυς is laden with meaning, all pointing to Gregory's aptness to discuss what he is going to discuss. The fact that the example he uses to prove his point is something he lived in first person on one side entitles him to pass judgements on the themes, giving him even the authority of a martyr, as the name μάρτυς and the narrative itself imply. Moreover, the extended narrative makes clear the context in which Gregory's proposal on the episcopate has matured, so that the proposal comments on and analyses the concrete situation with a clear apologetic aim from the poet. In II, 1, 12, the traditional oratorical structure of the poem produces the same short circuit between Gregory's autobiography and his general ideas on the episcopate that we have already noted in the construction of his model bishop (§3.1.5; §3.2.2) and in the previous section (§5.1.1).

II, 1, 10 lacks any general proposal, the poem being simply aimed at defending Gregory's reputation. The events of Constantinople are confined to the first part of the poem (1–24), and the poet draws a clear line between this theme and the description of his ascetic retreat (ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν λήθης κεύθῃ βυθός. Αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε . . . , 25). Through this strong distinction he wants to establish his status as outsider. The events of Constantinople are not exactly narrated; rather, they are recalled; therefore, the order of exposition is the opposite of the chronological order, because Gregory begins lamenting his being removed from Constantinople—the community that he so painstakingly established in the Nicene faith—in favour of “another”. Then he explains the reason behind his removal, which is an indictment of the episcopate of his time. Everything is expressed shortly and allusively: Gregory mentions his work in Constantinople to defend his right to that bishopric; then he alludes to the council to delegitimise his removal.

II, 1, 17 is also very elliptical: Gregory begins by declaring that, though he had desired to become a bishop, the wrongdoings of the other prelates made him change his mind (41–44). This generic plot is enriched thereafter with flashbacks from the mission in Constantinople (45–56). All this serves to justify Gregory's leaving his post and the description of the bad habits of bishops in the following lines. Narrative and description all concur to devalue the current state of the episcopate and to highlight the difference between Gregory and his peers.

This apologetic rewriting of the story is even more prominent in *or.* 42 and II, 1, 11. The speech presents itself as an account of Gregory's mission before the other bishops<sup>29</sup>. For this reason, it presents at length the situation of Nicene Christianity in Constantinople before Gregory's arrival as desperate and states the critical importance of his preaching for establishing a first community. The *refutatio* of accusations is located after the positive results Gregory boasts. In II, 1, 11 the apologetic aim is less explicit but just as evident as in the other pieces. Here, Gregory follows more or less the same order as in the narration of II, 1, 12, with more precision thanks to the greater space allowed by the theme. The accusations brought against Gregory are discussed as they occur; for example, criticisms of his mildness are brought up as a comment on the events which would have required more strength, and the problem of his allegiance is discussed in the midst of the council (see §5.1.2.2). What stands out from this narration is the great space devoted to Maximus (lines 728–1112), whereas *or.* 42 and the narrations in our poems do not discuss the affair<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, both *or.* 42 and II, 1, 11 are very concerned with doctrinal problems: *or.* 42 has a long doctrinal section (14–18), in which Gregory clarifies his position vis-à-vis the Arian and Macedonian dispute and consequently the kind of faith he has transmitted to Constantinople; II, 1, 11 constantly refers to the

<sup>29</sup> The legal overtones of this speech are pointed out by Elm 1999 (see also Elm 2000b).

<sup>30</sup> II, 1, 12 attacks Maximus, albeit without mentioning him, at 658–791, where he examines duplicity of character and the bishop-Proteus (see §2.2.3.2).

problem of the Holy Spirit<sup>31</sup>. Such precise references are completely lacking not only from II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 12 but also from II, 1, 13 and II, 1, 17. The last of these has a passing allusion to the question of the divinity of the Spirit, and in general the poems take for granted that the Nicene position is the orthodox one, without addressing possible dissent. The impression is that the poems on the bishops target a different audience than II, 1, 11 and *or.* 42.

In the following sections I will present the texts of II, 1, 10; II, 1, 11; II, 1, 12; II, 1, 17; and *or.* 42 side by side and in the order of events of II, 1, 12, so as to compare and analyse them. I will begin with Gregory's call to Constantinople (§5.1.2.1), then address the criticisms and difficulties he received there (§5.1.2.2), then give an account of his achievements (§5.1.2.3) and finally describe how he retreated (§5.1.2.4). For reasons of readability, I have decided to have no more than two columns; therefore, I have divided the texts according to metre in descending order of "dignity" (according to late antique literary theories) from elegy to iambus and prose.

### 5.1.2.1 Gregory is called to Constantinople

The passages of II, 1, 11 and II, 1, 12 have the same structure: after a premise, they explain whom called Gregory to the city and then what Gregory had to do there; finally, Gregory explains why he accepted<sup>32</sup>. The different premises notwithstanding, the verbal parallels between the two poems are clear, and they permit an analogous subdivision of the passage<sup>33</sup>. On the beginnings of Gregory's ministry in Constantinople, II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 17 are much less detailed.

How Gregory came to Constantinople is one of the least clear points of the story, partly because his accounts on the matter present differences. I have already briefly discussed how the different texts trace back Gregory's call to different people (§2.2.1.2). II, 1, 10 attributes it to God and his servants, who could be the clergy of Constantinople as well as the bishops at large. II, 1, 12 mentions "the assemblies of shepherds / and the orthodox people" (81–82)—namely, the bishops and the local community—together with the Holy Spirit (79). The term "assemblies" (σύλλογοι) may even allude to the synod of Antioch in 379. *On His Own Life* agrees with II, 1, 12 in mentioning

<sup>31</sup> The doctrinal conflict at Constantinople is perfectly described by McGuckin 2001a, 354–357, 367–368. Gregory pressed for a full confession of the divinity and consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit with God the Father and the Son, but in the council the cautious line prevailed.

<sup>32</sup> Premise: II, 1, 11, 583–594; II, 1, 12, 71–76; call: II, 1, 11, 595–597; II, 1, 12, 77–82; Gregory's task: II, 1, 11, 598–606; II, 1, 12, 83–89; acceptance: II, 1, 11, 607–608; II, 1, 12, 90–92.

<sup>33</sup> Analogies are to be found in the forceful call to Constantinople (ἀνδράσιν / κλαπείς βιαίους, II, 1, 11, 607–608; τις τῶν καλῶν ἀποσπάσας / Ἐκδημον ἤγαγε, II, 1, 12, 77–78), its attribution to the Spirit, the bishops and the community (ἡ χάρις τοῦ πνεύματος / πολλῶν καλούντων ποιμένων καὶ θρεμμάτων, II, 1, 11, 595–596; Εἶτ' οὖν τὸ θεῖον Πνεῦμα. . . σύλλογοί τε ποιμένων / Καὶ λαὸς ὀρθόδοξος, II, 1, 12, 79; 81–82), the formulation of Gregory's task there (ὡς ἂν καταψύξαμεν, II, 1, 11, 598; Ὡς ἂν τις ἔλθῃ, II, 1, 12, 84) and of his arrival (Οὕτω μὲν ἦλθον, II, 1, 11, 607; Οὕτω μὲν οὖν ἐπῆλθον II, 1, 12, 90).



bishops and people. Moreover, II, 1, 12 speaks of “one good person” (τις τῶν καλῶν, 77) who “dragged” (ἀποσπάσας) Gregory, and so II, 1, 11 has Gregory “summoned / by forceful men” (ἀνδράσιν / κλαπείς βιαίους, 607–608). This is perfectly in agreement with what Gregory says at the beginning of his eulogy for Basil (*or.* 43, 2), where he suggests that Basil was behind Gregory’s mission in the capital and describes Gregory’s call as a violent one (βιασθέντες)<sup>34</sup>. Gregory distances himself as much as possible from the decision through the use of passive verbs to express his acceptance of the mission: καμφθείς (II, 1, 12, 91); κλαπείς (II, 1, 11, 608); βιασθέντες (*or.* 43, 2). He did not accept; he has been made to accept—or so he would have us believe. On the contrary, in II, 1, 17 Gregory himself wants to become one of the bishops, probably meaning—in consideration of what follows in that poem—to become bishop of the capital. These different versions in the sources produce the different versions in the interpreters, who from time to time privilege the role of the “assemblies of shepherds” or of the “orthodox people” and try to explain how Basil may have contributed to the call, since he died before the Council of Antioch even began.

Gregory is also ambiguous as regards the divine call he received. At II, 1, 10, 15 and *or.* 43, 2 he gives the agency to God, while at II, 1, 11, 595 and II, 1, 12, 79 it is the Holy Spirit (πνεῦμα) who calls him to Constantinople. Moreover, two sources underline—each one twice—that Gregory’s mission was linked with a λόγος<sup>35</sup>. Clearly, this λόγος may be simply interpreted as the “doctrine” Gregory was meant to spread and defend in the capital, but since that doctrine was the ὁμοουσία of the Son or Λόγος with the Father and his divinity, it would be entirely correct to capitalise the lambda of Λόγος in these occurrences. From this perspective, the oscillation between God and Holy Spirit as to the agency of his call to Constantinople may serve Gregory to signal his own innovative doctrine of the divinity of the Spirit.

It is interesting to note that in the final passages II, 1, 11, 607–608 and II, 1, 12, 90–92, parallel in many respects, Gregory presents himself with two different titles: λόγου συνήγορος (II, 1, 11) and εὐσεβῆς ξένος (II, 1, 12). In *On His Own Life* he privileges his doctrinal mission, whereas in the poem against the bishops he puts forward his ascetic credentials. Indeed, if εὐσεβής indicates Gregory’s orthodoxy, the word ξένος is no mere legal fact, but an allusion to the ascetic value of ξενιτεία, which Gregory so often appropriated and Gautier has already studied<sup>36</sup>. The word ἐκδημιον (II, 1, 12, 78)

34 καλῶς βιασθέντες, καὶ κατὰ Θεὸν ἴσως ἐκδημιον γεγονότες. The prosaic passage is linked verbally to II, 1, 11 by the use of βιασθέντες/βιαίους and to II, 1, 12 by the use of ἐκδημιον.

35 λόγου συλλήπτορας (II, 1, 11, 597); λόγου συνήγορος (II, 1, 11, 608); περὶ τὸν ἀληθῆ λόγον ἡσυχολήμεθα... μηδὲν ἕτερον ἀναπνεύσαντι ὅτι μὴ λόγον εὐσεβῆ καὶ κόσμου παντὸς σωτήριον (*or.* 43, 2). Note in this last reference how εὐσεβῆ can be referred to a correct doctrine (one that permits to accord devotion to the right objects, in this case the Son), but that the second attribute, κόσμου παντὸς σωτήριον, would be much more apt for Λόγος in the sense of Son of God. The ambiguity is conscious in Gregory’s words.

36 On εὐσεβής, see Lampe 1961, 575–576, s.v. εὐσεβής 5. On ξενιτεία, see §3.2.2.2; Gautier 2002, 7–16, 69–77.

has ascetic overtones, too, as demonstrated by II, 1, 12, 579 (νοῦ πρὸς ὕψος ἐκ πάχους ἐκδημίαις). The particular attention of II, 1, 12 for Gregory's ascetic self-presentation is shown also in his premise to the call to Constantinople (II, 1, 12, 71–76): while in *On His Own Life* he begins with a description of the dire straits of the Nicene Christians in the capital (583–594), in the poem against bishops he describes his own condition when the call reached him, tearing him away from ascetic retreat. Even the mention of expiation of sins as one of the causes of his mission is directed at mending the apparent contradiction between the ascetic portrayal and the mission, making the mission congruent with asceticism<sup>37</sup>. This might seem odd, since *On His Own Life* should be more concerned with the person of Gregory and the poem against bishops more concerned with the state of the church. However, Gregory's ascetic self-portrait in II, 1, 12 may be explained in the wider context of the poem, where the comparison between bishops with an ascetic background and those who are chosen from the realm of politics is a running theme. Therefore, Gregory presents his call to Constantinople as the bishop's passage from ascetic retreat to the *vita activa*, so that, when he will argue in favour of bishops with ascetic background, he will also be legitimising his tenure in the capital, and his tenure in the capital will work as a proof of the usefulness of having bishops with ascetic background<sup>38</sup>. Once more Gregory develops a general proposal and an apologetic argument side by side.

In boasting of his ascetic credentials at the beginning of II, 1, 12 Gregory also presents his character as it will appear in the following narrative. Lines 592–594 of II, 1, 11 play an analogous role<sup>39</sup>. Apart from the understatement of 592–593 on Gregory's stance in matters pertaining to religion, what is particularly interesting in this self-presentation through the eyes of others (ἐδόξαμεν) is the expression ἄγρικοις βίος. This means literally that he has lived in the province (Cappadocia) for a long time, but the term ἄγρικοις has a deeper political significance. The trait is presented as a disadvantage through the conjunction καίπερ. Indeed, Cappadocia was perceived as a backwater region<sup>40</sup>. The term has the same negative nuance when applied to Gregory's adversaries at II, 1, 12, 138: “ἄγρική cannot bear παιδευσιν”—that is, the uncouthness of the bishops could not bear Gregory's sophistication. And yet the fact that ἄγρική is applied to Gregory as well as to his adversaries should make us wary about its ambiguity.

For starters, Cappadocia, though provincial, was also considered a bulwark for the faith, a fame renewed by Basil's centrality in church politics of the time<sup>41</sup>. On the

<sup>37</sup> On asceticism as penance: Griffith 1995, 234–235.

<sup>38</sup> On this see: §3.2.2.

<sup>39</sup> ἐδόξαμεν γὰρ ἐν θεῷ τινες / εἶναι βίω τε καὶ λόγῳ τῶν γνωρίμων / καίπερ αἰεὶ ζήσαντες ἄγρικον βίον.

<sup>40</sup> Bernardi 1995, 80–82.

<sup>41</sup> See: Καππάδοσαν γῆν λιπών, / Ἥ πίστει ἔρεισμα τοῖς πᾶσιν δοκεῖ (II, 1, 12, 93–94). The export of Arian bishops notwithstanding (Auxentius of Milan, Gregory and George in Alexandria), Cappadocia could boast the heritage of Gregory the Thaumaturge, Origen's pupil (McGuckin 2001a, *passim*), and of

contrary, the city of Constantinople was plagued with heresy, so that “to come from the countryside” may not have been that bad a mark on one’s Christian portfolio. In this perspective, the signature at the end of II, 1, 10 may acquire new meaning: Οὗτος Γρηγορίου λόγος, τὸν θρέψατο γαῖα / Καππαδοκῶν, Χριστῷ πάντ’ ἀποδυσάμενον. (II, 1, 10, 35–36). Second, ἀγροικία is a synonym for strangeness, not only in a geographic sense but most of all as social “otherness”. The ἄγροικος is a kind of savage to the life of the city, marked by *paideia*. In this sense, the term is part of a wider pattern of self-characterisations by Gregory as an outsider to the polite society of the era. We have already seen that at the end of II, 1, 12 (829–830) he characterises himself as an old and drunken man, while at II, 1, 12, 90 he used the word ξένος, which is a key term of his ascetic approach (§3.2.2.2). The same designation of “guest” and “stranger” is implied by his description of the famous stoning in II, 1, 17, 47–48: Λᾶες ἐμοί, κείνων δὲ Τριάς, θεότης νεόπηκτος / Τοίοις ἀλλήλους ξεινίσαμεν ξενίοις. The repetition of the root ξεν- highlights Gregory’s condition as outsider and the hardships he had to endure for it. Again, his whole rationale for writing the poems as poems depends on his status as outsider (see §1.3.2).

In this pattern of otherness, ἀγροικία taps into a wealth of classical images which we can roughly divide into two groups: the philosopher and the comic hero. As for the philosophical side, Gregory’s strangeness recalls Socrates’s ἀτοπία, the “Athenian stranger” of Plato’s *Laws*, and the Cynic and Stoic ξενιτεία<sup>42</sup>. The harshness (τραχύν τε καὶ τὰ πλείω δύστροπον) confessed at II, 1, 12, 828 may echo Eros being αὐχμηρὸς in Plato’s *Symposium*<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, philosophy is associated with drunkenness more than once in the same work<sup>44</sup>. Moreover, ἀγροικία, when it means that Gregory came from a faraway province with the fame of being only slightly Hellenised, may be a reference to the idea of an “alien wisdom”, coming from a barbarian<sup>45</sup>. Furthermore, the ἄγροικος was a recurring character of the Old and New Comedy. In New Comedy, the ἄγροικος is mostly ridiculed as uncouth and unable to behave in the context of urban life; Menander is the only one moderating this tendency and representing also

Basil (Meier 1989, 86). Monasticism was important in preserving the Nicaean faith, too (Bernardi 1995, 95–97). A more general perspective on culture and Christianity in late antique Cappadocia: Van Dam 2002, 157–204; Van Dam 2003b.

<sup>42</sup> Socrates: Plat. *Theaet.* 149A, 9; *conv.* 215A, 2; 221D, 2; *Phaedr.* 230C, 6. On ξενιτεία: Gautier 2002, 9–10.

<sup>43</sup> Plat. *conv.* 203D, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Anagnostou–Laoutides 2021, with many references to the *Symposium*.

<sup>45</sup> For the prestige of alien wisdom in Hellenistic times: Momigliano 1990, 85–87, 144–149; the *locus classicus* of this idea is the beginning of Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives*, where the biographer reports that some people believe philosophy was born among the barbarians, an opinion Gregory echoes at *or.* 4, 107–109, where he lists various arts invented by barbarians and brought to the Greeks. See also §3.1.3.3 n. 125 (comparison of Gregory’s wisdom and classical philosophy, in the same section there is also a reference to the position of Christian philosophy as “alien wisdom”). There was also a Christian tradition of “alien wisdom”, exemplified in *or.* 33, 9–10.

rustic people with noble sentiments<sup>46</sup>. In Aristophanes, on the other side, the ἄγρικοι is seen more sympathetically; in fact, many comic heroes come from the countryside (Dikaiopolis in the *Acharnians*, Strepsiades in the *Clouds*, Trygaeus in the *Peace*, Chremylos in the *Pluto*). Aristophanes often represents through them the point of view of country people on the extravagant and corrupted mores of the city<sup>47</sup>. Moreover, the traditional language for the comic ἄγρικοι shares many features with Gregory's poetry: sententiousness, moralism, long tirades, and a tendency to exaggerate everything<sup>48</sup>. It might well be that Gregory chose to identify himself with this comic mask in many of his iambic poems in order to claim for himself the strangeness from the city and the utopian heroism of Aristophanic ἄγρικοι; in this case, style would be part of his self-presentation and would be used to lend authority to his voice.

All this means that there is an ἀγροικία which is sheer lack of knowledge, opposed to a παιδευσίς, which is pure knowledge; but there is also an ἀγροικία which is strangeness to the logic of the world and of society, as opposed to a *paideia*, which is involvement in the bonds of society. Gregory reserves for himself knowledge, for the bishops ignorance and the burden of social life. Not casually, at II, 1, 12, 138 he assigns ἀγροικία to the bishops and παιδευσίς, "education", to himself, while in the same poem he uses ξένος and not ἄγρικοι for himself (90), thereby avoiding too evident a contradiction. In this sense, when he uses the word ἄγρικοι, as well as other tokens of strangeness, he is casting himself in the mould of the late antique philosopher, which, as Brown points out, was the social role endowed with the authority to chastise others, their social rank notwithstanding<sup>49</sup>. This is in accordance not only with what we already know of his self-presentation as narrator of the poems (§1.3.2) but also with his description of the ideal bishop: the ἄγρικοι βίος of II, 1, 11 corresponds to the ascetic self-presentation of II, 1, 12, and the ambiguity of ἀγροικία to the ambiguity of Christian doctrine as explained in §3.1.3.3.

From the rhetorical point of view, this self-portrait, which implies by necessity a portrait of his adversaries, has some critical advantages. First, it can be exploited to put to shame the adversaries, because they had to have theology taught to them by an outsider, a shameful reversal of roles<sup>50</sup>. Second, it allows Gregory to claim a theological authority (and to undercut the authority of others) despite, or rather thanks to, his political failure: failure itself demonstrates the bishop's ascetic prowess and theological

<sup>46</sup> Konstantakos 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Konstantakos 2005, 1–5; Ehrenberg 1975, 82–91; Dover 1972, 35–36.

<sup>48</sup> Konstantakos 2005, 3.

<sup>49</sup> On the position of the philosopher outside society in Imperial times: Brown 1992, 64–70.

<sup>50</sup> This reversal of roles is stigmatised at II, 1, 12, 549–574; 634–641 (see §3.2.2); the word ἄγρικοι is premised to a similar reversal in the fable of swans and swallows in *ep.* 114; the provincial (ἄγρικοι) is perhaps the freest (ἐλεύθερος) when he is ashamed of bad bishops (*or.* 2, 9), as if his isolation and innocence gave him a superior moral sense. The theme may be also used as a *captatio benevolentiae* (see *or.* 38, 7).

depth and thus his strangeness to political machinations<sup>51</sup>. Third, and as already anticipated (§3.1.3.3), the double meaning of *paideia* as social ability on one side and theological education on the other is a two-edged sword, capable of striking both of Gregory's rivals. Nectarius, given his background as civil servant, surely had *paideia* in the traditional sense, but his social conformity did not lend him the kind of philosophical authority the bishop should have according to Gregory. Maximus, on the other side, claimed precisely that kind of authority, but Gregory does everything to undermine Maximus's cultural competence, highlighting his lack of *paideia* in the traditional sense<sup>52</sup>.

Apart from the aside of lines 592–594, the premise of Gregory's call at II, 1, 11 is a description of the Nicene community in Constantinople. A similar description is repeated in the following lines of the same poem (598–606), when Gregory sets forth his aims in the city, and, in the same position, II, 1, 12 too has a description of Constantinople. Furthermore, the longest and most detailed such description is found in *or.* 42, whence I have indicated one passage with significant verbal similarities to the poetic ones<sup>53</sup>. Two issues plague the congregation: on one side, the Nicenes are few and far apart, likely a reference to the prohibition against using the churches of the city and their lack of clergy and leaders; on the other, most Christians in the city are Homoians, so that a wealth of different doctrines circulate and there is a certain confusion on the tenets of the faith. The poet describes these problems with a set of metaphors recurring in all three texts: he compares the community with a harvest, a vintage, and a living organism in need of air, light, and water. The agricultural metaphor dominates *or.* 42, 4. The link with II, 1, 12 is in the quotation from Isaiah relative to the ripe grape in the unripe branch: ὁ ῥῶξ ἐν τῷ βότρυι (Jes. 65:8) becomes ῥάγα μίαν ἢ δευτέραν ὠριμον ἐν ἄρῳ τῷ βότρυϊ (*or.* 42, 4) and τις μέλαινα ῥὰξ ἐν ἄρῳ βότρυϊ (II, 1, 12, 89). In both

51 This strategy was applied in II, 1, 11, 784–806 to explain away Maximus' affair; cf. τὸ μὲν γὰρ εὐκίνητον εἰς μοχθηρίαν / τηρεῖ τὰ πάντα καὶ βλέπει τὰ καίρια / τὸ δ' εἰς ἀρετὴν πρόχειρον εἰς ὑποψίαν / τῶν χειρόνων ἀργόν τε καὶ νωθὲς φύσει (II, 1, 11, 803–806).

52 Gregory criticises Maximus at II, 1, 41 in terms similar to his "generic" criticisms of bishops at II, 1, 12: cf. Κυβιστάτω τις μὴ μαθὼν, τοξευέτω, / Πτεροῖς φερέσθω πρὸς νέφη μετάρσιος. / Ἀρκεῖ τὸ βούλεσθ', οὐδαμοῦ τὸ εἰδέναι (II, 1, 41, 12–14) with II, 1, 12, 541–569 (but also the herald's speech at II, 1, 13, 89–108). In this context, Maximus is accused of ἀγροικία: τῆς ἀγροικίας / Θάρσος λαβούσης οὐ καλῶς ἀζήμιον (II, 1, 41, 9–10). Gregory has not written a separate poem against Nectarius, but the man can be recognised behind various characteristics the poet criticised in II, 1, 12, especially the dishonestly rich man of 432–441 and the mundane man of 610–633 (see McGuckin 2001a, 375, 377, 382–383; McGuckin 2001b, 163–164; Elm 2000b, 420–421; McLynn 1997).

53 Τοιοῦτον ἡμῶν τὸ γεώργιον, τοσοῦτον τὸ θέρος· μέγα μὲν, καὶ εὖσταχυ, καὶ πῖον τῷ θεωρητῇ τῶν κρυπτῶν, καὶ τοιοῦτου γεωργοῦ πρέπον εἶναι, ὃ πληθύνουσι κοιλάδες ψυχῶν καλῶς τῷ λόγῳ γεωργουμένων· οὐ μὴν γνωριζόμενον τοῖς πολλοῖς, οὐδὲ εἰς ἓν συναγόμενον, ἀλλὰ κατὰ μικρὸν συλλεγόμενον, ὡς καλὰμῃ ἐν ἀμητῷ, καὶ ὡς ἐπιφυλλίς ἐν τρυγητῷ, μὴ ὑπάρχοντος βότρυος. Προσθήσειν μοι δοκῶ κάκεῖνα, καὶ λίαν κατὰ καιρὸν, ὡς συκῇ ἐν ἐρήμῳ εὖρον τὸν Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ ὡς ῥάγα μίαν ἢ δευτέραν ὠριμον ἐν ἄρῳ τῷ βότρυϊ, εὐλογίαν μὲν Κυρίου τετηρημένην, καὶ ἀπαρχὴν καθιερωμένην, πλὴν ὀλίγην ἔτι καὶ σπάνιον καὶ οὐ πληροῦσαν στόμα ἔσθοντος (*or.* 42, 4). The complete description spans *or.* 42, 2–10.

cases Gregory's rewriting expands and clarifies the biblical text, adding the attributes ὠριμον/μέλαινα and ἄωρῳ. No difference in style can be detected between the prosaic and the iambic formulation, except perhaps the metonymy of μέλαινα instead of ὠριμος, expressed with an adjective of ample attestation in poetry. As usual in biblical paraphrase, Gregory restores the classical form ἡ ῥάξ instead of the κοινή and Ionic form ὁ ῥώξ, found in the Bible. The agricultural metaphor of II, 1, 12, 88 (ὡς καλάμη ἐν ἀμητῷ) has the same structure as that of *or.* 42, 4 (Οἶόν τι τερπνὸν ἐν μέσῳ βάτων ῥόδον), with pleasing produce standing out from among barren plants, but instead of cereals the poem employs the rose as simile<sup>54</sup>. II, 1, 11 and II, 1, 12 are more similar, to the point that sometimes one is a paraphrase of the other. An example is II, 1, 11, 601 (γλῶσσαι δὲ λάβροι καὶ πολυστροφοὶ πλοκαί), which is paraphrased by II, 1, 12, 86 (Λάλων τε γλῶσσῶν, καὶ πολυσχιδοῦς πλάνης), preserving the same alliterations, but with II, 1, 11 expanding on the theme in the following lines in accordance with its greater interest in doctrinal strife. Furthermore, λαὸν βραχὺν μέν, τῷ θεῷ δὲ πλείονα (II, 1, 11, 589) and Καὶ λαὸς ὀρθόδοξος, ἀλλ' οὐπω πλατὺς (II, 1, 12, 82) present the same contrast between number and orthodoxy and show the same variation from "shortness" (βραχὺν) to narrowness (οὐπω πλατὺς). In both poems, the community, as a living creature, must breathe, as is said by II, 1, 11, 588 (εἶχέν τι μικρὸν ζωτικῆς σπέρμα πνοῆς) and II, 1, 12, 85 (Μικρὸν τ' ἀναπνεύσῃ τῶν κύκλῳ κακῶν). Note how the same word, μικρὸν, and the metaphor of breath are employed at II, 1, 11 to describe residual and dying life, whereas in II, 1, 12 it describes new life. Indeed, in II, 1, 11 the community is presented as dying out, whereas in II, 1, 12 it is just born: θανοῦσά τ' οἰκτρὸν ἐξ ἀπιστίας μόρον (II, 1, 11, 587); Ἄρτι πρὸς αὐγὰς ἡλίου μικρὸν βλέπων (II, 1, 12, 83). Much more than a true historical development, these images mark the feebleness and paucity of the congregation.

As we have seen regarding the metaphors for the bishop (§2.2.2; §2.2.4.5), these images are largely traditional in the description of a Christian community. Surely, they imply the figure of the farmer, husbandman, or shepherd, and thus they suggest that the community needs a bishop, but they are also a convenient way to describe a phenomenon which is described not nearly as directly, the state of a collective of people. As to the function of these descriptions, they highlight the necessity of Gregory's mission; indeed, it would be safe to doubt the clear-cut image they depict, not because the Nicenes were not few and banned from the churches, but because many parishioners might not have been so easily classifiable as "Nicene", "Homoian," or "Novatianist," as if these communities were distinct and separated. Moreover, this image omits social inequalities: How did the relationship of imperial court and city reflect in these religious differences? How did these differences play out inside the court? Gregory gives no clue to answer these questions.

<sup>54</sup> As noted by Meier 1989, 85, it is a proverbial expression. Another agricultural image is used at II, 1, 11, 599 for the souls in need of Gregory's preaching and again in the description of Gregory's work (see §5.1.2.3 and §2.2.2).

### 5.1.2.2 Criticisms leveled against Gregory

Gregory mentions three main criticisms against his person in Constantinople: first, concerning the validity of his election (II, 1, 12, 95–97); second, concerning his handling of the congregation after Theodosius's arrival in the city (II, 1, 11, 1407–1419; II, 1, 12, 100–105; *or*: 42, 23); and third, concerning his handling of the council (II, 1, 10, 19–24; II, 1, 11, 1766–1776; *or*: 42, 22). It is likely that these criticisms are a faithful representation of those that actually hit him, if we admit that these poems had an apologetic function. Apart from a rapid hint to the first criticism in II, 1, 12, the poems on bishops focus on one accusation each: II, 1, 12 underlines Gregory's failure to retaliate against Homoians in Constantinople when he had the opportunity, whereas II, 1, 10 underlines his refusal to choose one side in the Antiochene schism. Both poems present their respective accusation in chronological order, with II, 1, 10 presenting it *after* Gregory's successes as bishop of the city, reflecting the context of the council, in which the problem was brought up, and II, 1, 12 mentioning its accusation at the outset of Gregory's adventure in the city. The order is inverted at *or*: 42, which, however, is more analytic than narrative in its organisation of themes, dividing achievements and criticisms regardless of chronological order. Finally, II, 1, 11 treats every criticism according to its chronological order; therefore, we find Gregory's excessive meekness right after his violent installation by Theodosius in the Church of the Holy Apostles (installation: 1273–1395; criticism: 1407–1419) and his refusal of partisan politics during the council before the arrival of the Egyptians, when the prelates were still discussing the Antiochene succession (1766–1776). A fourth criticism—namely, one against Gregory's doctrine of the Spirit—is mentioned *en passant* only in II, 1, 17, though it has parallels in other writings of the author. Otherwise, II, 1, 17 does not mention criticisms, but rather attributes Gregory's failure to φθόνος.

As regards the validity of the election, the poems on bishops rarely touch the subject. The main defence on this front is entrusted to II, 1, 11, 521–551<sup>55</sup>. Only II, 1, 12, 95–97 hints at this criticism, dismissing it as a false narrative invented by his “enemies” (ἐχθρῶν)<sup>56</sup>. Since we know from II, 1, 11, 1798–1815 that the problem was brought up

<sup>55</sup> Here, Gregory assures that he served in Nazianzus not as bishop but only as managing the bishopric his father left when he died waiting for a new bishop. As explained by McGuckin 2001a, 226–227, the idea that Gregory was *de facto* and possibly *de iure* bishop of Nazianzus before he came to Constantinople might have been more significant in the accusations of the Egyptians than his failed consecration as bishop of Sasima by Basil. Gregory never went to Sasima (at least according to him) and that bishopric ended up with another bishop, whereas at his fathers' death Gregory was the sole ecclesiastical authority in Nazianzus, he had administered the community since long and preached in its church, not counting his being the son of the previous bishop and the main benefactor of the local church—which were significant circumstances in the choice of a bishop.

<sup>56</sup> “Having left the land of Cappadocia, / . . . / not a community [οὐ λαὸν] or anything I was compelled by [τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἐμοί]” (II, 1, 12, 93; 95). These lines are interpreted by Meier 1989 as a defence against the accusation of abandoning the community in Sasima, deemed by Gregory to be ἐχθρῶν πλάσματα, ψευδεῖς λόγοι, / Φθόνου καλύμματ' ἀστοχῶς εὐρημένα (II, 1, 12, 96–97). A passing reference to canon 15

by the Egyptians, we can infer that even after the council, Gregory still considered them “enemies”, whereas the Antiochene faction, even though it equally contributed to his removal, is treated with less harshness. However, the version at II, 1, 11 tends to exclude a personal grudge of the Egyptians against Gregory; this interpretation is accepted by Bernardi<sup>57</sup>, who says that the question of the fifteenth canon of the Canons of Nicaea was brought up to invalidate the decision of the Asiatic bishops, not to attack Gregory personally. It must be noted—and this is but an instance of this phenomenon—that the poet's approach in II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 10 is much more antagonistic than in II, 1, 11, as befits poems titled “Against the bishops” (see §5.1.2.4).

*Or.* 42, 23 explains well why Gregory was attacked for his tenure in the capital after the arrival of Theodosius. The new emperor brought a twist in the power relations of Homoians and Nicenes, because in the years from 364 to that moment (380), the emperor Valens had strongly favoured Homoians and disfavoured the Nicenes<sup>58</sup>. With the return of the Nicene emperor Theodosius from the Gothic wars and the installation of Gregory as bishop of the capital, a new era could open for the Nicenes. However, it seems Gregory did not exploit his position and the favour of the court to retaliate against the Homoians, proceeding instead with great caution. This caution and his pursuit of reconciliation with the Homoians were seen as a sign of weakness. Indeed, his position was weak, if we believe the narrative of his installation in the Church of the Holy Apostles (II, 1, 11, 1273–1395): the majority in Constantinople was still Homoian, and even with the support of the imperial arms, Gregory might have found it dangerous to push his luck with the city. However, the poet does not defend his politics with this argument from facts; instead, he claims that his leadership approach was his own choice and expressed a different style of leadership from the world.

In this theme, too, Gregory chooses to highlight his personal stake in II, 1, 12 and to develop general considerations in II, 1, 11, as he had done in the premise of the two narrations (see §5.1.2.1). In II, 1, 11, which is more similar to *or.* 42, 23, the poet places

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of Nicaea could be the “law” (νόμος) mentioned at II, 1, 12, 350, through which Gregory's enemies silence those who speak too much (τῶν λαλισταίων), according to Meier 1989, 111. Meier rightly recognises the pejorative sense of the suffix -ιστερος and the negative sense of the adjective λάλος, from which λαλίστερος comes. He is wrong in saying that Gregory uses it here in a positive sense; his mention of New Testament usage is inconsequential, because λαλέω preserved its negative nuance only in Atticist Greek, but was unmarked in Koine Greek. Gregory uses it here in its Attic sense; he is just sardonically assuming the point of view of his enemies. Meier 1989, 78 sees an even vaguer reference to Canon 15 of Nicaea at II, 1, 12, 15 in the expression οἱ κρίνοντες ἄτοπα, which should be referred to those who “judged” Gregory's case as regards said Canon.

<sup>57</sup> Bernardi 1995, 215.

<sup>58</sup> At *or.* 42, 23 Gregory lists the persecutions the Nicenes would have suffered from the Homoians during Valens' reign. Leski 2002, 242–263 and Simonetti 1975, 403–405, even as they recognise rhetorical exaggerations in Nicene sources, do not deny that the rude emperor Valens persecuted—albeit not systematically—the Nicene prelates. On the historiographical tradition around Valens: Marasco 2002; Sabbah 2001.



the issue in the realm of justice (δίκαιον, 1407 and 1418)<sup>59</sup>: he refutes a misplaced idea of power (ἀνδρικόν, 1411), hints at the ancient philosophical idea that the wise man does not change his attitude as his fortunes change (1413), and finally compares the bishop's mission to that of the physician (1414). In perfectly rhetorical fashion, he closes with two reasons for the usefulness (the *utile*, κερδαίνειν, 1415) of his approach—namely, the good example and the good reputation he would project. In II, 1, 12, the question is less the state-mandated persecution of Nicenes under Valens and more the hardships Gregory had suffered from the Homoians of the capital before Theodosius came, in particular the attempted stoning from a mob. In this regard, Gregory justifies his reluctance to retaliate with the imitation of Christ's passion, as the express reference and the many verbs of suffering intimate<sup>60</sup>. This *imitatio Christi* must be interpreted in the wider context of the poem, both because Gregory had begun in the proem by denying he could suffer without a word as Christ did, and most of all because recommendation of the imitation of Christ solidifies Gregory's self-portrait as ascetic bishop. In fact, the following lines mentioning his bodily deterioration caused by worries go in the same direction, and the imitation of Christ's suffering was a fundamental part of the monastic ideology<sup>61</sup>. The narrative of II, 1, 12 confirms itself as consequent in pushing an ascetic self-portrait of Gregory.

The third important criticism against Gregory is treated in II, 1, 10: what he characterises as the refusal of partisanship is likely a reference to his position in the Antiochian schism. By sticking to the previous agreement after Meletius's death

59 The similarities of II, 1, 11, 1407–1419 and *or.* 42, 23 are the sarcastic naming of the bishops who criticised him (λίαν γάρ εἰσιν ἐντελεῖς καὶ δίκαιοι, *or.* 42, 23; τί οὖν με ποιεῖν, πρὸς θεοῦ, δίκαιον ἦν; / διδάξαθ' ἡμᾶς, εἰπαθ', οἱ νῦν ἐντελεῖς, II, 1, 11, 1407–1408) and the importance given to the *καιρός*, the lucky moment of Theodosius' power (μετὰ τῆς τοῦ καιροῦ ῥοπῆς, καὶ τῆς τοῦ κρατοῦντος ὁρμῆς... τὰ τοῦ καιροῦ, *or.* 42, 23; καιρῷ τ' ἀπλήστως χρωμένους καὶ τῷ κράτει, II, 1, 11, 1413). The general approach of II, 1, 11, 1407–1419 is proved by the number of neuter substantivised adjectives (δίκαιον, τὸ πρᾶον, ἄδρανές, τὸ δ' ἐμμανές τε καὶ κάκιστον ἀνδρικόν, καλὰ), the infinitives (ὠθεῖν, ἐλαύνειν, ἀγριοῦν, ἀναφλέγειν, φαρμακεύειν) and the use of the first-person plural (cf. τί οὖν με ποιεῖν, πρὸς θεοῦ, δίκαιον ἦν; 1407, and φανήσομαι, 1418, with χρωμένους, 1413, and ἡμᾶς, 1417). Moreover, Gregory gives the passage a general relevance: τοῦτ' ἦν δίκαιον, τοῦτο καὶ φανήσομαι / ἀεὶ τε ποιῶν καὶ τόθ', ὡς μάλιστ' ἐνῆν (1418–1419): the idea is of a personal conformity (φανήσομαι) to a general rule of justice. Similarly, at *or.* 42, 23, the first-person plural is relative to the sufferings of the Nicenes and the retaliation they should impose, whereas restrain is predicated only of Gregory (αὐτάρκης ἐμοὶ τιμωρία). On the contrary, the narrative of II, 1, 12 is wholly in the first-person singular, putting Gregory, even in his suffering bodiliness, in the spotlight. The only similarity of II, 1, 12 and *or.* 42, 23 is in the use of the word ἐγκλημα (II, 1, 12, 107).

60 Verbs expressing patience and suffering: ἐφεισάμην (102), Ἐκαρτέρησα (104), Παθόντα τὰ Χριστοῦ με οὕτω καὶ φέρειν (105). A good collection of texts on the stoning in Crimi 1998; its christological interpretation is given by Hofer 2013, 178.

61 For the imitation of Christ in the prologue: Ἰσως μὲν ἔχρην, ὡς κακούμενον φέρειν / Ταῖς τοῦ παθόντος ἐντολαῖς τυπούμενον, / Οὕτω παθόντα καρτερεῖν καὶ τὸν λόγον, / Ὡς, ἂν πλείως ὦμεν ἡγωνισμένοι, / Καὶ μισθὸν ἐλπίζωμεν ἐντελέστερον (II, 1, 12, 1–5). The intimate link between suffering, asceticism and Christ has been examined at §1.3.2.

and supporting Paulinus, Gregory seemed to have forsaken his natural camp, the Eastern bishops who supported Flavian. On the other side, he could not and would not support the Egyptians and Westerners unreservedly, being also disliked by them. Therefore, Gregory has to defend his on-the-fence (according to his colleagues) or balanced (according to himself) position in a very polarised debate. Comparable texts in the *Speech* (or. 42, 22) and in II, 1, 11 (1766–1776) approach the theme with different language, albeit small linguistic signals demonstrate that Gregory is referencing the same question—besides, we do not know other events involving his loyalty to a “faction” during the council. For example, the verb συμφέρω to indicate the fellowship with one or the other party is employed at II, 1, 10, 22 as well as or. 42, 22<sup>62</sup>. II, 1, 11 and 10, on the other hand, share the use of a verb composite with προ- in a sentence expressing Gregory's refusal to prefer party affiliation to salvation<sup>63</sup>. Another common character of these texts is their employment of polyptoton to highlight Gregory's nonconformity with the requests of the other bishops, his failure to *repeat* what they do (so at II, 1, 10) or to *return* what they ask (II, 1, 11), up till the *reversal* of their attitude (or. 42, 22)<sup>64</sup>.

In or. 42 Gregory deals with the criticism by referring to his aristocratic self-portrayal: he is a man refusing to conform to the ways of the world even at the cost of isolation, experienced as a sign of his excellence; and not casually does he employ Callimachean language to describe this stance<sup>65</sup>. In both II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 11 the Christian argument of submission to Christ alone prevails, all the more so as the bishops' proposals are characterised as immoral<sup>66</sup>. In II, 1, 10 in particular, the claim not to place anything or anyone above Christ hints at 1Cor. 1:11–13, a biblical passage widely used in our poems to accuse others of schismatic behaviour<sup>67</sup>. Furthermore, II, 1, 10 employs a metaphor and a simile to explain the conformity Gregory was supposed to show: the metaphor of the good soldier (19) and the simile of the raft (22). Denying these images,

<sup>62</sup> Μηδ' ὡς νηὺς ὀλίγη φορτίδι συμφέρομαι (II, 1, 10, 22) and οὐ τὰ πολλὰ συμφέρομαι τοῖς πολλοῖς (or. 42, 22).

<sup>63</sup> Χριστοῦ ἄλλο τι πρόσθε φέρειν (II, 1, 10, 20) and τι προδώσω τῆς ἐμῆς σωτηρίας (II, 1, 11, 1776).

<sup>64</sup> Ἀμπλακίη δ' ὅτι μηδὲν ὁμοῖον ἡμπλακον ἄλλοις (II, 1, 10, 21); αἰτοῦντες δέ γε / τὸ γνήσιον, φεῦ, Γρηγόριον τὸν γνήσιον, / οἱ γνήσιοι (II, 1, 11, 1768–1770); φερόντων καὶ φερομένων τῶν ἄλλων... οὐ τὰ πολλὰ συμφέρομαι τοῖς πολλοῖς... Ἀνιᾶ με τὰ τῶν ἄλλων τερπνὰ, καὶ τέρπομαι τοῖς ἐτέρων ἀνιαιοῖς (or. 42, 22).

<sup>65</sup> Signals of elitism: αὐτός τι βέλτιον τῶν πολλῶν γινώσκων; ἐλεύθερος. Cf.: οὐδὲ τὴν αὐτὴν βαδίζειν ἀνέχομαι· θρασέως μὲν ἴσως καὶ ἀμαθῶς, πάσχω δ' οὐκ ὁμῶς. Ἀνιᾶ με τὰ τῶν ἄλλων τερπνὰ, καὶ τέρπομαι τοῖς ἐτέρων ἀνιαιοῖς (or. 42, 22) with οὐδὲ κελεύθωι / χαίρω τίς πολλοὺς ὦδε καὶ ὦδε φέρει, / ... σικχαίνω πάντα τὰ δημόσια (Callim. *epigr.* 28, 1–2; 4).

<sup>66</sup> For submission to Christ alone: Χριστοῦ ἄλλο τι πρόσθε φέρειν (II, 1, 10, 20); τίς δ' ἐφ' ὀφθαλμοῖς τόσον, / ὡς πλῆθος ἄξει πρὸς τί μ', οὐ θεοῦ λόγος; / ... τι προδώσω τῆς ἐμῆς σωτηρίας (II, 1, 11, 1776). On the immorality: at II, 1, 10, 21, Gregory speaks of “fault” (Ἀμπλακίη), at II, 1, 11, 1769 of a “conspiracy of the wicked” (σύμπνοια κακῶν).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. II, 1, 11, 679–695; II, 1, 13, 154–157; see also how this biblical verse inspires a theology of the name of the community to Ephrem (Griffith 1999), which is reflected in CN 20 (§3.1.3.1; §3.3.1).

Gregory refuses also a humiliating image of himself, because these images set him not only as one among the many in a faction, but as a sort of lackey, a second-rank character. More importantly, in the following lines (23–24), explaining the negative consequences of his independence, he suggests that the party he had offended, the “fickle-minded” (κουφονόουσιν), had left his episcopal throne to their friends. The attribute κουφονόος is not frequently employed; one notable usage is in Sophocl. *Ant.* 342, where it is used of the birds caught in the nets of men: κουφονόων τε φύλον ὀρνίθων ἀμφιβαλὼν ἄγει. If this famous passage was familiar to Gregory and his audience, it may have suggested a degrading comparison of the bishops in council with birds, and not particularly sly birds at that. After all, the same image of disputes between birds expresses the futility and gratuitous noise produced by bishops in II, 1, 17, 92: χηνῶν ἢ γεράνων ἄκριτα μαρναμένων. The paradox here is that, for the loyalty they requested from Gregory, the other bishops showed no loyalty towards him. In fact, Gregory must have known that Nectarius’s name was proposed by the Meletian faction (in particular Diodore of Tarsus), which had backed Gregory before. Clearly, Gregory perceives their readiness to accept the objections to his election brought by the Egyptians—expressed with the verb ἀνίημι, “let go”, “loosen up”, “allow”—as treason.

Finally, at II, 1, 17, 75–78, Gregory alludes very obliquely to the criticisms against his doctrine of the Spirit. The passage is part of the longer list of things the poet will not do anymore thanks to his retreat. One thing is to self-censor as regards the Trinity and the Spirit in particular (τὰ Πνεύματος ἔκτοθι ῥίψας, 77). It is remarkable that here the problem is not so much subscribing to heretical teachings as failing to voice orthodox ones. The link with the council of 381 is made clear by the expression πλεόνων εἰς ἓν ἀγειρομένων (76). The reason behind this reticence is to accrue more consensus (φίλτρον ἔχων πλεόνων, 78; note the comparative). A similar passage is found in *or.* 42, 14, where Gregory says that some bishops fail to preach this doctrine because of οἰκονομία or of δειλία, so for convenience or fear. The idea, though more negative in the speech than in the poem, is always that the confession of the Spirit’s divinity makes one an outsider, a position Gregory was all too eager to claim.

### 5.1.2.3 Gregory’s achievements

The description of the community in Constantinople after Gregory’s work there is a staple of his narrative, because it works as an oblique description of his achievements. In a way, it is the necessary counterpart of his description of the city before his arrival: as much as the Nicene community was isolated and dispersed before Gregory came, so is his preaching vital and fundamental for a growing number of Christians. The result is a living and healthy community. However, even in the long description of *or.* 42, Gregory never presents the community as particularly numerous. On the contrary, a key element of all his descriptions is the partiality of his work: in II, 1, 12 different people have still different stances towards his preaching, and a total conversion is still only a hope (ἐλπὶς δὲ παντός, 121); an analogous subdivision of different people with different stances is

proposed in II, 1, 11; in *or.* 42 the idea of a future growth of the congregation is explicitly stated; in II, 1, 10, the poet characterises what he has built in Constantinople only as the “preliminaries” (πρώτα, 12) of orthodoxy, whereas in II, 1, 17 his preaching lingers still (ἔτι) as an echo (ἤχος)<sup>68</sup>. We can interpret these texts in two ways. On one side, it is reasonable to believe Gregory and to think that the Nicene congregation in Constantinople was still small as the council began, and likely even after, because the faithful and clergy (especially those ordained by Demophilus) would have hardly shifted allegiance in a matter of months from Theodosius's arrival. On the other side, Gregory's attention to this detail may serve to highlight the error of electing to that episcopal seat a civil servant and stranger to theology, especially as the Nicene creed is just recovering there. Conversely, Gregory, who initiated that recovery and is an expert in theology, would have the perfect profile to lead the community towards its ἐλπίς παντός. In any case, implies Gregory, the hardest part of the job has already been done, and whatever positive outcome will appear under Nectarius, it should be attributed to Gregory's tenure.

As regards Gregory's exploits, it is remarkable how consistent his use of metaphors and similes is: his mission, which is primarily characterised as teaching, is defined by the images of water, light, and stability, as the community is sometimes a flock, sometimes a plant, and sometimes an offspring of the bishop<sup>69</sup>. Taken together, these images create a set of connotations around Gregory's mission which echo important symbols

**68** Τοὺς δ' ἐγγὺς εἶχον, οἱ δ' ἐμελλον αὐτίκα. /... Ἐλπίς δὲ παντός καὶ ῥοπή τις μετρία. (II, 1, 12, 121; 124); τοὺς μὲν γὰρ ἦγεν . . . /... τοῖς δ' ἦν λόγος τις.../ οἱ δ' ὡς ἀθλητῇ καρτερῶ προσέτρεχον, / οἱ δ' ὡς ἑαυτῶν ἔργον εἶχον ἀσμένως. /... Οὕτω λέγω τὸν ὀρθὸν ἐν πίστει λεῶν /... τί δ' ἂν τις εἴποι τῶν ξένων τῆς πίστεως... (II, 1, 11, 1120; 1126–1128; 1137; 1144); Τοιοῦτόν ποτε τοῦτο τὸ ποίμνιον, καὶ τοιοῦτον νῦν, οὕτως εὐεκτοῦν τε καὶ πλατυνόμενον· εἰ δὲ μήπω τελείως, ἀλλ' εἰς τοῦτο γε ταῖς κατὰ μέρος ὁδεύον προσθήκαι· προφητεύω δὲ, ὅτι καὶ ὁδεύσον. . . . Πολὺ γὰρ παραδοξότερον, ἐξ ἐκείνου τοσαύτην γενέσθαι, ἢ τὴν νῦν οὖσαν εἰς ἄκρον προελθεῖν λαμπρότητος. Ἐξ οὗ γὰρ συνάγεσθαι ἤρξαστο παρὰ τοῦ ζωογονούντος τοὺς νεκροὺς (*or.* 42, 6). (cf.: Ποία δίκη, μόχθον μὲν ἐμοὶ καὶ δέιμα γενέσθαι / Ἀστέος εὐσεβίῃ πρώτα χαρασσομένου / ἄλλον δ' αὖ μόχθοισιν ἐμοῖς ἐπὶ θυμὸν ἰαίνειν; II, 1, 10, 11–13). Note that this relationship between past, present and future of the community is expressed through the typology of resurrection at *or.* 42 and II, 1, 11, 1120–1125, a typology often used by Gregory in relation to his church-headquarter in the city, the Ἀναστασία, “Resurrection” (e.g.: II, 1, 15, 49–52). This image is absent in II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 12, where the stress is rather on Gregory's personal role in the situation. Resurrection-imagery would be absurd if attributed to Gregory's activity.

**69** On the metaphor of light: φαεσφόρον (II, 1, 10, 9); θεῖος δ' αὐθὺς ἡστραπτεν λόγος... φωτὶ μικρῶ τοὺς ἄγαν σκοτούμενους (II, 1, 11, 1113; 1143); Τριάδ' ἔλαμψα τοῖς πρὶν ἔσκοτισμένοις (II, 1, 12, 118); §2.2.4.5. On the metaphor of water: πέτρης ἐκπροχέοντα ῥόον (II, 1, 10, 10 with reference to Ex. 17:6; Num. 20:11 and the typological interpretation at 1Cor 10:4); ὡς τοὺς ἀνύδρους ταῖς φανεύσεις ἰκμάσι (II, 1, 11, 1141); ἄνυδρον τοῖς λόγοις ἐπήγασα (II, 1, 12, 116). On stability: πυκνωθέντος ὥσπερ ἐρκίου / ἢ καὶ φάλαγγος (II, 1, 11, 1114–1115); ἐπήξα λαὸν (II, 1, 12, 115); τὸ ταύτην στηρίζαι τε καὶ σθενώσαι (*or.* 42, 10); at II, 1, 17, 47 it is the Trinity (*rectius* the doctrine of the Trinity) that gains stability (θεότης νεόπηκτος). On the metaphor of the flock: λαὸν ἐν μέσῳ λύκων / Ποίμνην... (II, 1, 12, 115–116); §2.2.1. On the metaphor of the plant: Ἐσπείρα πίστιν τῷ Θεῷ ῥιζουμένην (II, 1, 12, 117); τῆς γεωργίας τῆς ἡμετέρας (*or.* 42, 13); §2.2.2. On the metaphor of the offspring: τεκέων (II, 1, 10, 8); τὸν τῆς ἐμῆς ὠδίνος εὐγενῆ τόκον (II, 1, 11, 1138); §2.2.4.1.

of Christianity. Pastoral, agricultural, and familiar images have already been analysed (§2.2.1–2; §2.2.4.1), and they evoke a rich array of biblical texts on leadership. The result is a complex idea of affectionate relationship but also of hierarchical subordination for the community and almost jealousy for Gregory, especially thanks to the repeated use of the root \*τεκ/τοκ/τκ to refer to it. Furthermore, the simultaneous reference to water, light, and stability evokes the ritual of baptism. This can be demonstrated through a reference to *or.* 40, 2–4, where Gregory repeats and explains the different symbols associated with baptism. Among these there is naturally the purification of water, the idea of a second birth (which would justify calling the baptised “offspring”, “children”), and, most importantly, illumination (φωτισμός). Furthermore, at *or.* 40, 3 baptism is called *ἔρεισμα πίστεως*, a formula echoing the images of stability used for Gregory’s mission (see note 68). The unique metaphor found at II, 1, 10, 12 (Ἀστεος εὐσεβίῃ πρῶτα χαρασσομένου) may be linked to the idea of baptism as a seal (σφραγίς; see *or.* 40, 4). Besides, part of Gregory’s mission likely consisted in baptising people in Constantinople<sup>70</sup>. Hence, Gregory’s mission is characterised as a sort of collective baptism of the city. These baptismal metaphors of water and light are introduced with expressions evoking the water Moses made to spring forth from the rock and the light prophesied by Isaiah<sup>71</sup>. While the Isaian tag links Gregory to Christ (see §5.1.2.4), the sophisticated rewriting (ἐκπροχέοντα for ἐξελεύσεται/ἐξηλθεν, ῥόον for ὕδωρ) of Moses’s miracle at II, 1, 10, 10 suggests that Gregory resembles the most important biblical model of the episcopate<sup>72</sup>. By uniting all these images and biblical references, Gregory presents himself as the ideal bishop.

A unique feature of the narration in II, 1, 12 is the emphasis on Gregory’s rhetorical abilities. It is true that in almost every text Gregory refers to the λόγος as an instrument or object of the conversion of the city, with II, 1, 17 going so far as to imply a fond memory of the preacher; but it is in II, 1, 12 more than in any other text that the poet puts forth his preaching expertise as a fundamental element of his success in the city; here, therefore, the mission in the capital is given the strongest connotations of a teaching mission<sup>73</sup>. Gregory describes his ability through a series of striking images that look back at the traditionally Greek theme of the power of rhetoric, conceived as something violent, almost supernatural<sup>74</sup>. The first image, rennet in the milk (ὁπὸς ἐν γάλακτι, II, 1,

<sup>70</sup> Bernardi 1995, 180; McGuckin 2001a, 256–258.

<sup>71</sup> Moses, cf. πέτρης ἐκπροχέοντα ῥόον (II, 1, 10, 10) with καὶ πατάξεις τὴν πέτραν, καὶ ἐξελεύσεται ἐξ αὐτῆς ὕδωρ (Ex. 17:6); ἐπάταξεν τὴν πέτραν τῇ ῥάβδῳ δις, καὶ ἐξηλθεν ὕδωρ πολὺ (Num. 20:11). Isaiah, cf. Τριάς’ ἔλαμψα τοῖς πρὶν ἐσκοτισμένοις (II, 1, 12, 118) with ὁ λαὸς ὁ πορευόμενος ἐν σκότει, ἴδετε φῶς μέγα· οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐν χώρᾳ καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου, φῶς λάμψει ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς (Jes. 9:1).

<sup>72</sup> On Moses as model of the bishop: Sykes 1982, 1130; Elm 2000b, 422; McGuckin 2001a, 14, 144; Sterk 2004, 62–63, 96–97, 101–110, 124, 128; Rapp 2005, 125–132.

<sup>73</sup> Θεῖος δ’ αὐθις ἡστραπτεν λόγος (II, 1, 11, 1113); λιμοῦ βοηθὸν τὸν λόγον ποιουμένους (1142); ἔχαιρον τῷ λόγῳ (1145); γλώσσης ἤχος ἐθ’ ἡμετέρης (II, 1, 17, 46); λιπὼν λόγον οὐκέτ’ ἄπιστον (49); στηρίξαι τε καὶ σθενῶσαι τοῖς ὑγιαίνουσι λόγοις (*or.* 42, 10).

<sup>74</sup> See Romilly 1975.

12, 119), is traced back by Meier to Ares's healing in Homer (*Il.* 5, 902)<sup>75</sup>, which says a lot about the supernatural connotations of the simile. Another likely source for the comparison is Plutarch's quotation of Empedocles regarding friendship (φιλία), which employs verbs similar to those used by Gregory to describe the thickening power of friendship<sup>76</sup>. Moreover, the comparison with Empedocles's φιλία reinforces the supernatural connotation of Gregory's art. The definition of rhetoric as a φάρμακον πειθοῦς (II, 1, 12, 119–120) echoes analogous definitions of poetry in Gregory's poems (see §1.3.1 and 4) and in classical writers, beginning with Gorgias<sup>77</sup>. It also refers to Helen's νηπενθές φάρμακον (Hom. *Od.* 4, 420), normally allegorised as referring to her words and brought up by Clement of Alexandria in reference to Scripture and with the same words as Gregory<sup>78</sup>. Differently from poetry, which is characterised as sweet or sophisticated (τὸ κομψόν), the kind of “persuasion” rhetoric is said to produce is βίαία, “violent”, and this also has precedents in Greek rhetoric<sup>79</sup>. The oxymoron πειθοῦς βίαίας (II, 1, 12, 120) reminds us of the famous conjecture on the text of Aeschylus, χάρις βίαιος for the transmitted χάρις βιαίως at Aeschyl. *Ag.* 183. This idea of violence is applied to the audience, which is δεσμίους, “bound” (II, 1, 12, 120), another expression with magical connotations<sup>80</sup>. Equally linked to magic or divine power is the idea of soothing “boiling” spirits (τὸ πρὶν ζέων, 122), as well as the word φίλτρον (123), which could also be used for poetry (see Pind. *Pyth.* 3, 63–65). It is true that, in Gregory's line, it may be taken to mean simply “affection”<sup>81</sup>, but the verb συνεκράθη, from συγκεράννυμι, “to mix together”, clearly suggests the preparation of a magic potion, whose basic ingredient is λόγος.

This spin to the story has to be understood together with the attention Gregory gives to his ascetic authority and his highlighting of his sufferings among the persecuted Nicenes as an anticipation of the traits of the ideal bishop. As the bishop should be an accomplished ascetic and one not attached to power, he should also be a good teacher (§3.1.3.3). However, the profile of Gregory's good teacher and that of the word

<sup>75</sup> Meier 1989, 89.

<sup>76</sup> ἡ μὲν γὰρ συνάγει καὶ συνίστησι καὶ συνέχει καταπυκνοῦσα ταῖς ὁμιλίαις καὶ φιλοφροσύναις ὡς δ' ὅτ' ὁπὸς γάλα λευκὸν ἐγόμφωσεν καὶ ἔδρησε κατ' Ἐμπεδοκλέα (τοιαύτην γὰρ ἡ φιλία βούλεται ποιεῖν ἐνότητα καὶ σύμπληξιν), (Plut. *amic. mult.* 95A-B). Cf. καταπυκνοῦσα with πυκνωθέντος (II, 1, 11, 1114); σύμπληξιν with ἔπηξα λαὸν (II, 1, 12, 115).

<sup>77</sup> τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ λόγον ἔχει ἡ τε τοῦ λόγου δύναμις πρὸς τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς τάξιν ἢ τε τῶν φαρμάκων τάξεις πρὸς τὴν τῶν σωμάτων φύσιν (Gorgias *Encomium of Helen* 14); in Plato: Romilly 1975, 32–35.

<sup>78</sup> Allegorising of Homer: τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν ὡς ἔοικε τὸ ‘νηπενθές’ φάρμακον καὶ ἀνώδυνον, λόγος ἔχων καιρὸν ἀρμόζοντα τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις πάθεσι καὶ πράγμασιν (Plut. *quaest. conv.* 614C). In Clement: τὸ ἄσμα τὸ καινόν, τὸ Λευιτικόν, «νηπενθές τ' ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπίληθες ἀπάντων»· γλυκὺ τι καὶ ἀληθινὸν φάρμακον πειθοῦς ἐγκέκραται τῷ ἄσματι (Clem. Alex. *protr.* 1, 2, 4).

<sup>79</sup> For example: δυναστείαν καὶ βίαν ἀμαχον (*On the Sublime* 1, 4), although here the ecstatic violence is contrary to persuasion. The opposite connotation is adopted in a mosaic inscription for a bishop Peter in Thebes of Thessaly, ὁ τῆς μελίσης τῆς σοφῆς διδάσκαλος τῆς πνευματικῆς (Robert 1971, 446n371).

<sup>80</sup> Romilly 1975, 13 and n. 32.

<sup>81</sup> Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1942, s.v. φίλτρον, and both the PG 37, 1175 and Meier 1989, 39 translate accordingly

magician are quite different. This contradiction is difficult to interpret; I propose two possible explanations for it, without claiming to be exhaustive. On one side, this appeal to the classical conception of rhetoric may refer to a theme Gregory has always considered important—namely, the bishop's mission to convert the pagans of his city. The theme is referred to both in the narration of II, 1, 11 and elsewhere in II, 1, 12<sup>82</sup>. Presenting himself as the word magician, Gregory asserts his ability to reach a wide audience and even to interest pagan intellectuals thanks to his proficiency in the categories of their *paideia*.

On the other side, the emphasis on the violent power of rhetoric may serve to shift the emphasis from the much more concrete power of Theodosius's soldiers installing Gregory in the Church of the Holy Apostles. The episode was narrated in II, 1, 11, but II, 1, 12 does not mention it. Presumably Gregory, who clearly wants to focus the account of II, 1, 12 more on his own person, found that episode detrimental to the point of his *narratio*: that he behaved as the ideal bishop, that the community was blooming thanks to him, and that all this has been forcefully interrupted by the other bishops, as the next section will show. The impression that Gregory's emphasis on the power of rhetoric serves to cover the role of imperial military force in his installation is reinforced by the mention, immediately after that passage, of the bishop's good standing in relation to the emperor (II, 1, 12, 125–135).

Indeed, this good relationship with the sovereign was too important a credential to be left unmentioned, so that, if one did not want to mention the episode of the violent installation, one had to offer at least an implicit justification. After all, the immense value of an imperial endorsement is recognised (and thereby summoned) by Gregory himself<sup>83</sup>. He confirms it in the moment of his retreat, because he denies imperial intervention in his removal from the see by saying that the emperor could not do anything more than endorse him with words<sup>84</sup>. Furthermore, Gregory presents his imperial endorsement in the context of his relationship with the capital, as if enjoying a good relationship with the emperor were tantamount to enjoying consensus in the urban community<sup>85</sup>. The link between emperor and city is present also in the invocations at the beginning of II, 1, 10, where, however, the city is praised as more important than any

<sup>82</sup> τί δ' ἂν τις εἴποι τῶν ξένων τῆς πίστεως, / ὅπως ἔχαιρον τῷ λόγῳ μεμνημένος; (II, 1, 11, 1144–1145); for the example the bishop should give to pagans: §2.2.3.1; for Gregory reusing pagan arguments and thereby correcting them: §3.2.2.1.

<sup>83</sup> Παρ' οἷς πλέον καὶ μικρὸν εὐκλείας ἔχειν / Ἥ πρώτ' ἐν ἄλλοις τιμίου παντός φέρειν / Καὶ γὰρ τοσοῦτόν εἰσι πάντων κρείσσονες (II, 1, 12, 128–130).

<sup>84</sup> Πλέον γὰρ οὐδὲν εἶχον ἢ τοῦτο δρᾶσαι, / Οὐδ' αὐτὸς ἦτουν οὐδέν (II, 1, 12, 133–134). With this phrase, Gregory not only denies that the emperor had him removed in 381, but he also implies that Theodosius could not have installed him with violence before.

<sup>85</sup> The two references to the capital (Ρώμης τόδ' οἶδεν ἄστὺ τῆς εὐδαίμονος, II, 1, 12, 125; Ὡ πόλις πόλις, / Ἴν' ἐκβοήσω καὶ τι καὶ τραγωδικόν, 134–135) frame the whole passage. The imperial family is presented as the “first family” of the city (Καὶ τῆς μάλιστα φημι τὸ πρῶτον γένος, 126).

other, while at II, 1, 12 the imperial family was more important than any other<sup>86</sup>. This spin on the story, the link of emperor and city, is peculiar to these two poems: II, 1, 11 and *or.* 42, though they present verbal similarities with the poems on bishops, tend in different directions, and II, 1, 17 does not mention any of that.

In these praises of Constantinople, Gregory employs a number of recurring themes. First, the city is always called Rome, and only in II, 1, 11 is there a reflection on the existence of another, more ancient, Rome<sup>87</sup>. This reflection, which downplays the role of Constantinople, may be intended as a polemic against the Asiatic bishops (Meletius's party) who removed Gregory for his support of the candidate favoured by the Westerners (Paulinus) in the schism of Antioch. In other places, Constantinople is simply called "new Rome": for example, with the epic and personifying Ὀπλοτέρη in II, 1, 10, 5 and with the prosaic νεουργής in II, 1, 11, 15. Other attributes of the city are εὐδαίμονος (II, 1, 12, 125) and κλεινὸν (II, 1, 10, 4; II, 1, 11, 12): κλεινός is a poetic adjective, frequently used in classical times for cities<sup>88</sup>, whereas εὐδαίμων may allude to the attribute πανευδαίμων, the Greek translation of Latin *alma*, which Constantine employed for his city<sup>89</sup>. Apart from the obvious names of πόλις and ἄστυ, in poetry (both iambic and hexametric) Gregory employs the elevated term ἔδος (II, 1, 10, 4; II, 1, 11, 15) to highlight the link with the imperial family (Κωνσταντίνου μεγάλου; εὐγενῶν ἄλλων). The importance of the city as imperial residence is always made clear by the claims that κράτος (II, 1, 11, 17; 564; *or.* 42, 10) abides there most of all. Twice (II, 1, 11, 12; *or.* 42, 10) the poet employs the metaphor of the "eye of the ecumene", with ὄμμα in poetry and ὀφθαλμός in prose. The metaphor, often employed for the sun, elevates the city to the level of cosmic elements, and accordingly, II, 1, 10, 6 compares the city to the starry sky, II, 1, 11, 13 to a second cosmos, line 576 of the same poem to the evening star, and *or.* 42, 10 to the point of conjunction of East and West. This strong centripetal tendency is highlighted also by the recurring expression γῆ καὶ θάλασσα<sup>90</sup>. Fenster examines Gregory's praises of Constantinople and highlights their religious import—namely, the identity of Constantinople as *urbs christiana*<sup>91</sup>. However, in our poems Gregory does not mention this

<sup>86</sup> Ὡ νόμοι, ὦ βασιλεῖς ἐπ' εὐσεβίῃ κομόωντες, / Ὡ Κωνσταντίνου κλεινὸν ἔδος μεγάλου, / Ὀπλοτέρη Ῥώμη, τόσσον προφέρουσα πολίων, / Ὅσσάτιον γαίης οὐρανὸς ἀστερόεις (II, 1, 10, 3–6). Cf.: παρ'οἷς πλέον καὶ μικρὸν εὐκλείας ἔχειν / Ἦ πρῶτ' ἐν ἄλλοις τιμίου παντὸς φέρειν / Καὶ γὰρ τοσοῦτον εἰσι πάντων κρείσσονες (II, 1, 12, 128–130).

<sup>87</sup> Ὀπλοτέρη Ῥώμη (II, 1, 10, 5); Ῥώμη νεουργής (II, 1, 11, 15); Ῥώμης τόδ' οἶδεν ἄστυ τῆς εὐδαίμονος (II, 1, 12, 125); but: Δύω μὲν οὐ δέδωκεν ἡλίους φύσις, / δισσὰς δὲ Ῥώμας, τῆς ὅλης οἰκουμένης / λαμπτήρας, ἀρχαῖόν τε καὶ νέον κράτος (II, 1, 11, 562–564). On the significance of the comparison with Rome: McLynn 2012b.

<sup>88</sup> Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 957, s.v. κλεινός.

<sup>89</sup> see ἐπωνύμου ἡμῶν καὶ πανευδαίμονος πατρίδος τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, (Athan. *apol.* c. Arian. 86, 6=Socr. *h. e.* 1, 34=Soz. 2, 28, 5); Fenster 1968, 27n4, 68n3, 95; later: Synes. *provid.* 1, 15.

<sup>90</sup> γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης κάλλος ἡμφιεσμένοι (II, 1, 11, 14); γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης ὅτι κράτιστον (*or.* 42, 10).

<sup>91</sup> Fenster 1968, 57–61.



facet, probably to distance himself from the geographic claims and anti-West attitude of his Eastern colleagues.

As for the role of these praises in the larger context of the poem, it is quite varied. In II, 1, 11, Gregory presents his relationship with the emperor with many more details, and consequently he gives a more nuanced appraisal thereof; the praises of Constantinople are not absent, but they are not explicitly linked with the emperor. In *or.* 42, 10, the praise of Constantinople serves to highlight the value of Gregory's mission. This is always a component of Gregory's praises of the city, but it seems likely that in the case of II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 12 the link with the emperor serves to downplay the role of military power in establishing Gregory as bishop of the city.

#### 5.1.2.4. The retreat

The last part of Gregory's narratives, his retreat from Constantinople, is the most important in defining both his own character and that of his adversaries. All the rest serves only as a preparation for this incident, because this very incident is what Gregory must spin in a new and favourable way. In this respect, Gregory has at his disposal two strategies: either to cast his removal from Constantinople as a voluntary retreat or to blame it on the malice of the other bishops. He tries both. *Or.* 42 and *On His Own Life* are more conciliatory with the other bishops, because Gregory asks them to relieve him of his post, invoking his illness, old age, and general lack of strength, while he extols the benefits of the solitary life. In *On His Own Life*, in particular, Gregory tries to flee the council (1745–1765) while the other bishops try to keep him there (1766–1776). In his last speech he offers himself as Jonah (1868–1870): his resignation should bring peace between the Eastern bishops and the Egyptians. If resignation is a willing sacrifice in *On His Own Life*, in *or.* 42 it is presented as no less than a prize (μισθόν) for his accomplishments.

The attitude is completely different in II, 1, 12. Here, Gregory's removal is presented almost as a robbery and a betrayal, prompting the poet to violent attacks against the other bishops. Motives justifying his resignation in II, 1, 11 and *or.* 42 are reversed to become accusations against the others: if Gregory was a new Jonah offering himself for the common good in II, 1, 11, 1868–1870, he becomes “ballast” (ὄγκον) and “a burden” (φόρτος) happily thrown out of the ship in II, 1, 12, 146–147, whereas the same analogy with Jonah turns sour in II, 1, 17, 50–56<sup>92</sup>. Gregory in II, 1, 12 simply states he was thrown out of the ship (Πίψαντες, II, 1, 12, 147), but in the speech of II, 1, 11 he

92 ἐγὼ δ' Ἰωνᾶς ὁ προφήτης γίνομαι. / δίδωμ' ἑμαυτὸν τῆς νεῶς σωτηρίαν / καίπερ κλύδωνος τυγχάνων ἀναίτιος. / ἄραντες ἡμᾶς ῥίψατε κλήρου φορᾶ. (II, 1, 11, 1838); Ὡσπερ τιν' ὄγκον ἐκ νεῶς βαρουμένης / Ῥίψαντες (II, 1, 12, 146–147); Κεῖμ'· ἐπίβαιν', ἐπίβαινε, κακὲ φθόνε. Ἥ τάχα δὴ σε / Σχήσω, καὶ πυμάτοις πείρασι κευθόμενος, / Καὶ θηρὸς ζοφεροῖσιν ἐνὶ σπλάγχνοισιν ἐερχθεῖς, / Κήτεος εἰναλίου, ὥς ποτ' Ἰωνᾶς ἔδω. / Σῶμα μὲν ἐν σπλάγχνοις· νόος δ' ἀδέτοις ἐρωαῖς / Βήσεται, οἷ κ' ἐθέλει, καὶ περ ἐεργόμενος (II, 1, 17, 51–57).

demands to be thrown out (ἡμᾶς ῥίψατε, II, 1, 11, 1841). Apparently, II, 1, 17 entails the same demand, expressed in the imperative (ἐπίβαιν', ἐπίβαινε, II, 1, 17, 51); here, however, the command has a completely different meaning, being a sarcastic request to pile on his misfortunes, a request that serves to highlight the malice of his adversaries (κακὲ φθόνε). It is their pressure, according to Gregory, that has pushed him to resign (ὑπόειξα, ... Πάντοθεν ἡμετέροις κύμασι βαλλόμενος, II, 1, 17, 49–50). On the other hand, Gregory says in the same poem that he wanted to leave the episcopate because he saw the crimes and vices of his colleagues, and he uses an expression similar to a line of II, 1, 11<sup>93</sup>. If in *On His Own Life* Gregory's removal is presented as a sacrifice for the benefit of the church (δίδωμ' ἑμαυτὸν τῆς νεῶς σωτηρίαν, II, 1, 11, 1839), in II, 1, 17 it should appease the malevolence against Gregory (σε, II, 1, 17, 51 = κακὲ φθόνε), most of all because now that he is going to live in hiding there is no reason to hate him anymore<sup>94</sup>.

The illness which Gregory put forth as a reasonable ground to dismiss him in *or.* 42 and II, 1, 11 becomes an aggravating circumstance of the betrayal of the other bishops towards Gregory in II, 1, 12, 139–141: they should have known better than to exploit the weakness of a church veteran<sup>95</sup>. In fact, no declaration of voluntary resignation may be clearer than that at II, 1, 11, 1849–1850 (καὶ νῦν ἔκων / ἄπειμι, πείθει καὶ τὸ σῶμ' οὕτως ἔχον). Similarly, Gregory requests that the other bishops consider his illness in *or.* 42 (ὁρᾶτε). On the contrary, in II, 1, 12 (λαβόντες) he simply states that they have sent him away. Therefore, the illness completely changes its value, too: if in II, 1, 11 it was a “good patron” (Ἐμοῦ δὲ καλῶς ἡ νόσος προεστάτει, 1745), in II, 1, 12 it becomes the “accomplice” (συνεργόν, 140) of the scheming bishops, with a clear negative connotation<sup>96</sup>. Even Gregory's willingness to turn to an ascetic life, so says the poet, was exploited to get rid of him by his adversaries<sup>97</sup>. This is already apparent from the different agencies in the poems. *On His Own Life* highlights Gregory's will through the first-person singular (ἔρρηξα, ἤρπασα, ἄπειμι), whereas II, 1, 12 expresses compulsion with many verbs in the third plural (Προύπεμψαν, ἔπεμψαν). The word ἄσμενος/ἀσμένως has its meaning

93 Cf. Ἄψ ἀναχασσάμενος ἐκτὸς ἔθηκα πόδα (II, 1, 17, 44) with Ἐντεῦθεν ἐξέκλεπτον ἐκ μέσου πόδα. (II, 1, 11, 1777).

94 Cf.: II, 1, 7; Οὕτω τάχ' ἂν μοι τῶν φίλων σπείσαιτό τις, / Πάλης θανούσης, ἧ φθόνος συνέρχεται, II, 1, 12, 835–836.

95 Ἐμοὶ δὲ ὁρᾶτε καὶ τὸ σῶμα ὡς ἔχει τοῦτο, καὶ χρόνῳ, καὶ νόσῳ, καὶ πόνῳ δαπανηθέν (*or.* 42, 20); Ἐμοῦ δὲ καλῶς ἡ νόσος προεστάτει, / ἢ μ' εἵργεν οἶκοι πολλὰ δὴ καὶ πολλάκις / πρὸς ἓν μόνον βλέποντα, τὴν ἐκδημίαν, / ἢ πάντων εἶχε τῶν κακῶν ἀπαλλαγὴν. / ... καὶ νῦν ἔκων / ἄπειμι, πείθει καὶ τὸ σῶμ' οὕτως ἔχον (II, 1, 11, 1745–1748; 1849–1850); Καὶ τὴν ἐμὴν λαβόντες ἔκγονον πόνων / Ἀρρώστῳ συνέργον (II, 1, 12, 139–140).

96 Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1711, s.v. συνεργός; e.g.: Thuc. 8, 92.

97 Cf. ἔρρηξα δεσμὰ τὴν τ' ἀφορμὴν ἀσμένως / (οὐκ ἂν πείσαιμι τοὺς φιλάρχους οὐποτε, / εὐδηλὸν ἔστι, πλὴν ἀληθές) ἤρπασα. / ... οὐτ' ἔθρονίσθη ἄσμενος καὶ νῦν ἔκων / ἄπειμι (II, 1, 11, 1824–1826; 1849–1850) with Τό τε θρόνου τοσοῦτου μὴ στέργειν κράτος, / Ταῦτ' οὖν λαβόντες σὺν ῥοπῇ τοῦ δαίμονος / Προύπεμψαν ἔνθεν ἀσμένως οἱ φίλτατοι / ... Οἱ καὶ μ' ἔπεμψαν ἔνθεν ἐκ πονηρίας, / Οὐ σφόδρ' ἄκοντα (II, 1, 12, 142–145; 151–152).

overturned: in II, 1, 11, 1824 it expresses Gregory's preference for a secluded life, and in II, 1, 10, 28, Gregory "gladly fled" (Ἀσπασίως προφυγών), and for this statement he uses the perfect epic synonym for ἀσμένως; but in II, 1, 12, 145 the same word expresses the satisfaction of the bad bishops in removing Gregory (Προύπεμψαν ἔνθεν ἀσμένως). Furthermore, in II, 1, 11, 1849–1850 Gregory resigns with a clear-cut statement, highlighted by chiasm (ἐθρονίσθη/ἄπειμι-ἄσμενος/ἔκων) and enjambement (ἔκων/ἄπειμι). To this dry ἔκων a litotes with a reinforcing σφόδρα corresponds: Οὐ σφόδρ' ἄκοντα (II, 1, 12, 152); this tormented way to express the concept sounds like a difficult confession, but at the same time it is meant to reveal Gregory's detachment from power. Finally, in II, 1, 12 Gregory strikingly attributes to the devil (σὺν ῥοπή τοῦ δαίμονος) what he claims as his choice in II, 1, 11.

The accounts of II, 1, 11 and II, 1, 12 agree on the point of the esteem and warmth the bishops directed to Gregory once he finalised his decision to abandon the post, but if II, 1, 11, 1868–1870 reports this detail cursorily and with the stereotyped comment *nemo propheta in patria*, II, 1, 12 exploits the idea to paint a vitriolic portrait of the courteous bishops, dripping with bitter irony, echoed in the other invective poem, II, 1, 13<sup>98</sup>. The bishops are said to be καλοί τε κάγαθοι and φίλτατοι, but the terms are clearly sarcastic<sup>99</sup>. The word συμποίμενες is likely meant to frame Gregory's removal as a betrayal or with the same sarcastic tone as the mentioned attributes, because Gregory dissociates himself from the other bishops (Καὶ γὰρ ἦν αἵσχος μέγα, / Τούτων τιν' εἶναι τῶν καπήλων πίστεως, II, 1, 12, 152–153)<sup>100</sup>. The mention of the sacred rites in this context (148–150) highlights the hypocrisy of the bishops. Similarly, at II, 1, 13, 14–17 Gregory laments the duplicity of the bishops:

Αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν, εἰ καὶ με κακὸν καὶ ἀνάρσιον ἄνδρα  
 Πάντες ὁμοῦ θείητε, χοροῦ δ' ἀπο τῆλε δίοισθε  
 Ὑμετέρου, βάλλοντες ἐπασσύτεροισιν οἴστοις,  
 Ἀμφαδίους, κρυπτοῖς τε, τό περ καὶ φίλτερον ὑμῖν  
 (II, 1, 13, 14–17)

whereas I, even if all of you together may hold me  
 an evil man and strange, and pull me far away  
 from your chorus, shooting one dart after another,  
 openly and, what you love even more, secretly

This difference in attitude of II, 1, 10; II, 1, 12; and II, 1, 17 in respect to *or.* 42 and *On His Own Life* can be explained with the different focus of the poems: as in the case of the fifteenth canon of Nicaea (§5.1.2.2), our poems take a much more aggressive stance against the bishops because their primary concern is to comment on the state of the

<sup>98</sup> Ἄλλ' οἱ καλοί τε κάγαθοι συμποίμενες / Φθόνῳ βραγύντες... Προύπεμψαν ἔνθεν ἀσμένως οἱ φίλτατοι (II, 1, 12, 136–137; 145).

<sup>99</sup> Meier 1989, 90, 92.

<sup>100</sup> Cf.: II, 1, 11, 1777–1780; II, 1, 13, 203–204; II, 1, 17, 41–44.

episcopate, whereas II, 1, 11, though it also comments on the state of the episcopate, is primarily concerned with Gregory's autobiography. In the case of II, 1, 12, the theme of the poem explains the dramatic difference in attitude, because the narration serves as a foil for the invective that follows; this, in turn, must be as grim as possible, so that Gregory's proposals for the episcopate may gain urgency and relevance. Indeed, the autobiography anticipates themes and tones of the invective<sup>101</sup>. Among these themes is the ever-present φθόνος (φθόνῳ ῥαγέντες, 137), which recurs also in the other poems against the bishops<sup>102</sup>. The educational concerns of the poet are anticipated by his comments on the bishops' lack of *paideia* (οὐ γὰρ φέρει παιδευσιν ἢ ἀγροικία, 138), on their scarce experience in all things ecclesiastical (τοὺς καὶ τι μικρὸν τῷ Θεῷ κεκημηκότας, 140), and on their inconsistency in matters of faith (τῶν καπῆλων πίστεως, 153)—it is here that ἀγροικία is employed with its negative sense (see §5.1.2.1). Another important theme of invective is the discord among bishops, and this also is duly anticipated among the circumstances of Gregory's removal (κόσμου ῥαγέντος ἐν μάχης μεταίχμιῳ, 143). Even the use of the comic mask of the Θρασωνίδης in line 137 anticipates the comic style of the invectives. All of this demonstrates how the biographical construction is put in service of the wider argument.

The interpreter could also assume a difference in public. II, 1, 11 and *or.* 42 are in general conciliatory towards the bishops, but II, 1, 11 violently attacks the Egyptians (576–578; 738–751; 831–864; 896; 1800–1802); both are concerned with the doctrinal problem of the Spirit, and II, 1, 11 establishes a strong link between Gregory and Basil (as does *or.* 43). These features may indicate that Gregory intended these works for the Asiatic faction of bishops, to which he himself belonged (hence the conciliatory attitude), which had been organised by Basil and which had failed to recognise the divinity of the Spirit at the council. In this case, II, 1, 12 and the other poems (II, 1, 10; II, 1, 13–17) would be meant for a wider audience, and so they could attack all bishops more generically. However, Gregory's address to the community of Constantinople at the beginning of II, 1, 11 (12–17) may be taken as a counter of this hypothesis, because it is presumable that that community was more varied than the Asiatic episcopate. Furthermore, these different attitudes may correspond to the progress observed at §1.3.2 from an attitude of violent engagement in ecclesiastical politics (exemplified by II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13) to a more detached and mature style, characterised by ascetic renunciation (manifested in II, 1, 11).

However, even in the most aggressive poem—II, 1, 12—and a fortiori in the others, Gregory does not renounce his ascetic self-portrait: when it comes to his retreat, Gregory never fails to find an element of freewill in the loss of his seat, or at least of relief in

<sup>101</sup> Meier 1989, 38 even divides lines 136–153 from the rest of the *narratio* and groups them with the first invective (lines 154–175).

<sup>102</sup> οἷά μ' ἔοργεν / Ὁ φθόνος; ὡς ἱερῶν τῆλε βάλεν τεκέων (II, 1, 10, 7–8); Κεῖμ'· ἐπίβαιν', ἐπίβαινε, κακὲ φθόνε (II, 1, 17, 51).

leaving behind such a corrupt and corrupting atmosphere. Describing his departure in II, 1, 12, Gregory hints at the origin of his illness and affirms his detachment from power and his willingness to leave the post<sup>103</sup>. The fact that the illness should command the respect of fellow bishops—provided they have suffered for God at least a little bit (καί τι μικρόν)—implies that the illness was acquired in service of God. It witnesses at the same time to Gregory's ascetic exercises, which have left him weakened; to his seniority; and to the persecutions and preoccupations he faced in Constantinople. The poet expresses this concept in such an oblique way in order to accuse the other bishops either of falling short of the dignity of their office as servants of God or (more likely) having never really served God in the first place. Meier rightly cites Gregory's age, because the conflict with younger prelates such as Diodore of Tarsus is one of the themes of his polemic<sup>104</sup>. However, the illness also lends credibility to Gregory's renouncing attitude towards power, because it implies that power was for him mostly a source of suffering. II, 1, 10 alludes at its beginning to the responsibility of other bishops, but then describes Gregory's retreat as an ascetic feat in its second part<sup>105</sup>. The persistence of this feature—glorification of retreat—even when it could counter the main argument in which it is inserted, is a sign of its importance in Gregory's self-portrait.

Another sign of its importance and persistence is the metaphor of the storm at sea<sup>106</sup>. Every poem against the bishops employs it at least once. Often it is at the end, where Gregory declares his intention to retreat: it is so in II, 1, 13, 205–211 and also in II, 1, 12, 792–796. In the latter, however, the theme is also anticipated during the autobiographical narrative (II, 1, 12, 146–147). In the short II, 1, 10, the autobiography flows directly into the final declaration of his retreat, and there we find the metaphor (II, 1, 10, 30–32), whereas in II, 1, 17 it is found only at the end of the autobiographical narrative (II, 1, 17, 50–54). The metaphor has two elements: one is the storm at sea; the other is Gregory's destination once he removes himself from the storm. Normally, the autobiographical narratives use the example of Jonah and identify Gregory's destination with the sea itself, into which he is thrown by the bishops: this is the case of II, 1, 12, 146–147 and II, 1, 17, 50–54. On the contrary, when the metaphor is at the end of the poem, the destination is a safe haven, as in the case of II, 1, 10, 30–2; II, 1, 12, 792–796; and II, 1, 13, 205–211 (here Noah's ark). Public life is thus equated with a dangerous and painful environment, while retreat remains ambiguous, sometimes an injustice that has befallen an innocent man, sometimes the sought-for escape from the dangers

**103** Detachment from power: Τό τε θρόνου τοσούτου μὴ στέργειν κράτος... Οὐ σφόδρ' ἄκοντα (II, 1, 12, 142; 152). On the illness: Ἀρρωστίαν... ἣν αἰδεῖσθ' ἔδει / Τοὺς καὶ τι μικρόν τῷ Θεῷ κεκμηκότας (140–141).

**104** Meier 1989, 91. See II, 1, 11, 1680–1689; II, 1, 12, 620–7; II, 1, 13, 198–200; on the identification of younger prelates: McGuckin 2001a, 352–354.

**105** On the responsibility of other bishops: οἳ μ' ἔοργεν / Ὁ φθόνος; ὡς ἱερῶν τῆλε βάλεν τεκέων (II, 1, 10, 7–8). As regards the ascetic connotations of II, 1, 10, 25–28, see §1.3.2.

**106** The theme has been studied by Lorenz 1979, but not in relation with political life.

and pains of public life. The metaphor adds to the emotional weight of this ambiguity, because it has a strong link with Gregory's own experience: he was indeed in a storm during navigation, and in that very moment he vowed to be baptised and become an ascetic. Therefore, the storm represents for him what is deeply unsettling as well as the occasion of a conversion.

With voluntary retreat we touch the cornerstone of Gregory's self-presentation. It is not a coincidence that his attitude towards power and his numerous retreats have been already much studied<sup>107</sup>: scholars have correctly identified in this recurring motif of Gregory's works their central problem, given the complex of themes linked to it<sup>108</sup>. I have already analysed many facets of Gregory's self-portrait with respect to his retreat in our poems, but I want to give a complete picture here and to draw some conclusions.

Retreat being a movement, its verbal expression requires the definition of two points: whence one retreats and whereto he retreats. Gregory applied the scheme to many different situations of his life and of the lives of others, but in general one can say that all these situations—and certainly all instances of retreat in our poems—can be reduced to these two points: retreat *from* public life, retreat *to* ascesis. The movement from public life to ascesis is already implied by Gregory's connotation of the two: public life is characterised as dangerous and painful, whereas ascesis is peaceful and soothing. Therefore, whenever Gregory wants to prepare a declaration of retreat, he presents himself as a very distressed and miserable man, going so far as to imply that public life has left him physically scarred—for example, through sickness. I think this process, already delineated at §1.3.2, can be appreciated from the texts analysed in this section. As regards ascesis, it must first be said that the second point of the movement is not always clearly delineated. For sometimes Gregory depicts retreat *already* as a

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**107** The fundamental book, exploring the theme in all its ramifications, is Gautier 2002. The function of retreat in legitimising “philosophical” power is analysed by Elm 2012, 158–165 (in reference to the fundamental *or.* 2; see also Elm 2000a and Elm 2000b, in particular at Elm 2000a, 92n28 with bibliographical indications) and by Storin 2011 (with reference to the poems on silence). Previous scholars had explained Gregory's retreats either in hagiographical tones (Lenain de Tillemont 1714, 479–480) or, more recently, with the poet's psychology (for example, Otis 1961, 160–161; Simonetti 1975, 534–535; see Elm 2000b, 413–415 for more bibliographical references and quotations). Modern research is much more influenced by the application of social sciences to the study of late antiquity initiated by Peter Brown: this tendency produced more general studies on the ideological and ascetic values of retreat from public office (e.g., Lizzi 1987; Rapp 2005, 142–146; see other titles in Elm 2000a, 92n29), which apply to Gregory too. These different strains in Gregorian scholarship are traced by Storin 2017 for the biographical elements.

**108** Gregory's removal from Constantinople is just the last and most controversial of his retreats. Before he even became a priest, he had already employed this strategy in Athens (McGuckin 2001a, 79–81) and upon his return to Cappadocia (McGuckin 2001a, 86–87). He began his ecclesiastical career with the famous flight to Basil's hermitage in Pontus (Bernardi 1995, 125; McGuckin 2001a, 102) and then again he refused the episcopal see of Sasima (Bernardi 1995, 140; McGuckin 2001a, 197–199). Otis 1961, 160 explicitly defines the conflict between active and contemplative life as the kernel of Gregory's poetic experience.

form of ascesis, both because it is a form of renunciation and because it soothes the soul as ascesis does. Gautier has given a good explanation for Gregory's insistence on retreat as a form of ascesis: given his muddled curriculum when it comes to ascetic experiences, Gregory's flights witness to his desire for an ascetic life that he really lived only for short periods of time and often in unconventional forms<sup>109</sup>. Furthermore, the desire for ascesis and the distress of public life that Gregory feels characterise him as an outsider, someone who does not fit well in the society of the time because of his extreme sensitivity and ridiculously high moral bar, preventing him from finding a compromise with his environment. It is the already examined trope of the ἄρπουκος (§5.1.2.1).

If these were the only elements of Gregory's retreat, we would be dealing with the self-portrait of a suffering, socially awkward religious fanatic escaping from normal people. In reality, retreat always implies an opposite movement in Gregory's writings, a movement of engagement with contemporary society. This has often gone unnoticed by interpreters, yet more recent research recognises this pattern, which was probably evident to audiences accustomed to such rhetorical tropes. Every element of Gregory's representation of retreat points to a perfect candidate for public offices. First, the very refusal of office and of public life, as Lizzi has shown<sup>110</sup>, is the prerequisite of the true politician, according to the Platonic model of politician-philosopher current in late antiquity. Then, ascesis, as a mean not only to purify one's moral action but also to obtain specific knowledge about God and the divine world, was the most important qualification for a good bishop according to Gregory: we have seen it in §3.1.3.1, §3.1.3.3, and §3.2.2, but it is also confirmed by Elm's analysis of *or.* 2 and *or.* 6<sup>111</sup>. After all, true priesthood is exercised in solitude as contemplation of God: Gregory says so when he retreats, underplaying the importance of active bishops (§3.1.2). Finally, the status of outsider, which Gregory continually claimed for himself, granted a political authority, not only because the definition of a Christian culture and of the Christian ascetic is couched in the same terms in order to imitate the outsider status of the late antique philosopher but also because this position grants advantages to the authorial voice (see §1.3.2): the educated outsider is the only one who can criticise the prevailing society with authority, as Socrates and Dikaiopolis did. Thus, Gregory justifies at the same time his being worthy of office and his poetic utterances.

Therefore, retreat is a dialectical movement and a cyclic occurrence. It subtracts the subject from the public sphere and, thus, makes him worthy thereof. In practice, the good bishop moves, as did Gregory, between periods of public engagement and of spiritual retreat. The two must be continually alternated. This is how we should understand the contrast between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, so prevalent in Greg-

<sup>109</sup> Gautier 2002, 216, 239–241.

<sup>110</sup> Lizzi 1987.

<sup>111</sup> Elm 2000a; Elm 2012.

ory's poetry. Finally, retreat is a concrete moment in Gregory's life as represented in his autobiography. Through the description of this moment, as we have seen it in this section, he can cast himself in the same mould as his ideal bishop and thus claim to be worthy of office and authoritative in writing. At the same time, his retreat in favour of a less worthy substitute sets the stage for his invective against the other bishops. And so, retreat becomes one of the chief situations in which the short circuit between self-writing, political program, and invective (see §5.1.1) plays out at its best.

### 5.1.3 The "I" of the poems

If we compare Gregory's poems with those of Ephrem, it is remarkable that Gregory not only speaks of himself in autobiographical parts, giving information in narrative form, but that his personal perspective, often in the form of first-person verbs, always permeates the diction, whereas in Ephrem, except for the rare first-person passages, the poet's voice tends to disappear. Indeed, many passages with first-person plural or singular are spoken *in persona Ecclesiae*—that is, as if the poet were the community at large (first-person plural) or the church in Nisibis personified (first-person singular). In Gregory, on the contrary, the first person represents the voice of the poet as an individual. This is one of the reasons why for Gregory we can speak of fictive situations (§1.1.1) and for Ephrem this is much more difficult: when there is an individual voice, especially if it addresses other people or even voices their objections (§3.3.2.1), one is brought to imagine a situation, an encounter. The impression is confirmed by passages like that at the beginning of our chapter (II, 1, 12, 811–836), where Gregory describes his own mental state in that particular situation. Nothing of the sort can be found in Ephrem, except for the final, self-effacing prayer customary in his poems. This peculiarity in Gregory prompts the question of the nature of the "I" in the poems. Based on what he says of himself, on how he addresses the reader and on how he describes others, what is this "I"? What is the structure of the authorial voice in the poems? What kind of perspective does the poet adopt on his matter? In my opinion, three elements form the structure of the "I" in this poem and allow for its classification according to genre: memory, character, and addressees.

The most prominent element is undoubtedly memory. The "I" of the poems corresponds (or claims correspondence) to a historical figure, which is also the author of the poems. In three of the four poems, the "I" even gives himself a name and a geographic provenance, so that the speaker is unambiguously identified. In this sense, we can define the poems as autobiographical writing. Moreover, this historical figure often focuses on his past, narrating events and occurrences he took part in: these are also elements that allow for an identification of the speaker with Gregory of Nazianzus, but more generically, they provide the "I" with a personal history and a chronological depth. This means that the speaker is not only nominally identified but gets a form of characterisation *inside* the poems through the stories he narrates about himself. Such



a characterisation is first and foremost *external*, in the sense that we get to know the historical position, the relationships, and the actions of the character, but not necessarily his intimate thoughts, feelings, and character. Through memory and narrative, the speaker appears as the character in a story rather than as a “voice” perceiving, filtering, and judging reality.

This is all the truer when the autobiographical narrative lacks details concerning the inner state of the speaker and the development of his personality. This is not completely lacking in Gregory: for example, II, 1, 11 has such character-defining moments, which the poet consequently treats<sup>112</sup>. Yet the summary narrations of our poems do not contain such moments, except perhaps the moment of truth in II, 1, 17, 41–44 (see §5.2.4): there, Gregory relates how he desired to become a bishop but, seeing the vices of his colleagues, decided to retreat. This version of the trope of retreat is unique in showing refusal of office as a dynamic reaction to a sort of trauma; normally, it constitutes Gregory’s basilar approach. In general, however, the poems are poor in inner development, and the character is defined primarily by what he does and what happens to him.

This reflects on the second fundamental element, which is character. Characterisation may be pursued in different ways: through the actions, through the words, and through description. As regards actions, we get plenty of that in the autobiographical narratives, above all through the trope of retreat, which defines Gregory’s character. Words, too, are carefully chosen to create a definite character for the speaker. I have already mentioned how Gregory’s style may hint at the stock character of the ἄγρικοις through γνῶμαι, digressions, and a tendency to exaggerate things. The frequent use of exclamations and rhetorical questions, as well as the forceful language against the bishops, is employed not only for their rhetorical effectiveness but also to communicate the indignation and sadness the speaker feels regarding the situation of the episcopate. The effect is much more relevant in the hexametric and elegiac poems than in II, 1, 12, where it is confined mostly to the frame of the discussion—namely, the autobiography and the ἐξιτήριοις λόγος examined at the beginning of the chapter. However, even the cooler-minded discussion of II, 1, 12 does not lack its moments of sarcasm or outright attack. A good example is lines 747–750:

Ταῦτ’ οὖν ὁρῶν ἔκαμνες εὐρεῖν ποιμένα;  
Ὡς μικρὸν ἐσπούδαζες! ἐγκαλύπτομαι.  
Ὡσπερ λογιστὴν ἐσκόπεις τὸν προστάτην.  
Κόπρων μέλει σοι, μειζόνων δ’ ἐμοὶ λόγος

(750)

Is it with this in mind, then, that you were striving to find a shepherd?  
How small an effort! I’m ashamed for you.  
You look for a bishop as for a city curator.  
You care for dung, but my concerns are wider.

(750)

<sup>112</sup> Storin 2019, 17, with reference to the famous sea-storm.

This kind of language casts Gregory in the role of the diatribic philosopher, with decidedly Cynic undertones<sup>113</sup>. In such cases, Gregory's language is in harmony with his self-presentation as outsider, philosopher, and comic hero, a self-presentation examined in §1.3.2.

As regards open descriptions of Gregory's feelings, a reading which does not sufficiently take the context into account may conclude that we are dealing here with a lyric "I" almost of the modern sort. This has been in fact often argued, whenever Gregory was interpreted as a shy man of letters or an oversensitive idealist<sup>114</sup>. It is true that, in comparison with *On His Own Life* and the famous I, 2, 14, *On Human Life*, our poems offer less material for this type of reading. The autobiography of II, 1, 12 is quite poor in descriptions of the inner workings of Gregory's mind in those moments, and it expresses his view mostly through the connotative value of some words or through sarcasm. In the case of II, 1, 17 and II, 1, 10 the autobiographical narrative is more subjective: II, 1, 17 presents the already mentioned moment of truth at its beginning and laments the workings of φθόνος in line 51; II, 1, 10, 20 explains Gregory's choice to remain neutral in the Antiochian schism as based on his will to remain faithful only to Christ, and then in 28 (ἀσπασίως) and 31 (καγχαλόων) the poet expresses all his joy concerning his retreat. Still, II, 1, 12 shares with II, 1, 13 the emotive justification to write poetry as a form of venting (see §1.3.2). The emotive state of the speaker comes back prominently in the ἐξιτήριος λόγος in II, 1, 12 and in the prayer in the middle of II, 1, 13—devolving in an invective against bishops—and in the final *peroratio* of the same poem<sup>115</sup>. Interestingly, all these passages are not spontaneous pourings of emotion, but take a mediated form, be it the auto-reported speech of II, 1, 12, 811–817<sup>116</sup>, the prayer to Christ of II, 1, 13, 139–145, or the figure of the αἰοιδός in II, 1, 13, 195. Given their position in the poems, these authorial interventions have a structural role: they articulate and frame the content proper.

At this point, my treatment of the poems should have made clear how such elements of characterisation must really be read. The speaking voice of the poems has a fundamental role in Gregory's literary strategy; it is not a "lyric" role, in the sense that the aim of the poems is to express Gregory's personal or existential stance, but is fundamental because the construction of a voice contributes to the credibility of the

113 On Gregory and Diogenes: §3.1.3.3 n. 123.

114 On the pitfalls of Gregory's biography, see Storin 2017.

115 On the ἐξιτήριος λόγος see the beginning of this chapter. The passages of II, 1, 13 I am referring to are: Τοῦνεκεν αἰάζω, πίπτω δ' ὑπὸ σεῖο πόδεσσι, / Χριστὲ ἄναξ, μὴ μοί τις ἀπαντήσκειν ἀνίη / Χαζομένω. Κέκμηκα λύκοις δηλήμοσι ποίμνης, / Ποιμέσι μαρνάμενος δηρὸν χρόνον. Ἐκ μελέων δὲ / Ῥικνῶν ἔπτατο θυμὸς, ἀναπνέω δ' ὀλίγον τι / Τειρόμενος καμάτοισι, καὶ αἰσχεσιν ἡμετέροισιν. / Ὡν, οἱ μὲν θώκων ἱερῶν πέρι δῆριν ἔχοντες... (II, 1, 13, 139–145); Ἡμεῖς δ' αὖ κακίη γέρα θήκαμεν· ὦ θανάτοιο! / Τίς τάδε θρηνήσειε γόων πολυῖδρις αἰοιδός (194–195).

116 Τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἐκείθεν, ὦ φίλοι, λελέγεται. / Πλὴν ἐξιτήριόν τιν', εἰ δοκεῖ, λόγον / Βραχὺν μὲν, ἀλλὰ χρήσιμον, δέξασθέ μου / Ὡς οἱ πατρώας λαμβάνοντες ἐν τέλει / Φωνὰς ἐπισκήψεις τε μνήμης ἀξίας / Μεθ' ἧς λόγος τις οὐκέτ' ἐξακούεται, / Ὡς καὶ πλεον μένουσιν ἐν βάθει φρενός.

message<sup>117</sup>. Therefore, the voice is determined by genre conventions (diatribe, comedy, elegy, etc.), which are adopted to express a social role, an ideal type of person. The fact that the type of person expressed is an outsider with his personal stance against the world must be regarded as an accident in respect of the structure of the poems: the aim of the texts is not to reproduce a unique individuality, but to propose a model to imitate—which happens to be a unique individuality. By identifying the ideal bishop with the speaker of the poem, Gregory gives to the voice that speaks our texts an exemplary character even as he expresses intimate feelings and personal idiosyncrasies. In reality, the composition must have proceeded in the opposite direction: the social value chosen for the ideal bishop prompted the choice of sentiments to express.

However, thanks to his chronological depth, the speaker is not only a pure type, but comes out as a real, historical person. If to this historical reconstruction we add the presence of addressees in the poems, the compositional procedure will clearly appear. All poems except II, 1, 17 purport to be a real-life, historical act of speaking. They assume—and thereby evoke—the presence of hearers who may eventually respond to this speech act. Indeed, II, 1, 12 tries to anticipate and voice their response, while the Εἰ μὲν δὴ πεπιθοίμεν, ὀνησόμεθ’ of II, 1, 13, 198 invites the audience to respond to the poem. Thus, the poem is embedded in a context which to those in the know would have appeared as a historical event (see §1.1.1). II, 1, 10; II, 1, 12; and II, 1, 13 are not extemporaneous outpourings, but works of historical fiction—not because the autobiographical parts are not true, but because they implicitly create a historical scenario and attribute to one of the characters (Gregory) a speech he did not pronounce. On the contrary, II, 1, 17 lacks this clear contextualisation and comes off as a more abstract piece, a reflection *a posteriori*.

Finally, piecing together the three elements examined, we can identify what is the “I” in these poems. The speaker is a historical person—that is, a character with stories attached. He speaks on a particular occasion before an audience. The style of the speech, as well as the occasional outpourings of sentiment, defines a conventional character, which in turn lends credibility to the content. These elements correspond to the

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<sup>117</sup> For the importance of suffering and misfortune as justifications for self-writing, see §1.3.2; Storin 2019, 15–17; the precedent of Saint Paul is particularly relevant, since Paul was also the ideal bishop of *or* 2. Another example of self-writing caused by suffering is the *Vision of Dorotheus* from the Bodmer library: Dorotheus identifies himself by name and patronymic (line 300), creates historical depth through his ὡς τὸ πάρος περ (Hurst/Reverdin/Rudhart 1984, 16), describes his own repeated sinning and redemption, in order to propose himself as a role-model for his community (see Agosti 2017). Even though Dorotheus knew well the technique of the *ethopoia* (see Agosti 2005, 43–45), his poem lacks a frame to characterise it as an individualised act of speech in a historical context; therefore, its self-writing cannot be categorised as an *ethopoia*. Given its content, it must be seen as a development of the first-person singular of apocalyptic literature (such as the prophet Ezekiel or the apostle John; see Agosti 2001c, 205–206).

scholastic proceeding of ἡθοποιία (or προσωποποιία)<sup>118</sup>. In the words of Aelius Theon, the first extant rhetor writing on school exercises (προγυμνάσματα):

Προσωποποιία ἐστὶ προσώπου παρεισαγωγὴ διατιθεμένου λόγους οἰκείους ἑαυτῷ τε καὶ τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις πράγμασιν ἀναμφισβητήτως, οἷον τίνας ἂν εἴποι λόγους ἀνὴρ πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα μέλλων ἀποδημεῖν, ἢ στρατηγὸς τοῖς στρατιώταις ἐπὶ τοὺς κινδύνους. καὶ ἐπὶ ὠρισμένων δὲ προσώπων, οἷον τίνας ἂν εἴποι λόγους Κῦρος ἐλαύνων ἐπὶ Μασσαγέτας, ἢ τίνας Δάτις μετὰ τὴν ἐν Μαραθῶνι μάχην ἐντυγχάνων τῷ βασιλεῖ. ὑπὸ δὲ τοῦτο τὸ γένος τῆς γυμνασίας πίπτει καὶ τὸ τῶν πανηγυρικῶν λόγων εἶδος, καὶ τὸ τῶν προτρεπτικῶν, καὶ τὸ τῶν ἐπιστολικῶν.  
(Ael. Theon *progymnasmata* 8)

Personification (*prosôpopoeia*) is the introduction of a person to whom words are attributed that are suitable to the speaker and have an indisputable application to the subject discussed; for example, What words would a man say to his wife when leaving on a journey? Or a general to his soldiers in time of danger? Also, when the persons are specified; for example, What words would Cyrus say when marching against the Massagetae? Or what would Datis say when he met the king after the battle of Marathon? Under this genus of exercise fall the species of consolations and exhortation and letter writing.

(transl. Kennedy 2003)

If we were to introduce and sum up our poems with a question each, they would sound just like the examples of προσωποποιία of historical people (ἐπὶ ὠρισμένων δὲ προσώπων): “What would Gregory of Nazianzus have said to the bishops during the Council of Constantinople?” (II, 1, 13). “What would Gregory’s last speech in the City have been like?” (II, 1, 12). “What sorts of words would Gregory have said to say goodbye to his community in Constantinople?” (II, 1, 10). In the case of II, 1, 17 we find a more traditionally elegiac self-presentation, although the “I” still has the same exemplary role and artificial nature as in the other poems.

It may seem paradoxical that an author would treat his own person as a historical figure like Cyrus and Datis, to feign to be himself while writing. However, we must bear in mind that ἡθοποιία was no obscure extravagance but a common tool of the trade for late antique writers; its applications had potentially no limits, provided one preserved the requirement of correspondence between words and character, situation and audience. Moreover, in the eyes of Gregory, he *did* play a historical role in a critical moment for the church; from a Christian point of view, his adventure in Constantinople may even be more important than the Battle of Marathon. Finally, the mode of publication of these poems may have influenced this rhetorical strategy, especially as regards II, 1, 10. If ἡθοποιία comprised also epistolography, as Theon says, then these poems, which reached Constantinople and their audience attached to letters (see §1.2.2), may have taken on something of the epistolary style to accommodate the publication method.

<sup>118</sup> For a useful and complete overview of this concept: Berardi 2018.

After all, if they do not give “an image of the writer’s soul” in his absence, as epistles did, they at least give an image of his role<sup>119</sup>.

## 5.2 The enemies

Until now I have examined two prongs of Gregory’s three-pronged literary strategy, the theorising on the ideal bishop (§3) and the self-writing (§5.1). It is now time to look at the third, the sharpest: the invective against the other (or, simply, bad) bishops. Beyond the character assassination of his adversaries, which is an obvious point of our poems, these invectives are deeply significant because of how integrated they are with the other two points. The bad bishops are the negative image of Gregory’s ideal bishop and of Gregory himself; conversely, Gregory’s theorising on the ideal bishop, and consequently his own self-styling, reacts to tendencies in the episcopate of the time which Gregory considered damaging.

Before diving into the contents and intertextual network of Gregory’s invectives, it is worthwhile to consider their genre and position in the contemporary literary space. Then, I will analyse the invective texts closely, dividing them in five groups: first, the difficult question of invectives against the socioeconomic background of bishops and Gregory’s elitism (§5.2.1); second, those passages that lament the social background because of the moral shades it throws on the character of the candidates to the episcopate, which clearly refer to one of Gregory’s enemies, Nectarius (§5.2.2); then, outright moralising against vices and sins of prospective and reigning bishops (§5.2.3); a section will be devoted to the question of duplicity or deception, because Gregory devotes some texts exclusively to this vice in order to attack his rival Maximus (§5.2.4). Finally, we will consider and explain Gregory’s harsh judgement of the episcopate as a collegial body, especially when in joint session during a council or synod (§5.2.5).

II, 1, 10 has no proper invective, but rather some allusions to themes of invective that explain Gregory’s retreat and are presented as elegiac laments. Something similar happens in II, 1, 17: after the first invective (13–20; 29–34), introduced with the lyrical device of the *Priamel*, the longest polemic (59–108) is formally part of Gregory’s autobiographical narrative. Thus, the poet casts invective themes into the traditional themes of elegiac poetry—namely, lament, autobiographical or hot-topic narrative, and moral reflection. After all, since archaic times poetry in distichs had covered a wide variety of themes, not only mourning. Solon and Theognis, two important poets for Gregory’s elegiacs, were particularly interested in moral reflection, especially taking contemporary events as points of departure or as examples. Furthermore, the theme of exile was

<sup>119</sup> Cf.: Πλεῖστον δὲ ἔχέτω τὸ ἠθικὸν ἢ ἐπιστολή, ὥσπερ καὶ ὁ διάλογος· σχεδὸν γὰρ εἰκόνα ἑκάστος τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς γράφει τὴν ἐπιστολήν. καὶ ἔστι μὲν καὶ ἐξ ἄλλου λόγου παντὸς ἰδεῖν τὸ ἦθος τοῦ γράφοντος, ἐξ οὐδενὸς δὲ οὕτως, ὡς ἐπιστολῆς. (PsDemetr. Phal. *eloc.* 227).

frequently treated in this metre; thus Gregory's condition would be particularly suited to elegiacs<sup>120</sup>.

II, 1, 12 presents us with an apparently simple case, invective expressed through iambs. Gregory's choice here demonstrates an unusual respect for the classic system of genres and metres in comparison to the majority of poetic invectives of his time. Agosti and Hawkins offer much material for this discussion<sup>121</sup>: for example, the gnomic and moral function of iambs in late antiquity, as well as their *humilis* character appealing to Christian sensibilities, may explain Gregory's choice, since II, 1, 12 has a much more ambitious program than just invective<sup>122</sup>. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that Gregory has chosen in this case a classicising form. Indeed, the poet himself signals his models in the text. From the very beginning, with his denial of ὄνομαστί κωμωδεῖν<sup>123</sup>, the poet sets his invective in the tradition of comedy and iambus, a setting reaffirmed in the part of his biography immediately preceding the invective proper:

Πλέον γὰρ οὐδὲν εἶχον ἢ τοῦτο δρᾶσαι,  
 Οὐδ' αὐτὸς ἦτουν οὐδέν. Ὡ πόλις πόλις,  
 Ἴν' ἐκβοήσω καί τι καὶ τραγωδικόν. (135)  
 Ἀλλ' οἱ καλοὶ τε κάγαθοὶ συμποίμενες  
 Φθόνῳ ῥαγέντες (ἴστε τοὺς Θρασωνίδας·  
 Οὐ γὰρ φέρει παίδευσιν ἢ ἀγροικία)  
 (II, 1, 12, 133–138)

More than this they could not do,  
 nor did I ask anything. Alas city, city!  
 Let me deliver some tragic verse, too. (135)  
 Yet those real gentlemen, my fellow shepherds,  
 burst with envy (you know those Ancient Pistols:  
 the boorish can't stand education).

Comedy is clearly present in the name Θρασωνίδας (137), a typical character of the New Comedy, corresponding to Plautus's Pyrgopolynices in the *Miles Gloriosus*<sup>124</sup>: the bishops are thereby transported into the realm of comedy. Less clear but equally important is Gregory's appropriation of the "tragic" tone (ἐκβοήσω καί τι καὶ τραγωδικόν, 135) in his exclamation Ὡ πόλις, πόλις (134). The fact that Gregory declares this appropria-

<sup>120</sup> On elegiac poetry: Crusius 1905; West 1974, 1–22. Nicastrì 1981 highlights Gregory's links with Hellenistic elegy on the basis of I, 2, 14, but he does not examine the moral and paraenetic character of the genre, being concentrated on its expressive function. However, he alludes to the interplay of poetry and autobiography in the genre (p. 453).

<sup>121</sup> Agosti 2001b; Hawkins 2014.

<sup>122</sup> On Christian iambs: Agosti 2001b, 229–233. "Philosophical" iambs are known since the Archaic period: West 1974, 32.

<sup>123</sup> Οὐ γὰρ ὄνομαστί τοὺς λόγους ποιήσομαι, / Τοῦ μὴ δοκεῖν ἐλέγχειν ἃ κρύπτειν χρεών (II, 1, 12, 21–22).

<sup>124</sup> Meier 1989, 91.

tion instead of simply declaiming in a tragic manner signals that his true model is not tragedy itself, but comedic paratragedy—namely, comedy’s conscious appropriation of elements of tragedy<sup>125</sup>. The indefinite *τι*, which is found also in the first attestation of paratragedy in comedy, signals that the tragic imitation does not obliterate the comic character of the whole and is limited to a part<sup>126</sup>. In particular, Gregory’s exclamation echoes that of Dikaiopolis’s in the prologue of the *Acharnians*, clearly inspired by multiple Sophoclean passages<sup>127</sup>. This would again put Gregory in the role of the comic hero, as explained at §5.1.2.1, but the irony is that he appropriates the exclamation of the honest *ἄγροικος* par excellence (Dikaiopolis) but then just a few lines later calls his opponents *ἄγροικοι* (138). Moreover, after exposing the ignorant and unprepared bishops, as Gregory introduces the problem of the immoral ones, he employs the metaphor of a play (*σκηνή*): “Alas, what a specious scene is played: / Personages now, and the persons later”<sup>128</sup>. He also describes the appointment of bad bishops with a reference to comic masks<sup>129</sup>. In the last part of the poem, as he decries the hypocrisy of some bishops, Gregory refers to three different fables, and in one line he names excrement (750)<sup>130</sup>. Gregory alludes to the dung beetle, too, an animal particularly linked with iambic and comic poetry: Ἄνω τρέχουσι, κύνθαροι πρὸς οὐρανὸν, / Πόλον στρέφοντες, οὐ τὸν ἐκ κόπρων ἔτι (170–171)<sup>131</sup>. The inclusion of fables had been an important trait of iambic literature since Archilochus, notably reprised and elaborated by one of Gregory’s models, Callimachus<sup>132</sup>. Summing up all these features, II, 1, 12 is perfectly inscribed—as regards the relationship between its form and contents—in the literary

125 For an overview of the phenomenon, see Farmer 2017.

126 Cf. *Τὶν’ ἐκβοήσω καὶ τι καὶ τραγωδικόν* (135) and *ἐγὼ γὰρ αὐτὸν παρατραγωδησαί τι μοι* (Strattis *frg.* 50 K.).

127 Meier 1989, 90.

128 *Σκηνή τις, οἶμαι, παίζειτ’ εὐπρεπεστέρα* / *Νῦν τὰ προσωπεῖα, τὰ πρόσωπα δ’ ὕστερον* (II, 1, 12, 359–360).

129 Ἡ κωμικὸν πρόσωπον ἄνθρωπος τεθὲν / *Τῶν εὐτελεστάτων τε καὶ μικρῶν ἐνὶ—* / *Πέφηνεν ἡμῖν οὗτος εὐσεβῆς νέος* (II, 1, 12, 397–399). On the importance of performing arts for the characterisation of bad bishops in the following lines see §2.2.4.9.

130 Fables: Ἄρ’ ἔστι καὶ παῖξαι τι τερπνῷ πλάσματι / *Σπουδῆς μεταξύ· καὶ γέλως ἐν δακρύοις* / *Γαλῆν καθίζει μῦθος εἴσω παστάδος· κτλ.* . . (II, 1, 12, 699–708; cf. Perry 50 and §2.2.4.4); *Τοῦτ’ ἔστ’ ἐκεῖνο ράμνον ἄρχειν τῶν ξύλων* (723; cf. Perry 213); *Κάνθων δὲ τίς ποτ’ ἀστικῶν ἄλλου πλέον* / *Κάνθωνος ἐζήτησεν ἀγροίκου φέρειν*; / *Ἄλλ’ ἔστιν ὥσπερ ἔστι, κἂν οἰκῇ πόλιν* (784–786; cf. Perry 352); for further references see Meier 1989, 152, 154, 161. The lowly tone of traditional iambus is to be seen at 750: *Κόπρων μέλει σοι, μειζόνων δ’ ἐμοὶ λόγος* (on the scatological language of iambus: Agosti 2001b, 220; Carey 2009, 151).

131 Cf. Semonid. *frg.* 13 W.; Hipponax *frg.* 92, 10–11 W.; in Aristophanes’ *Peace*, Trygaeus, the comic hero, reaches the house of Zeus riding a giant dung-beetle, a reference to the Aesopic fable of the dung-beetle and the eagle (Perry 3). Cf. Steiner 2008. Here then, the identity of the comic hero and *ἄγροικος* is taken on by Gregory’s enemies.

132 Archilocus *frg.* 174–177 and 185–187 W.; *Iambs* 2 and 4 by Callimachus echo respectively Perry 240 and Perry 213 (see Scodel 2011), the latter being also referenced in the Bible at Iudc. 9:15 and by Gregory at II, 1, 12, 723. In this respect, it is true that fables unite different traditions, such as archaic iambus,

space of late antiquity, if with a somewhat archaising sensibility, a conscious reprise of classical models.

The discourse is much more complicated for II, 1, 13, a poem in which, as in II, 1, 12, invective has a prominent role. The former is in fact a hexametric poem, so that, in the classical system of genres and metres, its personal invective regarding current events would not be suited to the metre. Again, a reference to Agosti's article is necessary: late antiquity could make allowances for these combinations of metre and matter, and in particular two dynamics were at play that can explain Gregory's choice. On one side, there is the tendency, especially in pagan poets, to employ the highest forms and languages more freely, particularly hexametric epic. On the other side, invective was ubiquitous in poetry of the time, so that it was bound to invade also the realm of hexameters. And invade it did: as was already briefly recalled (§1.3.1), invective in hexameters was successfully practiced by Claudian, who, though writing mostly in Latin, came from the *pars orientis* and could also compose in Greek<sup>133</sup>. Indeed, Gregory's invective shares some features with Claudian's, such as the hexametric metre, the narrative form (see §3.3.2.2), the edgy insults covered by epic convention, and their being inverted mirrors for the good bishop or politician<sup>134</sup>. However, there are also important differences. Claudian's invectives, especially the longer *In Eutropium* and *In Rufinum*, are extensively modelled on epics in their overarching narrative structure and on the ψόγος of rhetorical treatises. This, being conceived and structured as the negative image of the ἐγκώμιον, is focused on one person, following his career from infancy to his deeds in public life as examples of his vices. In the case of Gregory, even if framing devices and comparisons have a narrative form, the overarching structure remains that of a deliberative or judicial speech (§1.1.1). Moreover, his invective does not address a single person. It is true that his main target is Nectarius, but he has in mind Maximus and the bishops at the council, too. Yet even if there was only one target in real life, the form of the poems is still that of a catalogic invective, listing different vices and immoral behaviours without construing a single literary character in whom all these features inhere. Gregory's kind of invective is much more similar to the iambus against women by Semonides than to Claudian's character assassinations. If we add that Gregory writes more than a decade earlier than Claudian, there is no single extant work of literature that may have offered a model for II, 1, 13: Gregory's fusion of rhetoric, Homeric speeches, and iambic invective may be an innovation, although perfectly understandable within the literary taste of the time.

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Hellenistic diatribe, Callimachus' poetry and non-Hellenic traditions, as Scodel 2011, 370 says. It is the perfect device for Gregory.

<sup>133</sup> Agosti 2001b, 238.

<sup>134</sup> On this facet of Claudian's invectives, closely paralleling Gregory's use of invective, see Perret 2018. On edgy insults, see the oblique Ως ὄφελον Γετθαῖαν ἀναπλήσαιεν ἀνίην, / Ἐνδικὸν ἐδρήεσσιν, ἐφ' ἔδρη τίσιν ἔχοντες (II, 1, 13, 149–150 with explanation at §2.2.4.6) and Claudian's allusions to Eutropius as eunuch in the *In Eutropium* (Perret 2018, 6–7).



### 5.2.1 Socioeconomic invective

Once we have clarified the issue of genres, we must tackle the elephant in Gregory's room—namely, his invective against lowborn prelates: Gregory's elitist attitude is a far cry from our sensibilities.

A long passage from II, 1, 12 and a shorter excerpt of II, 1, 13 lament the humble conditions of many candidates to the episcopate. Such a blatant classism sits uneasily with modern sensibilities, and in particular because if classism was by no means unknown to ancient literature, a Christian writer may be expected to dismiss differences of class inside his community, especially in contrast to a society so deeply influenced by paganism. In these passages, the modern interpreter sees more easily the educated landowner than the ascetic bishop, perceiving also a contradiction between the two<sup>135</sup>. Was it so for Gregory and his contemporaries, too? In a way it was. This is made apparent from the text itself: in II, 1, 12, after the invective against lowborn bishops (154–175), Gregory anticipates the objections of an imaginary counterpart, responding to them with his narrative of historical decadence (176–191; see §3.1.3.1). The objections carry on with the counterexample of the apostles, who were fishers before (192–198), and the response thereto becomes a summary of Christian Greek culture to set against both purely pagan culture and the refusal of culture by some sectors of Christianity (§3.1.3.3). If the poet is so preoccupied with defusing these objections, it means that they might have been raised against him. On the other hand, passages with similar invectives (II, 1, 13, 100–107, but also II, 1, 12, 395–441) are not defended in the same way. Given the likely upper-class audience presupposed by these poems, it is probable that those objections are not to be interpreted in the same way as the modern reader's reactions to ancient classism. To understand these objections, as well as to understand Gregory's elitist argument, we must remove for a moment the filter of our democratic and post-Marx presuppositions and appreciate the various arguments in their context.

In the two passages in question (II, 1, 12, 154–175; II, 1, 13, 100–107), the common theme consists in the lowly trade exercised by would-be bishops. Gregory mentions specifically professional activities (jobs); he reviles them for their low social position and refers chiefly to people who desire to become bishops but are not yet such. First of all, it must be noted that the two passages show the same catalogic structure, defined by anaphora to include different behaviours or professions in the same argument<sup>136</sup>. This use of the anaphora can be traced back to Semonides's iamb against women (*frg.* 7 W.), an important model of Gregory's invective, and it will also find employment in other invective passages I will analyse.

<sup>135</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 4; Louth 1997, 283.

<sup>136</sup> Οἱ μὲν... οἱ δ' ἐκ... οἱ δ' ἐξ... οἱ δ' ἐκ... ἄλλοι δὲ... ἄλλοι δὲ... (II, 1, 12, 154; 156–159; 163); μή (II, 1, 13, 100–102) and ὁ μὲν... ὃς δὲ (II, 1, 13, 104–105).

Second, II, 1, 12, 154–175 also has items in common with II, 1, 13, 100–107: in both lists, Gregory includes the labour of the ploughman and of the blacksmith<sup>137</sup>. Besides these, the list in II, 1, 12 includes also the banker (or money changer), the farmer, the seaman, and the soldier, whereas II, 1, 13 has the carpenter, the tanner, the hunter, and, obliquely through the instrument of their work, the lumberjack and (perhaps) the surgeon<sup>138</sup>. While the anaphoric grid and the jobs mentioned correspond by and large, the two passages are also embedded in different discourses through different framing devices. I will begin with the exegesis of the single slurs and then examine the different contexts and aims of the two lists.

The trades listed are almost all the epitome of three-D's jobs, dangerous, dirty, and demeaning, with the stress falling on the third D—demeaning. Apparently, both catalogues are introduced to criticise contemporary bishops' lack of qualifications, but this choice of occupations is also intended to be insulting, no mere statement of inadequacy. From some intertextual clues in II, 1, 12, 154–175, the impression this passage conveys is that these humble jobs are also synonymous with defective moral character. In this way, Gregory discredits at the same time the would-be bishops' theological preparation and moral worth.

For Gregory's strategy to work, however, the insults must be effective as well. Therefore, it is useful to see how precisely they are insulting. Beginning with II, 1, 12, 154–175, as stated before, Gregory lists three-D's jobs and depicts them as particularly debasing. He does so in various ways, first by evoking the jobs through their instruments, visibly conveying the passage from a humble occupation to the episcopate as leaving behind (ἐξ) the instrument, giving a sense of immediacy in the passage and of concreteness in the previous occupation: ἐκ τραπεζῆς, ... ἐξ ἀρότρων ... ἐκ δικέλλης καὶ σμινύης πανημέρου / Ἄλλοι δὲ κώπην, ἢ στρατὸν λελοιπότες (156–159). Τράπεζα here means the table of the money changer, from which the job takes the name of τραπεζίτης. Δίκελλα and σμινύη are widely employed in dramatic poetry, especially in relation to agriculture<sup>139</sup>.

137 Cf. Οἱ δ' ἐξ ἀρότρων, ἡλίω κεκαυμένοι (II, 1, 12, 157) with Μὴ τέ τις οὖν ἀροτήρ... ὅς δ' ἄρ' ἐχέτην / Ρίψας (II, 1, 13, 100; 105–106); Ἄλλοι δὲ τεχνῶν ἐμπύρων τὴν ἀσβολὴν / Οὕπω τελείως σαρκὸς ἐκνευμμένοι (II, 1, 12, 163) with μὴτ' ἐμπυρον ἔργον ἐλαύνων (II, 1, 13, 101).

138 Banker (or moneychanger): Οἱ δ' ἐκ τραπεζῆς, τῶν τ' ἐκεῖσ' ἀλλαγμάτων (II, 1, 12, 156); farmer: Οἱ δ' ἐκ δικέλλης καὶ σμινύης πανημέρου (158); seaman and soldier: Ἄλλοι δὲ κώπην ἢ στρατὸν λελοιπότες, / Ἄντλου πνέοντες ἢ τὸ σῶμ' ἐστιγμένοι (159–160). Carpenter: μὴ τέκτων (II, 1, 13, 100); tanner: μὴ σκυτοεργὸς; ὅς δὲ δορὴν (100; 105); hunter: Μὴ θήρην μεθέπων (101); lumberjack and surgeon: ὁ μὲν ἐκ χειρῶν πέλεκυν μέγαν ... ὅς δὲ πυράγρην (104–105). On the respective identities of these trades see below.

139 Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 430, s.v. δίκελλα; 1620, s.v. σμινύη; in Plat. *resp.* 370D σμινύη and ἀροτρον exemplify the instruments of the farmer; Callimachus likely contrasted σμινύη and πέλεκυς as the instruments of farming and wood-cutting at *Ait. frg.* 190a, 4; see also Harder 2012, 1014–1015; between the synonyms, Menander prefers δίκελλα (9x) and Aristophanes σμινύη (4x).

The synecdoche of the instruments for the jobs is paralleled at II, 1, 13, 104–107. In the case of the ploughman, the epic version is more vivid because it expresses the verb (ρίψας) and uses the metonymy of ἐχέτλην, “the handle”, to mean the plough. Among the jobs that mark out the hexametric version from the iambic one there are the lumberjack and, maybe, the surgeon (πέλεκυς, πυράγρη, 104–105), which are characterised by their instrument. The πέλεκυς would mean the double axe used to fell trees, hence alluding to the lumberjack’s trade. The word πυράγρη is used often for the fire-tongs in hexametric poets who strongly influenced Gregory, such as Homer (*Il.* 18, 477; *Od.* 3, 434), Callimachus (*hymn. in Del.*, 144), and Oppian (*halieut.* 2, 342). However, in medical prose, the word indicates some kind of forceps, which can be used for various surgical operations, not only for childbirth. It is more likely that Gregory is referencing the fire-tongs of the already mentioned blacksmith (101), as the ἐχέτλη of line 104 refers back to the ἀροτήρ of line 100, and the δορή of line 105 to the σκυτοεργός of the same line. Moreover, if we take the hapax δούρεα (105) as a form of δόρυ, the term may refer to the hunter’s as well as the soldier’s trade; in such a context, the πέλεκυς may also refer back to the τέκτων of 100<sup>140</sup>. In this way, all instruments would reprise the previously mentioned occupations. However, there is also the possibility that πέλεκυς refers to the lumberjack and not the carpenter, δούρεα to the soldier or even to the carpenter (in its sense of “beam”, “plank”) and not the hunter, and πυράγρη to the surgeon and not to the blacksmith.

Another insulting element of II, 1, 12 is that each job is associated with the physical marks it leaves on the body of its practitioners: the ploughman is tanned (157), the seaman stinks (160), the soldier is scarred (160), the blacksmith is covered in soot (163–164)<sup>141</sup>. Foul odour and dirtiness are clearly negative marks; suntan and στίγματα less so. As regards soldiers τὸ σῶμ’ ἐστιγμένοι, there are two viable interpretations: Meier connects the στίγματα to the previous line (στρατὸν λελοιπότες, 159), so that Gregory is referring to a deserter punished with a burning brand, even though in this case a tattoo is more likely than a burning brand<sup>142</sup>; this interpretation anticipates the following reference to runaway slaves. In fact, lines 165–166 (Μαστιγίαι τε, καὶ μυλῶνων ἄξιοι, / Πρὶν καὶ τὸ τίμημ’ εἰσενεγκεῖν δεσπότηις) resemble the description of slaves punished in the flour mill, with flogging and tattoos, at *Apul. met.* 9, 12. Thus, Gregory would not consider the profession of soldier as disqualifying per se, but only because he is speaking of deserters. However, if such were the case, the parallelism with the seaman and with the other professions would not hold. Indeed, the cases of the seaman and of the soldier are peculiar: their lines are carefully built in parallel because the

<sup>140</sup> See, e.g., τέκτονες ἄνδρες ἐξέταμον πελέκεσσι (*Il.* 13, 390) and Odysseus building the raft in *Od.* 5: δῶκέν οἱ πέλεκυν μέγαν... πελέκκησεν δ’ ἄρα χαλκῷ... ἐν εἰδῶς τεκτοσυνάων (234; 244; 250).

<sup>141</sup> ἤλιψ κεκαυμένοι (157); Ἀντλου πνέοντες ἢ τὸ σῶμ’ ἐστιγμένοι (160); τεχνῶν ἐμπύρων τὴν ἀσβολὴν / Οὐπω τελείως σαρκὸς ἐκνευιμένοι (163–164).

<sup>142</sup> Meier 1989, 93; for this specific sense of λείπω, cf. words like λιποστρατέω, λιποστρατία at Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1053; on tattoos as punishment: Jones 1987, 147–149.

metaphors of the army and of the ship are very significant for church leadership, and the poet highlights the presumption of these tirots of their trade to aspire to its spiritual counterpart. In this respect, it is significant that *Cod. Theod.* 10, 22, 4 and *Aet. Med.* 8, 12 testify that soldiers were tattooed as they entered service<sup>143</sup>. The tattoo (στίγμα) would be the military counterpart of the oar (κώπη) for the seaman, signifying the lowest rank in the respective hierarchies (the rookie and the oarsman), contrasting with their ambition to be Λαοῦ κυβερνηταί τε, καὶ στρατηλάται (161), helmsmen and generals in the church. Still, the στίγμα likened the soldier to the runaway slave, the criminal, and the barbarian (Jones 1987, 144–145), and it was also prohibited by the Bible (καὶ ἐντομίδας ἐπὶ ψυχῇ οὐ ποιήσετε ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν καὶ γράμματα στικτὰ οὐ ποιήσετε ἐν ὑμῖν· ἐγὼ εἰμι κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν, Lev. 19:28). In the case of *suntan*, I could not find parallels of this trait as an element of scorn against countrymen. However, Gregory values it at II, 1, 12, 695 as a sign of ascetic efforts. Indeed, all these scorned traits may have a positive meaning when applied to the ascetic: lack of personal hygiene and the olfactory result thereof are typical traits of the monk, while the penal tattoo was reinterpreted by Christian martyrs as a positive sign.<sup>144</sup>

Finally, the jobs of II, 1, 12 are associated with moral condemnation: the tax collector and the banker could be damned per se, while the image of the runaway slave, syntactically linked to that of the blacksmith, could taint the rest of the jobs by association. Apart from the eponymous τράπεζα, what characterises banking here is its ἀλλάγματα (156). The term means “compensation” or “vicissitude” and may refer to the profits made by the banker through commissions, to the uncertainties of his job, or to his activity as money changer. Banking (i.e., the τραπεζίτης) in antiquity was primarily money changing, with functions such as deposit and lending exercised by other institutions.<sup>145</sup> The distinction is somewhat lost in late antiquity, justifying the interpretation of ἀλλάγματα as the vicissitudes of an unstable business<sup>146</sup>. If Gregory has in mind the business of the moneylender, dubious morality and dishonour are inherent in the very instability of the job and reinforced by the philosophical and biblical condemnation of charging interest<sup>147</sup>. On the other hand, the money changers might have inspired antipathy because of the commissions on changes, through which the amount of money was diminished by the change; maybe the money changers (κολλυβισταί) in the Jerusalem temple, whose tables (τράπεζαι) Jesus overthrew in the Gospels, are also referenced here<sup>148</sup>. Indeed,

<sup>143</sup> See Jones 1987, 149.

<sup>144</sup> Harvey 2006, 241–308; Gustafson 1997, 98–101.

<sup>145</sup> Millett 2012.

<sup>146</sup> Bandow 2018.

<sup>147</sup> On the immorality of high-risk jobs cf. the reflections on the merchant at Giardina 2020. Condemnations of usury: Aristot. *pol.* 1258b; Ex. 22:24; Lev. 25:36–37; Dtn. 23:20–21; Hes. 18:17; 22:12; Neh. 5:7; Ps. 15:5.

<sup>148</sup> Mt. 21:12–17; Mc. 11:15–19; Lc. 19:45–48; Joh. 2:13–16.

banking was an infamous activity, though not so central in comedy<sup>149</sup>. It was associated with slaves, too<sup>150</sup>. As regards the slave, he seems not to be stigmatised per se but only in his disobedience: the terms μαστιγίαι and μυλώνων ἄξιοι presume a transgression on his part, confirmed by his behaviour shortly after, wantonness, and stealing by force or by guile. However, μαστιγίας is also a standard comic insult<sup>151</sup>. Gregory hints at the trope of the bad slave of comedy, so that one suspects his condemnation of slaves is less about morality than about social class<sup>152</sup>.

In II, 1, 13 these last two features (physical marks of the job, moral condemnation) are left out; this contributes to making the hexametric version tamer and testifies to Gregory's ability to distinguish different forms and the tone each requires. Another example of this attention to tone is the description of the blacksmith (ἔμπυρον ἔργον ἐλαύνων, II, 1, 13, 101). Gregory pinpoints the blacksmith's trade through the post-Homeric adjective ἔμπυρος in both hexameters and iambs; however, the nexus of ἔργον with a specifying attribute is much more poetic (e.g., Hom. *Il.* 2, 614; *Od.* 5, 67) than the τεχνῶν ἐμπύρων of II, 1, 12, attested in this sense at Plat. *Protag.* 321E. Furthermore, the hexametric expression highlights, through the verb ἐλαύνων, "to forge,"<sup>153</sup> and the singular object, the concreteness of the trade. Contrary to this poetic, vivid, and alliterative word-choice, II, 1, 12 has the word ἀσβολή, the Ionic form of Attic ἄσβολος, echoing Semonid. *frag.* 7, 61 W. The iambic poem insists thus on the dirtiness of the job. However, II, 1, 13 too implies through word choice that these are disreputable jobs. The hunter is described as θήρην μεθέπων (101), an ambiguous expression meaning either "chasing game" or "plying hunt". The components of the expression, as well as its construction, have some poetic pedigree (see Pseudo-Phocylides 161) but the expression is never used of hunting in Homer and epic poetry, where hunting scenes are mostly concerned with the high-class practice of hunting<sup>154</sup>. In antiquity there was a firm social distinction between hunting for sport, reserved for the elites, and hunting for a living, a low-class mean of subsistence<sup>155</sup>. Here, the latter is clearly meant. The hapax σκυτοεργός is a more epic-sounding version of the ordinary σκυτοτόμος (cf. ὀβριμοεργός, κακοεργός, ἐκάεργος): though the latter is not wholly un-epic (cf. Hom. *Il.* 7, 221), it still has a

<sup>149</sup> Suet. *vit. Aug.* 4, 2; 2, 6; in Comedy, see Antiphan. *Com. frag.* 159 K.; a quotation from Menander at Phrynichus Arabius *Eclogae* 408.

<sup>150</sup> Millett 2012.

<sup>151</sup> Sophocl. *frag.* 329 R.; Aristoph. *equ.* 1228; *Lys.* 1240; Diphilus *frag.* 97 K.; Hipparchus *frag.* 1 K.; Philemon *frag.* 145 K.; Philippides *frag.* 9 K.; Men. *Dysc.* 140; 473; *epitr.* 1113; *kol.* 125; at Eur. *Cycl.* 237–240 μάστιξ with μυλών.

<sup>152</sup> Konstan 2019, 878. In this direction also Pigott 2021.

<sup>153</sup> Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 529 s.v. ἐλαύνω III.1.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. αἶψα δὲ δῶκε θεὸς μενοεικέα θήρην (Hom. *Od.* 9, 158, but without μεθέπω); other hunting scenes: Hom. *Il.* 9, 533–549; *Od.* 9, 154–158; 10, 157–163.

<sup>155</sup> Anderson 2012.

much better standing in comedy, where the tanner or leatherworker is used in lists of lowbrow jobs as here<sup>156</sup>.

Although it is in the nature of late antique poetry that single sections may be elaborated and read with more independence from the whole than in earlier ages, Gregory's catalogues find their complete meaning in the course of the wider argument of the poems. The catalogue of II, 1, 12, 154–175 has indeed a structural role, because it connects the autobiographical part of the poem to the subsequent argumentation, while at the same time hinting back at the initial theme “bad bishops”, so that the autobiographical part is justified by the invective<sup>157</sup>. The catalogue begins with a relative pronoun (ὧν, 154), the antecedent thereof being the bishops who forced Gregory to resign and leave Constantinople at the end of his narration. It is interesting to note how Gregory ends the narration and introduces the invective:

Οἱ καὶ μ' ἐπεψαν ἔνθεν ἐκ πονηρίας  
Οὐ σφόδρ' ἄκοντα. Καὶ γὰρ ἦν αἷσχος μέγα  
Τούτων τιν' εἶναι τῶν καπήλων πίστεως.  
Ἵν οἱ μὲν ὄντες ἔκγονοι φορογράφων . . .  
(II, 1, 12, 151–154)

they who have sent me too thence out of cowardice,  
though not very much against my will, because 'twas a real shame  
to be one among those dealers in faith.  
Some of them are sons of clerks for the exactors . . .

The invective is presented as an enumeration of the bishops who pressured Gregory and amounts to a direct attack against his rivals. This link between invective and the personal life and misfortune of the poet is a topical element of ancient iambus: the iambographer writes to have revenge over his real-life enemies<sup>158</sup>. Moreover, here we find the same specular rhetoric examined at §5.1: invective serves to justify Gregory's retreat and unwillingness to participate in the dealings of his colleagues<sup>159</sup>. Thus, the

156 τοὺς μὲν καλοὺς τε κάγαθοὺς οὐ προσδέχει, / σαυτὸν δὲ λυχνοπώλαισι καὶ νευρορράφοις / καὶ σκυτοτόμοις καὶ βυρσοπώλαισιν δίδως (Aristoph. *equ.* 738–740); Ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἡμῶν σκυτοτομεῖ καθήμενος, / ἕτερος δὲ χαλκεύει τις, ὃ δὲ τεκταίνεται, / ὃ δὲ χρυσοχοεῖ γε χρυσίον παρὰ σοῦ λαβῶν (*Plut.* 162–164); τίς χαλκεύειν ἢ ναυπηγεῖν ἢ ράπτειν ἢ τροχοποιεῖν, / ἢ σκυτοτομεῖν ἢ πλινθουργεῖν ἢ πλύνειν ἢ σκυλοδεψεῖν, / ἢ γῆς ἀρότροις ῥήξας δάπεδον καρπὸν Διὸς θερίσασθαι (513–515); cf. ἀνάγωγος ὧν δὲ καὶ βάνασσος παντελῶς / ἐν σκυτοτομείῳ μετὰ τινων καθήμενος (*Machon frg.* 17, 359–360 K.).

157 See: Θάρρει λέοντα· πάρδαλις τῶν ἡμέρων· / Ἀσπίς τάχ' ἂν σε καὶ φύγοι δεδοικότα· / Ἐν ἐκτρέπου μοι, τοὺς κακοὺς ἐπισκόπους, / Μηδὲν φοβηθεῖς τοῦ θρόνου τὴν ἀξίαν (II, 1, 12, 33–36).

158 Hawkins 2014, 2; see §1.3.2.

159 For Gregory's forceful expressions of difference from the other bishops, see §3.1.2; οὐ μὲν ἐγὼ κείνοισιν ὁμόθρονος, οὐχ ὁμοεργός, / οὐδέ τι συμφράδμων, οὐ σύμπλοος, οὐ συνοδίτης (II, 1, 13, 203–204); τῶν μὲν ἐγὼ ποθέων εἰς ἔμμεναι (οὐκ ἐπικεύσω) (II, 1, 17, 41); οὐδέ τί που συνόδοισιν ὁμόθρονος ἔσσομ' ἐγῶγε . . . (II, 1, 17, 91).

poet gives a positive evaluation of his defeat, while at the same time claiming outsider status and difference from the other bishops.

If there is much exaggeration in Gregory's narrative of the affair, an element of his accusation is, however, true: he calls those bishops *κάπηλοι πίστεως* ("dealers in faith", 153), with a reference not only to the following description of their humble background (which may well be grossly exaggerated), but above all to their nominating Nectarius as bishop of Constantinople. This choice reveals how this-worldly their preoccupations were, since the only credential of the man was the approval of the emperor. Therefore, the theme of the humble background is introduced also as an explanation for the philistine behaviour of the prelates. In fact, retail trade (*καπηλεία*) had a poor reputation in antiquity, because it was not felt to add any real value to the merchandise, while it increased its price, as opposed to the risky but necessary long-distance trade (*ἐμπορία*)<sup>160</sup>. It must be noted that Gregory is not consistent in the use of words: in II, 1, 11, 1756 he uses *χριστεμπόρων*; in *or.* 40, 11 *Χριστοκάπηλοι καὶ Χριστέμποροι*. In our text, Gregory refers to the election of Nectarius in his place; in II, 1, 11, to doctrinal questions; and in *or.* 40, 11 to those who defer baptism to be forgiven of all their sins (*μηδὲ ἀναμείνωμεν πλείον γενέσθαι κακοὶ, ἵνα πλείον συγχωρηθῶμεν· μηδὲ γενώμεθα Χριστοκάπηλοι καὶ Χριστέμποροι*). In this last case the metaphor is apt, since the bad catechumen reasons as a good merchant, hoping to obtain a greater benefit (more sins forgiven) at the same "price" (baptism). The two poetic usages are vaguer. In II, 1, 12, 153, Gregory probably does not want to suggest simony—he does not seem to accuse his opponents of having been bribed by the emperor or Nectarius. It is more likely that he refers to the immaterial advantages—especially in terms of political opportunity—of his removal in favour of Nectarius.

The invective ends with Gregory saying that these bishops coming from a slavish background are not even able to count their own feet and hands. This *pointe* serves to highlight their ignorance, but what immediately precedes it is more important: they *ἀριστερὰ λαλοῦντες*, "babble awkwardly" (174). Lack of education is a problem, in Gregory's view, insofar as it hinders correct teaching from the bishops. Thus, the invective introduces the long discussion on the intellectual skills required of a prelate in a time of widespread heresy (§3.1.3). The equation of low background and bad teaching demonstrates that the following discussion is concerned with *paideia*, the expensive and long training of the upper classes, and not in general with any form of knowledge. This is confirmed by the negative moral connotation of these lowbrow jobs, since *paideia* was also conceived as a training of personal character and restraint<sup>161</sup>. On the other hand, Gregory does not automatically link upper-class status and aptness to the role, as II, 1, 12, 344–352 demonstrate: there he attacks those who presume to be capable of being

<sup>160</sup> Cf. the excellent analysis of commerce in the Roman world given by Giardina 2020 for this distinction.

<sup>161</sup> Brown 1992, 48–50.

bishops just because of their social position and education<sup>162</sup>. Again, centrality is given to specifically Christian elements, such as experience in asceticism and command of Christian doctrine, not to *paideia* for *paideia*'s sake. However, it is remarkable that, through its position at the beginning of the discussion on *paideia* and by its concentration of the background of bishops, the invective in II, 1, 12, 154–175, formally referring to reigning bishops (Gregory's enemies), ends up being more significant for candidates for the episcopate such as Nectarius and Maximus.

The similar invective in II, 1, 13, 100–107 concentrates on this last function. It vividly represents the lack of scrutiny of candidates for the episcopate, a lack that Gregory denounces throughout the herald's speech. Much less than intellectual insufficiency, the whole speech seems to stigmatise the low bar set on morality, considering the preceding catalogue of vices (see below §5.2.3). However, even here the list of jobs is linked, although indirectly, to Gregory's autobiography: in the ascetic old man thrust away by one stronger than him as a sundry mob crowds the altar, it is easy to read Gregory's removal from Constantinople in favour of the more connected Nectarius<sup>163</sup>.

### 5.2.2 Against Nectarius

Indeed, Gregory's remarks on the lowly social background of bishops are an attack against Nectarius. This is apparently paradoxical: Why should these elitist tirades insult a wealthy senator of Constantinople? To answer this question, as well as to relativise Gregory's elitism, it is worth adding two more passages out of II, 1, 12 to consideration. Here is the first :

Ὡ τῆς ταχείας τῶν τρόπων μεταστροφῆς. (395)  
 Πισσῶν κυλίσματ' ἐν κύβοις τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ·  
 Ἡ κωμικὸν πρόσωπον ἀθρόως τεθὲν  
 Τῶν εὐτελεστάτων τε καὶ μικρῶν ἐνί—  
 Πέφηνεν ἡμῖν οὗτος εὐσεβῆς νέος.  
 Πολλὴ τις ὄντως ἡ χάρις τοῦ Πνεύματος, (400)  
 Εἴη' ἐν προφήταις καὶ Σαοὺλ ὁ φίλτατος.  
 Χθὲς ἦσθα μίμων καὶ θεάτρων ἐν μέσῳ  
 (Τὰ δ' ἐκ θεάτρων ἄλλος ἐξεταζέτω),  
 Νῦν αὐτὸς ἡμῖν εἴ ξένη θεωρία.  
 Πρώην φίλιππος, καὶ Θεῶ πέμπων κόνιν, (405)

<sup>162</sup> Ὅς μὲν τις εὐγένειαν, ὃς δ' εὐγλωττίαν, / Πλοῦτόν τις ἄλλος, ὃς δὲ κομπάζει γένος. / Οἱ δ' οὐκ ἔχοντες, ἐξ ὅτου δόξουσιν τι, / Ποιοῦσιν αὐτοὺς γνωρίμους πονηρία (II, 1, 12, 345–348).

<sup>163</sup> Ἄλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐκ χειρῶν πέλεκυν μέγαν, ὃς δ' ἄρ' ἐχέτην / Ρίψας, ὃς δὲ δορὴν, ὃς δούρεα, ὃς δὲ πυράγρην, / Ἐνθάδ' ἴοι, θεῖον δὲ περιθλίβοισθε τράπεζαν, / Στεινόμενοι, στεينوῦντες. Ὁ δ' ἄλκιμος ἄλλον ἐλαύνει, / Πολλάκι καὶ τ' ἄριστον, ἐνιδρώσαντα θρόνοις, / Γηραιὸν, σάρκεσσι τετρυμένον, οὐρανοφοίτην... (II, 1, 13, 104–109).



Ὡς ἄλλος εὐχὰς ἢ νοήματ' εὐσεβῆ·  
 Τὸ δ' αἴτιον· πίπτων τις ἀρματηλάτης  
 Ἦ τις τὰ δεύτερ' ἵππος ἐν δρόμοις φέρων·  
 Ἴππων δ' ἀήρ σοι κοῦφος ἀντετύπτετο  
 Ὡς ἐκ φρενῶν πεσόντι καὶ μεμηνότι· (410)  
 Νῦν εὐσταλῆς τις καὶ βλέπων αἰδῶ μόνην,  
 Πλήν εἰ λαθὼν που πρὸς τὸ ἀρχαῖον δράμοις,  
 Ὡς λοξὸς—οἶμαι—πτόρθος ἐκφυγὼν βίαν  
 Χειρὸς κατευθύνουσιν εἰς ταῦτόν τρέχει.  
 Χθὲς ῥητορεύων τὰς δίκας ἀπημπόλεις (415)  
 Στρέφων ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω τὰ τῶν νόμων,  
 Ἐξ ὧν ἀπώλλυς οὐς ἔσωζεν ἡ δίκη·  
 Στάθμη δικαίᾳ χρώμενος τῷ πλείονι·  
 Νῦν μοι δικαστῆς, καὶ Δανιήλ τις ἀθρόως.  
 Χθὲς μοι δικάζων σὺν ξίφει γυμνουμένω, (420)  
 Τὸ βῆμ' ἐποίεις ἐννομον ληστήριον  
 Κλέπτων, τυραννῶν, καὶ πρὸ πάντων τοὺς νόμους·  
 Ὡς ἡμερὸς μοι σήμερον. Οὐδ' ἐσθῆτά τις  
 Οὕτως ἀμείβει ῥαδίως, ὥς σὺ τρόπους.  
 Χθὲς ἐν χορευταῖς ἐστρέφου θηλυδρίαίς, (425)  
 Γάμων δὲ ἡκόρδαξ† ἦσθα Λυδαῖς ἐν μέσαις  
 Ὡιδᾶς λυγίζων καὶ πότοις γαυρούμενος·  
 Νῦν σωφρονιστῆς παρθένων καὶ συζύγων·  
 Ὡς σου τὸ καλὸν ὑποπτον ἐκ τοῦ πρὶν τρόπου.  
 Σίμων Μάγος χθὲς, σήμερον Πέτρος Σίμων. (430)  
 Φεῦ τοῦ τάχους, φεῦ, ἀντ' ἀλώπεκος λέων.  
 Σὺ δ' εἰπέ μοι, βέλτιστε, καὶ πράκτωρ φόρων,  
 Ἦ καὶ στρατοῦ τιν' ἐκλελοιπῶς ἀξίαν . . .  
 (II, 1, 12, 395–433)

What quick reversal of ways and habits! (395)  
 It's a roll of dice: what is divine is decided by dice.  
 Or you just put at once a comic mask  
 on someone paltry and cheap,  
 and suddenly he appears to us as a pious man.  
 Truly, great is the grace of the Spirit, (400)  
 if even our most dear Saul is among the prophets.  
 Yesterday you were a mime in the theatre  
 (let another one inquire what you were outside the theatre),  
 now you yourself are our unusual show.  
 You were just now a horse lover, sending God dust (405)  
 as others send prayers or pious thoughts;  
 something happens—a charioteer falls,  
 or a horse comes second at the races—  
 and the nimble haze of horses strikes you,  
 as a madman or one out of his mind; (410)  
 now you are well-behaved and radiate only sobriety,  
 unless you are not seen and run to your old vice,  
 like a queer branch that, fleeing the grip

of the hand that kept it straight, runs to its shape.  
 Yesterday an attorney, you sold justice, (415)  
 twisting the law up and down,  
 thus damning those whom justice would have saved  
 and applying the rule of justice to the highest bidder;  
 Now you are my judge, an instant Daniel.  
 Yesterday you judged me, sword drawn, (420)  
 and made of the court a lawful den of robbers,  
 stealing and bullying, above all the very laws;  
 how meek are you today! One could not change  
 clothes as easily as you your character.  
 Yesterday you squirmed among effeminate dancers, (425)  
 at weddings you played the burlesque among the Lydians,  
 twisting your voice in songs and swelling on drunken pride;  
 now you watch the behaviour of virgins and consorts:  
 how suspicious your virtue after your former habits!  
 Simon Magus yesterday, today Peter Simon. (430)  
 O the speed! O a lion instead of a fox!  
 But tell me, dear friend and exactor of tributes,  
 or former-something in the civil service . . .

As was the case for socioeconomic invectives, here too Gregory's attack is structured as a list of damning scenarios<sup>164</sup>. The list is concerned with the credentials one has *before* one becomes bishop; in fact, the invective is part of the longer discussion on the role of sacraments in the election of bishops. It underlines Gregory's argument that the bad state of the episcopate of the time is due to a faulty selection of candidates (371–394; §3.3.2.1). From the point of view of content, it describes the swift change from a morally despicable situation to a morally admirable one, but it can also be read as an attack against the new bishop of Constantinople and Gregory's substitute, Nectarius. The common character of this passage and the following one is in the explicit derivation of a moral tarnish from some social circumstances, something we have already seen, though only implicitly, in the invectives of the former section (§5.2.1); however, here we are considering not the professional occupations of lower social classes, as was the case there, but the leisure and pastimes of the higher classes. Thus, these passages are much more apt to attack Nectarius.

The attack against Nectarius is explicitly signalled by the reference to the tax collector in II, 1, 12, 432–433. This reference is shared with the previous list (154–175), although it must be noted that in 432–433 the tax collector is not included in the catalogue proper; instead, the poet speaks directly to him (σὺ δ'εἰπέ μοι, βέλτιστε) at the

<sup>164</sup> The framing devices are the exclamations of lines 395–401 at the beginning and the exclamation of line 431 followed by the apostrophe at 432. Internally, the list is structured around the repeated contrast between adverbs meaning “before” (Xθὲς, 402; 415; 420; 425; 430; πρῶην, 405) and adverbs meaning “now” (νῦν, 404; 411; 419; 428; σήμερον, 423; 430).

beginning of the next section, as a framing device. In the previous list (154–175), the tax collector opened the catalogue of bad occupations. These two placements highlight him among the others as the focus of Gregory's invective. Therefore, McGuckin is partially justified when he concentrates on the mentions of the tax collector to interpret II, 1, 12; moreover, his reading of the tax collector as an allusion to Nectarius is certainly correct<sup>165</sup>. Gregory chose to highlight this facet of Nectarius's career because the tax collector had always had a bad reputation in Christian and Greek literature. Tax collectors are known to the New Testament and mocked by comedy primarily as *τελώναι*<sup>166</sup>. Gregory's *φορογράφος* (154) is a hapax, whereas the term *πράκτωρ* (432; 612), besides being the good Attic form, has less of a comic connotation and a more serious, even intimidating aura<sup>167</sup>. The office is associated with dishonesty, and this feature is apparent in the treatment at II, 1, 12, 432–441<sup>168</sup>: having introduced his rival as tax collector, the poet goes on to ask him how he will dare to occupy the episcopal throne after he accumulated riches in such a disreputable way.

In this context, the function of the preceding catalogue of occupations is clear: Gregory lists behaviours that have bad moral associations to introduce the case at hand, that of Nectarius. In this light one can understand also Gregory's emphasis on "speed" (*ταχεῖα μεταστροφή*, 395; *τὸ τάχος*, 431) as regards the movement from immoral occupations to the episcopate: as the following tirade against Nectarius demonstrates, the poet's problem is not so much with Nectarius's occupation per se, but with his hasty election. The catalogue in II, 1, 12, 395–433 arouses more indignation at these hastily elections. The harsh contrast between previous life and episcopal duties brings home the point that time and trying are needed to make a good prelate. The underlying message of II, 1, 12, 395–433, as well as of II, 1, 13, 100–107, is specular to that of II, 1, 12, 154–175: all three catalogues justify the idea that one should be prepared, both intellectually and morally, to assume the role of bishop and that improvisation cannot be tolerated any longer.

If, however, the jobs listed in II, 1, 12, 154–175 and II, 1, 13, 100–107 were suspect for their social class, the behaviours listed in II, 1, 12, 395–433 are damning for their moral status. Yet each damns in its own way. In this respect, two jobs stand out, the attorney (*ῥητορεύων*, 415) and the judge (*δικάζων*, 420), because they are not morally reproachable in themselves, but only if the practitioner is dishonest—as Gregory

<sup>165</sup> McGuckin 2001a, 381–384.

<sup>166</sup> E.g.: Mt. 9:10–11; 11:19; 18:17; 21:31; Anaxippus *frag.* 1, 40 K.; Apollod. *Car. frag.* 13, 13 K..

<sup>167</sup> E.g.: Jes. 3:12 in the Septuaginta version; ὁ κριτής σε παραδώσει τῷ πράκτορι, καὶ ὁ πράκτωρ σε βαλεῖ εἰς φυλακὴν (Lc. 12:58); καὶ οὐκ ἔσονται μοι τῶν βαρβάρων οἱ πράκτορες φοβερώτεροι (Themist. *or.* 8, 115a 4).

<sup>168</sup> Ancient disdain towards tax collectors is demonstrated by Aspasia's definition of greedy people: καὶ τίνες εἰσὶν οἱ κατὰ τὴν λήψιν ὑπερβάλλοντες· εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ πανταχόθεν ἀξιοῦντες λαμβάνειν καὶ μηδὲν κέρδος αἰσχρὸν νομίζοντες, οἷον πορνοβοσκοὶ καὶ τελῶναι καὶ οἱ κατὰ μικρὰ δανείζοντες καὶ ἐπὶ πολλῷ τόκῳ πάντα γὰρ οὗτοι αἰσχροκερεῖς (Aspas. *in Aristot. eth. Nic.* 102, 19–22).

describes these examples to be. Indeed, these jobs were part of the world of the elites, who occupied most such posts<sup>169</sup>. Their negative features are commonplace, too. The judge is here represented as corrupt and violent. As regards corruption (Τὸ βῆμ' ἐποίεις ἔννομον ληστήριον, 421), this image had been a classic since Hesiod<sup>170</sup>. It was occasionally employed as a motif of slander or a real accusation to attack a political enemy<sup>171</sup>. In late antiquity, the corruption of judges was widespread, passively accepted even if theoretically deemed immoral<sup>172</sup>. For example, Palladas repeatedly accuses the *praefectus Aegypti* Damonicus—who was also supreme judge of Egypt—with the participle κλέπτων<sup>173</sup>. In the Bible, favouritism and corruption are the sins most commonly associated with judges<sup>174</sup>. The judge is also represented as dreadful and violent (σὺν ξίφει γυμνουμένω, 420), which agrees with contemporary reality, with its pervasive use of torture<sup>175</sup>. This connotation of the judge is found in the Bible, where sometimes God's judgement is symbolised by the sword<sup>176</sup>. It is also interesting to compare the description of the fugitive slave in II, 1, 12, 165–170 and that of the corrupt judge in 420–422: both end up “stealing” (κλέψαντες) through bullying (τυραννικῶς, 169; τυραννῶν, 422). That a slave would be dishonest is no surprise by itself, and the judges, as we have seen, also had a bad reputation, but the poem, through these lexical echoes, enhances the coincidence of theological preparation (which the slave lacks) and moral worth (which the corrupt judge lacks). In this way, socioeconomic invectives acquire a moral undertone, and at the same time they can be applied—even against the appearances of social success—to Nectarius.

Gregory represents the barrister as unnaturally perverting the laws through his words (στρέφων ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω, 416)<sup>177</sup>. The injustice of professional barristers was notorious in late antiquity<sup>178</sup>, but the trope goes back to Old Comedy and fourth-century orators, to the time when professional formation in public speaking (resulting in

169 Jones 1964, 479–484, 507, 510–515.

170 αὐτίκα γὰρ τρέχει Ὀρκος ἅμα σκολιῇσι δίκησιν / τῆς δὲ Δίκης ρόθος ἐλκομένης ἢ κ' ἄνδρες ἄγωσι / δωροφάγοι, σκολιῆς δὲ δίκης κρίνωσι θέμιστας· . . . ταῦτα φυλασσόμενοι, βασιλῆς, ἰθύνετε μύθους, / δωροφάγοι, σκολιέων δὲ δικέων ἐπὶ πάγχυ λάθεσθε. (Hesiod. *op.* 219–221; 263–264). Athenian comedy writers, though lawcourts are a big concern of their plays, do not lament corruption as a problem, since juries were popular and their system lacked any professional of law (Wohl 2014, 323–324).

171 Kelly 2012, 386.

172 Harries 1999, 153–171; Jones 1964, 496; Gregory's oxymoron is telling: Τὸ βῆμ' ἐποίεις ἔννομον ληστήριον, (II, 1, 12, 421).

173 *Anth. Gr.* 11, 283, 4–6; 285, 2–3; Jones/Martindale/Morris 1971, 242; Jones 1961, 479.

174 Ex. 23:26; Lev. 19:15; Dtn. 1:16–17; 23:2–3; 1Reg. 8:32; Jes. 1:23; 5:23; 10:1; Amos 5:12; 6:12; Mich. 3:11; 7:3; Prov. 6:19; 12:17; 18:15; 2Chron. 19:7.

175 Harries 1999, 156–158; Jones 1961, 519–520; cf. Brown's parallelism between process and exorcism at Brown 1981, 108–111.

176 Dtn. 25:2; Mt. 5:25; sword: Dtn. 32:41–42; Jes. 34:5–6.

177 Cf. Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1654, s.v. στρέφω II.

178 Jones 1964, 496; Agath. *Anth. Gr.* 11, 350.

παρασκευή, “preparation”) was at its beginning and looked upon with suspicion<sup>179</sup>; Pal-ladas, like Gregory, highlights the venality of lawyers but also describes a judge as a sophist<sup>180</sup>.

Incidentally, judge and attorney are also the only unequivocally professional activities listed, because in all other cases Gregory describes participation in disreputable activities without clarifying if the person described is effectively exercising the activity as his job. Indeed, μίμων καὶ θεάτρων ἐν μέσῳ (402) may mean direct participation as well as fruition, but the expression νῦν αὐτὸς at 404 seems to imply that the subject was spectator before, spectacle now. Φίλιππος (405) and the third-person πίπτων τις ἄρματηλάτης (407) exclude the possibility that the satirised person is firsthand chariot-ing, but whether Gregory has in mind a spectator or an investor in games is unclear<sup>181</sup>. Ῥητορεύων (415) and δικάζων (420), on the other hand, define the activity of the subject; finally, ἐστρέφου (425) and following verbs describe direct involvement, but given the occasion (γάμων), it is unclear whether these words refer to a professional involvement or simply participation in the festivities as a guest. The reason is that the common thread of the list is not so much profession but participation in all the paramount occasions of civic life that, in Christian thought, were notorious for their immorality: the theatre, the circus, the court, and wedding feasts<sup>182</sup>. Some of these occasions were scorned also by pagan authors, but the true insult here lies in the description of these activities in a way that could be universally damning in contemporary society.

As regards the theatre, Gregory's rival is too engaged in the show, going so far as to share the habits of theatre professionals *outside* the stage (402–403). Performers of mime and pantomime (the most widespread forms of theatre in late antiquity) were the subject of prejudice, especially as regarded their ambiguous sexuality and an alleged promiscuity outside the stage<sup>183</sup>. The circus elicits emotional reactions that are unbecoming in an educated man, and Gregory describes an excessive show of rage for a

179 Cf. Aristoph. *Ach.* 676–718; Cratinus *frag.* 197 K.; Andoc. 1, 1; Lys. *or.* 19, 2; Isaeus 4, 5; 8, 5.

180 Venality: cf. τὰς δίκας ἀπημπούεις (II, 1, 12, 415) with *Anth. Gr.* 10, 48; sophistry: Ἐπεὶ δικάζεις καὶ σοφιστεύεις λόγοις, *Anth. Gr.* 10, 92, 1.

181 Meier 1989, 118.

182 The classic treatment of the social significance of spectacles in Antiquity is Veyne 1976 but see also Cameron 1976; Potter 1999. The difficult relationship of early Christianity with the shows has been thoroughly studied: Veyne 2009, 479–558 (on gladiators); Lugaresi 2008; Weismann 1972; Jürgens 1927. On mime and theatre in particular: Webb 2008, 139–216. Condemnations of dance are relevant both for the bad fame of theatre shows and of wedding feasts: Meier 1989, 120–121; Webb 2008, 26, 180. On the wariness of the Christians towards secular courts: Τοῦ μὲν τις ὑμῶν πρᾶγμα ἔχων πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον κρίνεσθαι ἐπὶ τῶν ἀδίκων καὶ οὐχὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀγίων; ἢ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι οἱ ἅγιοι τὸν κόσμον κρινούσιν; καὶ εἰ ἐν ὑμῖν κρίνεται ὁ κόσμος, ἀνάξιοι ἐστε κριτηρίων ἐλαχίστων (1Cor. 6:1–2); Harries 1999, 191–192.

183 Webb 2008, 139–167; Meier 1989, 117. Leppin 1992, 160–168 is also useful, because it explains the apparent ambiguity of Western Roman attitudes towards actors and performers as a consequent strategy of integration and preservation of the social order.

defeat in the circus (405–410)<sup>184</sup>. There is a wealth of parallel texts from the same time period, highlighting the visible reactions of the public at the circus<sup>185</sup>. This insistence is due to the powerful etiquette of the late antique elites, proscribing any excessive show of emotions, most of all of rage, which was also considered a sign of unmanliness<sup>186</sup>. The attorney and the judge take on the worst traits of their profession, cunning amorality and dreadful and violent greed (415–424). Finally, participation in wedding feasts is marked by unmanly dances and excessive drinking (425–428). Gregory's description is rich with connotations: the χορευταῖς θηλυδρίαις (425) imply the perversion of natural gender roles, expressed also with the verb ἐστρέφω, which hints at something more than the simple movements of the dance, echoing the perversion of law by the attorney (στρέφω, 416). The same connotation is carried by the verb λυγίζω in 427. Meier also cites Aristoph. *ran.* 775 (τῶν ἀντιλογιῶν καὶ λυγισμῶν καὶ στροφῶν), an application of these two verbs to the realm of rhetoric<sup>187</sup>. Indeed, in Aristophanes the new rhetoric was often associated with sexually licentious and gender-bending behaviours<sup>188</sup>. This would even more strongly link the unmanly show put on by the would-be bishop in line 425–428 with the perversion of laws by the attorney in line 416. Again, Meier correctly identifies the denotative sense of the “Lydians” (Λυδαῖς) in 427 as referring to female flute players, but he fails to notice the connotation of decadent luxury associated with the Lydians in Greek literature<sup>189</sup>. The transmitted κόρδαξ nicely plays in this connotation, through its link with theatre, drunkenness, and obscenity<sup>190</sup>. One of the common threads of all these insults is Gregory's undermining of the virility of his adversary: theatre life, excessive venting of rage, crookery through rhetoric, and finally effeminate dancing are not only behaviours contrary to propriety; they signal in the mind of late antique males a serious defect of masculinity, such as to render a man unsuitable to public life, as well as to the clergy, since canon 1 of Nicaea forbade churches to consecrate eunuchs.

<sup>184</sup> Meier 1989, 118.

<sup>185</sup> τηλόθεν ἔσκοπίαζον ἐπειγομένων δρόμον ἵππων / ὣν ὁ μὲν εἰστίκει πεφοβημένος, ὃς δὲ τινάσσων / δάκτυλον ἄκρον ἔσειεν ἐπισπέρχων ἐλατῆρα, / ἄλλος ἀμιλλητῆρι πόθῳ δεδονημένος ἵππων / ἵππομανῇ νόον εἶχεν ὁμόδρομον ἡνιοχῆος / καὶ τις ἐοῦ προκέλευθον ἰδὼν δρόμον ἡνιοχῆος / χερσὶν ἐπεπλάταγχε καὶ ἴαχε θυιάδι φωνῇ / θαρσύνων, γελῶν, τρομέων, ἐλατῆρι κελεύων. (Nonn. *Dion.* 37, 269–278); λαοῖς δ' ἔμπεσε λύσσα· καὶ ἦρισαν ἄλλος ἐπ' ἄλλῳ, / συνθεσίας τεύχοντες ἀτεκμάρτου περὶ νίκης / ἔσσομένης· τὰ δὲ δῶρα θυελλοπόδων χάριν ἵππων / ἢ τρίπος ἢ ἐλέβης ἢ φάσγανον ἢ βοεῖν / καὶ ναέτης ναετῆρι, φίλος δ' ἐρίδανεν ἑταίρω, / γηραλέος δὲ γέροντι, νέψ νεός, ἀνέρι δ' ἀνῆρ. (439–444); Greg. *Naz. or.* 43, 15, 4; Greg. *Nyss. vit. Moys.* 1.

<sup>186</sup> Brown 2008, 10–12; Brown 1992, 48–58.

<sup>187</sup> Meier 1989, 120.

<sup>188</sup> See the texts mentioned at Hubbard 2007, 493–495.

<sup>189</sup> Meier 1989, 120; Gazzano 2017, 42–44, with notes; Herodt. 1, 94, 1 says that the only tradition distinguishing Lydians and Greeks is that Lydians prostitute their daughters.

<sup>190</sup> On the problem posed by this word, see Meier 1989, 120; I concur with Rossi 2022 in believing the transmitted text to be correct and that Gregory took the word κόρδαξ not as referring to the dance, but to the dancer.

Yet this is only one-half of the scorn: these already insulting remarks are contrasted, one by one, with the countenance and functions that the bishop should take, so that the insults serve the wider point of highlighting the inadequacy of candidates with those features, vividly and with a moralistic connotation. In this respect, the images evoked at the beginning of the passage are very significant: Gregory is apparently astonished by the sudden change of character in the candidates he is going to describe (ὦ τῆς ταχείας τῶν τρόπων μεταστροφῆς!, 395), but in reality he knows full well how these changes are illusory, since they are described as masks and dice, two notoriously unstable objects. The mask signals that though inthronisation may happen in a few moments, the depths of the new bishop's heart are not prepared for his task, which is to him something external and false and something that dissimulates his true nature. The metaphor of the clothing in 423–424 (οὐδ' ἐσθῆτά τις / οὕτως ἀμείβει ῥαδίως, ὥς σὺ τρόπους) has the same function. The dice, on the other hand, see the situation from the point of view of those who must select new bishops; speed is still an element (throwing dice is quicker than looking carefully for a good candidate), but here it is particularly important to note the low esteem Gregory has for “random” methods of selection, although the church accepted them (§3.3). Another important clue is the recurring proverb on Saul prophesying<sup>191</sup>. The very same harsh contrasts involved in the following catalogue serve to debunk this apparent change of character. The concept is then recapitulated in the two concluding lines (II, 1, 12, 430–431).

Therefore, Gregory plays with the contrast between the insults and the description of the bishop's functions. “Theatres and mimes” (μίμων καὶ θεάτρων, 402) contrast with the “strange spectacle” (ξένη θεωρία, 404) of the new bishop, completely unapt to his role. This way, the poet hints at the almost theatrical role of the bishop during the liturgy or at his function as an example (§2.2.3). The “dust” (κόνιν, 405) furiously thrown contrasts with “prayers and pious thoughts” (εὐχὰς ἢ νοήματ' εὐσεβῆ, 406), both ironically moving upwards as offerings to God; thus, the neurotic downfall of the horse-fanatic, mirroring the fall of his favourite, contrasts with the bishop's appearance of decorum and restraint (πίπτων τις ἀρματηλάτης . . . ἐκ φρενῶν πεσόντι καὶ μεμνηότι / νῦν εὐσταλῆς τις καὶ βλέπων αἰδῶ μόνην, 407; 410–411). The same bishop, however, is still addicted to the races, so much that he “runs” to them as they had run before (ἵππος ἐν δρόμοις . . . πρὸς τὸ ἀρχαῖον δράμοις, 408; 412). Even the metaphor of the fresh sapling is expressed in terms of running (ἐκφυγῶν βίαν . . . εἰς ταῦτόν τρέχει, 413–414). “Prayers and thoughts” in this context (εὐχὰς, νοήματα) may hint both at the bishop's liturgical role and at his mystical mediation, a theme Gregory often underlines with the word νοήματα (see §2.1.3.1; §3.1.2; §3.2.3.3). The relationship of the dishonest lawyer with justice (δίκας, 415; δίκη, 417; στάθμη δικαία, 418) is turned upside-down when he becomes a bishop and is sarcastically compared with the just judge par excellence, Daniel (δικαστὴς καὶ Δανιὴλ τις, 419). The judge in the space of one day changes from a dreadful bully to a lovable

<sup>191</sup> See II, 1, 12, 401; II, 1, 13, 99 and §2.1.2.1 n. 48.

person (σὺν ξίφει γυμνουμένῳ, 420, vs. ὡς ἡμέρὸς μοι σήμερον, 423). Lawyer and judge serve to remind readers that the bishop too has juridical responsibilities (§3.1.1), and the stress respectively on justice and mildness echoes the idea of reconciling justice and mercy in judgement (§3.1.4.2). The role of σωφρονιστῆς (428) contrasts both with sexually relaxed behaviour (ἐν χορευταῖς ἐστρέφου θελυδρίαις, Λυδαῖς ἐν μέσαις, λυγίζων, 425–427) and with the wantonness induced by excessive drinking (πότοις γαυρούμενος, 427). However, it also confirms the episcopal role of disciplinarian (§3.1.4) and of guardian of the ascetics (§3.2). The whole rhetorical procedure is summed up in the “jewel” line 430: Σίμων Μάγος χθές, σήμερον Πέτρος Σίμων.

In this tirade, again, we find an example of Gregory's three-pronged literary strategy. The jabs against the past activities of bishops are all constructed as an inversion of the ideal bishop and his activities, but at the same time they are strongly connected with Nectarius through the theme of hasty ordinations and, therefore, with Gregory's biography. Thus, personal invective, the formulation of an ideal, and the wider invective against the episcopate are all connected.

The other passage, II, 1, 12, 610–630, is another good demonstration of this strategy, since its invective sets a counterexample to the ideal ascetic-bishop of the preceding lines (576–609; §3.2.2), while at the same time attacking Nectarius, Gregory's real life rival:

Τοιαῦτα κάλλη καὶ σύ μοι φράζειν τὰ σά· (610)

Οἶκος, γυνὴ σφριγῶσα, τεκνίων πόθος,  
Κτήσις, κελευσταί, πράκτορες, βοαί, δίκαι,  
Ἀπαντα μεστὰ φροντίδων καὶ πραγμάτων·  
Treal-lifeεγμαινουσα τῶν ἐδωδῖμων

Ταῖς ὀψοποιῶν καὶ κερασμάτων πλοκαῖς (615)

Γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης καρποφορούντων ἐντέροις  
(Ἐξ ὧν ὁ νοῦς βαπτίζεται· οὐδ' ἔχει πλάτος),  
Μύροις, γέλωσι, ψαλμάτων συναυλίας,  
Οἷς κυμβάλων δεῖ καὶ ποδὸς ψοφημάτων.

Ἄλλοι δὲ λύσσης ἔμπλεοι τῆς συμφύτου, (620)

Νοσοῦντες, οἰδαίνοντες, ἐστιλβωμένοι  
Γυναιξίν, ἄρτι νυμφίοι, τὸ μέτριον,  
Οὕτω λύσαντες παστάδας γαμηλίου  
ἢ καὶ πόθοις συζῶντες ἀζύγοις ἔτι

Πρὶν καὶ παρειὰν ἀνδρικῶς κοσμήματι, (625)

Θριξίν, καλύψαι, παντελῶς ἀρτίχνοοι,  
Νέοι τὸ σῶμα, τὸν τρόπον νεώτεροι,

Ἦ καὶ παλαιῶν ἡμερῶν πλήρεις κακῶν,  
Ἐπειτ' ἀσάρκων εἰσὶ τέκνων προστάται,

Ἀ πνεῦμα τίκτει σαρκὸς ἐξενωμένον . . . (630)

(II, 1, 12, 610–630)



Show me, prithee, such beautiful things among yours! (610)  
 A house, a plump woman, desire of children,  
 wealth, butlers, exactors, cries, lawsuits,  
 everything full of worries and works;  
 a table swollen with provisions  
 by the combinations of drinks and cooks, (615)  
 who bring their fruit to guts by sea and by land  
 (by which the mind is drowned and loses scope)  
 and by perfumes, laughter, consorts of tunes  
 that need cymbals and noise of feet.  
 Others then, filled with the folly of nature, (620)  
 addicted and swelling, all spruced up  
 for women, just married—to say the least—  
 having still to open the bridal chamber  
 or even living together with their lovers still unmarried,  
 even before their cheek is covered with beard, (625)  
 the ornament of men, just in their prime,  
 young in the body, younger in the behaviour,  
 or, on the contrary, laden with vices of days past,  
 these are the leaders of not-carnal children,  
 whom the Spirit, averse to flesh, begets, (630)

This passage shares the same context as II, 1, 12, 395–433, in that both are part of the longer discussion on the role of sacraments in bishops' elections, and another common point is that both attack would-be bishops for their engagement in elite life. The difference is that, while lines 395–433 are concerned with the public occasions of elite life, such as theatre, hippodrome, and weddings, lines 610–630 stigmatise private matters: if the former passage opened with the keyword *πρόσωπον* (397), the latter pushes the *οἶκος* (611) in the limelight.

Two characters of this invective are worth highlighting. First—and this is important for identifying in Nectarius the direct aim of the lines—this is the description of no common house or family, but rather of a decidedly high-class one. This is demonstrated by the reference to riches (*κτῆσις*, 612). This *κτῆσις* is no mere little property if it requires such legal and fiscal efforts (*πράκτορες*, *βοαί*, *δίκαι*, 612) and even a degree of delegation (the *κελευσταί*) to be maintained, which engenders preoccupations (*φροντίδων*, 613) in its owner; the recourse to formal litigations (*δίκαι*), in particular, was practically reserved to the higher classes, given the amount of corruption and the time required by these proceedings<sup>192</sup>. The other signal of high social class is the description of a lavish banquet: fancy and abundant food, imported from all over the world (614–616),

<sup>192</sup> Similarly, Synesius asks to be spared from the preoccupations that go with excessive riches as well as those linked to poverty: *μή μοι χθονίους / ὁμβρους ἀφένου / κρίνειας, ἀναξ, / ἵνα μὴ τὰ θεοῦ/ ἄσυχος εἶην· / μὴδὲ κατηφῆς / πενία μελάνθροισι / ἐγγριμπτομένα / περὶ γὰρ ἔλκοι / φροντίδα θυμοῦ. / ἄμφω ψυχὰν / βρίθει περὶ γὰρ, / ἄμφω δὲ νόου / ἐπίληθα πέλει, / ὅτε μὴ σὺ, μάκαρ, / ὀρέγοις ἀλκάν* (Synes. *hymn.* 1, 512–527). On the costs of justice: Jones 1964, 499.

perfumes, music and dance (618–619) are the ingredients of a premium quality symposium, one the commoner could hardly afford himself. Since Nectarius was a civil servant and a senator, these descriptions work very well against him. Moreover, they balance the previous invective against low-class jobs (154–175): if three-D's jobs and their practitioners certainly lack the skills necessary to lead a community and often also lack the moral worth to receive the Holy Orders, it is also true that the public and private life of contemporary elites are morally bankrupt from a Christian point of view. Therefore, class alone is by no means a guarantee of worthiness; much to the contrary, taken by itself it is a clue of immorality.

The second element of interest here is the sense in which the private life of higher classes is immoral. In this question, the context plays a key role: before the passage at 610–630 there was the portrait of the ideal ascetic, and right after it the reference to the bishop's role as head of the ascetics in his community (§3.2; here, 629–633). In this respect, 610–630 work much the same as 395–433, in that they overturn one of the bishop's tasks in describing the inadequate candidate. In fact, the private life of the late antique rich man is portrayed as the perfect opposite of ascetic values. If fasting and the kind of nourishment enjoyed by the ascetic were of the utmost importance for Gregory, so also the culinary possibilities elite life offers are one of his main criticisms<sup>193</sup>. Indeed, excess in food and drink work on the mind (*νοῦς*) in a diametrically opposite way to asceticism, effecting a downward movement as opposed to the ascending one of contemplation<sup>194</sup>. The perfume of the rich contrasts with the nudity of the ascetic, the laughter of the one with the other's tears, the mundane songs and dances of the former with the psalm singing of the latter<sup>195</sup>. Furthermore, the rich man is always preoccupied with money, whereas the ascetic, having renounced money, is preoccupied only with Scripture<sup>196</sup>. Finally, Gregory evaluates sexuality cautiously: chastity did not figure prominently in his ascetic portrayal, and accordingly, his usage of attributes in the description of elite life shows that he considered marriage a problem only under certain condi-

193 Cf. Τράπεζα φλεγμαίνουσα τῶν ἐδωδίων / Ταῖς ὀψοποιῶν καὶ κερασμάτων πλοκαῖς / Γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης καρποφορούντων ἐντέροις (II, 1, 12, 614–616) with (τί γὰρ τάφοις δεῖ εἰσφέρειν τὸν χοῦν ὅλον, / Σκώληξί τ' εἶναι δαψιλεστέραν τροφὴν, / Γεννῶντα, καὶ τρέφοντα τοὺς γεννωμένους;) / ... Καὶ γαστρὸς ὕβριν ἐνδεεῖ καθύβρισε / Τροφῇ, τὸ θνήσκειν μνώμενος καθ' ἡμέραν. / Τροφὴν γὰρ οἶδεν ἀγγέλων ἀπλὴν Θεόν. (580–582; 591–593) and καὶ μάζῃ στενῇ / Βίον γλυκαίνονθ' (74–75). For this and the following notes, cf. §3.2.2.

194 Cf. Εἶς ὢν ὁ νοῦς βαπτίζεται, οὐδ' ἔχει πλάτος (II, 1, 12, 617) with Καὶ νοῦ πρὸς ὕψος ἐκ πάχους ἐκδημία (579).

195 Cf. Μύροις, γέλωσι, ψαλμάτων συνουλίαις, / Οἷς κυμβάλων δεῖ καὶ ποδὸς ψοφημάτων (II, 1, 12, 618–619) with Οὗτος χαμεύνης, καὶ κόνει βεβρωμένος, / Καὶ σάρκας ἐξέτηξεν ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις, / Ψαλμωδίας τε καὶ στάσει νυχθημέρῳ / ... Καὶ δακρύων ἔσμηξε πηγαῖς τοὺς σπύλους / ... Οὗτος τὸ καλὸν σῶμα (πῶς γὰρ οὐ καλὸν / Τὸ τῶν ἀρίστων) μαργάροις συνέκλεισε, / Δεσμοῖς σιδηροῖς, λαθρίῳ κοσμήματι (576–578: 583; 602–604).

196 Cf. Κτήσις, κελυσταί, πράκτορες, βοαί, δίκαι, / Ἄπαντα μεστὰ φροντίδων καὶ πραγμάτων (II, 1, 12, 612–613) with Οὗτος πέννης νῦν, ἦν δ' ὅτε ζάπλουτος ἦν / Ἄλλ' ἐκβολὴν ἔστερξε, καὶ κοῦφος πλέει, / Ῥίψας πέννησιν, οὐ βυθῶ, τὸ φορτίον. (595–597) and Καὶ νοῦ μερίμναις, ἐν θεοπνεύστοις Γραφαῖς (57).

tions, mainly unrestrained sexual passion<sup>197</sup>. The detail of the τεκνίων πόθος (611) is another jab at the aristocratic nature of these vices, because those who had riches and a social position had to be much more concerned about its continuance in the future; indeed, procreation implied the preservation of power as much as the condescending to passion, so that the “desire of offspring” was an important aim of the more subversive tendencies of late antique asceticism, to which the Cappadocians were all but alien<sup>198</sup>.

One last observation on this passage in 610–630 is that the hedonism so obviously associated with the upper class is then mirrored in more general invectives on the immorality of bishops, without regard for precise socioeconomic facets. To such invectives I shall presently turn, after a brief summary of Nectarius’s figure in the poem, or, more correctly, the lack thereof. Indeed, Gregory’s archrival for the throne of Constantinople is ever present behind the poet’s considerations on the ideal bishop and his invectives against bad ones, and yet Nectarius does not appear as an individual character in the poems. In the narrative passages, the bishops are described and act as a choral character, causing Gregory’s downfall. On the contrary, Nectarius not only is never named, but he does not appear even as an actor or a described individual. The two pieces of invective more clearly relatable to him, which I have just analysed, are formally second-person accusations: if ever, Nectarius appears as the formal addressee of Gregory’s tirades. This direct character of the invectives and their enumerative form conspire to elude the fixity of a πρόσωπον, of a literary personality beyond the shallow masks of the stereotyped good bishop and of the bad candidate. For these reasons, and differently from Gregory’s own self-writing, Nectarius appears in the poems not as a narrative or descriptive entity, but as an exclusively rhetorical one, as the real-life and internal aim of Gregory’s attacks. His individuality is not immediately clear from the hail of scathing remarks from the poet; rather, the reader must reconstruct that identity, knowing the real-world referents of those remarks, mainly the senatorial rank and past civil service of Nectarius. He is alluded to more than referenced. From this literary construction it may be argued that Gregory’s intended audience knew perfectly well Nectarius’s profile and knew what to do with Gregory’s attacks. The very same Nectarius, if he came to know the poem addressing him directly, could recognise himself in Gregory’s generic interlocutor, although the poet had reserved to himself a space of plausible deniability.

<sup>197</sup> See γυνή σφριγῶσα, τεκνίων πόθος (II, 1, 12, 611); λύσης ἔμπλεοι τῆς συμφύτου, / Νοσοῦντες, οἰδαίνοντες, ἐστὶ λβωμένοι / Γυναιξίν, ἄρτι νυμφίοι, τὸ μέτριον, / Οὕτω λύσαντες παστάδας γαμηλίου / ἢ καὶ πόθοις συζῶντες ἀζύγοις (620–622). More on these lines in the next section.

<sup>198</sup> Brown 2008, 32, 285–304. Cf. the τεκνίων πόθος of II, 1, 12, 611 with Ποθὼν λαβεῖν ἔνδυμα τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν at 591, which plays out perfectly the contrast between sexual desire as a means of procreation and so of biological victory over death and the ascetic desire to win death in Christ (here expressed with the Syrian metaphor of clothing, ἔνδυμα). This contrast is the defining character of the Cappadocian view of sexuality according to Brown.

After all, Gregory himself admits obliquely to the allusive nature of his attacks twice at II, 1, 12, 21–32 and 809–810<sup>199</sup>. These passages, significantly located at the beginning and at the end of II, 1, 12, are the hermeneutical key to Gregory's invectives. Just as the poet declares that he won't name names, instead addressing his remarks only to the bad bishops, he compels us to find the real people alluded to by the impersonal lists of vices and sins, without tying his own hands to a particular interpretation. Moreover, the preemptive defence that those who will be offended are thereby admitting their fault serves to quench the likely opposition to his program and his version of the events of 381; through it, Gregory compels his opponents to consider him a truthful witness and a trustworthy advisor; otherwise, they will become the object of his not-so-anonymous invectives.

On the other side, the invectives also have a generic significance for the episcopate. When taken in the context of the poems, the catalogic invectives we have examined until now highlight once more the basic dialectic of Gregory's discourse on the episcopate, that between charisma and competence. This dialectic animated Gregory's discussion of Christian culture (§3.1.3.3), which began with the problem of the incompetence of bishops but also refused to acquiesce to the mechanisms of the secular elite network as embodied in its education, *paideia*. Similarly, his discussion of the selection procedure (§3.3.2.1), while it marks a strong departure from the charismatic conceptions current in the church, also preserves the orthodox view of sacraments against pagan criticisms. The two invectives of II, 1, 12 (in 154–175 and 395–433) serve indeed as introduction to those two discussions; therefore, they reproduce or anticipate that same dialectic. Gregory's classism, so clear in 154–175 as well as in II, 1, 13, 100–107, has no positive counterpart in the upper classes, since those too are belittled in comparison to the episcopal office. Among the immoral occupations in II, 1, 12, 395–433, the severe judge and the eloquent attorney stand side by side with the effeminate actor and the lascivious flute player. According to Gregory's formulation, it is not so much the initial condition that poses a problem; in other words, it is not as if to have been humble or immoral, per se, disqualifies a person from the bishop's office. Instead, the poet disapproves of the speed of the passage from one condition to the other and objects to the number of people passing through. Both catalogues of II, 1, 12 highlight the speed with which humble or immoral people reached the episcopal dignity<sup>200</sup>. The idea of speed

199 Οὐ γὰρ ὀνομαστὶ τοὺς λόγους ποιήσομαι, / Τοῦ μὴ δοκεῖν ἐλέγχειν ἃ κρύπτειν χρεών. / Ἀλλ' οὐδὲ πάντων ἐξ ἴσης μεμνήσομαι /—Μή μοι τοσοῦτον ἐκδρομήσειε στόμα—, / Πολλοὺς γὰρ οἶδα καὶ λόγου τοῦ κρείσσονος· / Ἀλλ' ὅστις ἐν κακοῖς τε καὶ κακῶν πέρα, / Οὗτος κρατεῖσθω καὶ δαμαζέσθω τὰ νῦν. / Τεμεῖ τοῦ χειρόν ἢ μάχαιρα τοῦ λόγου. / Τί τοῦτο; δείξεις· ἂν μάχη πρὸς τὸν λόγον, / Σαυτοῦ προδήλως ἐκφανῇ κατήγορος. / Τὸ δ' οὖν ἐμὸν τοιοῦτο· βαλλέτω με πᾶς· / Πόρρωθέν εἰμι τοῖς λίθοις ἡρμωσμένος (II, 1, 12, 21–32); Ταῦτα πρὸς ὑμᾶς τοὺς κακοὺς ὑπὲρ καλῶν / Οἷς εἴ τις ἄχθεθ', εὖρεν ὃν ζητεῖ λόγος (II, 1, 12, 809–810).

200 ἄνω τρέχουσι κάνθαροι πρὸς οὐρανόν (II, 1, 12, 170); ὦ τῆς ταχείας τῶν τρόπων μεταστροφῆς (395); κωμικὸν πρόσωπον ἀθρόως τεθέν (397); χθές (402; 415; 420; 425; 430); Δανιήλ τις ἀθρόως (419); Φεῦ τοῦ τάχους! φεῦ, ἀντ' ἁλώπεκος λέων! (431).

is less explicit in the first passage (154–175), but the references to the signs that past occupations left on the bishops who had practiced them suggest, all the same, a rushed election<sup>201</sup>. The herald's discourse of II, 1, 13, instead, attacks the great number of people aspiring to the episcopate, which is a sign of faulty selection.

Now, speed is an important factor of charisma, because those who have quickly risen to authority from unlikely backgrounds cannot justify that authority either through tradition or reason; they must claim something else—namely, any form of charisma recognised by their followers. This is even more important in Christianity, because one of its core narratological elements is indeed the unlikely and sudden reversal of fate, the conversion or the transformation of the highest into the most abject and vice versa<sup>202</sup>. The perfect paradigm of such oscillations is the very model of every bishop—namely, St. Paul, who becomes a pillar of the church after being a fierce persecutor, thanks to an unexpected vision<sup>203</sup>. Conversion and reversal of fate, from abjection to glory, are connected in Paul's self-presentation as an abortion (ἐκτρώμα), and then continued in his preaching: the scandal of the cross, which is at the basis of Paul's preaching, represents another form of this paradox<sup>204</sup>. In such a context, Gregory's invectives are very embarrassing, as he himself admits by discussing the career of the apostles (II, 1, 12, 192–264) and the conversion of Zacchaeus (II, 1, 12, 454–464), two episodes among the many in the New Testament that may have been used against his argument.

The theme of the great number in II, 1, 13 is more difficult to link to charisma, if one assumes this to be something unique or rare that marks out single leaders from the masses. However, the point here is not the claim of charisma and power, but the situation such claims create: if everyone wants to be bishop, then nobody will obey the bishops. In other words, Gregory wants to damn the idea of hasty ordination by tying it to the risk of anarchy. Now, charismatic communities do tend towards egalitarianism, whereas hierarchy often forms later<sup>205</sup>. The church of Acts, in particular, had egalitarian elements. Paradigmatic of this attitude is the opening of Peter's speech in Acts 2, right after the Pentecost, where he quotes extensively from the prophet Joel: Peter equates the church born on Pentecost with the eschatological Israel, in which all the people

201 οὕτω... ἐκνευμένοι (II, 1, 12, 164); πρὶν καὶ τὸ τίμημ' εἰσενεγκεῖν δεσπόταις (166).

202 Averincev 1988, 117–120; Auerbach 2015, 44–46, 48; Ratzinger 2000, 239–241.

203 Gal. 1:13–14; Phil. 3:6; Act. 9.

204 ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡς περὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὥφθη κάμοι. Ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι ὁ ἐλάχιστος τῶν ἀποστόλων ὃς οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανὸς καλεῖσθαι ἀπόστολος, διότι ἐδίωξα τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ· χάριτι δὲ θεοῦ εἰμι ὃ εἰμι, καὶ ἡ χάρις αὐτοῦ ἡ εἰς ἐμέ οὐ κενὴ ἐγενήθη, ἀλλὰ περισσότερον αὐτῶν πάντων ἐκοπίασα, οὐκ ἐγὼ δὲ ἀλλ' ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ [ἡ] σὺν ἐμοί (1Cor. 15:8–10). On the scandal of the cross: 1Cor. 1:17–25; 2:1–5; 2:13–15; 1Thess. 1:5. This imagery deeply influenced Christian culture into the Middle Ages: Averincev 1988, 287–299.

205 Weber 1922, 141, 144–145.

have faculty to prophesy (and therefore to teach)<sup>206</sup>. Ephrem confronted the idea of a collective magisterium at CN 19, 7:

ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ	ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ	ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ	ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ	ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ	ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ	ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ

(CN 19, 7)

Ephrem's position is not entirely clear, because it brings together two slightly contradictory Bible passages, Num. 11 and Num. 17. Num. 11, the episode of Eldad and Medad, endorses decentralised prophecy, whereas Num. 17, the story of Korah and Dathan, seems to criticise it. Since Moses in the previous stanza (CN 19, 6) was the type of Valgash (and Joshua of Abraham), I take Ephrem to mean that he advises Abraham to treat eventual dissent as Valgash did (§4.2), with kindness and comprehension if it stays within the community and does not put hierarchy in discussion, but to exclude those who claim positions on the basis of charisma. Similarly to Ephrem, Gregory defends against the dangers of charisma primarily by reference Old Testament and pagan models, eschewing the egalitarian church of the New Testament<sup>208</sup>.

Gregory's literary strategy consists in highlighting these contrasts: charisma against competence, low-class against educated, the abject called to the highest office, and so on. The function of these contrasts, however, is radically different from the function of such contrasts in the New Testament. First, Gregory moves to and fro in these dialectics in order to find a synthesis; for example, as regards teaching (§3.1.3.3), a new, distinctively Christian and ascetic, culture should characterise the bishops; as regards selection (§3.3.2.1), Gregory reinforces the previous idea, comparing the bishop to professionals rather than civil authorities and charismatic teachers. Thus, by manipulating the extremes, Gregory can present his preferred solution as the "middle way". This strategy is a fundamental feature of his way of thinking, as other scholars have already observed in regard to Trinitarian doctrine and the contrast between active and contemplative life<sup>209</sup>. No doubt, the strategy has rational advantages, in that it allows for correcting the faults of one position with the virtues of its opposite; but it also has a very practical political value. Through this approach, Gregory can relegate his rivals to the

<sup>206</sup> καὶ ἔσται ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, λέγει ὁ θεός, ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα, καὶ προφητεύσουσιν οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν καὶ αἱ θυγατέρες ὑμῶν καὶ οἱ νεανίσκοι ὑμῶν ὁράσεις ὀψονται καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ὑμῶν ἐνυπνίοις ἐνυπνιασθήσονται (Act. 2:17=Joel 3:1).

<sup>207</sup> "The love of Moses abides in you, / whose love is a love of discernment, // and whose zeal is a zeal of understanding; / when Korah and Dathan split away, // earth split apart below them, / and with a split a split was ended; // through Eldad and Medad was known, / that all his will is this, // that all his people prophesied. / **Blessed is he who was pleased in his will!**"

<sup>208</sup> On Old Testament types in II, 1, 13 see the analysis at §3.3.2.2.

<sup>209</sup> §3.1.1.3 n. 52.

extremes, while rallying support to the centre for his position—one wonders how much this attitude was influenced by Constantius's strategy in dealing with the Arian crisis, which took place when Gregory was still young<sup>210</sup>. In the particular case of our poems, the two extremes are quite naturally Nectarius and Maximus, variously represented to fit into the narrative more suitable to our poet.

Finally, in these catalogues the contrast between abjection (either social or moral) and excellence also has the function of scandalising the audience. The catalogues multiply, insist on, and enrich this contrast to elicit a primal reaction of disgust. This primal reaction is not contradicted by the ensuing synthesis, which exists in fact to correct that previous state of affairs. The emotional motor of Gregory's proposal for the episcopate is indeed the disgust these catalogues convey. This usage of the contrast between abject and excellent goes against typically Christian attitudes and is more coherent from the point of view of Greco-Roman antiquity. It has, in other words, a truly iambic quality. Yet this means, from a literary point of view, that Gregory's poetic is still that of classical literature: a slave who wants to teach the truth about God is something to laugh about, not an epiphany of God's power. Consequently, since these lines were written for an audience, and since that audience had to be moved and persuaded, we have to admit that Gregory's audience, though surely Christian, still had an essentially classicising taste.

### 5.2.3 Immorality

If the socioeconomic invective of II, 1, 12, 154–175 introduced Gregory's discussion of the intellectual prerequisite for the episcopate (see §5.2.1 and §3.1.3.3), another iambic catalogue (II, 1, 12, 330–354), this time of vices, introduces Gregory's long discussion of the moral problems of candidates for the bishop's office (see §3.1.4.1–2; §3.3.2.1). This list has a parallel in the beginning of the herald's speech in II, 1, 13, 73–89.

Even though the catalogue in II, 1, 13 refers to candidates for the episcopate, under the pretence of offering a bishop's post to unworthy people, and the catalogue in II, 1, 12 refers to reigning bishops, the two catalogues present many similarities<sup>211</sup>. Both passages are lists, and both apparently refrain from attacking bishops on the basis of their social background; the passages are concerned only with moral failures. A proof of this mainly moral concern is a structural similarity shared with other invectives: the texts begin with general labels of wrong behaviour (ἀθλιώτεροί τινες, II, 1, 12, 333; κακίης

<sup>210</sup> On this characteristic of Constantius' doctrinal policy: Elm 2012, 45–48; Simonetti 1975, 347–348.

<sup>211</sup> In the iambic poem the discourse on morality continues the one on ignorance, from which it is clear that the consequences of the unreliability of current bishops is the question: τί χειραγωγείς μὴ βλέπων; ... οὗτοι μὲν οὕτως· οἱ δὲ καὶ ἥσσον κακόν (II, 1, 12, 327; 330); at II, 1, 13, the herald invites new people to the episcopate: Δεῦρ' ἵτε θαρσαλέοι. πᾶσι θρόνος εὐρύς ἔτοιμος (II, 1, 13, 89).

ἐπιβήτορες, αἰσχεα φωτῶν, II, 1, 13, 75)<sup>212</sup>. Among such labels, ἀτάσθαλος, found at the end of the generic invective in II, 1, 17, 33, is of particular importance. Not only does the word occur also in II, 1, 13, 66, where the episcopate is defined χώρον ἀτασθαλίας τε μόρου τε, but the nexus also echoes Zeus's first speech in the *Odyssey*: οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ / σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὑπὲρ μόρον ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν (Hom. *Od.* 1, 33–34). Ἀτασθαλίη is an important theme of the *Odyssey*, justifying the end of many characters, notably Penelope's suitors, in terms of theological justice<sup>213</sup>. If Gregory consciously alluded to it, as the parallel between Homer's ἀτασθαλίῃσιν... ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν and II, 1, 13, 196 (ἀτασθαλίη μογέοντες) seems to imply, the word may reinforce his narrative of historical decadence in the church (§3.1.3.1; §3.1.4.1; §3.3.2.2). Beginning from the sources of these catalogues, and through a comparison with passages already examined (§5.2.2), I will examine the significance of the vices Gregory laments. These are primarily high-class vices, which signal the bishop's undue dependence on political power.

As regards the sources of such direct invective against bishops, the iambic catalogue is naturally of the utmost importance (see §5.2.1)<sup>214</sup>. However, this form of expression also has a long-standing New Testament tradition. On one side, there are lists of sins already in Paul's letters and in passages from the Gospels<sup>215</sup>. The list in Mt. 15:19 follows the order of the Ten Commandments (cf. Ex. 20:13–16; Dtn. 5:17–20) except for βλασφημία. The Pauline lists give pride of place and space to sexual sins, with Galatians associating them with sins against religion (idolatry, magic). All three lists close on behaviours typical of ancient symposia and holidays: drinking and giving free rein to language. The list of Gal. 5:19–21 is peculiar because it highlights the specifically “politic” sins, those that threaten the unity of the Christian congregation. The list at II, 1, 12 is more like this characteristic of Gal. 5:19–21, while the list at II, 1, 13 is more various. Here, many items are simply an epic paraphrase of those in Paul's lists<sup>216</sup>. However, Gregory does not highlight sexual sins as much as Paul, while he inserts words suggesting a broader ascetic perspective (εὐρυτένοντες, ἀβροχίτωνες). This is in accordance with his description of asceticism in II, 1, 12, 575–609 (see §3.2.2).

On the other side, a much more relevant model is the lists of episcopal virtues in Paul (1Tim. 3:2–12; Tit. 1:6–10), which must here be reversed to paint a negative picture. The two lists differ, in that 1Tim. joins a description of deacons to that of the bishop, while Titus has a negative foil for the prelate in the many heretics that the bishop should

<sup>212</sup> Cf. νόμον πονηρίας δίδωσιν τὸν προστάτην (II, 1, 12, 646, beginning the invective against Maximus, §5.1.2.2); ὃς δὲ κάκιστος (II, 1, 17, 13); ἀτάσθαλος (33); αἰσυλα ἔργα κακορραφίην τ' ἀλεγεινὴν (43); all these expressions of II, 1, 17 begin (13 and 43) or end (33) an invective.

<sup>213</sup> See Heubeck/West/Privitera 1988, 184.

<sup>214</sup> On the importance of catalogues of single words for late antique Latin poetry: Roberts 1989, 59–62.

<sup>215</sup> 1Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 5:3–4; Mt. 15:19.

<sup>216</sup> Κακίης ἐπιβήτορες (II, 1, 13, 75) = ἄδικοι (1Cor. 6:9); αἰσχεα φωτῶν (75) and ἀναιδέες (76) = αἰσχρότης (Eph. 5:4); Γάστορες (76) = ἄρπαγες (1Cor. 6:10, but cf. ποιμένες ἀγραυλοὶ, κάκ' ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἶον, Hesiod. *theog.* 26); Ζωροπόται (77) = μέθυσοι (1Cor. 6:10) and μέθαι (Gal. 5:21); φιλοκέρτομοι (77) = λοιδόροι (1Cor. 6:10) and μωρολογία ἢ εὐτραπεία (Eph. 5:4).



confute. An important element is the exclusion of neophytes (μὴ νεόφυτον, 1Tim. 3:6) and of people ignorant of theology (ἀντεχόμενον τοῦ κατὰ τὴν διδασχὴν πιστοῦ λόγου, ἵνα δυνατὸς ᾦ καὶ παρακαλεῖν ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ τῇ ὑγιαίνουσῃ καὶ τοὺς ἀντιλέγοντας ἐλέγχειν, Tit. 1:10). Gregory echoes these requirements (Νήϊδες οὐρανίων, νεολαμπέες, II, 1, 13, 87), which are particularly useful because they exclude Nectarius. Moreover, these lists underline the “political” virtues of the bishop (μὴ πλήκτην, ἀλλ’ ἐπιεικὴ ἄμαχον ἀφιλάργυρον, 1Tim. 3:3) that are opposite to the “political” sins of Gal. 5:21, giving great importance to mildness. As we shall see, Gregory’s moral invective too has political implications. Finally, both Pauline lists highlight among the virtues required of the bishop sobriety (νηφάλιον, μὴ πάροιον, μὴ οἶνω πολλῶ προσέχοντας) and an orderly family life (μιάς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα/ἀνὴρ/ἄνδρες, σώφρονα, τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου/τέκνων καλῶς προϊστάμενον, τέκνα ἔχοντα ἐν ὑποταγῇ, τέκνα ἔχων πιστά).

Gregory refers to family life with his description of freshly wedded bishops in II, 1, 13, 84–86, paralleled in II, 1, 12, 620–630<sup>217</sup>. Indeed, the passage in II, 1, 13 is an epic rewriting of that in II, 1, 12: ἄρτι νυμφίοι (II, 1, 12, 622) becomes ἀρτίγαμοι (II, 1, 13, 84), a word which in Oppian is *halieut.* 4, 179; οἰδαίνω (II, 1, 12, 621) and ζέω (II, 1, 13, 84, in the epic form ζείω) are both poetic; ἔτι χνοάω ἱουλον (II, 1, 13, 84) is the late epic form (Apollon. Rhod. 2, 43; 779 and Oppian. *cyneg.* 4, 347) of ἀρτίχνοοι (II, 1, 12, 626); the literal λύσσης τῆς συμφύτου (II, 1, 12, 620), with the attribute σύμφυτος, which is mostly prosaic and is used in the sense of “natural”—as opposed to “congenital”, “innate”—only in prose<sup>218</sup>, becomes a metaphorical φυσικοῖο πυρὸς (II, 1, 13, 85)<sup>219</sup>, with a possible reference to the myth of Prometheus. The poet’s insistence on a disordered family life is meant to allude to Paul’s texts and, by contradicting them so plainly, to imply the utter inadequacy of such candidates. Moreover, since the poet connects disorder with young age, this vice allows for a criticism of insufficient preparation, which could always be applied—regardless of age—to Nectarius. Finally, one must note that here it is not so much lust as something impure per se that is stigmatised (as in the list of NT sins), but it is stigmatised inasmuch as it overrides mastery of the self and of the house or as a sign of high-class interests. Such interests were also expressed through the image of the banquet (see §5.2.2), and on this point Paul’s insistence on sobriety could be turned to Gregory’s advantage. Indeed, banquets, wine drinking and gluttony are among the vices Gregory stigmatises the most, as a comparison of our passages with II, 1, 12,

<sup>217</sup> Οἶκος, γυνὴ σφριγῶσα, τεκνίων πόθος... Ἄλλοι δὲ λύσσης ἐμπλεοὶ τῆς συμφύτου, / Νοσοῦντες, οἰδαίνοντες, ἐστιλβωμένοι/ Γυναῖξιν, ἄρτι νυμφίοι, τὸ μέτριον, / Οὕπω λύσαντες παστάδας γαμηλίου, / ἢ καὶ πόθοις συζώντες ἀζύγοις ἔτι / Πρὶν καὶ παρειὰν ἀνδρικῶ κοσμήματι, / Θριξίν, καλύψαι, παντελῶς ἀρτίχνοοι, / Νέοι τὸ σῶμα, τὸν τρόπον νεώτεροι, / Ἥ καὶ παλαιῶν ἡμερῶν πλήρεις κακῶν (II, 1, 12, 611; 620–628); Ἀρτίγαμοι, ζείοντες, ἔτι χνοάοντες ἱουλον, / Ἥ κλέπται φυσικοῖο πυρὸς, φαέεσσιν ἔχοντες / Ἡερίην φιλότῃτα, δὲ ἀμφοδίην ἀλέησθε (II, 1, 13, 84–86). Cf. also Ἄλλος τὰ τερπνὰ τῶν νέων ἐδρέψατο (II, 1, 12, 60).

<sup>218</sup> Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1689, s.v. σύμφυτος.

<sup>219</sup> Yet φυσικός never occurs in poetry before Gregory (4x), except for Timon *frg.* 85, where it means “natural philosopher”.

610–630 shows<sup>220</sup>. The same metaphor of hunting, which was an upper-class activity, is employed for those who look for banquets (ιχνεύμονες, II, 1, 12, 340)<sup>221</sup>, but the clearest description of symposia as gatherings of social significance is given by II, 1, 12, 616–619, where to the mentions of food is added entertainment: Μύροις, γέλωσι, ψαλμάτων συναυλίας, / Οἷς κυμβάλων δεῖ καὶ ποδὸς ψοφημάτων (II, 1, 12, 618–619). Furthermore, the word ἀβροχίτωνες in II, 1, 13, 77 may refer to the same upper-class habits. In II, 1, 12, 345–348, Gregory says it explicitly: upper-class bishops use their worldly privilege to unduly manipulate church life<sup>222</sup>. This privilege, as we have seen (II, 1, 12, 612; §5.2.2), requires efforts incompatible with a bishop's ascetic way of life; but the implications of this privilege may be even more grim, if II, 1, 13, 78–80 (Ψεῦσταί θ' ὕβρισται τε, θοῶς ἐπιόρκον ὁμοῦντες, / Δημοβόροι, κτεάτεσσιν ἐπ' ἄλλοτρίοισιν ἀάπτους / Βάλλοντες παλάμας) refers to dishonesty in court and to tax evasion or tax collection<sup>223</sup>.

Therefore, both Gregory's inversion of the Pauline criteria for choosing a bishop and his allusions to Paul's lists of vices, though apparently stigmatising gluttony and lust, really are attacks on the elite way of life, consisting in family relationships and social networking. The poet criticises feasts and banquets mainly for their social significance in building up authority. Gregory reveals the link between power and luxury as he says that those who cannot afford the latter try to shut up others, and if only they had the occasion, they could even resort to violence (II, 1, 12, 349–353)<sup>224</sup>. The political content of these attacks is made particularly clear in II, 1, 12, 334–343 and its parallel, II, 1, 13, 81–83<sup>225</sup>. In both passages, the bishops are opportunistic and inconsistent: the language is very similar, the bishops being described as completely prone to what the political circumstances require, even at the cost of faith. Indeed, this is a recurring theme in the poems. Opportunism is presented as a veritable rule of conduct through

<sup>220</sup> Πάσης τραπέξης εὐφυεῖς ιχνεύμονες (II, 1, 12, 340); Τράπεζα φλεγμαίνουσα τῶν ἐδωδίων / Ταῖς ὀσποίων καὶ κερασμάτων πλοκαῖς / Γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης καρποφορούντων ἐντέροις (614–616); Γάστορες... Ζωροπόται (II, 1, 13, 76; 77) and cf. also II, 1, 17, 67–74.

<sup>221</sup> See §5.2.1 nn. 154–156. Cf. also the spirit of the ambitious bishops as a hunter at II, 1, 17, 89–90 (θηρήτορα τιμῆς / θυμόν).

<sup>222</sup> II, 1, 12, 345–348 has εὐγένειαν, εὐγλωττίαν, πλοῦτον, γένος, πονηρίαν; except the last, they are all elite values. For πλοῦτος, compare κτήσις at II, 1, 12, 612 and κτεάτεσσιν ἐπ' ἄλλοτρίοισιν ἀάπτους / Βάλλοντες παλάμας, II, 1, 13, 79–80. On the distinction of εὐγένεια and γένος see Maier 1989, 110.

<sup>223</sup> On fiscal pressure as an incentive to pursue the ecclesiastical career: Rapp 2005, 184–185, 211–215.

<sup>224</sup> Σοφὸν δὲ καὶ τόδ'· οὐ γὰρ εἰδότες λόγον, / Γλώσσαν ἔδησαν τῶν λαλιστέρων νόμῳ. / Εἰ δ' ἦν τις ὀφθαλμῶν τε καὶ χειρῶν ἔρις, / Καὶ ταῦτ' ἂν ἡμῶν ἐξεκόψατ', ὥ σοφοί. / Ταῦτ' οὐ πρόδηλος ὕβρις, οὐ βλάβη σαφής (II, 1, 12, 349–353).

<sup>225</sup> Δύστην', ἀπενυκτὰ τοῦ βίου κυβεύματα, / (335) Τὴν πίστιν ἀμφιδέξιοι, καιρῶν νόμους, / Οὐ τοὺς Θεοῦ σέβοντες, Εὐριπτοὶ λόγων / Παλιρροοῦντες ἢ κλάδων μετακλίσεις, / Θῶπες γυναικῶν, τερπνὰ δηλητήρια, / Μικροῖς λέοντες, τοῖς κρατοῦσι δ' αὐτοῖς κύνες, / (340) Πάσης τραπέξης εὐφυεῖς ιχνεύμονες, / Θύρας κρατούντων ἐκτριβόντες, οὐ σοφῶν, / Τὸ πρὸς χάριν τιμώντες, οὐ τὸ συμφέρον, / Ὡς ἂν κακοὺς ποιῶσι καὶ τοὺς πλησίον. (II, 1, 12, 334–343); Θῶπες ἐρισθενέων χθαμαλοὶ, χθαμαλοῖσι λέοντες, / Ἀμφίθετοι, καιροῖο πολυτρέπτου θεράποντες, / Πουλύποδες πέτρησιν ἀειδόμενοι χροῖα μύθῳ (II, 1, 13, 81–83).

the recurring word καιροί<sup>226</sup>. This entails continually changing one's position, most of all in matters of faith (πίστις), a behaviour stigmatised through the metaphors of water and wind, whereas the good bishop is hard and unchanging as a stone<sup>227</sup>. These winds and flows express the mutating expectation of the people, to which the bishops conform to achieve recognition<sup>228</sup>. In II, 1, 13, 83 (Πουλύποδες πέτρῃσιν αἰδόμενοι χροᾶ μύθῳ), Gregory interprets *in malam partem*, the metaphor of the octopus of Theogn. 213–217. In this context, the beloved metaphor of dice acquires a new meaning, expressing the bishops' lack of responsibility—reflected in their delegating to the seemingly casual preference of the day the most important things—but also highlighting the chaos that befell the church through the immoral activity of gambling<sup>229</sup>. The link between this behaviour and luxury is further established in II, 1, 12, 338, a line stigmatising the bishops' relationship with women right in the middle of the invective against opportunism<sup>230</sup>. The use of the same word for “flatterers” (θῶπες) as in II, 1, 13, 81, referring to powerful people, suggests that these relationships with women help the bishops gain access to these powerful people<sup>231</sup>. The themes of flattering, opportunism, and luxury are linked, because opportunism is determined by the bishops' relationship to powerful people: the texts make clear that luxury is the shared language of the bishop with the powerful, so that, to accrue the endorsement of these powerful men, the bishops must participate in and pursue those activities Gregory despises. Moreover, as the allusion to the language of fables suggests, these corrupt prelates, in acquiescing to the powerful (the “lions”), have no qualms about oppressing the poor and weak<sup>232</sup>. Indeed, the lion figures in many fables as a personification of raw power and bullying, whereas the dog

226 καιρῶν νόμους, / Οὐ τοὺς Θεοῦ σέβοντες (II, 1, 12, 335–336); καιροῖο πολυτρέπτου θεράποντες (II, 1, 13, 82); cf. καιροθέοισι φίλοις (II, 1, 10, 24) and κλινόμενος καιροῖσι, (II, 1, 17, 19).

227 Τὴν πίστιν ἀμφιδέξιοι, ... Εὕριποι λόγων / Παλιρροοῦντες ἢ κλάδων μετακλίσεις (II, 1, 12, 335–337); πλάγκται, ... Ψεύσται θ' ὕβρισται τε, θοῶς ἐπίορκον ὁμοῦντες ... ἄπιστοι ... ἀμφίβητοι (II, 1, 13, 77–78; 80); cf. κουφονόοισιν (II, 1, 10, 23); δόναξ πολύκαμπτος αἰήταις (II, 1, 17, 19); on the contrary: Ἀνθρώπων δ' ἀγαθοῖσι διδοῖ φρένα, τοῖς δὲ κακοῖσι / Κάμπτεται, ὅσσα λίθος ὀκρυόεις ἀδάμας (27–28).

228 Τὸ πρὸς χάριν τιμῶντες, οὐ τὸ συμφέρον (II, 1, 12, 342); cf. Οὐδ' ὃ γ' ἐπιστρέφεται πλούτου μεγάλων τε θωάκων, / Οὐ δόξης βροτέης ἐνθάδε συρομένης (II, 1, 17, 29–30); Οὐδὲ χέρας φονίους προσηπύξομαι, οὐδὲ γενεῖου / Δράξομαι, ὥστ' ὀλίγης ἀντιτυχεῖν χάριτος (65–66); Φθέγγομαι οὐασι τερπνὰ, τὰ Πνεύματος ἔκτοθι ρίψας, / Ὡς κεν ἔοιμι πρόφρων, φίλτρον ἔχων πλεόνων, / Τερπόμενός τε κρότοις, καὶ ἐν θεάτροισι χορεύων, / Κρημνοβάτης ἐπέων ἀντικουρυσσομένων (77–80).

229 ἀπευκτὰ τοῦ βίου κυβεύματα (II, 1, 12, 334); cf. Πισσῶν κυλίσματ' ἐν κύβοις τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ (396); Οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην μή τι καὶ θυμοῦ φέρειν / Κύβευμ' (659–660).

230 Θῶπες γυναικῶν, τερπνὰ δηλητήρια, / Μικροῖς λέοντες, τοῖς κρατοῦσι δ' αὖ κύνες (II, 1, 12, 338–339). The oxymoron τερπνὰ δηλητήρια expresses the corrupting influence of bishops on these women.

231 Θῶπες ἐρισθενέων χθαμαλοῖ, χθαμαλοῖσι λέοντες (II, 1, 13, 81). For examples of the relationship of spiritual leaders with upper-class women: §1.2.1. Gregory, too, could install himself in Constantinople thanks to his cousin, Theodosia, wife of the senator Ablabius.

232 Μικροῖς λέοντες, τοῖς κρατοῦσι δ' αὖ κύνες (II, 1, 12, 339); Θῶπες ἐρισθενέων χθαμαλοῖ, χθαμαλοῖσι λέοντες (II, 1, 13, 81). Cf. also the bad bishop at II, 1, 17: Ἐνδοθεν ἀδρανέων, ἔκτοθε κάρτος ἔχων ... Οὐδὲ δορὴν βασιλῆος ἔχων βριαροῖο λέοντος, / Κεύθει κερδῶν ἐνδοθι δουλοσύνην (II, 1, 17, 14; 31–32).

is a frequently employed metaphor for the servant of someone<sup>233</sup>. The idea of being a lion and becoming a servile animal when dealing with the powerful through adulation has its origins in Plato, and it is echoed in Gregory's discussion of *parrhesia*, which in a sense is the answer to the invective in II, 1, 12, 330–354:

Εἴ που δὲ καιρὸς ἐμπέσοι παρρησίας,  
 Ὅψει μαχητὴν τὸν πρᾶον, καὶ πηλίκον  
 Ἔστί κατορθῶν, τηνικαῦτα γνωρίσεις. (770)  
 Γνώσῃ, τί κέρκωψ, καὶ τί βρυχᾶται λέων  
 (II, 1, 12, 768–771)<sup>234</sup>

But if the right chance occurs for speaking freely,  
 you'll see the meek turn pugnacious, and you'll experience  
 in that circumstance how successful he's been. (770)  
 You'll learn how the ape and how the lion roars

The final confirmation of the link between luxury, elite society, and weak positions of the bishop comes from II, 1, 17, a poem we have already examined in relation to *paideia* and *parrhesia* (§3.1.1.3), to the moral leadership of the bishop (§3.1.4.2), and to Gregory's rhetorical strategy (§5.1.1). There are indeed many parallels between the moral invectives of II, 1, 12–13 and the references to Gregory's habits in Constantinople in that poem (II, 1, 17, 59–90), which are also anticipated by the description of the bad bishop in the same II, 1, 17.

Among the vices Gregory failed to curtail as a bishop in Constantinople, lust figures prominently, a parallel to the Pauline references in II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13. Here, as there, it is not intercourse per se that Gregory stigmatises, but rather lack of self-control, in accordance with pagan ideas of sexuality, with Paul's recommendations on the choice of the ἐπίσκοπος, and with the Synod of Gangra<sup>235</sup>. Indeed, II, 1, 17, 83–84 (Οὐ σώματος αἰθομένοιο / λύσσαν ἐπιψύξας) combines the word for mad love (λύσσα) in II, 1, 12 with the metaphor of fire in II, 1, 13, whereas the reference to the σώμα is equivalent to συμφύτου in II, 1, 12 and φυσικοῖο in II, 1, 13. If these references are meant to contrast with Paul's requirement that a candidate for bishop be in full control of his house and wife, another of Gregory's supposed failures—namely, to teach orthodoxy (οὐ ψευδῆ κραδίας δόξαν ἀποσκεδάσας, II, 1, 17, 86)—may refer to hastily created bishops' and neophytes' ignorance in matters of faith, which is examined at length in II, 1, 12 and referenced at II, 1, 13, 87 (Νήϊδες οὐρανίων, νεολαμπέες). This, in turn, is a throwback

<sup>233</sup> E.g.: "The lion's share" (Babr. *fab.* 67; Perry 149); Liddel/Scott/Jones 2011, 1015, s.v. κύων II.2 and III.

<sup>234</sup> Κολακεία δὲ καὶ ἀνελευθερία οὐχ ὅταν τις τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο, τὸ θυμοειδές, ὑπὸ τῷ ὀχλώδει θηρίῳ ποιῇ καὶ ἔνεκα χρημάτων καὶ τῆς ἐκείνου ἀπληστίας προπηλακίζόμενον ἐθίζῃ ἐκ νέου ἀντὶ λέοντος πίθηκον γίνεσθαι; (Plat. *resp.* 590B); see §3.1.1.3.

<sup>235</sup> Οὐ σώματος αἰθομένοιο / λύσσαν ἐπιψύξας (II, 1, 17, 83–84); Ἄλλοι δὲ λύσσης ἐμπλεοὶ τῆς συμφύτου, / Νοσοῦντες, οἰδαίνοντες, ἐστιλβωμένοι / Γυναιξίν (II, 1, 12, 620–622); Ἀρτίγαμοι, ζείοντες, ἔτι χνοάοντες ἱουλον, / Ἦ κλέπται φυσικοῖο πυρὸς, φαέεσσιν ἔχοντες / Ἡερίην φιλότητα (II, 1, 13, 84–86); Brown 2008, 9–11, 17–20.

to Paul's recommendations of an experienced bishop, particularly when the bishop had to repel heretical doctrines.

Yet, apart from these isolated references, the image II, 1, 17 conveys is that of a bishop who is servile with powerful people, inconsistent in church matters, and violent towards the weak. Servitude is particularly highlighted and explicitly linked with public occasions and banquets, where the bishop could express his subordination to powerful secular people, beginning with the emperor<sup>236</sup>. As in II, 1, 12, here the bishop "hunts" for banquets because he is "hunting" for recognition<sup>237</sup>. Therefore, the poet rewrites in II, 1, 17 all those expressions that are used in II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13 to stigmatise the opportunism of bishops and their inconsistency, dictated by political circumstances, going so far as to explicitly say that he, as bishop of Constantinople, had to adapt his predication of the fundamentals of the faith to political opportunity (75–80)<sup>238</sup>. The price of this immorality—this is Gregory's bottom line—is paid by the weak. The idea is expressed in two lines with important parallels with II, 1, 13. In II, 1, 17, 70 and 84–85, Gregory refers to the "hands" (παλάμαις, χέρα) ruining the property of others through theft. In the first instance the bishop himself is rapacious; in the second, the bishop fails to curb the rapaciousness of others—presumably powerful people<sup>239</sup>. This is paralleled by the ἀάπτους παλάμας in II, 1, 13, 79–80<sup>240</sup>, an expression more epic than Homer, since it rewrites the Homeric formula χεῖρες ἀάπτους with the more epic word for "hand", παλάμη, which is also significant because παλάμη is the hand that grasps<sup>241</sup>. The bishop, when he becomes an ally of powerful people, excuses their thievery towards the poor and even participates in the division of the spoils. Furthermore, in both II, 1, 13 and II, 1, 17 a string of attributes qualifies the bishops as violent: Νεκροβόρος, δολόμητις, ἀτάσθαλος... (II, 1, 17, 33) and Δημοβόροι, . . . / φθονεροί, δολόντες, ἄπιστοι (II, 1, 13, 79–80). The combination of δολόμητις and ἀτάσθαλος in II, 1, 17 strongly suggests Homer's references to Aegisthus, which would well symbolise the bishops' sins against Gregory: he has been metaphorically assassinated, even as he had to live his triumph during the council, and the murder served to commit an adultery, as they took away his church in Constantinople from him. The term νεκροβόρος requires some interpretation: in the *Patrologia Graeca*, it is taken as a reference to funeral banquets; I think that either it should be interpreted in a Cynic-ascetic fashion, as if disparaging food as

<sup>236</sup> Cf. δούλια δαινύμενος... Οὐδὲ χέρας φονίους προσπύζομαι, οὐδὲ γενεῖου / Δράζομαι, ὥστ' ὀλίγης ἀντιτυχεῖν χάριτος (II, 1, 17, 62; 65–66) with Θύρας κρατούντων ἐκτρίβοντες, οὐ σοφῶν (II, 1, 12, 341); Θῶπες ἐρισθενέων (II, 1, 13, 81). For the disgusting connotation of banquets in this passage, see §3.1.1.3.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. οὐδ' ἱερὴν ἐπὶ δαῖτα... θέων... ἄλλην ἐπὶ δαῖτα παχείην / σπεύδων... θηρήτορα τιμῆς / θυμόν (II, 1, 17, 67–68; 73–74; 89–90) with Πάσης τραπέζης εὐφρεῖς ἰχνεύμονες (II, 1, 12, 340); Γάστορες... δημοβόροι (II, 1, 13, 76; 79).

<sup>238</sup> See nn. 226–228. On 75–80: §2.2.4.9; §3.1.1.3; §5.1.1.

<sup>239</sup> ἀρπαλαῖς Βριαρέω παλάμαις (II, 1, 17, 70); χέρα μαινομένην / παῖσιν ἐπ' ἄλλοτρίοις (84–85).

<sup>240</sup> κτεάτεσσιν ἐπ' ἄλλοτρίοις ἀάπτους / Βάλλοντες παλάμας (II, 1, 13, 79–80).

<sup>241</sup> Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1291, s.v. παλάμη.

something dead<sup>242</sup>, or, as a consequence of the previous lines (31–32), the νεκροί should be understood as the victims of the bishop's violence or deceit, whence the bishop takes his material advantages. In this sense, since these victims are the weaker ones in the community, νεκροβόρος would be a paraphrase for δημοβόρος in II, 1, 13.

These apparently moral invectives have, therefore, a deeply political significance. Gregory laments the dependence of the episcopate on secular society and, indirectly, on political powers. It makes sense for him to insist on that point, since he was replaced by Nectarius. Such an election could well be construed as a self-defeat of the church, which had to resort to imperial power: the external conditions seemed perfect, with a favourable emperor (Theodosius) after years of persecution of the Nicene party and with East and West converging on the Nicene Creed; and yet, even in the absence of serious doctrinal problems, the Nicenes managed to reach a deadlock at the council, being divided on the Antiochene succession and on the relationship between Constantinople and Alexandria. Gregory's line was to solve these problems among bishops, which implies that everyone had to renounce something of his position. The other bishops found it more suitable to renounce Gregory. It is unclear how they came to Nectarius as a substitute, whether it was proposed by an anonymous person, by Diodore of Tarsus, or by the emperor himself, but the profile of the candidate implies reliance on the secular structure of powers to quench a crisis of the church. By choosing someone who was a stranger to the inner dynamics of the Nicene party, the bishops manifested inability to overcome the stalemate by themselves, and by choosing someone embedded in imperial institutions, they implicitly recognised these institutions as selecting people worthy of a spot in the limelight of church politics, mainly because such a person would not diminish the standing of the church before civil authorities (such as the emperor). The bishops had, in the eyes of Gregory, compromised a long-term, strategic advantage (self-government) in favour of the fleeting tactical result of not losing their entrenched positions. In this perspective, moral debauchery and political softness are inextricably linked.

Put in these terms, the whole affair deserves Gregory's invective, apart from the personal grudge due to his being replaced by an outsider. Naturally, this does not mean that his position is not deeply biased by that grudge and by his political vision of how things should be; but, alas, we do not have direct comments on the matter by Gregory's rivals to put against his account. Gregory's grudge is revealed by the more "political" insults he hurls at the bishops: his focus on inconsistency for the sake of politics and on bullying those weaker than them can be applied to his fate at the council. As regards inconsistency, the refusal of Meletius's party to honour the previous arrangement with Paulinus, as Gregory intimated, plays a major role, but one imagines also that in such synods the majority of bishops were whipped by the more prominent figures. If there were groups of opinion moving en bloc, Gregory might have resented the more gregarious bishops for not speaking up when the main figures of the Asiatic party abandoned

242 Cf. τάφον ἐμπνοον (II, 1, 17, 71); §3.1.1.3.

him in favour of Nectarius to quell the Egyptians, another case of inconsistency that must have incensed our poet. Finally, the insistence that the bishops had been willing to compromise faith in favour of politics might not be an exaggerated evaluation of their choice of Nectarius over himself; it might refer to their rejection of a high pneumatology even though they inwardly agreed with it. As regards the accusation of bullying weaker people, Gregory may be obliquely referring to himself, since, as we have already seen (§1.3.2; §5.1.2.4), he is wont to represent himself as weak; furthermore, he is supposedly an outsider to elite social networks too (§5.1.2.1), so that he is excluded from the power plays of these privileged bishops with their lay patrons.

Yet there is something deeper than personal resentment in the accusation of bullying. Variations of this idea are found throughout the texts. Here, the focus is on the negative ramifications that the subordination of bishops to earthly powers has for weaker people. At the beginning of II, 1, 12, instead, he throws the much more direct and heavy accusation of homicide: “my murderers; because they are murderers, who pervert judgement / and shed the blood of all those innocent souls / that they struck with their decisions” (15–17)<sup>243</sup>. This ties in well with the violent behaviour described in lines 349–354, where some bishops put down dissent and would be ready to use even bodily violence to preserve their authority. After all, even the metaphor of the lion (II, 1, 12, 339; II, 1, 13, 81; II, 1, 17, 31), which expresses violence, echoes that of the wolves employed in II, 1, 13, 141–142 (see §2.2.1.2). Facets of this idea have already been examined under the heading of “tyranny”, the perversion of episcopal leadership (and even of sacramental prerogatives) into the object of ambition and ownership (§2.1.2.1). The fact that this violence is partially directed at Gregory, the weaker bishop who was put down, does not exclude the possibility that it also affects the community of faithful. Indeed, as is purported by Gregory’s narrative (§5.1.2.3), the work of conversion at Constantinople was far from complete, so that his removal meant the loss of many souls. Furthermore, violence may be intended in a broader sense to mean that the political machinations of bishops arouse scandals which alienated people from the church—a practical instance of Gregory’s strong emphasis on the bishop as an example of morality, capable by his sole behaviour of teaching or destroying his community (§2.2.3.1). Finally, it is interesting to note that II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13 are much more concerned with the relationship of the bishop with the community than II, 1, 17: the latter poem contrasted good and bad models of the bishop on the basis of their relationship with God, even regardless of their reputation with the people (§5.1.1); here, however, a good relationship even with the lower strata of the community seems to characterise good bishops, while bad bishops oppress the people and give a free pass to the powerful.

243 τοὺς ἐμοὺς . . . / Φονεῖς· φονεῖς γὰρ οἱ κρίνοντες ἔκτοπα, / Ψυχῶν τ’ ἀθώων ἐκχέοντες αἵματα, / Πάντων, ὅσους ἔπλαττον, οἷς ὠκονόμουν.

### 5.2.4 Against Maximus

Besides violence, the attitude of bishops is marked also by deceit: the dichotomy is summed up in the expression *ψεῦσταί θ' ὑβρίζουσι τε* in II, 1, 13, 78, and the concept of deceit is at least implied by the bishops' inconsistency. Other passages, however, tackle the theme more directly: apart from a series of passing mentions of this vice, the beginning of II, 1, 13 and an invective in II, 1, 12 explore different facets thereof. This last passage is particularly interesting because it links the theme of deceit with the second of Gregory's rivals, Maximus.

As regards the passing mentions, duplicity and deceit are implied already in the declaration of the theme of II, 1, 12 (*Ἐν ἐκτρέπου μοι, τοὺς κακοὺς ἐπισκόπους... Τὸ κώδιον παρέλθε, τὸν λύκον βλέπε... Μισῶ διδάγμαθ', οἷς ἐναντίος βίος. / Τὰ χρώματ' αἰνῶν τοῦ τάφου, βδελύσσομαι / Τὴν ἔνδον ὁδὴν τῶν σεσηπότεων μελῶν*, 35, 38, 40). The theme is repeatedly elaborated upon in the form of an opposition of outer and inner; as, for example, in II, 1, 13, 162–163 (*Διπλὸς ἐστὶν ἕκαστος, οἷς λύκον ἀμφικαλύπτων, / Καὶ χαλκὸς λοχῶν πικρὴν νεπόδεσιν ἐδώδην*) and in II, 1, 17, 14 (*Ἐνδοθεν ἀδρανέων, ἔκτοθε κάρτος ἔχων*). Through the image of the wolf, both the passage in II, 1, 12 and that in II, 1, 13 combine duplicity with the violence of the *φονεῖς* (II, 1, 12, 15) who *Εἰρήνην βοῶντες, ἐφ' αἵμασι κυδιῶντες* (II, 1, 13, 148). Such duplicity is found in several expressions linked to the opportunism of bishops (see notes 242–244): for the poet it is not so important to specify if such a duplicity is the result of conscious deception or hypocrisy or conformism. However, he also refers to deception proper through keywords such as *ψεῦδος* and *δόλος*<sup>244</sup>.

Coming to the longer texts, the beginning of II, 1, 13 attacks the bishops of the council, referring to a detail of Gregory's narrative—namely, the bishops' false courtesy as he left them (see §5.1.2.4). The passage is worth quoting in full for its literary artistry and the many themes it touches:

- Ὡ θυσίας πέμποντες ἀναιμάκτους, ἱερῆς! (1)  
 Ὡ ψυχῶν ταμίαι μεγακύδες! Ὡ μέγαλοιο  
 Πλάσμα Θεοῦ χεῖρεςσιν ἐν ὑμετέρῃσι φέροντες!  
 Ὡ Θεὸν ἀνθρώποισι μέγ' ἔξοχον εἰς ἐν ἄγοντες!  
 Ὡ κόσμοιο θέμεθλα, βίου φάος, ἔρμα λόγιοιο, (5)  
 Μυστοπόλοι ζωῆς ἀτελευτήτοιο φαεινῆς,  
 Χριστοφόροι, θώκοισιν ἐνεδριώνοντες ἀρίστοις,  
 Ὑψηλοὶ, θεάτροισι γεγηθότες εὐπρεπέεσσι,  
 Σκηνοβάται, κώλοισιν ἐφισταότες ξυλίνοισιν,  
 Ἀδρανέως χάσκοντες ἐν ἀλλοτρίοισι προσώποις, (10)  
 Εὐσεβίης ὅσα δ' ἐντὸς, ὁμοίᾳ πᾶσιν ἔχοντες

<sup>244</sup> *ψεῦστα* (II, 1, 13, 78); *δολόεντες* (80); *πλεκτῆς...κακίης* (II, 1, 17, 12); *Κεύθει κερδῶν ἐνδοθὶ δουλοσύνην, / Νεκροβόρος, δολόμητις, ἀτάσθαλος, ἄλλος ἐν ἄλλοις / Παντοδαποῖς κακίης εἶδεισι κλεπτόμενος* (32–34); perhaps also *οὐ ψευδῆ κραδίης δόξαν ἀποσκεδάσας* (86).



Υμεῖς μὲν παίζετε, τὰ περ καὶ παίζετ' ἀεικῶς,  
 Καὶ σοβαρὸν φθέγγοισθε, τὰ δ' ἔρδετε ὡς μάλ' ἐλαφρά.  
 Αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν, εἰ καὶ με κακὸν καὶ ἀνάρσιον ἄνδρα  
 Πάντες ὁμοῦ θεείτε, χοροῦ δ' ἅπο τῆλε δίοισθε (15)  
 Ὑμετέρου, βάλλοντες ἐπασσύτεροισιν ὅϊστοις,  
 Ἀμφαδίοις, κρυπτοῖς τε, τό περ καὶ φίλτερον ὑμῖν  
 (II, 1, 13, 1–17)

O priests, you who offer bloodless sacrifices! (1)  
 O highly glorious ministers of souls, bearing  
 in your hands the image of the great God!  
 O you who the Supreme God with human beings together bring!  
 O world's pillars, life's light, foundation of the doctrine, (5)  
 initiators to the shining mysteries of life immortal,  
 Christ-bearers, sitting on the topmost thrones,  
 most high, rejoicing in comely shows,  
 stage treaders, standing on wooden stilts,  
 feebly yawning through alien masks, (10)  
 for what pertains to religion, the very same as everyone else.  
 Yea, you may play, although you play shamefully,  
 and your speech may be haughty, yet what you do is really shallow,  
 whereas I, even if all of you together may hold me  
 an evil man and strange, and pull me far away (15)  
 from your chorus, shooting one dart after another,  
 openly and, what you love even more, secretly . . .

The poet expresses the duplicity of the bishops in different ways. First, the structure of the passage: it begins seemingly as a praise of bishops and devolves suddenly into a polemic<sup>245</sup>. The catalogic pattern at the beginning suggests an almost hymnic treatment of the prelates, but the sudden turn to polemics, maintaining the catalogic form, is reminiscent of comic and iambic catalogues<sup>246</sup>. The insistence, at the beginning, on the liturgical role of bishops highlights the contrast between the dignity of office and the base behaviour of the prelates (see §3.1.2). Second, the emphatic metaphor of theatre, already examined at §2.2.4.9, denounces the apparent goodness of the bishops as a pretence or a play, so that elements of good behaviour in the poet's rivals may not detract from his criticism, but aggravate it. Finally, the bishops' deception culminates in their treatment of Gregory: here we find again the mixture of general remarks and autobiographical narrative so typical of these poems. The bishops kick Gregory

<sup>245</sup> For the way in which the two modes of expressions are linked through the ambiguity of line 8, see §2.2.4.9.

<sup>246</sup> For this hymnic structure, the *Orphic Hymns* are particularly representative (e.g.: Ὡ Διὸς ὑψιμέλαθρον ἔχων κράτος αἰὲν ἀτειρές, / ἄστρων ἡελίου τε σεληναίης τε μέρισμα, / πανδαμάτωρ, πυρίπνου, πᾶσι ζωοῖσιν ἔναυσμα, / ὑψιφανῆς Αἰθήρ κτλ., *hymn. Orph.* 5, 1–4). Note also the rhyme in the first lines: *ιερεῖς/φέροντες/ἄγοντες* and *μεγάλοιο/λόγοιο* (on rhyme in Christian Greek literature: Averincev 1988, 301–320). For comedic *accumulation verbale*: Spyropoulos 1974. For the fondness of late antique Latin poetry for catalogues: Roberts 1989, 59.

out because of his alienation (see §5.1.2.1), and they “strike” him with darts (βάλλοντες ἐπασσυτέροισιν ὀϊστοῖς, 16)—likely meaning with defamation—both in the open and behind his back. In conjunction with the metaphor of theatre, this accusation may be a throwback to the courtesy paid to Gregory once he had decided to step down from his position in Constantinople (§5.1.2.4): while they complimented him to his face, the bishops slandered him—or so Gregory thought—behind his back. Since, however, the poem seems to be fictionally set *during* the council (§1.1.1), and since it speaks also of “open” (ἀμφοδίους) attacks, it is more likely that Gregory alludes to the criticisms expressed against him during the council, both as open protests against his proposal for Antioch and as (suspected) behind-the-scenes agreements to have him removed for his inability to stabilise the situation, here under the label of ἀνάρσιον ἄνδρα (14): he is accused of being intractable because alienated from the dynamics of power. Another example of Gregory's dialectical self-portrait (§5.1.1): he appropriates the criticism of his rivals and turns it into apology, while applying its opposite (here, duplicity) to them.

The other passage, II, 1, 12, 647–708, is a prelude to the contrast between the ascetic and the “protean” bishop (§2.2.3.2), and, differently from II, 1, 13, 1–17, it is aimed at one person only<sup>247</sup>. In this text, as throughout II, 1, 12, Gregory employs the second person to criticise his rival; he did so also at the beginning of II, 1, 13, and this direct apostrophe may be meant to directly engage the bishops who hide behind deceit, to unmask them. Superficially, it seems like Gregory is simply excoriating his target for his falseness, but when closely read, the text reveals a shifting focus.

The first part (647–657) says that the bad bishop takes the appearances of a good one without having the inner features thereof<sup>248</sup>. This continues the previous discussion on the selection of bishops, a discussion that enjoined the church to choose trained and proven candidates (see §3.3.2.1). In a way, this passage closes the cycle opened by the invective at 395–433 (§5.2.3), where Gregory described these bad bishops as if they took on a mask at the moment of consecration. The images of 647–657 suggest the same kind of pretence. The contrived religious faith of line 650 (πιστὸς ἐσκευασμένος) echoes the apparent piety of 399 (πέφηνεν . . . εὐσεβής); the humble and solemn attitude of 649 (κατηφὲς ἦθος), characterised by the head down (αὐχένος κλάσις) and the slow pace (νώθρον βάδισμα, 651), echoes the decorum of 411 (νῦν εὐσταλὴς τις καὶ βλέπων αἰδῶ μόνον) and the mildness of 423 (ὥς ἡμερὸς μοι σήμερον); finally, the beard of the philosopher and ascetic (πώγων, 649) echoes the bishop's role as disciplinarian of the ascetics (σωφρονιστὴς παρθένων καὶ συζύγων, 428). Another interesting feature of this passage

<sup>247</sup> See the use of the second-person singular at, e.g., II, 1, 12, 660–661 (ἐπίσχες ἢ τρυφὴν ἢ τὰς τρίχας. / Τί καὶ τὰ μὴ σὰ καὶ τὰ σὰ ζητεῖς ἔχειν;).

<sup>248</sup> Ἐπειτα χαλκὸς χρυσὸν ἡμφιεσμένος / Ἡ καὶ χαμαιλέοντος ἑκστασις χροῶς / Πώγων, κατηφὲς ἦθος, αὐχένος κλάσις, / Φωνὴ βραχεῖα, πιστὸς ἐσκευασμένος, / Νωθρὸν βάδισμα, πάντα, πλὴν φρενὸς σοφός / Τὸ πρῶτον ἐν πρώτοις γε τῶν νυνὶ καλῶν, / Ἐφοῦδ' τὸ σεπτὸν ἢ Σαμουὴλ διπλοῖς / Σκίμπους ταπεινὸς οὐδ' ὅλως δεσμούμενος, / Τὰ πρὸς κάρηνα παρθένων κοσμήματα / Λίνῃ περισφίγγων τε καὶ σακκούμενος, / Τὰ πρόσθεν εὐχῆς σύμβολα προκείμενα.

is its mixing of ascetic and priestly imagery: the bishop's pretence employs the attire of the biblical high priest or prophet (the ephod and Samuel's mantle) as well as the lowly attitude of the ascetic (beard, cot, and sackcloth). At this point in the poem, Gregory has already sufficiently established the identity between the ideal priest and the ideal ascetic.

The following passage (658–675) seems concerned with something different—namely, the presence in the same person of contradicting features<sup>249</sup>. The precise import of these lines is far from clear: Gregory begins by contrasting τρυφή with τρίχες (660), but at the end the idea seems to be that of an inferior trying to imitate his superior (671–675, in particular 673: Αἰσχρὸν μεγάλων μίμησις ἐν μικροῖς λίαν). This impression is reinforced by the detail that Gregory implies an innate tendency to these features (660).

The following section (676–695) is even more enigmatic<sup>250</sup>: Gregory admits that, even in deceiving, his rival may be good if he can deceive until the end, so that deceit becomes his second nature (676–678); otherwise, he should just try to stay in his place (679–681). In any case, the good features are innate to Gregory, and his rival can only feign them (682–685). Finally, in the last passage (696–708) Gregory sums up the concept of good imitation and exemplifies it with the fable of the cat dressed as a bride (cf. Perry 50 and §2.2.4.4)<sup>251</sup>.

The overall theme seems to be the inadequacy of this candidate to reach the level set by Gregory's example. Whether the candidate should still pursue imitation hoping to reach it or should renounce the pursuit and engage in apter roles is not entirely

249 Πῶς μὴ τι ρήξω ῥῆμα τῶν ἐμοὶ ξένων; / Οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην μὴ τι καὶ θυμοῦ φέρειν/ Κύβευμ' ἐπίσχες ἢ τρυφῇ ἢ τὰς τρίχας. / Τί καὶ τὰ μὴ σὰ καὶ τὰ σὰ ζητεῖς ἔχειν; / Χωρὶς τὰ Μυσῶν καὶ Φρυγῶν ὀρίσματα. / Χωρὶς τὰ Μερρᾶς καὶ Σιλωᾶμ ῥεύματα· / Τὰ μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲ γευστά, τῶν δὲ καὶ νόσοι / Ἡτῶντων πρῶτον ἀγγέλω κινουμένων. / Διπλοῦν φυτεύεις ἀμπελῶνα, δισσὰ δὲ / Σπείρεις, τὸ δ' ἔνδυμ' ἐκ δυοῖν ὕφασμένον, / Τὰ δ' οὐχ ὁμοζυγοῦντα συζυγῇ τίθης. / Αἰηγόρευτο δ', εἴπερ οἶσθα, τῷ νόμῳ / Τὸ πλεκτὸν ἐκκλίνοντι τὸν δισσὸν τρόπον. / Ἄλλος γυναικῶν κόσμος, ἄλλος ἀρρένων, / Ἄλλο κολοιῶν ὕψος, ἄλλο δ' αἰετῶν· / Αἰσχρὸν μεγάλων μίμησις ἐν μικροῖς λίαν· / Μικροπρεπὲς γάρ· οἱ δὲ Φαραῶ φαρμακοὶ / Σαφῶς σε πειθέτωσαν ἱστορούμενοι.

250 Ἀλλ' εἴ τις εἶναι τῶν σοφῶν ἐσπούδακας, / Μὴ μοι μόνην τὴν ῥάβδον εἰς ὄφιν τρέπειν· / Ζητῶ τὰ πάντα σ'εἶναι τὸν μέγαν Ἀρῶν· / Εἰ δ' ἐντέταξαι σὺν μάγοις Αἰγυπτίων, / Εἰ καλὸν, ἐξάσκησον εὐθέως ὅλον· / Οὐδεὶς φθόνος σοι τῆς καλῆς μιμήσεως· / Εἰ φαῦλον, ἐκτὸς στήθι. Φεῖσαι τῶν ἐμῶν· / Ἐμὸν γὰρ ἴσθι, κἂν ὑποκρίνη σοφῶς. / Ἀποστρεφεῖς με καὶ σὺ τὴν μίαν ἀμνάδα. / Μοιχεύεται τὸ σχῆμα. Τίς Νάθαν φράσει; / Ρῆξω τὸ φαῖδον προσδραμῶν χιτῶνιον, / Εἴ σου λαβοίμην· καὶ γὰρ ἐν τούτοις ποτέ / Τρυφάτε, ὥσπερ βρωμάτων τοῖς χεῖροσιν, / Ὅταν πάθῃτε πλησμονὴν ἐν τιμίῳ; / Πῆξόν τι καὶ σὺ τῶν ἐμῶν, ἂν του λάβῃ / Τῶν μαλθακωτέρων τε καὶ νόθων ἐμοί. / Τούτων τί ἂν γένοιτο ἐνδικώτερον; / Ἔστω Λάβαν τὰ λευκά· τάπισμα δὲ/ Τοῦ πολλὰ μοχθήσαντός ἐστι ποιμένος, / Νυξὶν παγέντος, ἡλίῳ κεκαυμένου.

251 Αἰσχροῶν μὲν οὖν αἰσχιστον ἢ τρόπου πλάσις./ Ὅμως φύλασσε καὶ μ' ἐπαινέτην ἔχεις./ Νῦν δ' οἶόν ἐστι τοῦτο καὶ τῷ προσφερές./ Ἄρ' ἐστι καὶ παιζαί τι τερπνῷ πλάσματι/ Σπουδῆς μεταξύ; καὶ γέλως ἐν δακρύοις/ Γαλὴν καθίζει μῦθος εἰσω παστάδος/ Νύμφην γὰρ εἶχε νυμφικῶς ἐσταλμένη·/ Ἐδνα, κρότοι, γέλωτες· ἦν λαμπρὸς γάμος./ Ἡ δ' ὥς ἴδεν μὲν διατρέχοντ' ἐν τῷ μέσῳ, / Νύμφη μὲν ἦν, γαλὴ δέ· τῷ φανέντι γάρ/ Ἐπιδραμοῦσα δεῖπνον εἶχεν, οὐ γάμον./ Τοιοῦτός ἐστι πᾶς νόθος διδάσκαλος, / Τὸ γὰρ πεφυκὸς οὐ ταχέως μεθίσταται.

clear, but it is also not the main point: the problem is that such people should not be chosen in the first place. However, the criticisms Gregory lays on this hypothetical candidate remain ambiguous: Why exactly is he inadequate for the job? In my opinion, this ambiguity is better understood if we hypothesise that the whole passage refers to Maximus instead of being a general reflection like the passages before and after it. A clue in this direction is the reference to Pharaoh and his magicians in 674–680, since Gregory frequently uses all things Egyptian to give away that he is talking about Maximus<sup>252</sup>. Moreover, this interpretation explains the apparent contradiction between condemnation of luxury and of feigned asceticism, because Gregory reports that, under the pretence of Cynic asceticism, Maximus was more than happy to attain the luxury of Constantinopolitan society<sup>253</sup>. The two contrasting kinds of falsity denounced, inner inconsistency and usurpation of the prerogatives of another, apply to Maximus, in the sense that Gregory represented him as a liar, outwardly pious but internally perverse, and because Maximus was a concrete rival to Gregory's community in Constantinople: feigning asceticism was but a means for Maximus to get elected bishop of the city. Perhaps the biblical reference to τὴν μίαν ἀμνάδα at 684 is an allusion to the community in Constantinople. Certainly, the traits of simulation and ambition in the portrait of Gregory's copycat here are paralleled in the portraits of Maximus in other poems. The close link between simulation and ambition is drawn in *On His Own Life* (II, 1, 11, 780–788)<sup>254</sup>, together with a lament on the ability of human beings to feign a character different from their own in order to damage the honest ones (791–806). The story of Maximus's attempt to get appointed to the Constantinopolitan episcopate follows as an application of this wisdom, with Maximus compared to Proteus for his changing simulations (see also §2.2.3.2). The strong link between simulation and attempt in the description of Maximus in *On His Own Life* and the reference to the victimised status of the honest man in this context suggest that the double meaning of deceit in II, 1, 12 is linked to Gregory's apologetic strategy of as regards Maximus: Gregory presents his

252 E.g.: the Egyptian plagues at II, 1, 11, 740–751; Proteus at 808; Egyptian deities at 833–839; Egyptian fleas at II, 1, 39, 7.

253 Γράφειν σὺ τολμᾷς; εἰπέ μοι, ποῦ καὶ πόθεν / Μαθών; τίνος δὲ χειρὸς ἔργον τὸ γράφειν; / Ἀλλ' οὐ χθὲς οὕτως. Ἠγάπας δ', εἰ σοι στενὴν / Μάζαν πορίζοι τὸ λευκὸν τριβώνιον, / Τό θ' ὑλακόμωρον τοῦ βίου καὶ τοῦ τρόπου. / Λόγοι δέ σοι τότ' ἦσαν, ὡς ὄνω λύρα, / Καὶ βουσί κῦμα, καὶ ζυγὸς θαλασσίους. / Νῦν δ' Ὀρφεὺς ἡμῖν πάντα κινῶν δακτύλοις, / Ἡ τειχοποιὸς Ἀμφίων ἐκ κρουμάτων. / Τοιοῦτόν εἰσιν, ἦν τρυφῶσιν, οἱ κύνες. (II, 1, 41, 39–48); ξανθὸς μελάνθριξ, οὗλος ἀπλοῦς τὴν τρίχα—/ τὰ μὲν παλαιά, τὰ δ' ἀρτίως εὐρημένα / τέχνη γάρ ἐστι δημιουργὸς δευτέρα. / πλεῖστον γυναικῶν ἔργον, εἴτ' οὖν ἀρρένων, / χρυσοῦν, ἐλίσσειν τὴν φιλόσοφον σισόην. / τὰ τῶν γυναικῶν ἐν προσώποις φάρμακα / σοφοὶ φερόντων... οὐδὲν γὰρ εἶχε βρῶμα τῶν εἰωθότων / ὅξυ βλέπων δὲ καὶ σοφῶς ὁσφρώμενος (II, 1, 11, 754–760, 778–779).

254 Σοφὸν γὰρ ἔστω καὶ τὸ πικρῶς συντεθεῖν, / τὸ δ' ἐστὶν ἡμᾶς τῆς καθέδρας ἐκβαλεῖν / τοὺς οὐτ' ἔχοντας, οὐθ' ὁλως τιμωμένους, / πλὴν τοῦ φυλάξαι καὶ καταρτίσαι λεών / σοφώτερον δέ, καὶ γὰρ οὐ διὰ ξένων, / αὐτῶν δ' ἀφ' ἡμῶν συμπλέκει τὸ δρᾶμ' ὅλον, / ὡς ἂν σοφιστῆς τῶν κακῶν καὶ συνθέτης, / τῶν ταῦτ' ἀήθων καὶ πλοκῆς πάντη ξένων, / ἄλλην δὲ τιμᾶν δεινότητ' εἰθισμένων (II, 1, 11, 780–788).

own political failure as the sign of his simplemindedness, which qualifies him—paradoxically—as a good leader.

Therefore, Gregory is strongly engaged in this passage, contrasting the first and second persons at more than one point: his strategy is to highlight the difference between himself and this alternative “model” (in reality, just Maximus) of bishop. When the poet suggests that his rival cannot even potentially match him, he seems to appeal to elite self-representation: he draws a boundary between himself and Maximus not on the basis of ascetic practices, but of the nature of those who practice them. Indeed, “the imitation of the great [μεγάλων] by the petty [ἐν μικροῖς] is very shameful” (673). Such a boundary is necessary to Gregory’s position, since Maximus claimed the throne of Constantinople on grounds similar to Gregory’s, in particular as regards asceticism. The treatment of Maximus’s asceticism is the countercheck of the principle I have already more than once stated: that renunciation per se is not sufficient; there must always be—according to Gregory—something to be renounced beforehand; the ascetic is really worthy only if he had an elite status and *paideia* before. Therefore, Maximus’s asceticism, being without *paideia*, is justly discredited.

The way in which the poet discredits this asceticism is also interesting, for he stresses the effeminacy of Maximus as an ascetic<sup>255</sup>. Here, the theme is less developed than in II, 1, 11, where effeminacy is a major trait of Gregory’s portrayal of Maximus and where Gregory demonstrates a true obsession with Maximus’s hair<sup>256</sup>. In II, 1, 12, this characterisation is partly required as an allusion to the other poems, but it also suggests that the *parvenu* had to overdo, so to speak, in order to qualify himself as more ascetic. The accusation of effeminacy may also tap into the spirit of the Synod of Gangra, which condemned ascetic practices that obliterate the difference of the sexes: canons 13 and 17 of Gangra prohibit the adoption of male dress and habits by female ascetics; the case is the reverse of Maximus’s and is much more subversive, since it would endow women with the same authority as men; however, the common trait is the ascetic-bending gender roles<sup>257</sup>. In other words, Gregory pigeonholes Maximus in a strain of subversive asceticism already condemned by the Great Church.

At the same time, Maximus is accused of hypocrisy since he uses this powerful position (of ascetic subversive) to reap material benefits. In this perspective, the fable of the bride-kitten may allude to Maximus’s failed ordination: asceticism is the bridal dress and the apparel of the wedding; the mouse is the material advantages of the powerful position of a bishop; the sudden leap (Επιδραμούσα, 706) of the animal paral-

255 Τὰ πρὸς κάρηνα παρθένων κοσμήματα / Λίνω περισφίγγων (II, 1, 12, 655–656); Ἄλλος γυναικῶν κόσμος, ἄλλος ἀρρένων (671).

256 E.g.: Ἦν τίς ποθ’ ἡμῖν ἐν πόλει θηλυδρίας, / Αἰγύπτιον φάντασμα, λυσσῶδες κακόν, / κύων, κυνίσκος, ἀμφόδων ὑπηρέτης, / ἄρις, ἄφωνον πῆμα, κητῶδες τέρας, / ξανθὸς μελάνθριξ, οὐλος ἀπλοῦς τὴν τρίχα (II, 1, 11, 750–754); Gregory goes on until line 772 stigmatising Maximus’ hair as effeminate; then there is the long invective on Maximus’ hair at 913–939.

257 On the implications of Gangra and the kind of asceticism it forbade: §3.2.2.1 n. 259.

lels Maximus's hectic consecration<sup>258</sup>. The upstart may conceal his lowly nature under any garment of asceticism, but ambition will always betray him. This class contempt from Gregory is evident also in the overall tone of the passage. When the poet criticised Nectarius, he, although biting, maintained a serious tone. When, however, he criticises Maximus, he resorts to animal fable, accusations of effeminacy, and even threats of physical violence (686-687), employing a more iambic and comic tone. The criticisms of the other bishops are somewhere in the middle: the accusation of violence at the beginning of II, 1, 12, as well as the passages examined in §5.2.3 and the biblical metaphor of the wolves, suggest a serious tone; passages such as those on the background of the bishops (§5.2.1), on the other side, have a strong iambic and comic tone. I take this different treatment as a signal that Nectarius, although unworthy of his office, was still considered a gentleman by Gregory, in the sense that they belonged to the same elite class, perhaps with Nectarius even being a social superior to Gregory. On the other side, both Maximus and several other bishops are social inferiors, and Gregory could afford to not only criticise but also ridicule them. Moreover, even if Maximus was still a contender to the throne, his support came mainly from the West, far from Gregory. Nectarius, on the other hand, reigned in Constantinople with the endorsement of the emperor; in the same period as he wrote these poems, Gregory wrote personally to the Constantinopolitan bishop in courteous terms<sup>259</sup>; there was indeed much more to be lost in treating Nectarius roughly than in treating Maximus so. This can also be seen in a structural difference between the criticisms of Nectarius and Maximus: while Nectarius was rarely addressed directly, and many criticisms against him are couched in the form of collective catalogues, in the case of Maximus, although the name is still lacking, Gregory addresses his rival directly, drawing a fairly cohesive portrait, which allows us to imagine a particular person *inside* the poem.

Finally, Gregory attributes to the bishops, taken together, the greatest responsibility, even accusing them of spiritual murder and violence. Gregory presumably considered the other bishops more or less on a par with himself. It is now time to leave Gregory's rivals and the problems of selection and behaviour of single bad bishops to tackle the poet's accusation against the bishops as a body politic and against their whole system of church governance—namely, the councils.

258 See: Νὺξ ἦν· ἐγὼ δ' ἔκαμνον· οἱ δ' ὥσπερ λύκοι / κλέπται φανέντες ἀθρόως μάνδρας ἔσω... (II, 1, 11, 887–888). Similarly to the fable, Maximus' consecration ends with a βάθος, the revelation that his hair was dyed, that the shepherd was indeed a dog: τομὴ δ' ὑπῆλθε βοστρούχους εὐφορβίους / λύουσ' ἀμόχθως τὸν πολὺν χειρῶν πόνον, / τοσοῦτον αὐτῷ καὶ μόνον δεδωκυῖα, / ὅσον γυμνώσαι τὸ τριχῶν μυστήριον... Ποιμὴν δὲ δειχθεὶς ἐκ κυνῶν ἐκ ποιμένων / πάλιν κύων πέφηνε· τῆς ἀτιμίας (915–918; 924–925).

259 McLynn 1997, 303.

### 5.2.5 Synodal Waywardness

The harsh words Gregory has for synods and councils in a letter are relatively famous: “This is my attitude, to write the truth: to flee any assembly of bishops, for I have never known a synod with a beneficial end, nor reaching a solution to the ills but rather an increase thereof” (*ep.* 130, 1)<sup>260</sup>. This attitude is far from isolated in Gregory’s corpus: in the *Letters* alone, there is an entire cluster of missives devoted to or touching upon this theme<sup>261</sup>. It is also the only invective item repeated in all our poems, which always devote at least a couple lines to this theme. This repetition reveals how much Gregory was concerned by the collegial dynamics of the episcopate, a concern which is completely absent from the poems by Ephrem, for example. If Ephrem was concerned with the consensus of bishops in the expanse of time (the theme of *yubbālā*, §4.1), Gregory is much more concerned with consensus in the synchronous frame of space. In other works, Gregory shows a surprising awareness of the geographic or geopolitical nature of ecclesial strife. He correctly identifies two issues: first, the enmity between East and West<sup>262</sup>; second, the odd position of Alexandria, firmly allied with the West but linguistically, geographically, and politically in the Eastern sphere, and therefore stigmatised as an element of instability and discord<sup>263</sup>. These concerns are present in our poems, too.

The passages concerned with the theme are II, 1, 10, 16–24; II, 1, 12, 792–803; 820–825; II, 1, 13, 145–161; and II, 1, 17, 91–101. In the following pages, I will analyse the common language and imagery of these passages. Then, I will contextualise it in the different poems, with their fictive frame. Furthermore, I will consider Gregory’s general idea of councils emerging from the poems. Finally, through the analytic tools of Carl

<sup>260</sup> Ἐχω μὲν οὕτως, εἰ δεῖ τάληθές γράφειν, ὥστε πάντα σύλλογον φεύγειν ἐπισκόπων, ὅτι μηδεμιᾶς συνόδου τέλος εἶδον χρηστὸν μηδὲ λύσιν κακῶν μᾶλλον ἐσχηκός ἢ προσθήκην.

<sup>261</sup> Storin 2019, 95. See especially: Παρακαλῶ δέ, ὥσπερ τὸν ἐξωθεν πόλεμον... οὕτω λῦσον καὶ τὸν ἡμέτερον, ὅσα γέεστιν ἐπὶ σοί, εἰρηνικὸν γενέσθαι τὸ τέλος τοῖς συνελθοῦσιν νῦν ἐπισκόποις ἀγωνισάμενος. Τὸ γὰρ συνιέναι μὲν πολλάκις, μηδὲν δὲ πέρας εὐρίσκεσθαι τῶν κακῶν ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ προστιθέναι ταραχαῖς ταραχάς, μείζονος τῆς αἰσχύνης, ὃ καὶ αὐτὸς γινώσκεις. (*ep.* 136, 3–4); *ep.* 132, 3–4; *ep.* 133; *ep.* 173, 6–7. Note that all the epistles lamenting the shortcomings of the synodal method are addressed to secular officials, whereas letters with similar purposes and touching the matter of synods, but addressed to prelates, do not develop this discourse (e.g.: *ep.* 157).

<sup>262</sup> Ἐρρηξαν ἡδη τὴν ὅλην οἰκουμένην, / ὃ πρόσθεν εἶπον, ἡνίκ’ ἡρχόμην λόγου. / λῆξις δ’ ἐῴα καὶ δύσις λόγου πλέον / τομὴ νομίζεται’ ἢ τόπων καὶ κλιμάτων (II, 1, 11, 1558–1661; λόγος here is “doctrine”); ξένον γάρ ἐστιν, ὡς ὁρῶ, νῦν ἡ δύσις (1637); Χαῖρέ μοι, ἀντολίη καὶ δύσι μαρνάμεναι (II, 1, 16, 96); Μόνος τολμηρὸς ἐγὼ, καὶ θράσους γέμων, ὡς ἔοικε: μόνος εὐελπὶς ἐν τοῖς φοβεροῖς, μόνος καρτερικὸς, καὶ δημοσίᾳ προτιθέμενος, καὶ ἰδίᾳ καταφρονούμενος, καὶ Ἀνατολῇ καὶ Δύσει τῷ πολεμῆσθαι γνωριζόμενος (*or.* 26, 18); τὰ τῆς οἰκουμένης τμήματα συμπεπονθότα τοῖς στασιάζουσιν, ὥστε καὶ εἰς ἀντίπαλον μοῖραν ἀποκριθῆναι τότε Ἐῶν καὶ τὸ Ἑσπέριον, καὶ κινδυνεύειν τῆς γνώμης οὐχ ἥττον ἢ τῶν περάτων ταῦτα γενέσθαι τμήματα (*or.* 42, 21).

<sup>263</sup> ἦλθον γάρ, ἦλθον ἐξαπίνης κεκλημένοι, / ὡς δὴ τι συνοίσοντες εἰρήνης σκοπῷ, / Αἰγύπτιοι τε καὶ Μακεδόνες, ἐργάται / τῶν τοῦ θεοῦ νόμων τε καὶ μυστηρίων, / φυσῶντες ἡμῖν ἐσπέριον τε καὶ τραχύ. / τοῖς δ’ ἀντεπῆει δῆμος ἡλιοφρόνων. (II, 1, 11, 1798–1802, ferociously sarcastic).

Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*, I will reflect on Gregory's description of church discord in his time.

Comparing the passages, one can observe that Gregory employs a consistent group of elements in the four poems, but combines them differently inside different framings. A recurring element is the feeling of hate and enmity running through the episcopate. At II, 1, 10, 17, the discord is defined as δῆριν στονόεσσαν, modifying Empedocles' δῆρις αἰματόεσσα<sup>264</sup>. The allusion to Empedocles may suggest a cosmic relevance of the enmity. I find it noteworthy that in II, 1, 12 Gregory describes his own rhetoric in Empedoclean terms as an instance of φιλία (§5.1.2.3), whereas problems in the church were paralleled by images of cosmic chaos in II, 1, 13 (§3.3.2.3 and below): this suggests a running theme among the poems, of Gregory as agent of love and order contrasting enmity and the ensuing chaos of the other bishops. The juncture δῆρις στονόεσσα also highlights the emotional content by referring to the groans. In the same II, 1, 10, on 23, Gregory uses the word ἀπέχθομαι, which could seem just a variation on the theme of φθόνος directed towards his person, but the term echoes another one from the same root in II, 1, 13, 161, ἔχθος ἄπιστον: it is not just hate towards Gregory, but a widespread atmosphere of enmity between bishops<sup>265</sup>. Similarly, II, 1, 17, 93–94 explains the ἔρις in the councils as the result of gathering together “enemies” (δυσμενέων)<sup>266</sup>.

This enmity explains the strife between bishops, which is sometimes even described in terms of a war, especially in the epic poem II, 1, 13. Already the term δῆρις, especially in the accusative, points to an Iliadic context<sup>267</sup>, but the poem is rife with Homeric words for battle and strife, such as μ῀θος (II, 1, 13, 153; II, 1, 17, 93) and μάρναμαι (II, 1, 13, 153; II, 1, 17, 92; 99). Furthermore, Gregory describes the participant in such disputes as a warrior (θρασύς ἀσπιδιώτης, II, 1, 10, 19; ἀτειρέες εἰσὶ μαχηταί, II, 1, 13, 147)<sup>268</sup>, and he goes so far as to evoke blood spilled (ἐφ' αἵμασι κυδιώντες, II, 1, 13, 148). Sometimes, Gregory connects the strife to the geographic divide between East and West<sup>269</sup>. Interestingly, this broad geographic vision occurs together with the cosmic imagery of strife, as if the conflicts between bishops could materially tear the world apart<sup>270</sup>.

264 Ταῦτα νόσος στυγερή, ταῦτα Θεοῦ θέραπες, / Οἱ δῆριν στονόεσσαν ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισιν ἔχοντες (II, 1, 10, 16–17); Empedocles *frg.* 122, 8 D.-K.; perhaps borrowed by Quint. Smyrn. 1, 408; 642; 2, 484 etc.

265 Ὡς καὶ κουφονόοισιν ἀπέχθομαι (II, 1, 10, 23); Καὶ πρόφασις Τριάς ἐστι, τὸ δ' ἀτρεκές, ἔχθος ἄπιστον (II, 1, 13, 161). A parallel of this line at II, 1, 11, 460: ψυχραὶ προφάσεις, τὸ δ' ἐστὶν ἡ φιλαρχία, referring to the Sasima affair.

266 Ἐνθ' ἔρις, ἐνθα μ῀θος τε καὶ αἵσχεα κρυπτὰ πάροιθεν / Εἰς ἓνα δυσμενέων χώρον ἀγειρόμενα.

267 See Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 388, s.v. δῆρις, and the famous epic poem of Demodocus at Hom. *Od.* 8, 75–78: νεῖκος Ὀδυσσεὺς καὶ Πηλεΐδην Ἀχιλλεύς, / ὥς ποτε δηρίσαντο θεῶν ἐν δαίτῃ θαλεῖν/ ἐκπάγλοισ' ἐπέεσσιν, ἀναξ δ' ἀνδρῶν Ἀγαμέμνων / χαῖρε νόψ, ὃ τ' ἄριστοι Ἀχαιῶν δηριόωντο.

268 See also: συλλέγοντες συμμάχους (II, 1, 11, 1552).

269 Κλονέουσιν / Ἀντολίην τε δύσιν τε (II, 1, 13, 151–152), cf. with the passages listed at n. 262.

270 Πάντα στρεφούση, μικρὸν ἐκκλίναντά τι, / Πάντων ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω δονουμένων (II, 1, 12, 793–794); Κόσμος ὑμῖν εἰκέτω μέγας... Ὅψ' ὃν τὸ κοινὸν ἐκταράσσει' ἀθλίως (II, 1, 12, 800; 825); καὶ κόσμον ὅλον τέμνουσιν ἀθέσμως (II, 1, 17, 99).



Besides cosmic imagery and military metaphors, the poet also employs his favourite image of the storm at sea. This image runs through the second part of II, 1, 10, from the description of Gregory's independence from partisan politics, achieved through a naval metaphor, to his resignation and retreat, described as a ship's returning into a safe haven and thus escaping from a storm<sup>271</sup>. In such a storm, implies Gregory, the "small ship", if it does not want to associate with bigger vessels, must head to the harbour. The idea is much the same as in II, 1, 12, 792–796, which uses the charged term ζάλη, already employed for the spread of heresies (ἐν ζάλη γλωσσαλγίας, II, 1, 12, 184; §3.1.3.1) and the society the ascetic leaves behind (Καὶ τὴν ζάλην, ἥ πάντα τὰν μέσῳ στρέφει, 599; §3.2.2): this metaphor for episcopal strife is employed preferably in those recurring passages, where the poet distances himself from his colleagues in favour of ascetic life (see §3.1.2). Some verbs in II, 1, 12 (δονουμένων, 794) and II, 1, 13 (κυμαίνοντες, 146; κλονέουσιν, 151) suggest the confused movement of winds or waves—in the case of II, 1, 13, 146 describing the emotional state of bishops rather than the external situation caused by them<sup>272</sup>. As usual in that poem, the sequence κυμαίνοντες, ἐπασσύτεροισι suggests the Iliadic memory of κύμα θαλάσσης / ὄρνυτ' ἐπασσύτερον (Hom. *Il.* 4, 422–423).

Furthermore, a syntactic pattern recurs in the description of these divisions—namely, an asyndeton or coordination of contrasting elements, given as single points clashing against one the other outside of the customary syntactic order of the language<sup>273</sup>. When Gregory puts forward a cause for this enmity, it is mainly ambition, especially regarding the assignment of episcopal sees. This is expressed with parallel formulae involving the word θρόνος or θῶκος (see §2.2.4.6)<sup>274</sup>. II, 1, 13, 158–160 conveys the same idea of ambition, mentioning the material benefits (κτησίσις) of hierarchical offices. To this base desire for worldly goods may be connected the reference to vices and passions in II, 1, 12: οἱ τῶς ὁμόφρονες, / "Εως κρατεῖσθε τοῖς ἴσοις παθήμασιν (821–822); ἀφέντες τὰς ἰδίας ἀρρωστίας (823).

271 Μηδ' ὥς νηὶς ὀλίγη φορτίδι συμφέρομαι... φθόνον ἔκφυγον, ἐκ μεγάλου δὲ/ Χείματος, ἐν σταθερῷ πεῖσμα βάλον λιμένα (II, 1, 10, 22; 31–32). The word χεῖμα is not epic in the sense of "storm", cf. σύ τ', ὦ τάλαινα· χείματος γὰρ ἀγρίου/ τυχοῦσα λιμένας ἤλθες εἰς εὐνέμους (Eur. *Andr.* 748–749).

272 Ἀντία κυμαίνοντες, ἐπασσύτεροισι κακοῖσι / Βαλλόμενοι (II, 1, 12, 146–147).

273 II, 1, 10, 21: adnomination (ἀμπλακίη/ἡμπλακον) and antithesis (ὁμοῖον/ἄλλοις); II, 1, 12: anaphora (πάντα/πάντων, 793–794), antithesis (ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω, 794; τοὺς μὲν κάτω / Βάλλοιτε, τοὺς δ' ὑψοῦτε, 801–802) and asyndeton with climax (Χαίροιτε, ὑβρίζοιτε, πατριαρχίας/ Κληροῦσθε, Κόσμος ὑμῖν εἰκέτω μέγας, 799–800, with members of 3, 4, 8 and 9 syllables and the passage from optative to imperative); II, 1, 13: asyndeton and polyptoton (Βαλλόμενοι, βάλλοντες, 147), asyndeton, antithesis and rhyme (Εἰρήνην βοόωντες, ἐφ' αἵμασι κυδιόωντες, 148), climax, parallelism and chiasmus (Παῦλος ἐμός, Πέτρος δὲ τοός, κείνου δέ τ' Ἀπολλῶς, 154 with members of 4, 5 and 6 syllables), enumeration, asyndeton and climax (Ἡ δόξης κενεῆς, ἥ κτήσις, ἥ φθόνος αἰνός, / Τηκεδανός, κακόχαρτος, ἐναίσιμον ἄλγος ἔχουσι!, 159–160, with the members of line 160 of 4, 4 and 8 syllables).

274 Θρόνους μὲν οὖν ἔχοιτε (II, 1, 12, 797); οἱ μὲν θῶκων ἱερῶν πέρι δῆριν ἔχοντες (II, 1, 13, 145, with the wordplay on ἔδρη at 149–150); θρόνων, ὧν πέρι μαρνάμενοι / Σχίζονται (II, 1, 17, 198–199).

To understand how Gregory employs these tropes in different contexts, it is worth keeping in mind the fictional settings of these poems. The text of II, 1, 13 employs the first-person plural, implicating the speaker in the behaviours of the bishops<sup>275</sup>. Gregory still talks of himself as part of the episcopal college, which should not surprise us, since other clues identify this poem with the last speech Gregory gave during the Council of Constantinople before resigning (§1.1.1). Naturally, II, 1, 13 is also an *a posteriori* reflection on that moment, so that its harsh tone serves not so much to “convince” the fictive hearers as to prove that Gregory was right given the result of the council and thus to cast him in an epic light<sup>276</sup>. All the other poems feature Gregory dissociating himself from the other bishops in favour of a humbler station, given also his old age<sup>277</sup>. An analogous passage can be found also in II, 1, 13, but it is placed after the invective against bishops has prompted a final exhortation to mend their ways (II, 1, 13, 196), and it is presented as an eventuality subordinated to his success or failure at the council<sup>278</sup>.

II, 1, 12, which should register Gregory's resignation speech, puts his project of retirement from public life front and centre, portraying him leaving with a last exhortation to the council in the second-person plural<sup>279</sup>. Here, Gregory is still partially committed to the other bishops, as demonstrated by the *κἀγὼ* in line 826, which registers a more conciliatory tone than the previous *ἐγὼ δὲ* (803). The last lines (831–836) go in the same direction.

The two elegiac poems are mostly in the first-person singular, because here Gregory reflects in retrospective on the council, and he can protest his complete difference from the bishops. At II, 1, 10, 18, invoking “Christ the Lord”, Gregory remarks on his difference from the other bishops and his innocence<sup>280</sup>. Shortly after, in line 20, Christ is addressed in the third person, while Gregory still writes of himself in the first person<sup>281</sup>. This demonstrates that Christ is not the only interlocutor of the poem, which presupposes the presence of the community, too; the apostrophe to Christ and the first-person verbs give a sense of intimacy and truth. Thus, Gregory is addressing the Constantinopolitan community, explaining the reasons that had brought him to resign; this focus

275 καλεύμεθα, 156; ἡμετέροισιν, 158.

276 Examples of the epic nature of II, 1, 13: §3.1.4.1; §3.3.2.2; §5.2.5.

277 Ἐν ἀσφαλείᾳ τὰς βραχείας ἡμέρας / Θέσθαι, τὸ γῆρας δ' ἐν καλῷ στήσαι τέλει (II, 1, 12, 795–796); Τῶνδε γὰρ εἵνεκ' ἔγωγε μέσος χθαμαλοῖσι κάθημαι / Ἰητρὸς παθέων, αὐτὸς ἄνουσος ἑὼν. / Οὐ γὰρ ἐμῆς πολιῆς παίζειν (II, 1, 17, 95–97). At II, 1, 10 the equivalent follows immediately the passage I have excerpted: Ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν λήθης κεῦθοι βυθός. Αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε / Ἐνθεν ἀφορμηθεῖς, τέρψομαι ἀτρεμῆι, / Πάνθ' ἄμυδις, βασίλεια, καὶ ἄστυα, καὶ ἱερῆας / Ἀσπασίως προφυγῶν (II, 1, 10, 25–28).

278 εἰ δὲ καλῦπτοι / μῦθον ἐμόν . . . μαρτύρομ' . . . οὐ μὲν ἐγὼ κείνοισιν ὁμόθρονος οὐχ ὁμοεργός . . . ἀλλ'οἱ μὲν περόφωεν ἔην ὁδόν, αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε / ζητῶ Νῶε κιβωτὸν (II, 1, 13, 198–199; 201; 203; 205–206).

279 ἐγὼ δὲ συστραφήσομαι Θεῷ, II, 1, 12, 803; Εἴητε, 820; ὑμῖν, 821; κρατεῖσθε, 822; στέργοιτ[ε], 824; κἀγὼ παρήσω τοῦμόν . . ., 826.

280 Χριστὲ ἀναξ, οὐ μοι ταῦτα νοοῦσι φίλα (II, 1, 10, 18).

281 Οὐδ' ἔθελον Χριστοῦ ἄλλο τι πρόσθε φέρειν (II, 1, 10, 20); first person: γενόμεν (19); ἔθελον (20); ἡμπλακον (21); συμφέρομαι (22); ἀπέχθομαι (23).

on the local community can be seen also in the fact that this is the only passage not mentioning the geopolitical implications of the strife.

Finally, II, 1, 17 has Gregory strongly dissociating from the bishops according to the model of dialectical self-portrait already studied (§5.1.1). Here, the description of the strife gains traits that go beyond the customary reference to war and sound an iambic note. The poet compares episcopal discord to the war between cranes and geese (Χηνῶν ἢ γεράνων ἄκριτα μαρναμένων, 92), the subject of an Aesopian fable (Aesop 256; Perry 228), in which, however, they do not dispute with one another. Of course, one could refer to the strange simile of the war of cranes and Pygmies in Homer (*Il.* 3, 2–6), but there the cranes fight against human beings, not geese. The metrical tile Χηνῶν ἢ γεράνων recurs twice in Homer (*Il.* 2, 460; 15, 692). The first occurrence, though not mentioning a dispute between these species, features the adverb κλαγγηδόν, which may have inspired Gregory. The Homeric simile describes the deployment of the Achaeans; however, Gregory employs it as a metaphor, giving a much more comic turn to the image. Finally, one of the comic works attributed to Homer in the *Life of Homer* of the Pseudo-Herodotus (24) is the Ψαρομαχία, “the battle of the starlings”, which may suggest something similar to the *Batrachomyomachia* but with birds. When, shortly after, Gregory compares church leadership to apes (101), he may be referencing another lost work attributed to Homer, the Κέρκωπες, a tale of mischievous men-monkeys<sup>282</sup>. The poet of Old Comedy Hermippus composed a play with the same title. The word is attested in the Septuagint version of the Bible, too, in Prov. 26:22, where it refers to the flattering but false man. It is notable that Gregory had already employed this animal metaphor for the bad bishop in II, 1, 12, 771, contrasting his own *parrhēsia*, compared to that of a lion, with the character of the talkative political bishop, compared to an ape (§3.1.1.3). In any case, both animal references give a mock-epic or comic connotation to the passage, besides being very insulting. It is indeed interesting that II, 1, 17 would be more “iambic” than II, 1, 12 in this case. However, as we have seen, II, 1, 12 had its more iambic parts (§5.2.1–4), and it is just resuming its more serious frame—the official speech at the council—towards the end; besides, it still features violent attacks against colleagues, directly or sarcastically, except that the attacks are not couched in the humble images of the rest of the poem. II, 1, 17, on the other hand, began with the high tones of the *Priamel* and gradually descended more and more towards the iambus, especially in the description of Gregory’s life as bishop (§5.2.3). Here it goes towards its natural ending with *bathos*, using fable-images that are not wholly strange to the elegiac metre. This is, after all, one of the last poems treating explicitly the council before the cycle of the Lenten silence; therefore, the poet’s trust in public action is here at its minimum; he has never been so removed and estranged from the other bishops and their world.

282 *Harpocr. lex.*, s.v. κέρκωψ; *Suda* s.v. κέρκωπες.

Until now, I have considered only *how* Gregory stigmatises and criticises discord among bishops. Now I will analyse *what* and *why* he criticises the bishops as a collegial body. First, note that the word σύνοδος is used in relation to discord only in II, 1, 17, 91. This line is almost a poetic rendition of the incipit of *ep.* 130<sup>283</sup>. At least in their formulations, the other passages refer to the state of contemporary church hierarchy, not to the instrument of synods and councils. However, the setting of II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13, evoked by the use of the first-person plural in 13 and of the second-person plural in 12, situates these criticisms of the episcopate in the context of the Constantinopolitan Council, so that the dynamics the texts describe must be brought in relation with Gregory's evaluation of councils and synods. After all, these dynamics are indeed the dynamics Gregory met in the Council of 381.

In II, 1, 13, 161, Gregory says that the Trinity was just an excuse (πρόφασις Τριάς ἐστὶ), an evaluation which—even leaving aside Gregory as a source—corresponds to the reality of that council: the bishops who convened in Constantinople were all Nicenes, and the dissenting Macedonians were ousted at the beginning. With a Nicene emperor, determined to bring his influence to bear, the consensus on the Nicene Creed must have been taken for granted by the council as a mere formality. What was really at stake were Antioch and Constantinople, the first because of the schism, the latter because of the deposition of the Arian Demophilus. Here, again, Gregory is right in pointing out that the real point of contention was the “thrones”, with all the material benefits they brought<sup>284</sup>. This should not have been a problem per se, because provincial synods and even wider councils were a customary practice in the church to sort out these hierarchical matters, so many that the canons required wide consensus of the relevant prelates for the consecration of a new bishop<sup>285</sup>. Gregory's bitterness and his presentation of this quite normal proceeding as an awful spoil system stem from his personal experience in Constantinople. Indeed, it was the question of Antioch that exploded in his hands, dividing the episcopate during a supposedly easy council and leading to his own downfall. The fact that such strife was caused by an administrative matter, and not a doctrinal one, contributes to the indignation of the poet.

However, his blaming the councils for discord in the church is partially justified by the development of the schism of Antioch. Before the Council of Constantinople there was a deal between the two factions to end the division. It was after the death of Meletius at the council that the deal was challenged and ultimately ignored. The opposing sides may have been insincere since the beginning, but the fact remains that the deal

<sup>283</sup> Cf. Οὐδέ τί που συνόδοισιν ὁμόθρονος ἔσσομ' ἔγωγε (II, 1, 17, 91) with πάντα σύλλογον φεύγειν ἐπισκόπων (*ep.* 130, 1). τί που equals πάντα, συνόδοισιν equals σύλλογον (the latter is not attested in Homer), ὁμόθρονος with negation equals φεύγειν and, through the reference to the θρόνος, covers the specification ἐπισκόπων.

<sup>284</sup> Τόσσοις ἔρωι φαέεσσιν ἐπήχλυσεν ἡμετέροισιν, / Ἡ δόξης κενεῆς, ἡ κτήσιος (II, 1, 13, 159).

<sup>285</sup> See, e.g.: canons 4–6 of Nicaea; 2 and 6 of Constantinople. See the works on episcopal elections cited at §3.3.1 n. 209.

fell apart in the context of the council, with both parts attending and given ample opportunity to fight and, perhaps, to stiffen their positions. In retrospective, Gregory must have thought that it would have been better to avoid the encounter completely, and thus maybe the factions would have respected the deal: the council offered the occasion to exercise those ambitions and to harden those enmities that, in the day-to-day proceedings of the bishops, would have been hindered by distance and absence. This is the meaning of the following sentence: “Ἐνθ’ ἔρις, ἔνθα μῶθος τε καὶ αἵσχεα κρυπτὰ πάροιθεν / Εἰς ἓνα δυσμενέων χῶρον ἀγειρόμενα (II, 1, 17, 93–94). He notes another shortcoming of councils in II, 1, 11, 1739–1744<sup>286</sup>: he excuses himself for his failure to govern the council, noting that during such assemblies there is not a definite chain of command, but that the majority imposes itself—which is, according to him, nothing short of anarchy.

This idea is linked to another problem Gregory acutely notes. He is conscious of the negative fallout of synods, beyond the fact that they do not find solutions to the problems; as he says in *Letter* 136, 4: “To assemble often, far from finding a limit to the ills, always adds confusion to confusion” (ταραχαῖς ταραχάς; see note 273). Our texts describe the confusion ensuing from synodal strife, too. In these descriptions, the poet seems to point to more widespread consequences than the simple confusion in the college of bishops, because he uses terms with a general value, such as κόσμος (II, 1, 12, 800; with ὅλος at II, 1, 17, 99), πάντα (II, 1, 12, 793–794), τὸ κοινόν (II, 1, 12, 825), and “the East and West” (Ἀντολίην τε δύσιν τε, II, 1, 13, 161). These terms, which are the object of verbs meaning “to upset”, “to shake”, are ambiguous, in that they do not pinpoint one precise community which is “upset” or “shaken”. These words convey an idea of totality. Such a totality may be interpreted on three different levels. The first, and the most restricted, is the totality of the episcopal college. In this sense, Gregory has noted something important: the format of the ecumenical council, bringing together bishops from (at least in theory) all over the empire, was liable to extend the problems affecting just one part of the episcopate to its totality. After all, he did experiment with something similar when the Egyptians reached the council in Constantinople, tilting the balance of the Antiochian dossier against him and thereby challenging his own position—which seemed sure before—by unearthing the Maximus affair. And so, different matters, canonically pertaining to different regions, got intertwined with one another, so that a piecemeal solution was not possible anymore, while the simultaneous presence of groups of bishops with opposite interests hindered any comprehensive solution. The synodal way, says Gregory, brings conflicts and ills of the church painfully to light, but it is also the worst method to solve them.

<sup>286</sup> “σὺ δ’ οὐκ ἐπήνεις ταῦτα τὸ πρόσθεν; λέγε. / τῶν συλλόγων δὲ τίς ποτ’ εἶχε τὸ κράτος;” / οἱ σύλλογοι μὲν ἦσαν, ὧν ἦσαν τότε / (ὁκνῶ γὰρ εἰπεῖν αὐθις, οἷς αἰσχύνομαι), / ἦσαν δὲ πάντων, ἴσον εἰπεῖν οὐδενός / ἀναρχία γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ πλεισταρχία.

In a broader sense, the πάντα which the council disrupts may refer to the totality of church matters and especially to the rest of the faithful. A concern about the consequence that the bishops' discord will have for the faithful of is shown in particular in II, 1, 13, where the passage in question is followed by the following consideration: "Such are the leaders [ἡγητῆρες]. Then follows closely the people [λαός], / prone to wickedness, even without a leader" (II, 1, 13, 164–165). The turmoil caused by bishops introduces and explains the turmoil in the community, which lacks moral canons (see §3.3.2.2). This generalised turmoil in turn echoes the long description of the state of the church at the beginning of the poem<sup>287</sup>. The idea of chaos and confusion runs through all of II, 1, 13, and it is linked not only to the failure to select good bishops but also to the discord among existing bishops. This component is at work elsewhere as well, at least in II, 1, 17, where, after our passage, Gregory defends himself from the not-so-hypothetical accusation of having abandoned his community<sup>288</sup>. However, in this poem the perspective is that of the single bishop, whereas II, 1, 13 is much more interesting from this angle because it considers the church at large, as a κοινόν.

Finally, in their broadest sense, the references to κόσμος, πάντα, and τὸ κοινόν may involve also the secular sphere. Here, again, Gregory's experience is a fundamental guideline: each major step of his career in Constantinople, from his sending in 379 to his refusal to take part in the 382 council, had been determined by imperial policy, either as an endorsement of such policy or a reaction to it. For this reason, it must have been utterly clear to Gregory that the church's stability and unity were of the utmost importance for the emperor. The reason behind imperial care for church matters was equally clear: concerns of public order went hand in hand with religious disputes. This was especially true on an urban level, where schisms and hierarchical disputes could devolve into riots<sup>289</sup>. Moreover, many emperors and bishops were sincerely convinced that orthodoxy and a legitimate hierarchy contributed to the welfare

<sup>287</sup> §3.1.4.1; cf. ἐνθα καὶ ἐνθα / σείεται οἷα τε κύμα (29–30) with ἀντία κυμαίνοντες (146) and κλονέουσιν / ἀντολίην τε δύσιν τε (151–152). A group of echoes implies that the bishop's behaviour is a sacrilegious mock of Christ's Salvation: cf. Θεὸς ἦλθεν ἀπ' οὐρανίου τοῦ θωώκου (32) with οἱ μὲν θώκων ἱερῶν πέρι δῆριν ἔχοντες (145); κύδος ἐὼν θνητοῖσιν ἐνὶ σπλάγχνοις κενώσας... αἷμα τε θεῖον / ῥύσιον ἡμετέρης κακίης χέεν (33; 35–36) with ἐφ' αἵμασι κυδιώοντες (148) and κείνου καὶ χεیرهσσι καὶ αἵματι κύδος ἔχοντες (157). Cf. also: πῶς μήνη σκοτέεσσα τόσον κλέος ἀμφοκάλυψε; (42) with τόσος ἔρωσ φαέεσσιν ἐπὶ γλυσεν ἡμετέροισιν (158); ὁλοῖον... ἔχθος (52) with ἔχθος ἄπιστον (161). Note the parallel between the mention of the cities of refuge of the Bible and the mention of the Temple as secluded spaces, emblematic of the order and purity of the church: καὶ χώρος τις ἦν ἀποπομπαίοις θυέεσσι... (60) and ἦν δ' ὅτε Μωαβίταις νηὶς μέγας οὐ βατὸς ἦεν... (184).

<sup>288</sup> Cf. Εἰ δὲ κακὸν λαοῖο θεόφρονος ἡνία ῥῖψαι, / Ἰστωσαν κεφαλαὶ τῶν ἀποσεισμένων, / Ὅφρα κεν, ὡς θοδὸν ἵππον, ἀποπτυστῆρα χαλινῶν, / Θυμὸς ἄγοι κρημνοῖς, ἢ σκοπέλοισι φέρων (II, 1, 17, 103–106) with Ἡ σκοπέλοισιν ἔαξε, κυβερνητῆρος ἄτερθεν. (II, 1, 13, 55) and Τοῖα μὲν ἡγητῆρες· ὁ δ' ἔσπεται ἐγγύθι λαός, / Πρόφρονες ἐς κακίην, καὶ ἡγητῆρος ἀνευθεν. (II, 1, 13, 164–165).

<sup>289</sup> Two examples: the many riots in Alexandria (see Haas 1997, 245–330); the disorders in Rome surrounding the contested succession of Liberius between Damasus and Ursinus (Amm. Marc. 27, 3, 12–15; 9, 9).

of the empire, whereas heresy and illegitimate prelates were punished by God on a collective level<sup>290</sup>. We have already seen such an ideology in Ephrem (§4.1.2), and it is at work even here in Gregory. It is true that Ephrem is more explicit on this, since, thanks to the history of Nisibis, he has in mind the importance for the empire to win its wars. Gregory is more subtle, maybe because he took this notion for granted in his audience. For example, in II, 1, 13 the ongoing reference to ecclesiastical chaos is expressed with reference to the whole “cosmos”, as if to suggest that the upheavals of the church influenced the very structure of our world<sup>291</sup>. Moreover, in the first description of chaos in the poem (II, 1, 13, 27–58), Gregory often repeats the word λαός, suggesting a collective dimension of the problems decried<sup>292</sup>. These subtle hints signal that the bishops’ divisions reflect on the larger structure of the empire and, ultimately, of the world—even if that structure ought not to be the prime concern of the bishops: after all, at the beginning of that poem, Gregory called the bishops “world’s pillars” (κόσμοιοι θέμεθλα, II, 1, 13, 5).

Given the political dimension of this strife, I want to conclude with a parallelism between these passages and Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political*<sup>293</sup>. Gregory’s pessimistic analysis of the discord inside the episcopate has points of contact, in my view, with Schmitt’s generalisation of politics as the domain of the categories of friend and foe and with his close association of politics and war. I am drawn to this comparison by a detail of the enmity between bishops as described by Gregory—namely, its lack of real motives: Καὶ πρόφασις Τριάς ἐστὶ, τὸ δ’ ἀτρεκές, ἔχθος ἄπιστον (II, 1, 13, 161). As the analysis of the texts in this section has shown, Gregory excludes doctrinal motives for the conflicts between bishops and tends to connect the conflicts to an unspecified enmity. It is true that such enmities sometimes take ambitions of power and desire for riches as their triggers, but they are largely presented as a primitive, unaccountable fact. Gregory formulates this criticism after the traumatic experience of the 381 council, during which an apparent consensus of bishops, all belonging to the Nicene party and in the absence of doctrinal opposition, even with imperial support, shipwrecked on the matter of Antioch, leading to factions that were still divided and fighting up to the

<sup>290</sup> Elm 2012, 2–3. The rest of the book demonstrates from the texts how much the *Fortuna Romanorum* was linked with correct worship and correct theology.

<sup>291</sup> Λαὸς ὅλης γαίης βασιλῆϊος (II, 1, 13, 28); σπινθήρ δὲ λόγου, καὶ πυρὸς ἀερθεῖς, / Πᾶσαν ἐπέδραμε γαῖαν αἰδῖμος (48–49); Κιγκλῖδα τὴν μεσάτην κόσμων δύο, τοῦδε μένοντος, / Τοῦ τε παριπταμένοιο, θεῶν ὄρον, ἡμερίων τε. (70–71); Ξυνὸς μὲν πάντεσσιν ἀήρ, ξυνὴ δέ τε γαῖα, / Ξυνὸς δ’ οὐρανὸς εὐρύς, ἃ τ’ οὐρανὸς ὁμμασι φαίνει (96–97); Αὐτῶν κόσμος ἔοι, αὐτῶν θεὸς, ὅσα τ’ ἀρίστοις / Ἔσπεται ὑστατίοισιν ἐν ἡμασιν ἀμφιτάλαντα (171–172); Ἐν δ’ ἄρα πάντα πέλοι, Χριστὸς, βροτὸς, ἥλιος, ἀστήρ, / Φῶς, σκότος, ἄγγελος ἐσθλὸς, Ἐωσφόρος οὐκέτι λάμπων. (175–176); Πάντα δ’ ἅμ’ ἀλλήλοισι πεφυρμένα εἰς ἓν ἄγοιτο. / Ὅς ποτ’ ἔην, ὅτ’ ἄκοσμος ἔην πρωτόκτιστος ὕλη, / Κόσμον ἔτ’ ὠδίνουσα διακριδὸν οὐ βεβαῶτα. (181–183). On the cosmological imagery: §3.1.4.1; §3.3.2.2.

<sup>292</sup> Λαὸς ὅλης γαίης βασιλῆϊος, ἔθνος ἄπιστον (II, 1, 13, 28); Λαὸς ὁδ’ (32); λαοῖο (58); ὁ δ’ ἔσπεται ἐγγύθι λαὸς (164); see also: Σῶμα μέγα Χριστοῦ (27); τόδε σῶμα (40); ὅλον γένος (47); στρατὸν (51; 53).

<sup>293</sup> I quote from the synoptic edition of the different versions prepared by Marco Walter, Schmitt 2018.

time of the writing of the poems. Such an outcome of the council must have seemed so inexplicable that Gregory attributed it to none other than Satan (II, 1, 13, 43–58). Enmity acquires thereby a metaphysical foundation; it is not casual that the poet mentions Adam's expulsion from Eden as a demonic work before introducing the enmity between bishops. The current discord is therefore presented as a consequence of—or at least something similar to—the original sin. These elements—the arbitrariness of the division, its metaphysical nature, and the link with the original sin—resemble one of the key features of the friend/foe distinction according to Schmitt—namely, its irreducibility to other categories. The foe is such not because he is wrong or ugly, but simply because he is a foe: enmity is something primordial; it is cause, not caused<sup>294</sup>. Proceeding from his definition of “the political” (*das Politische*), Schmitt claims that those writers who could address what is authentically “political” were those with the presupposition of something intrinsically “wrong”, problematic, in human nature. Therefore, among Christian writers, the clear conscience of an original sin was the fundament of authentically political thought<sup>295</sup>. Thus, Schmitt draws a link between political thought and original sin and, more generally, metaphysics—a connection that is, in a way, analogous to what we find in Gregory, where arbitrary conflict is conceivable only in the framework of Adam's banishment from paradise and Satan's presence and activity in our world. It is perhaps significant that Gregory employs so many animal fables as examples in our poems, if Schmitt claims that the political interpretation of the animal fable is possible only when one believes men to be “naturally” evil<sup>296</sup>.

There are, however, significant differences between Gregory's representation of conflict and the requirements of the friend/foe distinction as put forth by Schmitt. First, Schmitt distinguishes between private rival and public enemy. He employs for the first the Greek word ἐχθρός, which is the word recurring the most in Gregory's poems for the bishops<sup>297</sup>. Even in the line quoted above (II, 1, 13, 161), enmity is called ἐχθος, meaning a private sentiment of hate more than a public relationship as required by Schmitt. Gregory consistently describes this enmity as a sentiment, something stemming from the inner mind of the bishops; for example, they are called δυσμενέων in II, 1, 17, 94, and their enmity against Gregory comes from their νοῦς in II, 1, 10, 18 (οὐ μοι ταῦτα νοοῦσι φίλα). Another important element of Schmitt's classification is the absence of a neutral third party—whether in the form of a regulation or of an adjudicating institution—that may resolve the conflict<sup>298</sup>. If church canons, though formally neutral and preordained,

294 Schmitt 2018, 76–79, 80–83. Van Dam's analysis of the strife between Eunomius and the Cappadocians (Van Dam 2003b, 15–45), although perhaps too cynic, stresses the personal and social enmity beyond and beneath doctrinal divergences of the participants. However, that conflict is entirely contained in the terms of a private rivalry and competition between provincial notables.

295 Schmitt 2018, 188–203, esp. 196–197.

296 Schmitt 2018, 180–183.

297 Schmitt 2018, 82–87.

298 Schmitt 2018, 78–81.



were irrelevant in resolving church conflicts, as the inconsistent application of canons 2 and 15 of Nicaea to Nectarius and Gregory demonstrate (see §5.1.2.2), the emperor was still capable of deciding church issues, at least for a while. In the end, the emperor had the power to declare or avoid war, whereas the bishops did not have it, so that their conflicts were not “political” in the full sense. This brings us to a third condition episcopal conflicts left apparently unmet: Schmitt requires that friend/foe conflicts entail the present, concrete possibility of death, either of the enemy or of oneself. Yet, since bishops could not raise armies or declare wars, their conflicts seem not to be capable of endangering the concrete, biological life of their participants.

Yet some of these differences are limited. The rivalries between bishops, for example, cannot be reduced to purely private issues. They have a collective character, first because the bishops did not act as individuals but were divided into groups and acted as *θρασεῖς ἀσπιδιώται*, to use Gregory’s expression (II, 1, 10, 19). Moreover, Gregory ascribes to them a significance surpassing the inner strife of a selected body of people. The meaning of his geographic references to East and West, as well as of the protracted cosmic metaphor implying that the conflict among bishops may tear apart the very fabric of the *κόσμος*, is precisely that these conflicts have a collective significance or at least that their effects trickle down to the whole church and the whole empire. The East-West divide is particularly unsettling, since its episcopal side could seem to reflect a much more important cultural and imperial dynamic—namely, the political division between *pars Orientis* and *pars Occidentis*, already played out many times during the civil wars of the fourth century, and the increasing linguistic divide between the Greek- and Latin-speaking church and between the Greek- and Latin-speaking empire. It is ironic that, at the very moment when the empire celebrated its last unification under Theodosius, the church revealed for the first time her East-West divide in the Council of Constantinople, and Gregory anticipated later developments when he highlighted this divide. Anyway, it is difficult to assess how far church conflict involved also the congregations, and, therefore, how much one is authorised to speak of collective conflicts as opposed to private grudges. In Antioch and Alexandria episcopal groups had communal footing, with conflicts sometimes devolving into violence, but the cases of these two gigantic cities are not to be translated throughout the Mediterranean lightly; perhaps this collective representation of the conflict is due more to Gregory’s poetic imagination.

As regards the threat of physical war looming above every authentic friend/foe distinction, although bishops could not declare war, physical damage was not completely excluded from church conflicts. As I have already said, such conflicts could devolve into violence, especially in bigger cities like Antioch, Alexandria, or Rome. One has only to remember the attempted stoning of Gregory at Constantinople, the controversial events leading to Damasus’s election to the see of Rome as recounted by Ammianus, or the

situation of Roman Africa in the time of Augustine described by Shaw<sup>299</sup>. Moreover, bishops were ordinarily exiled, persecuted, or incarcerated by the secular arm during the fourth century, as Gregory wrote in *or.* 42 (see §5.1.2.2, especially note 52). In many cases, the emperor and his officers were counselled by other bishops, so that one cannot strictly speak of a neutral (and neutralising) state in the same sense in which one speaks of the modern European states considered by Schmitt. State power was contestable, and indeed the competition to influence the emperor must have been one of the main components of the bishops' enmity. Thus, the violence one side could inflict on the other was still bound by irregularity of deployment (episodic outbreaks) or by the mediation of imperial power. For this reason, it is difficult to evaluate how much the communities backing the different groups of bishops perceived the threat of violence on an existential level.

These contradictory features of the enmity described by Gregory are explicated in Schmitt's idea that the friend/foe distinction can emerge gradually from other differences, as well as degenerate in grotesque instances of the same dynamic<sup>300</sup>. A full identification of the dynamics described by Gregory with the friend/foe distinction and Schmitt's definition of what is properly political can be safely dismissed. On the other side, there are undeniable analogies between the two, so that one could interpret the situation described by Gregory as one of those parasitic forms of enmity in which antagonism is expressed through tactics, intrigues, and rivalries. This situation, however, does not result from a previous full-fledged enmity; rather, it was first revealed—at least, in Gregory's perception—during the council. In the moment of their triumph, the Nicaenes found themselves divided. This did not bode well for the future: this, in my opinion, is the deep meaning of Gregory's insistent military metaphor, especially in II, 1, 13. The conflict has not yet escalated to a point where war is a concrete possibility of the ecclesiastical confrontation; however, the lack of a serious motivation (according to Gregory) in the conflict over Antioch and himself is the sign of a growing "politicisation" of ecclesiastical conflicts. After all, in the following two centuries christological controversies, with their East/West divide and the fundamental role of Alexandria, proved Gregory right. In a Schmittian perspective, to represent these conflicts with the language of war, alluding even to bloodshed, means to cast them as political conflicts; thereby, the poet tries to warn his audience of this growing "politicisation".

The modern interpreter may speculate on the reactions of Gregory's public to his warning. The warning must have been particularly relevant to lay audiences, especially to people close to the court: Gregory signals a weakening in the neutralising power of the secular arm. Although his ousting and the election of Nectarius may seem a victory from the point of view of the emperor, the poet argues that, coming from a deep divide in the episcopate and failing to address that divide, these actions serve merely to delay

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299 Shaw 2011.

300 Schmitt 2018, 88–89, 92–93.

and exacerbate the problem, especially if the Egyptians and the Westerners had perceived Nectarius's and Flavian's elections as a defeat. History vindicated our poet: the problem repeated itself, exacerbated, in the case of John Chrysostom less than a decade later. On the other hand, the ecclesiastical audience is sternly recalled to a higher standard of conduct by Gregory's military metaphors. If they had been able to piece together Gregory's considerations on the political cost of electing Nectarius (§5.2.3) with the implications for the empire of their discord as represented by the poet, they would have understood the risk Gregory could only obliquely allude to: ecclesiastical infighting causes the emperor to encroach on the independence of the church in order to restore order; this in turn leads to less dignity and freedom for the hierarchy. For this reason, it is important to preserve concord as much as possible and to sort out conflicts internally, renouncing partisanship.

Until now, to compare Gregory to Schmitt's thought, I have relied mostly on II, 1, 13. Military imagery, the theme of enmity, and the arbitrariness of the conflict are less relevant in the other poems, and this is not a coincidence. II, 1, 13 is fictionally set during the council, but it is really supposed to denounce the behaviour of bishops. Fictionally, the description of the dynamic of the council makes the bishops aware, but in reality, it exposes the bad state of the church. Gregory's insistent reference to Christ, his blood, and the church as mystical body is an attempt to overcome the opposing factions appealing to a broader belonging; the devil has, in this context, the function of the "other" against which enmity should be directed. The other poems have a different stance, one of progressive removal of Gregory from the political arena. In II, 1, 12, Gregory has already decided to resign but still tries to influence—however weakly—his colleagues. His final *peroratio* in favour of peace insists on the moral qualities of the single bishops as a prerequisite for concord. This is in harmony with the real-life meaning of the poem, which is concerned with the selection and the traits of the good bishop. These extroverted proposals cease with II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 17, two poems already focused on the self-presentation of Gregory as an ascetic. Already in II, 1, 12 Gregory had expressed his isolation from the rest of the bishops<sup>301</sup>; in II, 1, 10, however, his isolation turns to enmity. By refusing to "take arms" for either faction, Gregory has become the common enemy of both factions<sup>302</sup>. This paradox is the perfect corroboration of the apologetic argument, according to which Gregory chose to sacrifice his position and reputation—in short, himself—for peace among the other bishops, without denying malevolence on their part. The retrospection of II, 1, 17 brings an even harder judgement against councils and an even stronger removal from the bishops: Gregory does not propose any unity anymore but, generalising the "us vs. them" dynamic of the Council of Constantinople

301 Εἴτ' οὖν πεπληγὼς ἐκ μέθης τὸν νοῦν μόνος / Μέθῃ τετρώσθαι τοὺς ἀοίνους οἶομαι. (II, 1, 12, 829–830). Note the word μόνος in the middle of the distich. The passage has been analysed at §5.1 and §5.1.2.4, where Gregory's isolation and difference from the others is directly thematised.

302 οὐ μοι ταῦτα νοοῦσι φίλα. / Οὐ γὰρ ἦς γενόμην μοίρης θρασὺς ἀσπιδιώτης... Μῆδ' ὡς νῆς ὀλίγη φορτίδι συμφέρομαι. / Ὡς καὶ κουφονόοισιν ἀπέχθομαι (II, 1, 10, 18–19; 22–23).

to every possible assembly of bishop, he declares renunciation to politics the only viable solution. Read in this *corpus*, II, 1, 13 works as the premise of the other two poems, as it explains the danger of the ecclesiastical politics Gregory will renounce. Naturally, what these texts witness is but a conditioned renunciation of politics: the poems themselves are proof that Gregory has not ceased to make his voice heard in church matters; he has just chosen a new way to do it: through poetry.

## General Conclusions

The close comparison of Ephrem's and Gregory's poems reveals a consistent pattern of similarities and differences. Although the concrete, real bishops and their environments could be very different and varied, the core theological tenets on the episcopal office and the main problems bishops faced are common points between Ephrem and Gregory: the two poets sing of the same subject. On the side of differences are the concerns, the aims and the techniques employed by the two poets. They develop namely the same subject-matter in different directions and with different means.

The deep theological similarities of the two poets can be traced to two main sources: a common Christian tradition and the environment of fourth-century Syria. From the poems emerges a clear and established tradition of the episcopate, which is largely in accordance with canonical documents and previous or contemporary prose works; however, not every element of this tradition is equally highlighted by the poets, and some elements of novelty can be found. I have traced two main facets of the idea of bishop in the poems to a common Christian tradition: language and leadership. As regards language, Ephrem and Gregory are equally vague when distinguishing bishop and priest, and, as was customary in contemporary theorizing on the office of bishop, they rarely use the technical term for the bishop (§2.1.1). Instead, the poets draw on the wealth of titles and images the Bible uses for leaders, mostly in a very traditional way, as is the case for the metaphor of the shepherd (§2.2.1), but without ever excluding the possibility of revitalizing the metaphor to get their point across. In this sense, the Bible is a common heritage between the two poets—otherwise so aesthetically different—who both allude to it, rewrite it, and employ it for the benefit of an audience knowledgeable in the Holy Writ. However, their relationship with the Bible is not straightforward as regards the idea of bishop: if Christian tradition links the institution of the episcopate with New Testament figures as well as with Old Testament ones, our poets decidedly prefer the Old. After all, the terminology and the concrete organization of the communities implied by the New Testament oscillated and were hard to grasp. The model of the apostles, for example, though not totally absent, is not at all prominent; in Gregory, they appear as a counterexample to his model of bishop (§3.1.3.1 and §3.1.3.3), while in Ephrem they tend to be equated with Old Testament prophets (§3.1.1) without particular emphasis on their being the first bishops. Old Testament priesthood, albeit interpreted differently by the two poets, is a much stronger precedent, together with Old Testament leadership in general, in contrast to New Testament mission—an approach clearly demonstrated by the prominence of the shepherd metaphor to the detriment of the fisher metaphor (§2.2.1.1).

Another common element is leadership. The bishop is conceived mainly as the leader of the community and only secondarily as the high priest or the “lover of the poor”. Indeed, the leading role of bishops is the very *raison d'être* of our poems (§3.1; §3.1.3.1). Ephrem and Gregory share this vision with much Christian theorizing on bishops of the same period and earlier; on the contrary, contemporary research has

highlighted the importance of the social and economic role of the bishop as “lover of the poor” in shaping the life of the city and the nature of his own office. Traces of this real-life attitude can be gleaned from Gregory’s polemics against the bishop conceived as a patron (§2.1.3; §3.1.1.3) or from Ephrem’s polemics against a church that amasses riches (§3.1.1.2; §4.1.2), and the reader will notice that both Gregory and Ephrem categorically reject such a model of church leadership. Long before Gibbon, it was the fathers of the church that lamented the intrusion of secular matters in the bishop’s purview. Even within the boundaries of traditionally Christian leadership, Gregory and Ephrem do not insist on the crucial power of administering penance, thereby regulating the access to the community, a responsibility canonical documents are anxious to regulate and direct and which has been the focus of interest of many scholars. Contemporary appeals to mildness find little space in our poems—though they are not completely unheard (§3.1.4, esp. §3.1.4.2 and §3.1.4.3). The poets are much more interested in the doctrinal control of the community and the moral discipline the bishop should administer. It is not a question of breaking with tradition but of different emphases; for example, Gregory’s doctrinal interest (§3.1.3.3) stems from concern about Nectarius and engagement with classical culture. For Ephrem, mildness is less linked to penance and access to the community and more to the identity of the Christian community itself: mildness marks out the Christian congregation from its competitors, such as the Roman Empire, the synagogue, or the memory of the past bishop and the past community.

The leadership of the bishop operates mainly through personal example. This notion was common to previous treatises and already implicit in Paul’s recommendations for the choice of the bishop, but in Ephrem and Gregory it has an unprecedented importance, to such an extent as to justify the importing of images alien to biblical languages to express it: the mirror, the painting, the statue (§2.2.3.1). This is indeed the most extended and significant rhetorical device common to Gregory and Ephrem and independent of biblical culture. Highlighting example as leadership tool allows the poets to either praise (Ephrem) or criticize (Gregory) existing bishops on the basis of their personal merits and vices instead of describing communal dynamics in detail. Moreover, Ephrem refers to the power of example to indict the community without accusing the bishop: if the bishop teaches through personal example, he must not recur to compulsion or direct orders, and he is thus exempted from responsibility for the failures of his community, that should have followed the bishop’s example of its own accord. More important yet is that through the principle of example both poets support their requirement that the bishop be an ascetic.

Here we find a theme common to both Gregory and Ephrem and stemming not from a common Christian tradition but from the practices and ideas of their geographic area, Syria, whose influence in church matters was felt also in Cappadocia. Ephrem and Gregory share the ideal of a clergy composed of ascetics and the same concept of asceticism. In both poets we find a primitive Syrian asceticism clearly expressed (as already described by Brock and other scholars), which does not openly contrast with urban society, as did Egyptian monasticism and later Syrian anchoritism (§3.2). Ascetics consti-

tute the elite of the urban congregation, bound by the vows they have taken at baptism and engaged in key roles of the community, frequently with a deeper theological formation so that they can educate other faithful. It is from the ranks of these Christianly educated ascetics that the clergy should come. Indeed, both Ephrem and Gregory propose a harmonization of clergy and ascetics, with Gregory perhaps reacting to the disorders these urban ascetics have caused in his experience. The main difference between the two is that Gregory superimposes onto this traditional institution an Origenian and mystical interpretation of asceticism (§3.2.2.3), absent from Ephrem's view.

The bishop as ascetic-in-chief, named and described through the literary heritage of the Bible, is common to our poets. The way this model plays out in Gregory's poems is very different from how it plays out in Ephrem's. As I already said, similarities point to an established Christian *koine*, capable of overcoming the linguistic barrier between Greek and Syriac, even when it took regional colourings—in this case, those of fourth-century Syria. A deeper analogy between these two corpora of texts is that they both treat the theme of bishops through poetry, addressing a real-life audience. I demonstrated and explained this fact in chapter 1, pointing to publication and transmission practices shared by both poets (and by most authors of the time). Two elements must be stressed (see §1.2): first, writing and publication was by no means an individual enterprise; second, orality and writing were still mixed in the whole process that brought the poems to us. As for the first point, the poets worked inside and for a social network of people who could appreciate their art; this people might have helped in the compositional process, which happened through dictation, or they might have been the intended audience of the poet and were, in any case, responsible for the dissemination and eventually the transmission of the poems. On the other hand, this whole process had the text passing through oral and written forms multiple times as it was dictated, written, then read aloud to an audience, then eventually copied (possibly through dictation) and sent to new audiences or reread on occasions. Later, someone near the poet may have collected more texts to form the embryos of our tradition. All this demonstrates the public nature of these texts, which are not the private venting of isolated intellectuals, but communicative acts in a tight-knit social network. As regards the choice of poetry, I have highlighted not only its aesthetic value, justifying a special treatment of poetic texts (even if they share themes with prosaic ones, as is our case; see §1.3.1) but also the late antique practice of conducting polemics, especially theological polemics, through poetic texts (§1.3.3). Moreover, both of our poets were interested in the theme of education, and in a world where people began education with Homer, poetry could have an educational role beyond the polemics of the day (§1.3.4).

Yet these common conditions apply to the whole corpus of Gregory's and Ephrem's poetry. Concentrating on the poems on bishops, I have found key differences in the modes and addressees of publication, differences that affect the diverse literary treatment of the figure of the bishop in the poems. Here, geographic and linguistic difference really comes to bear. First, Ephrem writes mainly for his peripheral urban community in Nisibis, whereas Gregory, through Constantinople, writes, at least ideally,

for the whole ecumene. This is demonstrated by the different foci of the poets: while Gregory concentrates on the relationship between bishops, Ephrem discusses primarily the relationship of the bishop with his local community. Second, the Greek language comes with the strings of *paideia* attached—namely, its literary tradition, the teachings of rhetoric, and linguistic Atticism. Therefore, whereas the *Carmina Nisibena* are aimed at the whole Christian congregation, gathered in the liturgy, Gregory addresses his poems to a socially homogeneous group of upper-class readers, possessing the codes of *paideia*. Gregory exceeds Ephrem in geographic range, while Ephrem exceeds Gregory in social range.

There are two nice examples of these different conditions behind Gregory's and Ephrem's poetry. In my survey of the names and titles used for the bishop (§2.1), I have discovered variations in usage between the dactylic poems (II, 1, 10; II, 1, 13, and II, 1, 17) and the iambic one (II, 1, 12). For example, the term ἐπίσκοπος, used in iambs for the bishop according to prosaic usage, in hexameters has another meaning ("warden", "protector"; see §2.1.1). In fact, Gregory abides by the linguistic conventions of Greek literature, prescribing different usages and word choices for the different genres, defined, among other things, by metre. After all, if he failed to abide by these conventions, he would breach a communicative code he shares with his selected audience. Here, *paideia* imposes a variation which has no parallel in Ephrem, where even metre does not constitute an appreciable limit on the word choice of the poet. He, too, however, can turn to his advantage a formal feature of his poems: the refrain appended to each stanza, if collectively performed by a chorus, could serve to enhance and make visible the concord of the community (§3.3.1). Such a feature would be out of place in Gregory's poems, which were not meant for the liturgy in the local community. Thus, conditions of publication influenced the poetic form, and the poets made the best of these constraints for their aims.

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In Ephrem, these conditions skew his presentation of the role of the bishop. While it remains true that the bishop is mainly a religious leader, the crucial passage in *CN* 18, 11–12 gives prominence to his role in the liturgy, an attitude that is likely influenced by the fact that the poems were indeed performed during the liturgy (§2.1.3.2). This attitude is bonded with a broader tendency in Ephrem's thought to downplay the importance of speculative theology and, in our poems, with his relative negligence of the more secular tasks of the bishop, such as adjudicating and administering alms (§3.1.1.1; §3.1.3.2). Thus, liturgy motivates his advice to the bishop to delegate theology, judicial matters, and finance to others. These could be the Syrian ascetics, the *bnay qyāmā*, whose presence marked out the life of the local congregation: so local concerns and the occasion of performance let us understand the spin Ephrem gives to the ideal type of the bishop.

Another local concern is the authority crisis of Bishop Valgash, which Ephrem addresses in *CN* 13–16. Indeed, analogous awareness of local dynamics around the bishop is shown in the advice he gives later to the new bishop, Abraham (§3.1.4.3),



whose election must not have been completely undisputed (§3.1.1.1; §3.1.4.4). In the case of Valgash, scholarship up to this point had not yet been able to find out precisely what was the problem between the bishop and the congregation, albeit it has always been clear that Ephrem's aim with these texts was to shift the blame from the prelate to the people. I have attempted a reconstruction, hypothesizing (on the basis of the texts) a division inside the community between Judaizing Christians and rigorists who demanded firm measures against them from the bishop; the bishop would have then adopted a soft approach to Judaizers, lest he galvanize the rigorists and deepen the chasm in the community. Ephrem must defend this approach and decides to throw together Judaizers and rigorists in the same category as people incapable of overcoming the Old Testament to reach a truly neo-testamentary religion.

In order to defend Valgash, the poet also deploys circumstantial arguments, praising him for his ability as a preacher or his past career as an ascetic. Among these arguments, the reference back to Jacob, Valgash's predecessor, occupies CN 13. I closely read the relevant portions of text in §4.3, coming to an innovative reconstruction of Ephrem's poem. Once more, local concerns are of the utmost importance: Valgash may have monumentalized through a baptistery-martyrium the local memory of Bishop Jacob as saviour of Nisibis from the Persian sieges at the same time as the Persian army was again raiding the environs of Nisibis. With this initiative, Valgash also aimed at legitimizing himself in a moment of crisis, stressing his link with Jacob. Ephrem may have had the task of clarifying this program so that it elicited the hoped-for reaction from the congregation, and thus CN 13 may have been where he did so.

The reference to Jacob works as a legitimizing move for his successor only through the concept of *yubbālā*, which I examined in §4.1. This concept animates the whole of Ephrem's poetry on bishops, from the micro level of syntax and word order to the ampler structures of poems and the construction of poetic characters, to the whole theological conception these poems are meant to convey. *Yubbālā* is, essentially, the orderly succession of bishops in time: Ephrem insists continually on this orderly succession, representing the bishops passing their office from one to the other. Indeed, they resemble each other in character and worth, giving a concrete content to the otherwise formal handover of power. The poet goes so far as to represent their ascetic vocation, formally independent from the episcopate, as a relationship between teacher and pupil, with a clear succession of ascetic-masters corresponding to the bishops (§3.2.1). However, more important than similarity is difference: the poet employs the scheme of succession as a way to mitigate the real-life differences between bishops and the confusion in the community that ensues when its members observe these differences. Nisibis was in need of a "hermeneutic of continuity", and Ephrem's *yubbālā* provided precisely this. Simply speaking, the idea was that the succession of bishops was also a succession of historical periods, marked by a progression in the degree of maturity of the community; thus, differences in leadership are providentially motivated and "measured" (Ephrem employs this metaphor) by the different degrees of spiritual development of the congregation.

The concept does not remain a rhetorical move to justify difference but rises to the role of a true structuring principle for the poems: form and matter coincide. Whole stanzas are built as parallel lines—one line describing Jacob, the next Babu, the next Valgash—with variations embedded in a repeating and reassuring structure. Lines are split in half between a “call”, describing the situation in which the community lives, and a “response”, describing, through key characteristics, the bishop reigning in that situation. In this way, the poems perform, through rhythm and repetition, the continuity in difference that they at the same time argue for. Indeed, I contend that this game of parallelism and variation constitutes much of the aesthetic attractiveness that the audience found in these poems as poems. A poet, so it seems from these texts, is one who can organize a clearly rhythmic text, seemingly on the spot, and with copious variations and synonyms—not to mention puns and subtle biblical allusions. Moreover, the same principle of *yubbālā* guides Ephrem in his description of the first three bishops, Jacob, Babu, and Valgash: each is characterized in contrast to the others, in a progression of growing meekness and decreasing rigour. Like the saints in the paintings, sporting fixed and recognizable attributes, each bishop is reduced to a defining virtue or function, all of which would be features of the ideal bishop but are here found separately ascribed to the three historical bishops of Nisibis. Jacob is the rigorous, ascetic one; Babu the one more attentive to the material needs of poor and prisoners of war; Valgash is the meek and educated ascetic. All these characters are then reunited in Abraham in *CN* 17–21, whom Ephrem praises as an ideal bishop (§3.1.5; §4.1.1).

Through *yubbālā*, Ephrem is also able to muster one of the major themes of Syriac theology to his cause: the passage from Old to New Testament, from Israel to the church. As, on the micro level, each bishop gave way to a new one corresponding to a spiritually more mature epoch, so on the macro level the prophets of Israel gave way to the apostles, and these in turn transmitted their mission and authority to bishops, and each time the people of God progressed. The point in common is that the difference of the new epoch does not negate the previous epochs, but fulfils them. Thus, the questions of the local community are linked to a broader interpretation of history. In this context, Ephrem also inserts a parallelism between imperial and episcopal succession and thus expresses his thoughts on the relationship of kingship and priesthood (§4.1.2). Generally, he seems to endorse a clear-cut division of purviews between secular and religious power, although they are both providentially ordered in the succession of epochs. However, the correspondence between emperors and bishops he institutes in *CN* 21 and his praising of Abraham for his resistance to Julian suggest also moments of overlap or at least the hope of a harmonized work between the two.

The reference to the empire demonstrates that *yubbālā* is not an exclusively religious concept. It also claims to explain secular history. Indeed, the poems on bishops are connected through *yubbālā* to the other *Carmina Nisibena* (*CN* 1–12), that are more concerned with the Persian sieges in Nisibis. The sieges had been interpreted as divine retribution for the sins of the Nisibenes. Through the *yubbālā* of bishops this retribution acquires an educative value, because the community is first purified of its sins in

a harsh manner through the sieges and the stern guidance of Jacob, and then, as it progresses to a more neo-testamentary faith, the sieges stop and the meek Valgash becomes bishop. Naturally, the scheme is not simply linear but open to the zigzags of history: the Nisibenes cannot hold to their purified status long—a concept Ephrem summarizes with the expression “ungrateful peace” —so that new educational catastrophes ensue, and the spiral goes on. In this way, Ephrem presents to his community a theology of history capable of giving meaning and hope to the trauma of change and to collective tragedies such as war: an important feature of this poetry, written and performed in the dangerous boundary between two empires.

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What differentiates Gregory from Ephrem is the ecumenical reach of his texts and his deeper engagement with Greek culture. Greek culture is not completely absent from Ephrem’s texts; in fact, I have found isolated instances that may hint to his knowledge of Greek texts. They are, however, isolated and hard to interpret, so they could not be developed in a cohesive discourse on Ephrem and Greek literature. The commonalities with the Greek fathers, on the other hand, stem more from a common Christian tradition, expressing itself in Greek and Syriac and serving as a sort of bridge between the two cultures. On the contrary, Gregory engages the Greeks with purpose, even in the structure of the longer poems, imitating the *dispositio* of an oration according to contemporary rhetorical treatises (§1.1.1).

Both these conditions, the Hellenic and the ecumenical, are behind the two main features of Gregory’s poems, one literary, the other politico-theological. The literary device animating Gregory’s poems on bishops is a complex system of related connotations and characteristics, organized in a quadrangular structure. The poet always describes one of the three: the bad bishops; the ideal bishop; himself. At the same time, he addresses a second person, sometimes singular and sometimes plural. The second person is related to the bad bishops because, through the fictive context Gregory alludes to in the poems (§1.1.1), the reader understands that he is addressing those same bad bishops he satirizes. Similarly, generic descriptions of the ideal bishop find their exact counterparts in Gregory’s self-styling. Moreover, the features of Gregory and of the ideal bishops are mirrored and subverted by the features of the bad bishops, who also remind the savvy reader of the profiles of Gregory’s rivals, Nectarius and Maximus.

I have particularly researched Gregory’s construction of his self-portrait (§5.1), a feature almost completely absent from Ephrem’s poems, and I have concluded that this self-portrait is structured according to the procedures of the rhetorical exercise of ῥητοποιία: the speaker of the poems is made to correspond, through autobiographical narrative, to a historical person (in this case, the poet himself) and is fictively located in a certain moment of his life; thus, the poem purports to be the person’s reaction to a real-life situation. Since ῥητοποιία required that words correspond to the character of the person speaking, the texts also suggest a self-portrait of Gregory. In this respect I

have read the poet's frequent declarations that he suffered in his public life and wanted to retire and dissociate himself as far as possible from the other bishops, and I have read similarly his presentation of some poems (II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13) as venting and of himself as an ἄγποικος. Even his sarcastic and Cynical style of arguing and his concrete, sometimes gross, imagery serves Gregory's self-portrait: the poet constructs a mask of himself as martyr, ascetic, and philosopher. He is a martyr because of the pains of public life he took on for the sake of truth, he is an ascetic because he considers public life painful and not desirable, so much that he is retiring, and he is a philosopher because, thanks to his estrangement from civilized life, he can judge its irrationality and sinfulness. This mask, though it purports to be that of an idiosyncratic outsider, is not the mask of an individual in the modern sense; rather, it attaches itself to archetypes of late antique society and literature, both pagan (the philosopher) and Christian (the martyr), in order to conjure up their authority for Gregory and to propose a model of behaviour for his readers. Since the basis of much of this self-portrait is lamenting his own sufferance and claiming estrangement from society, the operation could not work without poetry: only the poet is authorized to vent his feelings with a sense of authenticity, and the role of punisher of bad habits, before the philosopher, was allotted to the iambographer and the comedigrapher (§1.3.2).

In respect to this complex self-portrait, the other characters of the poems pale. The ideal bishop is, when closely examined, a noncharacter, a bundle of features and actions meant to allude to Gregory himself (§3.1.5). The position of the bad bishops is a little more complex. As I said, they are at the same time described and addressed, although neither as addressees nor as subjects do they get names or a backstory, except for the abusive caricature of their humble professional background in II, 1, 12 (§5.2.1). In this poem, they serve the function of a fictive counterpart in the style of Cynic diatribe, which, although it may contain genuine objections to Gregory's position, is a purely formal device used to move and structure the argument. In II, 1, 13, they are always addressed as a collective, in accordance with the epic nature of this poem, which interprets church history as a war against Satan. Despite their absence as characters, their physical presence is evoked at the beginning of II, 1, 10; II, 1, 12; and II, 1, 13, and it contributes to the fiction of a real-life occasion, while the identity of at least two of them (Maximus, Nectarius) can be gleaned from Gregory's criticisms. As in letter writing, the poet engages in a dialogue with an interlocutor who is present despite his absence. Gregory has deployed this complex literary strategy in order to achieve three aims: first, to defend his ministry in Constantinople and his own credibility; second, to delegitimize and attack his rivals; third, with the broader perspective of using his personal experience, to prove that his proposal for the episcopate is the right one.

Gregory's proposal is the other innovative element of his poems: the ascetic bishop becomes almost a profession. This development is exposed most organically in II, 1, 12, whereas the other poems are less clear about it, with II, 1, 13 being a sort of prologue lamenting the problems that make the proposal necessary. Gregory begins in II, 1, 13 by describing the history of the church as a continuous struggle against Satan (§3.1.4.1;

§3.3.2.2), a continuist scheme similar to Ephrem's. However, in II, 1, 12 Gregory says that his time has elements of novelty, because the spread of heresies requires an educated bishop to confute them, a development absent in Ephrem's view of history (§3.1.3.1). Through the necessity of a specific education for the bishop, Gregory supports his reinterpretation of the model of the ascetic bishop through Origen's theology (§2.1.3.1; §3.1.2; §3.1.3.3; §3.2.2.3), whereby the traditional idea of asceticism as purification needed to celebrate the liturgy, expressed also by Ephrem's *CN* 18, 11–12, is given a mystical meaning. The authentic liturgy is the ascetic's contemplation of God, the authentic sacrificial offering is the souls of his congregation purified and given to God. Souls are purified through imitation of the bishop as the bishop is purified by imitation of God. Asceticism is the bishop's method of purification, contemplation, and imitation of God. Since God reveals himself in Scripture, asceticism should feature Bible study, possibly employing also the writings of previous Christians and covering the principles of Christian doctrine. Thus, Gregory defines the scope of a specifically Christian culture. The preference for ascetic bishops is therefore motivated by the time and effort required to reach contemplation of God through these methods: the reader recognizes here a development of a peculiarly Hellenic model, influenced by Origen, Greek philosophy and late antique notions of *paideia*.

Gregory advances his proposal to an ecumenical audience, coming from different dioceses, meaning that he has a collective of bishops in mind, not a single bishop as did Ephrem. These bishops were also conscious that new prelates were elected through co-optation by themselves; this is much different from Ephrem's traditional representation, where God as first, then the predecessor and the community, have vital roles in the election of a new bishop (§3.3.1). In this context, Gregory's ideal works also as a set of criteria to elect new bishops, so that they may be prepared for their office. The setting of prerequisites for the office is at odds with a charismatic conception of the episcopate, which could draw on New Testament examples and sacramental theology. Gregory reacts to this conception in II, 1, 12 (§3.3.2.1), assuming a series of criticisms against baptism from pagan authors and redirecting them against the election of neophytes: again, the influence of the Greek world proves decisive. Gregory's aim is to radically separate the charisma inherent in the episcopate from the authority of its recipient: the episcopate should be granted only when the recipient is worthy of the received charisma, fulfilling Gregory's criteria. The operation is reflected even in his linguistic usage, as he frequently employs metonymies to identify the episcopate as an office or as a collective (§2.2.4.6; §3.1.4.1). I have analysed this rhetoric in Weberian terms, finding that Gregory proposes a partial move away from charismatic authority towards a certain rationalization of the office of bishop; on the contrary, Ephrem's use of collective acclamations goes in the opposite (and traditional) direction of reinforcing the charismatic component of the bishop's authority (§3.3.1).

Gregory's concern for the selection of bishops is linked with his worries about their politicization. The victory of the Nicene party under Theodosius did not end internal strife, which continued unabated even in absence of clear motivations. Moreover, in the

Council of Constantinople this strife assumed clear geographic characters, contrasting the West and East of the church. I have compared these criticisms of the discord among bishops to Schmitt's definition of the friend-foe category and have thus concluded that Gregory, particularly through the universal narrative of II, 1, 13, seems to note the beginnings of a politicization of conflict (§5.2.5). Furthermore, the poet sees in the election of Nectarius a failure of the episcopate at large, which had to rely on civil authorities to solve an internal conflict, so that both the independence of the church and the neutrality of the state were undermined (§5.2.3). Gregory's proposal of a Christian education as a requirement for the episcopate responds to these challenges. Defining Christian education as composed of asceticism and Bible learning, Gregory delimits a discipline that is at the same time analogous and alien to the code of the imperial elite—namely, classical *paideia*. The ideal bishop is at the same time an outsider to polite society, qua ascetic, and a sophisticated intellectual, qua biblical philosopher. This odd positioning, together with the almost rational character of the bishop's authority (as expert in all things divine), prompts in Gregory the comparison with professionals, who do not belong to the elite but, thanks to their expertise, can influence it. Finally, this definition of Christian education serves to implicitly exclude his direct rivals, Nectarius and Maximus: the first was too mixed up with elite society and lacking ascetic credentials, and the other was too theologically inept, lacking a sophisticated upbringing. Again, the poet carries out criticism, apology, and ideals for reform at the same time.

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With this work I hope to have maintained the promise made at the beginning, of giving a guide to understand, if not in every detail at least in their overall working, these texts. The four key points are the public, political character of these poems, the common tradition of the Bible and Syrian asceticism in defining the bishop as ascetic leader, Ephrem's theology of history based on the succession of bishops and epochs, and Gregory's complex strategy of self-defence, rationalization of the episcopate, and criticism against his rivals. It is true that there is no accounting for taste, but I also hope a better understanding may enhance the aesthetic appreciation for these two great Christian poets.

# Appendix 1: Translation of Ephrem's *Carmina Nisibena* 13–21

## *Carmina Nisibena* 13

### On His Holiness Jacob and his companions

#### On the tune *How wondrous, O Lord, Thy sufferings*

- |                 |   |  |
|-----------------|---|--|
| 1               | Three priests dazzling<br>In shifting transmitted one to the next<br>Great is our mourning of the two,              | in likeness of the two luminaries,<br>throne, hand and diocese.<br>but the last is truly our comfort.                      |
| <b>Refrain:</b> |   | <b>Glory be unto Thee, Who chose them!</b>   |
| 2               | He who created the two luminaries<br>and fixed them in the threefold<br>As that couple of luminaries were quenched, | chose for himself these three luminaries<br>dusk of the past sieges.<br>truly the last blazed.                             |
| 3               | Three priests, three treasurers,<br>the key of threeness,<br>each one of them with his key                          | who steadfast keep<br>three gates opened up for us;<br>opened his gate in his time.  |
| 4               | With the first opened the gate<br>with the middle opened the gate<br>with the last opened the gate                  | to the chastisement that assaulted us;<br>to the majesty that came down to us;<br>to the good tidings that came out to us. |
| 5               | With the first opened the gate<br>with the middle the gates opened<br>with the third opened the gate                | to the fight of both multitudes;<br>to the kings of both climes;<br>of the ambassadors of both parties.                    |
| 6               | With the first opened the gate<br>with the middle opened the gate<br>with the last opened the gates                 | to the fight because of faults;<br>to the kings because of contest;<br>to the ambassadors because of mercy.                |
| 7               | Behold! In three generations,<br>wrath has become like the sun:<br>grew by the middle,                              | as in symbol or mystery,<br>it has dawned from the first,<br>set and disappeared by the last.                              |
| 8               | Even the sun shows<br>quick and bright his beginning,<br>and like a consumed lamp                                   | three forms in quarters three:<br>strong and harsh his middle,<br>soft and mild his end.                                   |
| 9               | Swift and bright his beginning,<br>hot and harsh his middle,<br>gentle and mild his end                             | which came to the sleepers to wake them,<br>coming to ripen the fruits,<br>because it has reached his perfection.          |
| 10              | Who is she, daughter born of vows,<br>whose generations flowed thus<br>and whose degrees rose thus,                 | enviable by all females,<br>and whose ranks increased thus<br>and whose chiefs shone thus?                                 |

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|----|--|--|
| 11 | Is it to the daughter of Abraham alone<br>or even unto you, daughter born of vows?<br>because her help is like her time, | that these images are applied,<br>For her ornament corresponds to her beauty<br>and her servant is like her help.      |
| 12 | As much as she lacked in her need,<br>her parents apt to her birth<br>her nourishment apt to her growth                  | to her need came fulfilment:<br>and her teachers apt to her notions,<br>and her clothing apt to her stature.           |
| 13 | Grace gave all these things<br>put them in comparison<br>extended them in succession                                     | and weighed them as on scales,<br>that from them help might come,<br>that from them perfection might come              |
| 14 | In the days of the first<br>in the days of the middle<br>then, in the days of the last                                   | peace lasted and peace ended;<br>kings descended and kings arose;<br>marauders thronged and marauders left.            |
| 15 | With the first came order<br>with the middle came and went away<br>with the last then shone forth on us                  | it came with him and left with him;<br>the crown which gladdens our churches;<br>a grace invaluable.                   |
| 16 | Against the first wrath<br>against the sultriness at midday<br>against the ungrateful peace                              | fought the toil of the first;<br>stood the shade of the middle;<br>multiplied the last his warnings.                   |
| 17 | To the first siege resisted<br>to the second siege resisted<br>the prayers of the last, then,                            | the first, triumphant priest;<br>the second, merciful priest;<br>mystically closed our breaches.                       |
| 18 | Nisibis is founded upon waters,<br>living springs are inside her,<br>the outer river cheated on her,                     | waters hidden and waters apparent:<br>a proud river outside her;<br>the inner source protected her.                    |
| 19 | The first priest, her vintner,<br>and lo! Dead and buried inside her,<br>therefore, when came the hewers,                | grew her branches to the sky,<br>he brought fruit in her bosom,<br>the fruit inside her protected her.                 |
| 20 | The time had come of her hewing,<br>because he was no more to entreat for her,<br>placing in her bosom her vintner       | it came in and took away her vintner;<br>she swiftly turned to cunning,<br>that she might be delivered by her vintner. |
| 21 | Imitate Nisibis,<br>which placed the body inside her,<br>put in yourselves a living body,                                | O eloquent daughters of Nisibis,<br>and it was a wall outside her:<br>which may be a wall for your life.               |



**Carmina Nisibena 14****Second, on the same tune**

- 1 Three shepherds  
one mother in the citadel  
since wrath ruined her folds,

**Refrain:**

- 2 The good toil of the first  
the bread and wine of the middle  
sweetened our bitterness in distress
- 3 The first tilled the earth with toil,  
the middle enclosed her all around,  
the last opened the barn of his Master
- 4 The first priest by hand of fasting  
the second priest with the prisoners  
now the last has pierced ears
- 5 Aaron had stripped the ears  
a dead calf which mysteriously  
those who forged his horns
- 6 Yet our third priest  
and put earrings forged  
to the Cross where his Lord was crucified,
- 7 Fire begot a son to Death,  
the son of Death, surpassing Death,  
the calf eschewed straw,
- 8 To the pristine lethal wood  
the Cross, namely, born of wood,  
the wood was source of death,
- 9 That very son of Death  
for he devoured bodies and souls  
but the gallows removed the disgrace
- 10 Both sons imitated  
the calf, begot by fire,  
the gallows, born of Grace,
- 11 O tongue of mine, hush and hide  
which the mind suddenly conceived,  
conceived them with the others,
- 12 As the babies fought inside the womb,  
but put his hand on the other's heel  
and, not getting it through birth,

had many musterers,  
had many daughters in every region:  
may peace restore her churches!

**Blessed he who chose those three!**

bound the land up in her distress;  
cured the city in her ruin;  
the sweet talk of the last.

uprooting thence briar and thorns;  
making her a hedge of redeemed;  
and sowed in her the words of her Master.

had closed the gates of the mouths,  
had opened the mouth of the purses,  
and put in them the jewel of life.

of earrings, to make a calf,  
once cold killed the encampment,  
with his horns ripped up.

pierced the heart's ears  
from the nails that were fixed  
thereby saving his fellows.

Death, who feeds on all bodies:  
on human souls fed;  
for minds were his fodder.

Grace begot a son,  
who fought against his parent:  
the gallows was source of life.

all opened mouths cursed,  
adding shame to his father's shame;  
of his father, the pristine wood.

their mothers, who begot them:  
fire set to the People;  
graces distributed to creation.

the manifold deeds of the Cross,  
and now they seize her with pangs,  
and they wanted to become firstborns.

hurried to spring forth the elder,  
the younger, desiring primogeniture,  
he got it through pottage.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>13 In this very manner latter deeds<br/>to gain by birth primogeniture.<br/>for truly the Cross's deeds</p> <p>14 For if he who has no beginning<br/>then his deeds too are the firstborns,<br/>Your deeds, O Lord, permit</p> <p>15 The first, at the step of conversion,<br/>the middle, at the second step,<br/>the last, at the third step,</p> <p>16 The first with all simplicity<br/>the middle with all brevity<br/>the third with all perfection</p> <p>17 She, too, growing daughter,<br/>with his teachers and parents:<br/>she was simple with the middle,</p> <p>18 The first, as by a toddler,<br/>the middle, as to a child,<br/>the last, as for an educated girl,</p> <p>19 Even for Jacob's daughter was set<br/>and to her youthful boldness<br/>until, as chastised and learned,</p> <p>20 Of the first, who begot the diocese,<br/>the middle with his glad countenance<br/>the last with his solemn countenance</p> <p>21 The first priest, who begot,<br/>the middle priest explained<br/>the third priest nurtured</p> <p>22 The first, diligent father<br/>the middle, in her perfection,<br/>the third, splendid oil,</p> <p>24 Before the One rewarding the wearied,<br/>before the One loving the bountiful,<br/>before the One judging the doctrines,</p> <p>25 And for the sinner who laboured, being<br/>when they see that "third",<br/>may those three beseech</p> <p>26 May the sinner push his way through,<br/>may the three teachers call<br/>may he collect under the tables</p> | <p>now are opposing the former<br/>But let us bring forth the deeds of our fathers,<br/>are the firstborns of creation!</p> <p>is the Firstborn of all creations,<br/>being older than the creations.<br/>to narrate of your servants.</p> <p>adapted his speech to his stage;<br/>to his stage his sermon lifted;<br/>magnified his speech in accordance.</p> <p>gave milk to his infancy,<br/>gave a taste to his childhood,<br/>gave food to his maturity.</p> <p>step by step ascended,<br/>she was a child with the first,<br/>came to perfection through the third.</p> <p>was loved and was feared,<br/>rebuked and brought joy,<br/>for her was relief and kindness.</p> <p>bait and stick to her childhood,<br/>was given sword and rule,<br/>came to her relief and kindness.</p> <p>his bosom kept her infancy,<br/>praised and gladdened her childhood,<br/>inspires awe to her youth.</p> <p>gave milk to her infancy;<br/>and gave a taste to her childhood;<br/>and gave food to her youth.</p> <p>put his treasures on her childhood;<br/>added provisions for her journey;<br/>added anointment to her vases.</p> <p>she brings the labour of the first;<br/>she brings the alms of the middle;<br/>she brings the debating of the last.</p> <p>the foster child of those three,<br/>who closed the door of his chamber,<br/>that he sets his door a little ajar for me.</p> <p>when he will be glad and scared at the sight;<br/>that one disciple with mercy;<br/>the crumbs full of life.</p> |
|---|---|

## Carmina Nisibena 15

### On the tune *The God whom you have loved*

- 1 If had not been the head straight,  
for from a crooked head  
and they'd find the cause in the head.

#### Refrain:

- 2 If, now that he is totally righteous,  
how much more if he were vicious!  
the embittered found fault.
- 3 O limbs, imitate the head:  
and kindness in his meekness,  
and in his wisdom instruction.
- 4 Acquire discretion in his modesty  
and solitude in his poverty:  
may we all be made fair by all of him.
- 5 Look what measure and balance  
Heed that even his paces  
All of him has the reins of the whole of him.
- 6 He was a master for his youth,  
His members did not become wanton,  
His will was a compulsion to him.
- 7 For he anticipated and outpaced his rank  
because he laid his foundation firmly,  
as he was made preacher for the people.
- 8 He was excellent among the preachers,  
and he was eloquent among the sages,  
and he was venerable among his friends.
- 9 In two dwellings was he  
being pure inside his body  
and both inwardly and outwardly chaste.
- 10 Yet, even if we, my brethren,  
and spoiled the discretion,  
for the perfection who called us,
- 11 nevertheless, she, the measure of truth,  
chose him, seeing that he chose her,  
from the beginning to the end.
- 12 As a leader, both chaste and venerable,  
he didn't swerve as we had done,  
and gave the reins to his reason.

perhaps would have murmured the limbs,  
the course of limbs is disturbed,

#### Blessed he who chose you, pride of our people!

we ascribe him our vices,  
Even with God, though sweet,  
acquire stillness in his serenity,  
in his holiness splendour,  
and sobriety in his seriousness,  
because he is fair all in all,  
is in his words and in his deeds,  
possess the metres of peace!  
whose submission was the yoke of sobriety.  
because they were put under the rod.  
by hurrying and bearing an early fruit of habits;  
he became a leader already in his youth,  
and he was learned among the lectors  
he was chaste among his brethren  
a solitary for his whole life,  
and solitary inside his house  
have confused the metres  
and are returned as schoolboys  
preserved herself in his vessel,  
preserved in him her scent and taste  
without raging nor grudging,  
but defined and preserved his measures,

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>13 He gave an example by his person,<br/>it'd been fit for us to know our time;<br/>losing savour in the time of taste.</p> <p>14 The fruit is chastised forcibly<br/>and in the middle by the force of sun,<br/>his end will be thick in sweetness.</p> <p>15 It is us, then, whom the beginnings chastised,<br/>The endings increased our sweetness,<br/>our loss of flavour was greater.</p> <p>16 Indeed, we came to maturity,<br/>to bring them to earnestness.<br/>that we be chided as kids.</p> <p>17 Hence the mild resisted patiently,<br/>so as to honour greatly our old age;<br/>let him be honoured who knew her time.</p> <p>18 And if one should say that people<br/>well, even fear drives the thief,<br/>and shame the fool.</p> <p>19 If with the head as first<br/>they would have led the third,<br/>followed them.</p> <p>20 But the second neglected the first,<br/>the ranks were despised one by the other.<br/>that the strangers too trod them down.</p> | <p>that, as he preserved the measure of his time,<br/>but we ourselves alienated from our time,</p> <p>at the beginning by the blowing wind,<br/>and when his forcing will be past,</p> <p>and then chided us the middle.<br/>but when our taste came,</p> <p>that we may restrain children from sport<br/>Yet our old age sorely needed</p> <p>and didn't use compulsion,<br/>and since she knew not her degree,</p> <p>are driven only with force and the stick,<br/>and threat the plunderer,</p> <p>the limbs had run as second,<br/>and all the whole body would have</p> <p>and the third the second,<br/>It's because the citizens neglected each other</p> |
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## *Carmina Nisibena* 16

### Second, on the same tune

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|---|---|
| <p>1 In this is a mirror culpable,<br/>because of its own spots,<br/>a veil before the beholder.</p> <p><b>Refrain:</b></p> <p>2 Since beauty is not adorned by it,<br/>it is a real damage to the beautiful,<br/>its profit of adornment.</p> <p>3 Stains are not uprooted by it,<br/>the abiding stain is like a damage,<br/>so that in it loss and damage convene.</p> | <p>if its clarity is clouded,<br/>because the filth on it became</p> <p><b>Blessed is he who polished our mirror!</b></p> <p>nor is stain despised by it,<br/>because their beauty cannot gain</p> <p>as ornaments are not increased by it;<br/>the lack of ornament is a loss,</p> |
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| <p>4 Our mirror, if it's dark,<br/>whose stains remain unreprieved,<br/>then 'tis our freedom that adorns itself.</p> <p>5 By it, damage doubled through loss<br/>since the fair are not crowned,<br/>the mirror shares only damage.</p> <p>6 Never did a mirror compel<br/>nor is the mercy that came<br/>compulsory as the law.</p> <p>7 Justice was for childhood<br/>for, since mankind was a child,<br/>while not purloining its freedom.</p> <p>8 Bait and stick had taken<br/>whenever she struck her, she soothed her;<br/>her bait softened the minds.</p> | <p>is a real joy for the foul,<br/>yet if polished and shining,</p> <p>for the foul and for the fair,<br/>nor are the foul adorned:</p> <p>with violence its observer,<br/>upon the justice of the law</p> <p>the adorning of compulsion;<br/>she adorned it through compulsion,</p> <p>Justice for that childhood:<br/>her stick curbed the rashness,</p> |
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- A 7 stanzas lacuna must be assumed here<sup>1</sup>.*
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>9 &lt;Hence, he treated the people harshly&gt;<br/>for the New Tidings it was an infant,<br/>it had no mind.</p> <p>10 For in the degree of maturity,<br/>and that slaves' law it loved,<br/>and in return for boldness slaps it.</p> <p>11 No ornament through compulsion<br/>this is important to God,<br/>therefore, he lifted compulsion.</p> <p>12 For, as prudently<br/>so prudently<br/>meekness was necessary in its stead;</p> <p>13 for, as much as it is meet for infancy<br/>it is even more hideous that under the stick<br/>so that compulsion becomes her master.</p> <p>14 Look then how God<br/>through the pastors I had,<br/>and through the fathers he numbered for me.</p> <p>15 For balanced with their times<br/>through the one who was right, awe,<br/>through the one who was proper, humiliation.</p> <p>16 With balance walked my measures,<br/>and then awe on my youth,<br/>cast and gave humiliation.</p> | <p>that today it may be adorned, my brethren:<br/>in the time of greatness of mind</p> <p>it descended to infancy,<br/>which in return for audacity strikes it,</p> <p>is true, because it is a mockery:<br/>that man adorns himself by himself;</p> <p>as he gave compulsion in its time,<br/>he lifted it in the time when</p> <p>to be running under the stick,<br/>wisdom gets enslaved,</p> <p>framed my generations<br/>and through the teachers he gave me,</p> <p>were the merits of their characters,<br/>through the one who was fit, consolation,</p> <p>they cast terror on my childhood,<br/>and to my wisdom and to my discernment</p> |
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<sup>1</sup> On this lacuna, see §1.1.2 n. 51.

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| <p>17 In rashness and in the age of infancy<br/>whose stick kept me from jest,<br/>and from delicacy his fear.</p> <p>18 He gave a second father to my youth,<br/>he had a bit of toughness;<br/>he had meekness.</p> <p>19 When I was lifted from the ages<br/>the former terror passed,<br/>and he gave me a mild pastor.</p> <p>20 Here is his nourishment for my adulthood,<br/>his meekness for my quietness,<br/>his soberness for my modesty!</p> <p>21 Blessed is he who, as with a scale,<br/>who were my aids according to my ages,<br/>my adornment according to my beauties!</p> <p>22 It is we now who overthrow<br/>since in the time of mildness,<br/>which may rebuke us as children.</p> | <p>I had a feared foster father,<br/>and from vice his terror,</p> <p>and, because I was a bit childish,<br/>because I was a bit elderly,</p> <p>of infancy and youth,<br/>passed the following fear,</p> <p>his exegeses for my discernment,<br/>his mildness for my stillness,</p> <p>weighed and gave me fathers,<br/>my physicians according to my illnesses,</p> <p>this beautiful succession and order,<br/>lo!, we are begging toughness,</p> |
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## *Carmina Nisibena* 17

Which is about Abraham, the bishop of Nisibis

On the tune *The children were slaughtered*

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| <p>1 Allow, Lord, my smallness, too,<br/>like that merchant of our flock,<br/>then parted and went to your haven:<br/>who became head of the flock:<br/>he was the fourth chief.</p> <p>2 In one love I will mix them,<br/>their flowers bright,<br/>of him who was chief, and of his disciple,<br/>The horn of his election was fervent,<br/>and he was lifted and made chief.</p> <p>3 Even the fat ones of the herd rejoiced,<br/>rejoiced the fold of the musterers,<br/>He lifted and fixed him as the mind<br/>and his limbs surrounded him,<br/>the new bread of doctrine.</p> <p>4 He chose him in the multitude of musterers,<br/>Time examined him in the herd,</p> | <p>to cast into your treasury her mite,<br/>who multiplied the talent of your doctrine,<br/>I will speak of his musterer,<br/>disciple was of three,<br/><b>Blessed is he who made him our comfort!</b></p> <p>and a garland I'll weave them,<br/>their blossoms sweet,<br/>who remained after him as Elisha.<br/>and he was confirmed and made head,<br/><b>Blessed is he who made him the best!</b></p> <p>to keep feeding on the fodder they fed on;<br/>seeing the succession of their orders.<br/>inside the large body of the church,<br/>to be supplied from him with life,<br/><b>Blessed is he who made him their barn!</b></p> <p>because he gave proof of his faith;<br/>and long wait proved him as a crucible.</p> |
|---|---|

- Because of his personal trial,  
may your fasting be an armour to our land,  
your thurible may obtain reconciliation.
- 5 The shepherd who departed from his herd  
and with his victorious staff  
come on, fill the office of your teacher,  
He put you as a pillar  
which relies on your prayers.
- 6 He delivered his hand to his own disciple,  
the key to the one who was faithful,  
meet for your hand is the consecration,  
and for your tongue the comfort.  
angels on the inside, hosts on the outside.
- 7 May your doctrine grow  
when you few words sow,  
that through much farming  
The ancient seed spontaneously  
but your new seed sixtyfold.
- 8 Bile was idle by you,  
Jealousy was quenched by you,  
you blunted the sting of envy,  
to the slander which brings turmoil  
as you rejoiced in clarity and truth.
- 9 May you give advice among your people,  
may you go all the way with the one  
may you shun all the way the one  
and a sign may Rehoboam be for you,  
and you may spurn envious advice.
- 10 The gift that was bestowed upon you  
do not name it in the name of a man,  
since no one can reach its place.  
that 'twas men who gave it to you,  
let only slavery serve men.
- 11 Painted is your master in your person,  
He parted from us, while he's with us:  
glorious who parted from us;  
and full of mercy as Babu,  
[lacuna]
- 12 Me too, the dregs of the flock,  
I painted an image of both,  
that the herd may see their ornaments,  
and since I am a speaking lamb  
in Abram's tenure I praise you.

he made him a wall to the multitude:  
your prayer a shield for our city,  
**Blessed is he who sanctified your sacrifices!**

had fed it on spiritual meadows,  
from invisible wolves guarded it;  
because there's thirst for the sound of his voice:  
in the citadel of a quivering people,  
**Blessed is he who made you our pillar!**

the seat to the one who was worthy of it,  
the pen to the one who was excellent;  
for your offering the atonement,  
May peace fix firmly your rule,  
**Blessed is he who chose you for joy!**

through works more than words:  
then farm our land through works,  
the scarce seed may grow rich.  
ripened thirtyfold among us,  
**Blessed is he who multiplies a hundredfold!**

because peace dewes gently all over you,  
because your love was always burning;  
that no one might be smitten from behind,  
you paid no heed,  
**Blessed is he who adorned your limbs!**

like Jethro among the Hebrews:  
who advised you to your advantage,  
who advised you otherwise,  
that you may choose advice beneficial,  
**Blessed is he who advised discernment!**

from on high descended floating:  
nor hang it onto a different power,  
The cunning Satan can convince  
but, since that gift is born free,  
**Blessed is he who made his gift descend!**

behold his features all over you!  
in you we see all three of them  
be for us a wall as was Jacob,  
and an eloquent treasure as Valgash,  
**Blessed is he who in one painted them!**

I did not skimp on what was due,  
with the dyes of both,  
and the flock their beauties;  
for you, God of Abraham,  
**Blessed is he who made me his harp!**

## *Carmina Nisibena* 18

### On the same tune

- 1 Lo! He is priest after his master,  
modest after the sober,  
your master didn't leave you,  
for, lo!, in you are painted his features,  
and from all of you all of him shines forth.  
  
shining after the splendid,  
vigilant after the fasting;  
in the living we see the departed,  
his marks in you are engraved,  
**Blessed is he who in his stead gave us thee!**
- 2 The fruit bearing the image of his tree  
failed us not yet  
You made his words visible corporally,  
in your behaviour was painted his teaching,  
and in your maturity his education.  
  
while he shows his root  
the flavours of his sweetness.  
fulfilling them through deed:  
in your business his doctrine,  
**Blessed is he who made your splendour shine!**
- 3 The last musterer, who was lifted  
the little who took primogeniture,  
nor through jealousy like Aaron,  
but through love took it, like Moses,  
your brothers rejoiced in you as Moses.  
  
and became head of his limbs,  
not at a price like Jacob,  
envied by his brothers, the Levites,  
because he was older than Aaron:  
**Blessed is he who chose you through concord!**
- 4 There isn't jealousy nor envy  
for they obey it for love,  
the head is the limbs' watchman,  
though exalted, he is humble for love,  
to take away their pain.  
  
among the limbs in the body,  
they are ordered by it for affection:  
for he can see all parts;  
he stoops even to the feet,  
**Blessed is he who joined your love with us!**
- 5 'Twas too slight this—namely,  
but in its wisdom old age died,  
For a young athlete dared  
attacked, perfecting heathenism,  
with its beginning found its end.  
  
to suppress heathenism through an old man,  
and in its time infancy triumphed.  
the heinous contest, when violence  
which like smoke overpowered and passed,  
**Blessed is he who blew to it, and it disappeared!**
- 6 The sound of a horn in the silence  
you attack like a new David,  
Your fight was not an ignorant one,  
against evil you had to muster,  
which brought a plain victory.  
  
dismays and calls you to war;  
and that second Goliath succumbs to you.  
for invisible ranks every day  
an invisible discipline was usual,  
**Blessed is he who chose you as our pride!**
- 7 Even before the trial, Job  
and, when trial came, he won;  
those with Hanania in the furnace  
Satan acted foolishly as, proving  
he increased his defeat plainly.  
  
trained his body and his mind,  
Joseph triumphed in the bridal chamber,  
and Daniel in the lions' den:  
the power of their victories secretly,  
**Blessed is he who multiplied his shame!**
- 8 As the apostate farmer began  
the righteous farmer was upset  
his right hand was full and sowed  
and, lo!, our sense was cultivated  
by you were our souls cultivated.  
  
to sow thorns with his left hand,  
and cut and mowed his left hand;  
in the heart living words,  
by prophets and by apostles:  
**Blessed is he who chose you as our farmer!**



- 9 And if your words are scarce,  
for with labour much  
better is one fair deed  
May your first seed bring the hundredfold,  
and even the fallow thirtyfold.
- 10 Light that is damped is unseemly,  
stain is not fit for the chief,  
for if drugs are dulled,  
and if perchance is light damped,  
may your light chase our darkness!
- 11 Appoint for you scribes and lawyers,  
and patrons and supporters,  
lest may be rusted by care,  
the mind and the tongue  
propitiating for the whole community.
- 12 How much the mind may be purged,  
how much the hands may be scoured,  
is not enough for the title of priest,  
should purify all himself all time,  
between God and humanity.

farm our land with works,  
the stalk and the root will get stronger:  
than listening to ten thousand words.  
and the second sowing sixtyfold,  
**Blessed is he who multiplied your harvest!**

salt that looses its flavour is unfit,  
as dirt is not for the mirror,  
then illnesses too can't be cured,  
the stumbling is increased:  
**Blessed is he who made you our lamp!**

gatherers and givers, too,  
all giving their service to each other,  
or defiled by anxiety,  
by which you offer the intercession  
**Blessed is he who makes your worship shine!**

and may the tongue too be purified,  
and may the whole body be cleansed,  
since he, offering the Living Body,  
to stand as a mediator  
**Blessed is he who purified his servants!**

## Carmina Nisibena 19

### From the same, on the same tune

- 1 Aptly your name is Abraham,  
yet, since you had no spouse  
here, your spouse is your diocese!  
may you have spiritual offspring,  
who may in Eden inherit.
- 2 Oh, fitting fruit of modesty,  
youngest of his brothers as Jesse's son!  
the hand upon you chose you,  
the pure altar for your ministry,  
and everything as one for your crown!
- 3 Here is your flock, oh blessed,  
Jacob ordered the sheepfolds,  
make the chaste shine purely,  
establish the priests in splendour,  
and the people in righteousness.
- 4 The healthy sheep keep safe,  
and bind up the one who's broken,  
feed it on the meadow of Scriptures

for you are father of many;  
as was Sarah for Abraham,  
Rear her children with your fidelity;  
and children born of the promise,  
**Blessed is he who painted you in Abraham!**

by which was priesthood adorned,  
The horn, fervent, anointed you,  
the church, desiring, loved you;  
the great seat for your honour,  
**Blessed is he who exalted your coronation!**

rise and tend it, oh diligent!  
you order these speaking sheep,  
the virgins modestly,  
the powerful in humility,  
**Blessed is he who filled you with understanding!**

and heal the one who's sick,  
and seek the one who's lost;  
and quench it with the fountain of doctrine;

- May firmness be a bulwark for you,  
and may be justice peace for you!
- 5 May be with you among your sheepfold  
for if he a transient sheep  
how becoming of you, oh winner,  
the soul, which is above all,  
but Christ's blood.
- 6 Joshua had served Moses,  
he received the right hand from him.  
he too gave you his right hand;  
a sheepfold whose half was wolves,  
whose third and fourth part is consecrated.
- 7 The love of Moses abides in you,  
and whose zeal is a zeal of understanding;  
earth split apart below them,  
through Eldad and Medad was known  
that all his people prophesy.
- 8 Elijah's poverty  
the poor gave to the poor  
Because you loved the misery  
may the fountain of his words gush from you,  
and he sings to you in you his wills.
- 9 No one envied your election,  
no one bristles at your rebuke,  
no one shrinks from your voice,  
no one complains about your yoke,  
and lightens the burden of our souls.
- 10 Do not overlook the great,  
soften and instruct the rich,  
with the harsh couple the patient,  
draw the bad with the good,  
and the impure by hand of the holy.
- 11 Take with you myriads of drugs,  
to the weak offer a drug,  
do not give any drug  
but apply abundantly any help  
even you must learn experience.
- 12 May we be the field of your will,  
may we be the flock in your fold,  
may you be a great leader,  
may we be fair for you and you for us,  
people and priest, in harmony.
- may the cross be a crook for you,  
**Blessed is he who increased your victories!**
- the strength that was with David,  
from the mouth of the lion delivered,  
to jealously wrest from the Enemy  
since nothing can ransom it  
**Blessed is he who sold, bought back  
everything!**
- and, as a reward for his service,  
As you served the splendid old man,  
Moses committed to Joshua  
whereas to you a flock was entrusted  
**Blessed is he who adorned your flock!**
- whose love is a love of discernment,  
when Korah and Dathan split away,  
and with a split a split was ended;  
that all his will is this,  
**Blessed is he who was pleased in his will!**
- loved Elisha more than riches,  
the gift that's great above all.  
of your master, the inwardly rich,  
so that you become the Spirit's lyre,  
**Blessed is he who made you his treasurer!**
- for humble is your leadership;  
for peace sows your word;  
for mild is your commanding;  
for it itself is wearied instead of our necks,  
**Blessed is he who chose you as our repose!**
- do not despair of the weak,  
bait and win the poor,  
and the long-suffering to the wrathful,  
and the greedy with the giving,  
**Blessed is he who chose you as our fisherman!**
- rise and go among the sick,  
and to the one who's healthy preservation;  
that may not suit the illness,  
that may bring the illness to recovery;  
**Blessed is he who toiled on our wounds!**
- may we be the vine of your labour,  
and healthy stock under your crook;  
and we the gems embedded in your crown,  
that we may fit, one with another,  
**Blessed is he who sows harmony among us!**

- 13 Listen to the Apostle as he speaks  
 “I burn for you, but with the ardour,  
 not that of the flesh, but of the spirit.”  
 that she may know who is and whence,  
 Jesus, her Faithful Bridegroom.
- 14 As her leaders were her customs,  
 and with a shining one she was splendid.  
 which, like the countenance of its beholder,  
 for, like the king, such his host,  
 each is shaped by them after themselves.
- 15 Without testament departed those  
 but since they meditated those  
 a big inheritance they left us—  
 without possessing anything  
 their church was their treasure!
- 16 Like the triumphant priest Jacob,  
 since he joined his love to his zeal,  
 Through Babu, loving almsgiving,  
 through Valgash, learned in the law,  
 through you then may her benefit increase!<sup>2</sup>
- to that virgin whom he had betrothed:  
 with the ardour of God,  
 You too for her burn purely,  
 and through you may long for, through you may love  
**Blessed is he whose zeal is holy!**
- as with a loose leader she was loose,  
 The church is like a mirror,  
 accordingly, wears his shapes,  
 like the priest, such his parish,  
**Blessed is he who shaped her after himself!**
- three priests dazzling,  
 two testaments of God,  
 namely, the model of poverty;  
 those blessed made us their possession:  
**Blessed is he who bought through them his possession!**
- with him she triumphed like him;  
 she put on fear and love.  
 with money she ransomed the prisoners,  
 she opened her heart to Scriptures,  
**Blessed is he who extolled her merchants!**

## Carmina Nisibena 20

### From the same, on the same tune

- 1 Oh, virgin that was bridegroom,  
 towards the wife of your youth,  
 in her childishness with many,  
 that she may know who is and whence,  
 Christ, the True Bridegroom.
- stir up a bit your understanding  
 break the intercourses she had  
 rebuke her and gather her senses,  
 and through you may endeavour and love  
**Blessed is he who betrothed her to his Only Son!**

<sup>2</sup> The points given in Beck's edition at lines 2, 4, and 8 suggest a second-person masculine singular (*nšaht*, point below *nun* and above *tav*; *et'ṭept*, point below the *'e*; *ptaht*, point below the *het*), whereas meaning and metric compel us to read it as a third-person feminine singular. For, as the bishops are addressed in the third person, the second person must be either God or the community (*'ammā*). But it is illogical both for God to be glorious as his bishop and wearing fear (2 and 4), and for the community to be masculine while the “benefits” and the “heart” are defined by a feminine possessive. Moreover, if the verb in line 4 was a second-person masculine singular, the verse would have a syllable less compared to the reading with the verb at the third-person feminine, which fits in the metre (*et'ṭept* vs. *et'atpat*). Therefore, we can dismiss the testimony of the codex.

2 Oh farmer, burn against the tares  
may the briar be wholly uprooted  
if a quick air raises it,  
What the three farmers sowed,  
thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and hundredfold.

3 It is meet for a new shepherd  
to know how great is its number  
This is the herd redeemed by the blood  
Call the sheep by its name and let it pass,  
are written in the Book of Life.

4 Here with you is the betrothed of your Lord,  
and from any man violating her, calling  
The name of her Betrothed she's given,  
since she wasn't baptized in a name of man,

of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

5 The Apostle, her matchmaker, had zeal  
not only by fake names,  
nor Peter's nor even his own name;  
gave her the name of her Betrothed;  
put their own names on the flock.

6 The token of the living, my brothers,  
and the sign on a sealed document  
he who corrupts the token is a thief,  
Christ's name has been changed,  
to the churches that were violated.

7 Look to the prophets and the apostles,  
'Twas the name of God the prophets  
and 'twas the name of Christ the apostles  
even forgers resembled each other,  
the churches that whored with them.

that spread and branch out among the wheat,  
that grew out of negligence:  
it boldly overwhelms the seed.  
may it return three times,

**Blessed is he who made your harvest  
abundant!**

to inspect the herd anew,  
and to see which is its need.  
of him who is Master of the shepherds.  
for the sheepfold's name and census

**Blessed is he who claims its number!**

keep her from all harms,  
the churches by their own names.  
she should not whore with another name:  
the names in which she's baptized she should  
profess

**Blessed is he in whose name she's called!**

that she may not be violated by names,  
but not even by the trustworthy ones,  
those that were trustworthy matchmakers  
the fake ones as adulterers

**Glory to your name, Our Creator!**

no man can falsify plainly,  
no man can add or change:  
and he who changes the name a forger.  
and fake names have been given

**Blessed is he who called his herd by his Name!**

how much they resemble each other!  
gave to God's people  
gave to Christ's church;  
since by their names were called

**Blessed is he in whose name we're sanctified!**

## *Carmina Nisibena* 21

### From the same, on the same tune

1 John was a lamp  
they hurried and quenched the lamp  
Be a torch resplendent  
for your doctrine shines so much  
to serve the whims of darkness.

that exposed and rebuked the perverse;  
that the whim of their appetites refused.  
and silence the servants of darkness,  
that no one in its splendour dares

**Blessed is he who made you our lamp!**

- 2 A great bliss was concealed  
Elisha served him and claimed  
double virtue she gave him,  
Because you loved the poverty  
may you inherit the treasure of his wisdom.
- 3 May gluttony succumb to your fasting,  
may lust be ashamed before your body,  
may greed succumb to you,  
you can bind on earth like him,  
since your faith is like his.
- 4 Your modesty is like Elisha's,  
and a covenant is on your eyes as Job's;  
and you are ungrudging as Jonathan;  
and your mildness is like the apostles';  
and you have the novelties of apostles.
- 5 Be thou a crown for priesthood  
be thou a brother for the priests,  
be thou a master for the infancy,  
be thou a bulwark for the virgins,  
and the church by your beauty adorned.
- 6 Through your poverty may  
through your chastity may  
through your harmony may  
of the false Iscariot fade.  
fashion them from top anew.
- 7 In your tenure may Mammon be ashamed,  
may fade from us the illness,  
destroy the causes that preserve  
Wickedness acquired us by habit,  
be, Excellence, the cause of our relief!
- 8 May bad habits be interrupted,  
that she may be able to acquire souls,  
Let not the departed be buried,  
amidst clothes, wails, and mourning,  
and the departed a whole trunk of clothes.
- 9 Lust is the cause of wickedness,  
and the thievery of the likes of Gehazi,  
These heinous fountains block,  
and filth come from them,  
may Our Lord shut their flow!
- 10 To the old commit the word,  
for the stranger who comes unto you  
namely, who it is that talks first,

in Elijah's poverty;  
a double reward for his service,  
as he twice put on her noble deeds.  
of your rich master, Valgash,  
**Blessed is he who enriched your teaching!**

as with the fasting of Daniel;  
as when it was ashamed before Joseph;  
as when succumbed before Simon;  
and you can loose on high in his manner,  
**Blessed is who handed to you his ministry!**

your chastity is like Elijah's,  
your compassion is like David's,  
your sternness is like Jeremiah's,  
you have the antiquity of prophets,  
**Blessed is he who filled you from their treasures!**

and through you be glorified the worship,  
a chief for the deacons, too,  
a staff and help for old age,  
may the covenant in your tenure be splendid,  
**Blessed is he who chose you to be a priest!**

the heinous habit of the likes of Gehazi end,  
the impure habit of the likes of Eli cease,  
the false peace coming from the lips  
Remould all over our thoughts,  
**Blessed is he, who in your crucible refines us!**

who was master of our freedom,  
to which we were accustomed and consenting:  
our customs full of detriment!  
may goodness acquire us by habit:  
**Blessed is he who chose you for our salvation!**

may the church not acquire wealth,  
and if she is able to do this, 'tis a wonder!  
cutting off hope, as heathens do,  
when the living wears a tunic,  
**Blessed is he who made us return to our dust!**

together with the gluttony of the likes of Eli,  
and the insolence of the likes of Nabal.  
lest they flow abundantly,  
which might reach with its blurs even you:  
**Blessed is he who dried their sources!**

to the youth entrust the silence,  
knows you from your order—  
and who's second and third,

and if everyone guards his mouth  
then they'll call you blessed.

- 11 Let one be the voice of your faith,  
Let the image of truth be on your heart,  
sad, rejoicing, or feeble:  
to the modest show that you are joyful.  
and for humanity be many.
- 12 If you should hear a bad rumour  
pour tears and quench  
may the discerning pray with you,  
and may your pen be in sorrow,  
that he may turn to repentance.
- 13 You shan't give ear to anyone,  
you shan't lend your foot to anyone,  
you shan't give yourself to anyone,  
keep your hand from the false,  
be both removed and present.
- 14 Here, the news of a new king  
for the plundered 'twas a comfort,  
The vomit of the greedy came,  
There was fright even because of you,  
the former habits be smothered.
- 15 There is one who, if he can, dares,  
one is thoughtful of the waiting judgement,  
there is one who stole and quenched his thirst,  
stole the rich and stole the poor,  
while stole the sated without measure.
- 16 Yet lately he gave a chance,  
how he was and whom resembled  
He removed the trial from everyone,  
He gave us a chance to consider,  
humiliation helped, by far.
- 17 For not willingly did he impose  
He gave us a chance and we boasted,  
we've been loving his light yoke,  
while our pleasure increased our grief,  
and by his yoke facility.
- 18 The whole world, like a body,  
namely, the fever of heathenism:  
The power of mercy touched it,  
Heathenism stopped forthwith,  
So with sweat returned cleansing.

and if everyone knows his rank,  
**May our Lord accomplish your designs!**

and the voices you borrow countless;  
while every countenance is on your face,  
to the erring show that you are wrathful,  
Be one for Divinity,  
**Blessed is he who with all men was all things!**

from trustworthy, not lying people,  
the fire that kindled in the others,  
and proclaim a fast for the educated,  
for the one that is lost to sin,  
**Blessed is he who found the lost sheep!**

lest you be flooded with deceits,  
lest you be led astray by the dissolute,  
lest you be downtrodden by the bold;  
lest he gather thorns with your hand:  
**Blessed is he who's near even when is far!**

goes thundering through the lands:  
and for the plunderers terror.  
when they threw up everything swallowed.  
lest between priest and righteous king  
**Blessed is he who was wroth and again  
merciful!**

and there is one who resists and curbs his bent;  
and the other doesn't even think there is one;  
and there is one who stole and thirsted to steal;  
but stole the hungry with moderation,  
**Blessed is he who tests all designs!**

and each unveiled his own intent,  
and what he favoured above what.  
lest anyone who didn't hate him deny him.  
that better than the current authority  
**Blessed is he who, aiding, rebukes us!**

his yoke on our neck by force.  
since, when we resisted and suffered,  
we've been preferring his sweet sceptre,  
since by his force comes serenity,  
**Blessed is he whose toil is delight!**

had fallen to a great disease—  
it was hot and sick and fell.  
and its soul was revived through grace.  
for there was the cause of the disease.  
**Glory to the hand that healed it!**

- 19 May the land be appeased in your days,  
By you may churches be built,  
in them may their books be opened,  
and may their deacons be purified,  
firstfruits for the Lord of Peace.
- 20 May your prayer rise to the sky,  
may the Lord of the sky rain  
and his comforts on our griefs,  
May he guard his zeal with his love  
our wickedness may his mercy blot out.
- 21 Since, like the first priest and king  
and as if balanced on scales,  
who were humble and serene,  
May the priests be luminaries,  
and may the judges too be flashes.
- 22 From kingship the laws  
That both should incline is hideous,  
Let one be stern and one be mild  
may fear be tempered with love:  
as our kingship stern.
- 23 Let the priests pray for the kings  
On the part of kings, victory,  
victory to preserve the bodies  
May the kings stop the battling,  
Let dispute and war cease!  
Glory be unto thee for thy gift!

having seen you so full of peace!  
may their ornaments return,  
and may their altars be arrayed,  
may praise rise from them,  
**Blessed is he who resuscitated our churches!**

and may rise with it reconciliation;  
his bounties on our wickedness,  
and his collecting on our dispersion;  
our shame may his justice avenge,  
**Blessed is he who blessed his flock!**

who were as if painted one in the other  
so were Valgash and the king's son,  
then may the last ones resemble each other:  
and may the kings be lightning,  
**Blessed is he who enlightened our souls!**

and from priesthood the atonements:  
that both should be stern is harsh;  
with sense and with discernment,  
may our priesthood be mild,  
**Blessed is he who tempered our aids!**

that they may be a bulwark for humanity:  
and from priests faith,  
and faith to preserve the souls.  
may priests stop the inquiring:  
**Blessed is the Offspring of the All-Appeaser!**





## Appendix 2: Translation of Gregory's *carmina* II, 1, 10.12.13.17

### II.1.10 To the Priests in Constantinople and the City Itself

O priests, you who offer bloodless sacrifices,	1
and servants of the great Unity in Trinity,	
O laws, oh kings boasting piety,	
O of the great Constantine glorious abode,	
younger Rome, as much surpassing all cities	5
as the starry sky surpasses earth,	
your generosity I invoke; what has Envy	
done to me? How far from my holy children threw	
me, all too long struggling, having brought light	
of heavenly teachings, having drawn streams from a rock.	10
What kind of justice is this, toil and throes for me,	
as the first marks of religion were carved on the City,	
and another one instead rejoicing in his heart for my toils,	
lifted suddenly on a throne not his own,	
upon which had got me God and God's good worshippers?	15
These things are a loathsome bane, these things God's servants,	
in their gloomy reciprocal contest,	
O Lord Jesus Christ, plot against me.	
For neither party dared I to bare arms,	
and no one besides Christ I wanted to support.	20
This is my fault: neither failed I someone else this way,	
nor I followed like a raft a merchant ship.	
Thus, I'm hated by the fickle-minded, those who left	
this tribune in unholy manner and roared against friends.	
But let a deep oblivion conceal these things, whilst I,	25
thence departed, will enjoy stillness,	
having left everything at once, the court, the city,	
and the clergy, willingly, as I had been already desiring,	
when God called me with nightly dreams	
and with the grievous terrors of the icy sea.	30
Therefore, with a laugh I flew envy, and from a violent	
storm I dropped anchor in a steady haven,	
where, elevating my spirit with pure thoughts of the mind,	
I shall offer silence too, as before speech.	
This is the word of Gregory, whom reared the land	35
of the Cappadocians, for Christ stripped of all.	

## II.1.12 To Himself and on the Bishops

### Prologue (1–32)

Maybe, as I stood slander on the model	1
of the One who suffered and commanded thus,	
so, once I had suffered, I should have curbed my words too,	
and thereby, by way of a full contest,	
hoped for a fuller reward.	5
Yea, to full toil, fuller reward,	
but to the wanting, also the prize is lacking.	
Yet, that the evil may not suppose themselves to prevail	
totally, nor have an easy ride,	
as no one resists them, while I'm leaving	10
their end to the Last Fire,	
to the All-Questioning and the justly purging,	
even what by some plot goes unnoticed here,	
I myself will smite with a brief speech	
my murderers: because they are murderers, who pervert judgement	15
and shed the blood of all those innocent souls	
that they smote with their dispositions.	
I'll speak what I'll say, without being wary	
of slander, which is forbidden	
to anyone, but to me even very hateful.	20
Therefore, I won't name names in my speech,	
that I may not seem to be shaming what ought to be hidden;	
nor shall I mention everyone regardless,	
—may not my mouth exceed so much!—	
because I know also many deserving a better speech.	25
But whoever is among the evil and beyond them,	
be conquered and be tamed now:	
the sword of speech will cut the worse.	
So what? If you should oppose the speech,	
you'll prove clearly and plainly your own accuser.	30
Such, then, is my stance, and let anyone smite me:	
for a long time I have been suited to the stones.	

### Bad bishops (33–42)

Trust the lion, the leopard regard as tame,	
and maybe the viper can run away from you while you fear,	
but please, this one beast avoid: bad bishops,	35
with little awe for the dignity of their throne.	
They all have rank, not all have grace,	
strip off the fleece and behold the wolf.	
Don't try to convince me with words, but with facts:	

I hate teachings that life contradicts. 40  
 While praising the colour of the sepulchre, I loathe  
 the inner stink of rotting limbs.

### Moral of the story: Life is unjust (43–69)

“How do you speak? And why? How come you,  
 always putting forth better words, don’t speak kindly now, too?”  
 It’s usual for those who suffer to throw up their misery 45  
 to God, to friends, to parents, to neighbours, to guests,  
 or to the time and life of posterity.  
 I shall bring the speech slightly further up.  
 Let no one ever say to toiling people that something more  
 is to be found in this life, for the one who thinks this is deluded. 50  
 Everything is driven through night and darkness;  
 indeed, God trials some by fire, other by darkness,  
 until the fire sheds light on all these things.  
 One endures a life of hardships,  
 groaning, sleepless, through tears wasting his limbs away, 55  
 sleeping on the ground and feeding scarcely,  
 and with anxious examining of the Divine Scriptures  
 and inner scourges mangling himself:  
 What have I missed? What wrong have I committed?  
 Another one has plucked all the pleasures of youth, 60  
 has danced, sung, has satisfied his feverish belly,  
 to all sorts of lust yielded, for the senses  
 failed to fit a bolt, a colt without reins.  
 And then the first is overrun by misfortunes—  
 except it’s not misfortunes, for nothing in this world 65  
 really bothers the wise, as seems to most of those  
 who deem lost even the appearance of wisdom—  
 while the other, always successful, succeeds also in this,  
 to be seen as the pinnacle of virtue.

### An example: Gregory’s story (*narratio* 70–153)

#### Gregory is called to the bishopric (70–92)

Witness of these words is the one delivering them. 70  
 I was seated above visible things,  
 touching with thought only the intelligibles  
 and casting off fame, property, hopes, erudition,  
 in not taking delight I took delight, with a scanty loaf  
 sweetening life, free from insolence of pride, 75

when (you should expect anything, even if wise)  
 against every expectation one good person dragged me  
 and brought me abroad; who this was, I dare not say.  
 Maybe the Holy Spirit, maybe my sins,  
 that I may atone for my conceit. 80  
 This, however, was clear: that the assemblies of shepherds  
 and the orthodox people, not yet so widespread,  
 or rather having just opened its eyes to the rays of the sun,  
 wanted some freedom of speech to come back,  
 and to enjoy a little respite from the evil all around, 85  
 from babbling tongues and from the many splinters of error,  
 at the hand of which they laboured, without any shelter,  
 like some sweet rose amidst brambles,  
 or a single black grape among an unripe bunch.  
 Thus, then, I came upon a pious stranger, 90  
 bowing down before oaths and entreaties manifold,  
 resisting which would have been too much of a disdain.

### Gregory's behaviour as a bishop (93–113)

After I came here, having left the land of Cappadocia,  
 which seems to everyone as the rampart of faith,  
 without a community or anything I was compelled by 95  
 (these are enemies' lies, fake accounts  
 and covers for envy, randomly made up),  
 thereafter what happened I want you to relate,  
 because you were witness of my toils.  
 Did I do or say something clumsy or uncomely 100  
 or damaging in these three years?  
 Except only this: I spared the evil people  
 by whose hands I endured to be welcomed  
 with a lapidation. Indeed, it was more pious  
 that I also suffered Christ's pains with Christ's mind. 105  
 See, such is the poor's present to God.  
 But let's take this as an accusation, if you want.  
 A sensitive temper—they say—is a moth  
 in the bones, and this I learned the hard way.  
 This brazen body of mine, pining for anxiety, 110  
 already droops, and I have nothing else to give,  
 owing much more even if I should bring everything in.  
 What will become of one who's paired with an unsound friend?

**Gregory's moment of glory (114–135)**

But let's return to the starting point.  
 I had been called, I established a nation among wolves, 115  
 I gushed forth words for a thirsty flock,  
 sowed the faith, which struck root thanks to God,  
 those who had formerly been clouded I enlightened with Trinity.  
 I was like rennet in the milk, a drug  
 that forces persuasion, and some were already bound, 120  
 and some others were not far, and others would have been forthwith.  
 Every heart was charmed, even if after seething,  
 and affection was already blended with doctrine.  
 I could hope everything, or at least a small turn of the scale.  
 That fortunate city of Rome knew this, 125  
 and her foremost kin knew this especially.  
 They thought me perchance of some worth,  
 whose least esteem is greater  
 than attaining every highest glory among others,  
 so much do they excel all others! 130  
 They held me in esteem as I was there,  
 and still censure the evil now that I'm gone.  
 More than this they could not do,  
 nor did I ask anything. Alas city, city!  
 Let me deliver some tragic verse, too. 135

**Gregory is dismissed by the bishops (136–153)**

Yet those real gentlemen, my fellow shepherds,  
 burst with envy (you know those Ancient Pistols:  
 the boorish can't stand education)  
 and took my sickness as an ally,  
 sprung from my toils, which should have been revered 140  
 by those labouring even a little while for God,  
 and my poor fondness for the power of that high throne,  
 while the whole world was torn apart 'tween battling fronts.  
 So, with these pretexts and a nudge from the devil,  
 those loving friends were more than happy to escort me thence, 145  
 as if throwing ballast from a weighed-down  
 ship. My rectitude was a burden for the evil.  
 Then, they'll raise their hands—as innocents—to God,  
 and expiatory gifts they'll send sincerely,  
 hallowing the congregation with mystic forms, 150  
 they who have sent me too thence out of cowardice,  
 though not very much against my will, because 'twas a real shame  
 to be one among those dealers in faith.

**Humble background of the bishops (154–175)**

Some of them are sons of clerks for the exactors,  
 and they can't think of anything but skimming; 155  
 others come from the bank and the exchanges thereof,  
 others from the plough, baked in the sun,  
 others from daily pitchfork and mattock;  
 others left the oar or the army,  
 stinking still of bilge water or marked in the body, 160  
 and like helmsmen or commanders of the people,  
 won't yield even in the smallest matter;  
 others, without having yet completely removed the soot  
 of the forge from their bodies,  
 are rascals worthy of the lash or the chain gang, 165  
 who even before they have paid their price to their masters,  
 when they have the least rest from labours,  
 at once become wanton, and steal  
 someone from the mob, or swindle or extort.  
 Then they hurry upwards, beetles towards the sky, 170  
 rolling the sphere, yet no more the one of dung,  
 nor bowing down as before,  
 but convinced to hold power over those above;  
 they babble awkwardly and can't even  
 count their own feet or hands. 175

**Intellectually unfit bishops (176–191; larger section: 176–329)**

Are not all these things awful, especially for a bishop,  
 my good friend? Let's not be so old-fashioned  
 as to wrongly approve such a situation,  
 not even if we zealously pursue humility.  
 The episcopate is not the least of things. As it should 180  
 definitely be for the best, I would choose  
 the very first; if not, at least be he not the last.  
 If my opinion should find some acceptance,  
 especially now, in this squall of raving tongues,  
 and enormous cities and congregations, 185  
 which, if they can keep firm, are a greater gain,  
 but, if they don't persevere, the loss is even greater;  
 according to it, then, you should be choosing the good,  
 for a mediocre man could barely manage,  
 even with serious effort, to equal the good. 190  
 Only a most truthful observer can take such a stance.

**Objection: The apostles (192–198)**

But here come to me the evangelists, exactors  
 and fishermen, and poor in speech,  
 who nevertheless have ensnared the world with simple speech,  
 catching even the learned into their net, 195  
 that the miracle might be greater than the speech.  
 'Tis indeed an argument easy for everyone to raise,  
 against which my answer will be short and really clear.

**Answer 1: The faith of the apostles (199–216)**

Give me, prithee, the faith of just one of the apostles,  
 his lack of brass, not carrying a scrip, 200  
 nor yet staves, half naked, without sandals,  
 living day by day and wealthy in hope alone,  
 courteous to no one for approval of his preaching,  
 lest flattery seem worthier,  
 nor busy with foreign doctrines. 205  
 Be one like them, and I'll take anything,  
 be he ignorant of the language, deformed, lowborn and cowherd:  
 for his ways cover the misery.  
 Be you like them, and even if you fish frogs,  
 we will then number you in the choirs of angels. 210  
 Therefore, grant me this one thing: Do you cleanse from devils?  
 Do you cast out the leper; the dead from his grave?  
 And do you give firmness to the limb of the palsied?  
 Lay hands on the sick, and rest the disease:  
 this way you'll convince me to despise education. 215

**Answer 2: Knowledge is good in itself and was granted to the apostles (216–244)**

So, if having one thing resulting from two,  
 one praiseworthy, the other deplorable,  
 you take into account one, leaving aside the other wittingly,  
 you, mischievously indeed, are hijacking the comparison.  
 Yea, Matthew was a tax collector, but worthy, 220  
 yet not as tax collector, but as laden with Spirit.  
 Peter was the chief of the disciples, but he was Peter  
 not as fisherman but because full of zeal.  
 The ways persuade me to honour even the net.  
 But you I avoid, even if you show some sign of seriousness, 225  
 because it is only a snare and a trap.

You are a painter, who imitates the beautiful  
 forms only when leprous or maimed.  
 Either you paint the whole beauty, or you leave it out whole. 230  
 And tell me also this, how come you call such people uneducated,  
 whose speeches and writings  
 we strive to understand even in the least detail,  
 we, bred in eloquence from the beginning,  
 and for whom the works and words are still so many  
 that everything is filled with books, 235  
 from every tongue and learned mind,  
 bringing the sublime fruit of interpretation?  
 Wherefore were kings and cities, assemblies,  
 accusers, and eloquent prosecutors,  
 at the bar or in the middle of theatres, 240  
 wise men, lawyers, supercilious philosophers,  
 politicians who speak properly and timely,  
 convinced and refuted outspokenly,  
 if they hadn't the doctrine you deny them?

### Answer 3: The role of charisma (245–264)

Maybe you'll say, "Through the stream of Spirit", 245  
 and you'd be right, but consider what you imply.  
 Don't you partake of the Spirit, too? Of course, and you take  
 too much pride in it. Why, then, do you grudge doctrine  
 to those who seek it? Either you attribute  
 falsely to the nature of Spirit 250  
 and to the righteous to inspire doctrine  
 and to be inspired, or they were indeed wise.  
 This way, you are inextricably ensnared by your own reasoning,  
 yes, you who promptly say, and only,  
 what would have been better not to have said, but to have kept inside. 255  
 I've heard that the spirit of the enemies is mute:  
 'tis better to keep silent than to speak badly.  
 May you loosen the tongue, O Word of God,  
 of those who utter justice, and burden the one  
 of those who spout and hiss like vipers 260  
 and shoot poison from the inside to kill their siblings.  
 You are just like this: How could be different  
 the speech of the ignorant? But let me say briefly  
 how things really are, and what is better to think.

### Nature and use of knowledge (265–302)

They were, yea, they were well learned back then, of course, 265  
 but not well learned even in the pleasantries of speech,



because, here's the thing: our every speech is double,  
 the words and the meaning; the ones are like the outward  
 clothing, the other is the body clothed.  
 Someone has both good, others only one of them, 270  
 or finally both are bad, according to nature or nurture.  
 As regards us, the outside is not a big deal,  
 nor its conditions, while the inside is really important,  
 for in the meaning is our salvation,  
 if it's uttered and shown. 275  
 Which profit from a sealed spring,  
 from a ray of sun concealed by clouds?  
 Such is a wise thought unspoken,  
 like the beauty of a rose that an ugly cup  
 covers; the beauty appears when, 280  
 burst open by the wind, the cup pushes its offspring on stage;  
 but if the beauty were to remain always covered,  
 there would be no delight in much-revered spring.  
 We don't look for anything more than speaking  
 like those who seem simple as regards speaking. 285  
 At least, may their meanings be present.  
 I long to perceive if only a part of your splendour.

### Value of education (288–308)

For if written doctrines are of no value,  
 why did I jest such a long time,  
 or rather: why did I count vainly the sands of the sea, 290  
 in toils weaving nights with the days,  
 in order to have, if only with wrinkles, a bit of learning?  
 But if they are—as they are—well written,  
 then leave not to the cobwebs the labours of the just.  
 Be the style pedestrian, the language coarse, 295  
 I won't mind: I can walk lowly, too.  
 The frugal meal I oftentimes find dearer  
 than the one adorned by the hands of the cooks.  
 For the garment is the same: fair is the beauty  
 not feigned by hands, but inherent to nature. 300  
 Be the meaning noble, and it will be enough.  
 Sophistication is vain, we leave it to those who like it.  
 Spare me Sextus and Pyrrho,  
 goodbye Chrysippus, far be the Stagirite from me,  
 don't grow fond even of Plato's eloquence. 305  
 Renounce the ornaments of the doctrines you rejected.  
 Be philosopher, but with plain words:  
 you'll please us even with unrefined talks.

**Christian culture (309–329)**

Teach us as you prefer, but teach,  
 who is Trinity for me, how God is One 310  
 and still distinct, one worship, one nature,  
 monad and triad; which is the nature of angels,  
 the duplicity of the world, the justice of Providence  
 in spite of many injustices apparent to the majority  
 and which is the relationship between soul and body 315  
 and the first and second laws and what is incarnation,  
 which exceeds by far any other object of knowledge,  
 and the mixture of two natures in one glory,  
 mortification resulting in awaking and heaven again,  
 and what is the sense of resurrection and judgment, 320  
 which the life of the just, which of the wicked.  
 Tell me, prithee, how everything goes, and where it stands,  
 if the Spirit has revealed some of these things to you,  
 or everything, whether only a little or even poorly,  
 inasmuch as the purity of your mind was capable. 325  
 Rob me not of these! But if you are totally blind,  
 then why do you blindly lead? Alas, the dimness  
 of those who trust a blind guide,  
 how shall they fall together in the pit of their ignorance!

**Morally unfit bishops (330–354)**

Be this enough for those: yes, they are the lesser evil, 330  
 but ignorance is still an evil, even if the lesser.  
 Yet what should be said mentioning also the wicked?  
 For there are, truly there are, some who are more wretched,  
 miserable, revolting crapshoots of the game of life,  
 ambidextrous of the faith, honouring the laws of fashion, 335  
 not those of God, weathercocks of words  
 always changing direction, or flapping willows,  
 flattering to women, pleasant poisons,  
 lions for the weak, dog for the strong,  
 natural hunters of any table, 340  
 wearing out the doors of the powerful, not the wise,  
 esteeming favour, not duty,  
 so as to make even their neighbours worse.  
 Do you want me to say something wise about them?  
 There's one boasting nobility, another eloquence, 345  
 another one riches, another his clan.  
 Those who lack something to stand out  
 make themselves known through knavery.  
 Also, this is artful: they know nothing of speech,  
 and they bind the tongue of the more eloquent with a law. 350

If a strife were kindled of eyes or hands,  
 you would have cut these off from us, too, you artists!  
 Is this not a clear outrage? Is it not a plain damage?  
 Who shall tolerate this? *Mysterium fidei!*

### Consequences for the church (355–370)

What a salvation we have received from God, 355  
 one that spread already almost to the whole world,  
 and nevertheless what utterly worthless leaders we have!  
 I won't speak falsely, yea, but neither pleasantly.  
 Alas, what a specious scene is played:  
 Personages now, and the persons later. 360  
 It is shameful to say how things are, and still I'm going to say it.  
 Appointed to be teachers of virtue,  
 we are the workshop of every vice,  
 silently screaming even when appearing not to talk:  
 "Wickedness presides: let no one labour, 365  
 be wicked instead, 'tis the shortest  
 and best way: action lays down the law."  
 For one could barely, through toils of teachers,  
 incline for the better, but if one has a perverse  
 model, one's done, a stream running downhill. 370

### The reason: failure in selecting bishops (371–396)

Here's the reason: they say it is with the rays of the sun  
 that the eagle tries his hatchlings' sight cleverly;  
 through these, the bastard from the legitimate is told,  
 and the one cast forth, the other recognized as son;  
 we on the contrary enthrone easily anyone, 375  
 provided he wants it, as leader of the community,  
 examining nothing of neophytes nor of older Christians,  
 neither their behaviour, nor any of their words, nor their acquaintances,  
 not even as much sound as suffices to evaluate a coin,  
 and not those conspicuous for the trial by fire of time, 380  
 but those who there and then appear worthy of the throne.  
 Indeed, if we should keep in mind that power  
 in the majority of cases makes its recipient worse,  
 who in his right mind would put forward someone he doesn't know?  
 And if 'tis such a big deal to steer 385  
 only my own soul through the mighty swells of life,  
 how dare you give the reins of such a community to anyone,  
 except if you truly want to drown the ship?

How come when precious stones are difficult to find,  
 and spices are not grown on any place of earth, 390  
 many are the cheap nags on the market,  
 while the high-bred are nurtured in the houses of the rich,  
 that the leader is easily found,  
 without training, ready and fresh for the office?  
 What quick reversal of ways and habits! 395  
 It's a roll of dice: what is divine is decided by dice.

## Second reason: Lack of preparation of bishops (397–431)

Or you just put at once a comic mask  
 on someone paltry and cheap,  
 and suddenly he appears to us as a pious man.  
 Truly, great is the grace of the Spirit, 400  
 if even our most dear Saul is among the prophets.  
 Yesterday you were a mime in the theatre  
 (let another one inquire what you were outside the theatre),  
 now you yourself are our unusual show.  
 You were just now a horse lover, sending God dust 405  
 as others send prayers or pious thoughts;  
 something happens—a charioteer falls,  
 or a horse comes second at the races—  
 and the nimble haze of horses strikes you,  
 as a madman or one out of his mind; 410  
 now you are well-behaved and radiate only sobriety,  
 unless you are not seen and run to your old vice,  
 like a queer branch that, fleeing the grip  
 of the hand that kept it straight, runs to its shape.  
 Yesterday an attorney, you sold justice, 415  
 twisting the law up and down,  
 thus damning those whom justice would have saved  
 and applying the rule of justice to the highest bidder;  
 Now you are my judge, an instant Daniel.  
 Yesterday you judged me, sword drawn, 420  
 and made of the court a lawful den of robbers,  
 stealing and bullying, above all the very laws;  
 how meek are you today! One could not change  
 clothes as easily as you your character.  
 Yesterday you squirmed among effeminate dancers, 425  
 at weddings you played the burlesque among the Lydians,  
 twisting your voice in songs and swelling on drunken pride;  
 now you watch the behaviour of virgins and consorts:  
 how suspicious your virtue after your former habits!  
 Simon Magus yesterday, today Peter Simon. 430  
 O the speed! O a lion instead of a fox!

**Not enough time between baptism and ordination (432–441)**

But tell me, dear friend and exactor of tributes,  
 or former-something in the civil service,  
 how come you, being poor, and then exceeding Cyrus  
 the Mede, Croesus, or Midas with your revenues, 435  
 owning a house made and full of tears,  
 you migrated to the altar and took hold of the throne,  
 and still retain what you seized by force?  
 And finally you are a tyrant even of God's mysteries,  
 upon which one shouldn't perhaps even dare to look 440  
 if not prepared for a very long time.

**Objection 1: Baptism (442–502)**

The purification of baptism has changed you utterly?  
 Wait: we'll see, why should we envy you?  
 The advantage is mine, allow just some time,  
 I ask you just a little delay of desire. 445  
 If you, cleansed today by a gift of God,  
 burst forth again with the same mud thanks to sluggishness,  
 the spring that burst forth with those former vices being still there  
 (because immersion doesn't cleanse your every habit,  
 but the fruit grown out of your habits), 450  
 know clearly that yours is a mournful salvation,  
 all the more because before, there were at least high hopes,  
 but now not even these: one is the grace of the One God.  
 But maybe one is not evil: Will it suffice?  
 Well, we prefer a wax tablet that, formerly smoothed 455  
 of its old images, registers new, beautiful ones.  
 Become a Zacchaeus, and if you want to,  
 don't give more, but just the sum you stole from them,  
 for you cannot abide by the law;  
 give to the poor as much as you want, 460  
 and then you'll host Christ properly.  
 But if you keep the spoils inside or give little  
 to the poor, and believe yourself to be acquitted,  
 then our God—if I may speak thus—can be sold.  
 Where is justice, if my mischief 465  
 is unforgiven while Grace allows you  
 not to pay the price of your trespasses?  
 You have Grace? Then from the others' wealth  
 stay far away: this way your purification will be perfect.  
 But if, while you were receiving the charisma, 470  
 you had what's not yours, or were not thoroughly cleansed,  
 then I omit the rest, because it's clear to anyone.  
 You look for Grace: it's because you now know you're a debtor,

even if the throne lifts you too high.  
 'Tis our past faults, not our present errors, 475  
 that baptism washes. Therefore, purify  
 yourself perfectly, and do not become now a laughingstock,  
 purifying others as you yourself are soiled,  
 unless you alone had from God the distinction—  
 similar to those written by the emperor's hand and grace— 480  
 to be praised even in your tyranny.  
 If, however, even baptism does not purify totally  
 those who—as I said—receive its grace  
 (for never has anyone cheated with God,  
 Who binds even the cunning more cunningly), 485  
 who could purify of the sins after the anointing  
 those who plunge themselves again in the muddy pit  
 and the dignity of our image from above  
 outrage with the effigies of reptiles  
 and brutes, which we become by imitation? 490  
 Habit is a second Maker,  
 difficult to uproot and cast away.  
 Therefore, there is no second cleansing.  
 Once I was begot, and then formed anew by God;  
 perchance I will be formed in another, future 495  
 creation, cleansed by the loving fire.  
 Now I do not know remedy, except tears,  
 wherefrom barely comes healing,  
 while the scars remain anyways, I believe,  
 as accusers of the former nefarious wounds. 500  
 If there is someone who trusts more in God,  
 the advantage is mine: let him just persuade us.

## Objection 2: Ordination (503–521)

One could say that the hands of bishops,  
 the public mandate, are cleansing graces,  
 or our loud proclamation of unworthiness 505  
 in public, taking the genuflection as a purification,  
 or the Spirit, that veritable tyrant,  
 according to righteous and wise bishops,  
 although I believe these will get some defilement faster  
 than add something to their own splendour. 510  
 For 'tis easier to partake in evil than in good,  
 and thence you'll know this truth:  
 if sanctified meat should touch  
 a drink—as Micah says—or some mortal,  
 it could never sanctify that which it touched, 515  
 whereas defiled things will profane the sacred.

The blessed Paul knows this very well,  
 when, instructing Timotheus in his epistles,  
 he gives the precept not to impose hands offhand  
 on another, and not to share his ways: 520  
 Our own sins are burden enough.

### The importance of morality: For outsiders of the church (522–540)

But let's concede as you like that even this is a purification.  
 Who guarantees for the morality, except time,  
 which shows that Grace has wiped clean in depth  
 and not on the surface, as if like a dye from herbs 525  
 is the splendour whose beauty can be washed away?  
 But be it a complete purification as well:  
 your degree has changed you. Behold! You're an angel.  
 A faithful one who honours our laws  
 will concede this readily for the sake of dogma. 530  
 But the pagan has, apart from our reputation,  
 no other standard for the goodness of the faith:  
 he, who doesn't care about his vices,  
 becomes a grudging prosecutor of yours.  
 How are we, tell me, to persuade him to change 535  
 his mind from the one we gave him formerly?  
 How are we to put to rest his tongue, with which words?  
 Indeed, 'tis not in our laws to despise what  
 in any respect polishes, as a kind of statue,  
 the leader, lest the people have any damage. 540

### It is difficult to achieve *after* ordination (541–569)

But I'll concede also that grace is stronger than fame.  
 Everyone marvels at you and blame doesn't reach you.  
 You come right after Elijah for your holy speech.  
 How come you sit high, unproven and uneducated  
 in things thoroughly practised and desired 545  
 by many? I'd marvel if you at least desired them:  
 Conceit doesn't allow learning,  
 because it convinces you that what you don't have is easy to acquire.  
 But that's not the problem: rather, how will you avoid  
 seeming at the same time the student and the teacher, 550  
 and to sharpen the sharpening as the fangs of boars,  
 having to teach while you still learn?  
 What is such a confusion of tasks?  
 Since when has our doctrine become so cheap?  
 There is no boxer who hasn't begun by holding forth 555  
 his hand or by looking for the favourable position;

nor a runner not training his feet in advance;  
 which sane human, in just one day,  
 has ever cut, wrought, and played a flute in a contest?  
 Of which consummate painter has it ever been hear 560  
 that he did not mix many different qualities of colours?  
 Who harangued or healed a disease  
 before many pleas and many diseases?  
 Small indeed would be the renown of art  
 if the bare will sufficed to its acquisition. 565  
 Yet the prelate is required, and he alone,  
 to be admirable and excellent straightway.  
 But, as the saying goes, "No sooner said than done":  
 Christ orders, and a creature forms.

### The importance of morality for the faithful (570–574)

I'll just drop this. How dare you, looking down 570  
 on the abiding worshipper of God there,  
 exalt yourself and desire the power of the throne?  
 Don't you shiver and tremble before the throne,  
 lest you should herd cows better than their herder?

### The good faithful vs. the bad bishop (575–633)

Consider things this way, provided you bother to look them at all: 575  
 This one sleeps on the ground, devoured by ashes,  
 and he wasted away his flesh with vigils,  
 chanting the psalms and standing night and day  
 and exiling his thoughts from the crass to the sublime  
 (for why should one entrust to the graves one's whole dust 580  
 and be for the worms a more lavish food,  
 begetting and feeding the begotten?),  
 and with springs of tears he wiped clean his stains,  
 if he ever had the smallest of sprinklings,  
 whence even the wise is affected in the mire of life. 585  
 He was sealed with worthy signs in his flesh,  
 parched by prayer and manifold toils  
 (with them the ancient tasting afflicted me,  
 turning me to earth, our nurturing mother),  
 and he shudders, with his hunger and meagre rags 590  
 desiring to reach the clothing of incorruption.  
 He did violence to the violence of belly with scant  
 food, wooing death each day:  
 for he knew the only food of angels is God.  
 This one is now poor, but there was a time when he was very rich. 595



He, though, preferred jettisoning and sailing light,  
 casting the load not to the abyss but to the poor.  
 This one, fleeing the cities and the applause of the crowd  
 and the storm that shakes all public things,  
 fitted closely to God the dignity of thought, 600  
 alone devoted to divine matters with himself alone.  
 This enclosed his beautiful body (for how can  
 the body of the best not be beautiful?) with pearls—  
 iron chains, a hidden ornament—  
 thereby binding himself though innocent, 605  
 lest he trespass, even when free,  
 and binding together with himself the erring senses.  
 To such a man the Spirit taught the depths of Scripture,  
 loosening what's sealed for the minds of the many.

Show me, prithee, such beautiful things among yours! 610  
 A house, a plump woman, desire of children,  
 wealth, butlers, exactors, cries, lawsuits,  
 everything full of worries and works;  
 a table swollen with provisions  
 by the combinations of drinks and cooks, 615  
 who bring their fruit to guts by sea and by land  
 (by which the mind is drowned and loses scope)  
 and by perfumes, laughter, consorts of tunes  
 that need cymbals and noise of feet.  
 Others then, filled with the folly of nature, 620  
 addicted and swelling, all spruced up  
 for women, just married—to say the least—  
 having still to open the bridal chamber  
 or even living together with their lovers still unmarried,  
 even before their cheek is covered with beard, 625  
 the ornament of men, just in their prime,  
 young in the body, younger in the behaviour,  
 or, on the contrary, laden with vices of days past,  
 these are the leaders of not-carnal children,  
 whom the Spirit, averse to flesh, begets, 630  
 these, who have learnt to honour the passions they suffer,  
 who use the vices of others as excuses for their own,  
 giving the same permit they claim.

### Power is wearing (634–657)

Such are they. But maybe, in becoming  
 better than themselves, they can be hindered by their thrones. 635  
 Power, in facts, makes the fool worse.  
 The disciplined instead remains disdained,  
 eyes down, looking to God alone,  
 fond of the place of the disciple, whose current teacher

maybe is unworthy to be his student, 640  
 if at least valour is not told by position.  
 Such is the power of the Slanderer among us!  
 Such subtle, shrewd tricks he plays  
 whenever he wants to strike a city or a nation:  
 besides the individual temptations, he gives also 645  
 the leader as a summary law of wickedness.  
 Here it is, then: copper laminate in gold,  
 or the changing colour of a chameleon,  
 a beard, a downcast countenance, a bent neck,  
 a mild voice, dressed up as faithful, 650  
 a slow pace, in all wise, except mind.  
 Here are the first of the foremost honours of our time,  
 the holy ephod and Samuel's cloak,  
 a petty cot, not even totally made up,  
 sackcloth as dress and a linen knot around 655  
 luxuriant hair, fitter for the heads of maidens,  
 ostentatious outwards frills of orison.

### Avoiding duplicity and unseemly imitation (658–695)

How shall I not utter this uttering foreign to me?  
 But I could not deliver something—even if from wrath—  
 casual: maintain either the luxury or the mop! 660  
 Why do you strive to possess both what's yours and what's not?  
 Different are the borders of Phrygia and Mysia,  
 different the courses of Merra and Siloam:  
 the ones cannot be even tasted; to the others, moved  
 by an angel, illnesses yielded. 665  
 You plant two vines, twice then  
 you sow; your garment is woven from two cloths,  
 you render a pair what does not belong to the same pair.  
 Don't you know it is forbidden by the law  
 that shuns duplicity, the twisting and mixing? 670  
 One is the ornament of women, the other that of men;  
 one the flight of jackdaws, the other that of eagles;  
 the imitation of the great by the petty is very shameful,  
 because of its shabbiness: let the sorcerers of Pharaoh  
 persuade you clearly with their story. 675  
 But if you strived to be one of the wise men,  
 don't just turn the rod into a snake;  
 I want you to be all in all the great Aaron.  
 However, if you are numbered among the mages of Egypt,  
 if it's good, practise the whole art itself: 680  
 no one grudges you a fair imitation,  
 but if it's foul, then stay away. Refrain from what's mine,  
 for you know what is mine, even if you pretend cleverly.

You too rob me of my one little ewe lamb:  
 your countenance is a cheating, and which Nathan will speak? 685  
 I'll rip your grey garments running onto you,  
 if I catch you, because sometimes even of these  
 you brag, as of the worst of foods,  
 when you suffer from overeating delicacies.  
 But rip you too something mine, if you can find something 690  
 too feeble or fake in me.  
 What would be more right than this?  
 Let Laban keep the white flocks, but the spotted ones  
 are of the shepherd that has long laboured,  
 frozen by nights and baked by the sun. 695

### Example of imitation (696–708)

Therefore, feigning one's character is the worst of shames;  
 however, if you hold fast, I will praise you.  
 But how is it this, and to what is it similar?  
 Can I play a bit with a pleasant fable  
 while being serious? There is laughter even in tears. 700  
 The tale places a kitten in a bridal chamber,  
 because it depicts her as a bride in bridal garments;  
 Gifts, applauses, laughter: 'twas really a brilliant wedding.  
 Then, she saw a mouse running through the middle of the room.  
 She was a bride, yea, but still a cat: at that sight 705  
 she ran upon it and had dinner; not wedding.  
 Such is every false teacher:  
 Nature is not easily changed.

### Should a bishop be a skilful politician? (709–760)

“Still, he knows his way around in business,  
 this one you blame, and is a perfect leader, 710  
 practised in old and new movements,  
 whereas that pious one is useful only to himself.”  
 Who says such things? Someone too malignant.  
 For no one exists to live for himself only,  
 neither among the good nor among the evil. 715  
 Rather, as this air, depending on who draws it,  
 acquires a pleasant or a bad odour,  
 so we are made like our neighbours most quickly,  
 less, however, from the good, but too much from the evil.  
 Wickedness in facts is easier to imitate. 720  
 But if such a man should become also our leader—  
 that is, if he is mean and full of wickedness—

then this is the proverbial bramble ruling the trees,  
 whereas if he's excellent, by the pillar of fire  
 once more led, the Great Israel will proceed 725  
 to that land of hope we all earnestly pursue,  
 even if its leader is not always around in the marketplace,  
 nor a Proteus skilful in stealing appearances,  
 nor a Melampus nor another restless man  
 easily adapting himself in everything to everyone else, 730  
 based on everyone's continuous changing.  
 So why do you call useless—tell me—the one  
 whose imitation can make us better?  
 Or why is the best leader and right the one 735  
 whose imitation makes you despise ours?  
 Excess is unsuitable for the sage,  
 while generosity is most trustworthy.  
 You can be that one, if you desire, but I'm this.  
 Do you hold as the best of painters  
 not the one painting lively forms with simple colours, 740  
 a Zeuxis or Polyclitus or a Euphranor,  
 but anyone who with bright and shadowless  
 dyes contrives misshapen bodies,  
 like Callimachus and Calais did, in my opinion  
 barely representing the copies of the copies? 745  
 Such is every manifold man.  
 Is it with this in mind, then, that you were striving to find a shepherd?  
 How small an effort! I'm ashamed for you.  
 You look for a bishop as for a city curator.  
 You care for dung, but my concerns are wider. 750  
 Leave to the priest one task and one only,  
 to purify souls through life and words,  
 bringing them upwards with inspired impulses,  
 being gentle and high-minded, only by the divine,  
 spotless reflections moulded 755  
 as a mirror reflecting from within  
 and to send pure offerings on behalf of his children,  
 until he has restored them as an offering.  
 Let other tasks be left for the ones in them more accomplished.  
 This way, we can have a secure life. 760

### Should a bishop be a good polemicist? (761–776)

Yet, as you deem free speech as the highest value,  
 I accept it: nor do I find it unimportant,  
 provided we use it with reason and moderation;  
 however, mind how things are: the wise man's  
 silence is worth more than your claptrap, 765  
 for, while even your courage is boldness,

nobility means also curbing our words.  
 But if the right chance occurs for speaking freely,  
 you'll see the meek turn pugnacious, and you'll experience  
 in that circumstance how much he's successful. 770  
 You'll learn how the ape and how the lion roars,  
 when your human nature will be spit,  
 as the bad conscience turns towards earth,  
 while he, being irreproachable, is easily received.  
 Nothing else in fact is more trustworthy than temper. 775

### The strife for the biggest cities (776–791)

Thus in this respect too is the skilful one worse.  
 Nevertheless he boastfully takes seat in the spotlight,  
 enjoying the fruits of another man's table,  
 so much despising all the others, like abortions,  
 as he himself should be despised, 780  
 having this one spur of pride, his glorious city,  
 and deserving for this an even more abject downfall:  
 for in this way you are producing more wicked men.  
 What kind of urban ass have you tried  
 to present as better than another ass from the countryside? 785  
 An ass is an ass, even if it lives in the city.  
 What do I mean? Well, how won't this favour the wicked?  
 Is it not a plain snare for those who progress?  
 In fact, the wise becomes like the unwise,  
 whenever things flow well for the wicked 790  
 and those who correct have a wretched life.

### Gregory renounces further action (792–810)

But this is the best course: as in a storm  
 that twists everything, veering a little away  
 from where everything is turning up and down,  
 secure our short days, 795  
 and give to old age a good end.  
 So, go ahead and keep your thrones and tyrannies,  
 you, since you deem them as most important.  
 Enjoy it, exploit it, carve up  
 your patriarchates, let the great world yield to you, 800  
 change seat after seat, plunge  
 the ones, the others lift: 'tis what you like.  
 Go ahead, I'll recollect myself in God,  
 by whom I live and breathe and for whom I look,  
 to whom before birth my mother promised me, 805

with whom bound me dangers and the gifts of night,  
 and to him I'll sacrifice pure movements of the mind,  
 as far as it's possible at least, alone talking to him alone.  
 All these things have been said to you, wicked, on behalf of the good:  
 if one is grieved by these, my speech has reached its target. 810

All the rest, my friends, will be brought up in the end;  
 however, please accept from me a valediction  
 that, although brief, is still useful,  
 like those who receive the last, fatherly  
 words and commands, worthy of remembrance 815  
 because not a word more will be ever heard again,  
 so that they remain even more deeply in the heart.  
 If you should receive another Gregory, my friends,  
 be more careful with him; if not, then  
 be ye gentlemen with your neighbours 820  
 and with yourselves, you that agree just as long  
 as you are possessed by the same passions;  
 and that peace that I always earnestly served  
 you should love, giving up your weaknesses,  
 by which the community is miserably troubled. 825  
 I too shall let go of mine, be it that I think  
 myself better than others or that my old age  
 has made me harsh and peevish for anything,  
 or finally that I, the one high in spiritual drunkenness,  
 believe the sober to be dead drunk. 830  
 Be it as you prefer, but remember me,  
 who has suffered much for the behaviour of friends,  
 but keeping reason as a good guide  
 and this old age, which delivers me from these sorrows.  
 In this way maybe a friend could make peace with me 835  
 after the strife has died, with which envy goes along.

## II.1.13 To the Bishops

O priests, you who offer bloodless sacrifices! 1  
 O highly glorious ministers of souls, bearing  
 in your hands the image of the great God!  
 O, you who the Supreme God with human beings together bring!  
 O, world's pillars, life's light, foundation of the doctrine, 5  
 initiators to the shining mysteries of life immortal,  
 Christ-bearers, sitting on the topmost thrones,  
 most high, rejoicing in comely shows,  
 stage treaders, standing on wooden stilts,  
 feebly yawning through alien masks, 10  
 for what pertains to religion, the very same as everyone else.  
 Yea, you may play, although you play shamefully,

and your speech may be haughty, yet what you do is really shallow,  
 whereas I, even if all of you together may hold me  
 an evil man and strange, and pull me far away 15  
 from your chorus, shooting one dart after another,  
 openly and, what you love even more, secretly;  
 nevertheless, what my heart stirs and urges,  
 I will say, yet not wilfully, but I'll burst forth speech  
 from my soul, as when a swell, forced from within 20  
 by a mighty wind and running under a rock, invisibly  
 bellows, and then blasts out of the ground,  
 from the rim of the crack in throes.  
 I cannot hold my gall within, so bear it,  
 if I should say some heart-biting word, too, born of grief. 25  
 Talking is a remedy for sorrow, if only to the wind.

Christ's great body, the Lord's pride and glory,  
 a kingly people from the whole earth, a nation beyond belief  
 was once; now instead God's property is shaken  
 to and fro, like a swell in the roaring sea, 30  
 or a plant quaking though raging winds.  
 This people, for whom God came from his heavenly throne,  
 and emptied his glory in the bowels of a mortal,  
 and mixed with mankind, God and mortal in one conjoined,  
 and, suffering, gave his body as a great price, his divine blood 35  
 poured as restitution of our sin, and many other  
 victims, those who later sowed everywhere the gospel  
 and from a bitter hand accepted a sweet death,  
 thereby paying God the Word with word, his blood with blood.  
 Who is disturbing this body? Whence such a burden for me? 40  
 How come a lone-grazing boar spoils my vineyard?  
 How come a shadowy night conceals such splendour?  
 Rabid, malevolent, grudging mankind  
 ever since he first cast Adam out of paradise  
 and immortal life, deceiving with the baneful fruit 45  
 and always striking us with many and powerful disruptions,  
 because he managed not, even as he desired, to cast down  
 our whole race with his cunning (the spark of Word and lifted torch  
 spread all over the earth with fame, while the persecutors  
 confirmed even more those convinced by the martyrs), 50  
 he found another wily mean. Recognizing the power  
 of the army, he throws a deadly enmity between its leaders.  
 Thus, once the chief is fallen, the whole army declines;  
 a bad gale can capsize a seafaring ship  
 or break it on the cliffs when it is without helmsman. 55  
 Thus households, cities, choruses, cattle, chariots, flocks  
 destroyed the ignorance of their guide. I speak to those who know  
 the vice of all of us, guiding the people.

In the past a city was assigned as exile for the murderers,  
 and a place to send the scapegoat to, 60  
 and also one of bitterness and blood in the last  
 days, whither whoever despised Christ gushed out,  
 having the scarce and petty price of the Priceless,  
 and not from One unwilling, since God is intangible  
 to the hands, if he wants; and nevertheless they gushed out. 65  
 But now 'tis one the place known for wickedness and doom  
 by everyone, the strangers as well as our fellow believers,  
 the former august seat of the wise, hedge of the best,  
 this stage thriving with angelic choirs,  
 the midmost gate between two worlds, the perennial 70  
 and the one flying away, boundary of gods and mortals.  
 Such was once; now instead 'tis ludicrous, as everyone  
 is given way inside through an open door; so that I seem  
 to hear a herald shouting in the town square:

"Come here, you experts of vice, shames of mankind, 75  
 Tubbies, jocks, shameless, arrogant,  
 drunkards, tramps, jeer lovers, clad in luxury clothes,  
 liars and wantons, quick to perjure,  
 devourers of the public, on other people's properties laying  
 invincible hands, envious, wily, unreliable, 80  
 humble flatterers of the mighty, lion with the humble,  
 two-faced slaves of the ever-changing convenience,  
 octopus on the stone sung in the stories for their skin,  
 just married and already seething, still with their first down,  
 you surely hide the natural fire, keeping in the eyes 85  
 a misty love, when you wander publicly,  
 ignorant of heaven, just baptized yet sooty,  
 as wickedness is joined with the dazzling Spirit.

Come on, here, bold ones, a broad throne is ready for everyone!  
 Come here, bend with the hands the young neck 90  
 to everyone readily; even to the unwilling 'tis bent.  
 The manna again, a strange rain: everyone collect  
 in his lap, some more, some less, the same grace.  
 If you want, don't even spare God's holy day of rest,  
 for it may fester in greedy hands. 95  
 Common to all is air, and common is earth,  
 common the wide sky, and what his eyes illuminate,  
 common is also the bounty of the sea, common the thrones, too.  
 How wonderful! Not even Saul is a stranger to grace, but an oracle.  
 Therefore, let no ploughman, no carpenter, no worker in leather, 100  
 no hunter of prey, no one forging fiery works  
 remain afar, nor let him have someone else as guide to God.  
 For 'tis better to rule than to obey the ruler.  
 So, the one who from the hands a big axe or a plough  
 threw away, or the leather, or the planks or the tongs, 105



let him come here, to press all around God's table,  
 thronging and thronged. Let the strong drive away the other,  
 often even the better, who sweated in these seats,  
 old aged, worn out in the flesh, conversant with heaven,  
 despising the world and having his lot with God, **110**  
 a dead among the living and a faithful priest of the King.  
 One paints an image from its model,  
 setting it before himself, and the board takes up its form;  
 but seeing you, one should take the opposite way.  
 This is the only advantage of your depravity." **115**

Thus would the herald shout. Yet I do  
 dread such things as I've heard about the glorious Moses,  
 who alone gazed openly in through the cloud to God  
 and ordered the others to remain on the foothills,  
 although most holy in clothes most holy and trembling **120**  
 at the very sound of the divine voice. For 'twas better  
 even for the brutes not to step on God's ground,  
 that they might be not destroyed under bursting stones.  
 I do dread also the end of Aaron's sons, who, for the offerings  
 put on strange fire, a strange death died **125**  
 and sudden, and the place of their death was sanctified.  
 Although the sons of the great Aaron, they were destroyed.  
 Thus even the Helids a baneful fate seized,  
 the sons of Heli, for their greedy mind. Yea, they'd lay  
 unholy hands on the holy kettles. **130**  
 Nor did Heli escape the wrath, but even him  
 the ungodly belly of his sons vexed, though righteous  
 and laden with words of rebuke for them.  
 So, if such sins such a wrath awaits,  
 how much more should we dread before greater evils! **135**  
 Even thee, kingly ark, he who kept thee with impure hands  
 from falling died forthwith. God's temple too was made  
 to hands untouchable by the pillars outside the walls.

Therefore, I wail and fall at your feet,  
 Lord Jesus Christ, that no disgrace may come upon me **140**  
 as I retire. I am wearied by the wolves hurting the flock,  
 with the shepherds I strove long; heart has fled  
 my crooked limbs, I can barely breathe,  
 oppressed by toils and our disgraces.  
 Of whom some compete for the holy seats, **145**  
 swell one against the other, through evils  
 tossed and tossing to and fro, and are stubborn contenders  
 who scream "Peace!" and brag of the blood.  
 Oh, that they may try the full measure of the Gethan plague,  
 righteous and on the seat, for 'tis the seat's retribution. **150**  
 The others, divided on each side, harass  
 East and West; God has left flesh,

and among these fighters there are different names and slogans:  
 Paul is with me, Peter with you, Apollo with him,  
 and these are the gods. Christ was vainly nailed, 155  
 for 'tis not Christ's name we bear, but those of humans,  
 although we have glory in his blood and hands.  
 How much lust has clouded our eyes,  
 lust for vain glory or possessions, or dread envy,  
 consuming and delighting in evil, to our rightly sore eyes! 160  
 And Trinity is just an excuse, actually 'tis hate unbelievable.  
 Everyone is two-faced, a sheep enfolding a wolf,  
 and bronze concealing a sour bite for the fish.

Such are the leaders. Then follows closely the people,  
 prone to wickedness, even without a leader. 165  
 There is no distinction between good and evil,  
 nor between hoary sense and reckless youth,  
 nor a grievous and devout life and an effeminate one.  
 One is the rule: to make much of the worst. Damn  
 that man who first brought here the wicked! 170  
 Let them have the world, God, and whatever  
 compensation awaits the good in the last days;  
 let the good fruitlessly toil. Such is the sentence  
 of our judges, and let justice be banned from here.  
 Let everything be the same, Christ, man, sun, star, 175  
 light, shadow, a pious angel, and Lucifer no more shining.  
 Let God-slayer Iscariot be the same as Peter,  
 and most impious Samaria as Jerusalem most holy.  
 Let gold and silver be worth the same, and even iron,  
 a pearl and a rugged stone, fountains and ravines: 180  
 let's mix up everything and treat it as the same!  
 Thus 'twas once, as the first-created matter was unadorned,  
 still delivering the unsteadily defined world.

Once the great temple was unapproachable to the Moabites  
 and the Ammonites, for they vexed a brave army. 185  
 Others were numbered by Joshua among the water bearers  
 and the wood bearers, for they had deceived him.  
 This for the evil, yet they honoured great Levi's seed:  
 indeed, they made him servant of the heavenly tent,  
 and here too there were rules for victims, place and toil. 190  
 Each man laid hands on his task,  
 to hasten what was of the temple and outside it.  
 Those served under such rules of virtue,  
 whereas we raffle prizes for the vice: oh, death!  
 Is there a bard skilled enough in laments to bewail this? 195

Refrain, friends: let's stop suffering for the derangement;  
 even late God can be honoured with pure victims.  
 If I'll have persuaded, then good; but if my words and age  
 should be smothered by youthful rashness or by a cloud

of jackdaws croaking death to me foolishly, 200  
 I shall testify by the hand of God immortal and the black  
 day that devours with the last fire the light materials,  
 I am not on the same throne as those, nor of the same works,  
 nor even of the same mind, on the same boat or the same road.  
 But let them thread their own way, whilst I 205  
 will search Noah's ark, to avoid a grim fate.  
 So may I escape, far removed from the wicked,  
 even the fiery rain of Sodom, awful and bitter.  
 From these bounds recollecting the wondering mind inside,  
 all turned inwards, laughing about the storms of life 210  
 which still soil shamefully even the faces of the wise,  
 and always impressing on the heart divine notions,  
 approaching nothing mixed with evil, but pure, to the light  
 of the Thrice-Shining Godhead, with urging longings,  
 I shall come blameless to the throne of God immortal; 215  
 There all will be visible, nay, what is more, equal,  
 then, when the balance will be in the hands of God, the Just Judge.

## II.1.17 On the Different Lifestyles and against Fake Priests

A painter is excellent when he draws on his canvas 1  
 the exact shapes, looking as if they were alive,  
 not when, mixing many colours and bright aimlessly,  
 he makes a meadow of painting of the canvas.  
 I praise the seafaring ship, not the one counterfeited 5  
 in her beauty, or splendid with garlands on the stern,  
 rather the one the hands of the shipwright had best fastened  
 with bolts and given to the swells confident.  
 Even a host is excellent if braver, not if fair-looking,  
 and the dazzling house is second to the sound and solid. 10  
 Such are even the lives of mortals. The one is immortal whom awe  
 brings to Christ, an alien unto twisted vice,  
 steadfast, unshaken, imperturbable. The other most wretched,  
 inside being feeble, outside feigning force,  
 short-lived, the like of the idiots, to whom everything 15  
 whirls, as their mind is unstable.

Such is the heart even of glorious Christ's priests.  
 The one is slave to the ever-shifting strength of mortals,  
 bowing to opportunity, a cane oftentimes bent by winds,  
 of all kinds of vices not remedy, but model, 20  
 whereas the other with trembling and cleansed palms  
 offers the Gift, reconciled by the flesh of Christ  
 and by the great sufferings that God bore down here,  
 ransom of our ancestral passions.

For him alone he lives and rejoices; for him he rips 25  
 his heart apart from earthly things, turned away from here.

To good people he gives mind; to the evil, however,  
     he bows like a rugged, inflexible stone.  
 Nor does he turn to riches or important thrones,  
     nor the ephemeral glory that creeps along here, 30  
 nor does he, with the skin of the violent king, the lion,  
     conceal inside servile self-interest,  
 scavenger, skilled in deceit, wicked, shifting concealer  
     of shifting and various kinds of misdeeds.  
 Rather, nourishing his mind with pure thoughts, 35  
     he already grasps the heavenly Trinity,  
 Whose image he fixed in his own senses,  
     beholding one glory in triple beauties;  
 then, making the people Godlike with holy sacrifices,  
     he will finally bring the bloodless offerings of soul. 40

I (I won't hide it) longed to be one of them,  
     and I had already one foot on the threshold,  
 when I saw godless behaviours and troublesome mischief;  
     suddenly I recoiled and brought away my foot,  
 yet how much I toiled among the other misbelievers, 45  
     among whom the echo of my tongue is still heard.  
 To me the stones, Trinity to them, the divinity finally confirmed:  
     such gifts we gave to each other!  
 But even thus I complied, leaving a doctrine no more unbelieved,  
     thrown everywhere by my swells. 50  
 I'm down: trample, trample, malignant envy! But perchance  
     I'll stop you when I'll hide at the extreme boundaries,  
 or I'll be shut in the dark bowels of some beast,  
     a huge sea monster, as Jonah once was plunged.  
 Well, the body may well be in the bowels, but the mind will move 55  
     with unbound rush, wherever it wants, even if shut in.  
 This one thing of the good is free and can't be restrained  
     nor taken away: a mind lifted by Christ.

No more guest of a mortal king, as was before,  
     is Gregory, giving tiny gifts to his envelope, 60  
 lying in the public, downcast and mute,  
     with a breathless panting and feasting on slavish food.  
 The judge won't punish me with a seat, either equal  
     or lower, to give a measure to my inflation.  
 Nor will I greet murderous hands or clutch 65  
     their cheek to obtain a measly favour,  
 nor will I run with many people to some holiday feast,  
     either for a birthday or for a funeral or a wedding,  
 to put every spoil in my jaws or give it to my attendants  
     with the rapacious hands of a Briareus; 70  
 then late, bearing a burden, as a living grave, I'll drag myself  
     back home, worn out by the toiling belly,  
 slurring the breath of surfeit, still hurrying towards another

fat feast, before having dispersed the previous glut.  
 Nor, presiding in the holy places, 75  
     be I alone or with many gathered as one,  
 Shall I utter something pleasant to hear, excluding the Spirit,  
     that I may be prudent and loved by the majority,  
 enjoying the applause and dance in the theatres,  
     a tightrope walker of fighting speeches, 80  
 the like of winning athletes and much-modulating disgraces,  
     or even the mad antagonist charioteers:  
 not wounding the rage, not quenching the fury  
     of the burning body, not fettering with reason  
 the hand raging all over other people's property, 85  
     not scattering false conceit from the heart,  
 not throwing on the floor with doctrine swelling delusion,  
     not calling forth tears with floods of tears,  
 but using just one terrible drug, a heart hunting  
     glory, and really a deadly drug. 90  
 Nor shall I ever sit in one of those synods,  
     where geese and cranes recklessly quarrel:  
 there is strife, there are fight and disgraces formerly hidden  
     gathered to one place full of enemies.  
 Therefore, I for me sit among the humble ones, 95  
     healer of pains, myself being sound.  
 My hoar should not play, and it's unmeet to be  
     a servant before the thrones, for which, competing,  
 they divide, and unlawfully cut to pieces the whole world.  
     Alas! How large our distresses! 100  
 Let these things to the one who cares about them, and the power to the monkeys,  
     while I'll fill full of Christ in stillness.  
 And if 'tis bad to cast away the reins of a godly minded people,  
     let the chiefs of those who shook me off from themselves know,  
 until they, like a quick horse, which spits the bit, 105  
     will be by appetite dragged and brought over cliffs or reef.  
 I pray that they care for whatever God wants,  
     but if 'tis worse, may my ears be far away.



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