Christine Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy. Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria*. North American Patristic Society Patristic Monograph Series 20. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of American Press, 2008.

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This revised dissertation represents a substantial contribution to the continuing exploration of the rhetorical practices by which influential voices negotiated orthodox Christian identity in Late Antiquity. Focusing on the infamous anti-Judaism of Ephrem's hymns, the author identifies the prolific 4th-century deacon as a significant yet often overlooked participant in the "imperial theological struggles" (3) over the implications of Nicene orthodoxy. In his original ecclesial context, Ephrem's apparent anti-Judaism is due more to his desire to champion Nicea and construct an orthodox Syriac community than to his active opposition to Judaism or Jews.

Chapter One presents the book's basic argument and outlines its contents. Ephrem often expresses an easy confidence in the triumph of Nicene orthodoxy. Yet his hymns continually caution vigilance against the pull of the "Judaizers" and the "Arians," betraying his anxieties about the firmness of his congregants' allegiances and the outcomes of the political-theological turmoil of his setting. Building on a legacy of Christian anti-Jewish polemic, Ephrem uses the figure of "the Jew" as the quintessential *other* to Christianity in order to fashion a subordinationist anti-type of the faithful Christian. The liturgical rhetoric by which he constructs this image is designed to leave his congregation with no choice but to side with Nicea, against the "Judaizing" Arians.

In Chapter Two the author sets Ephrem's anti-Jewish language in the context of 4th-century disputes about Christian identity in the Roman empire, proposing that Ephrem's use of passionate anti-Jewish rhetoric functions primarily to construct a distinctive Christianity bounded by Nicene orthodoxy. Though the author acknowledges that at least some of Ephrem's references may have actual Christian-Jewish interactions in view, she asserts that Jewish proselytizing is not the main backdrop. Instead, Ephrem deploys anti-Jewish rhetoric in response to the complex and subtle overlapping of the two communities. Apparently, a "visible minority" (46) in Ephrem's context treats the boundaries as

somewhat porous, periodically attending both synagogue and Christian worship and engaging in practices of both. Ephrem attempts to distinguish the groups more cleanly by repeatedly applying pairs of mutually exclusive categories and by reciting markedly different histories for the two. Having established clear demarcation, Ephrem employs a range of insults against the Jews and issues dire warnings about them in order to create a sense of dread about crossing the boundaries. By thus constructing the communities as unambiguous "binary opposites" (53), Ephrem leaves his congregants with little choice but to eschew Jewish ritual practices and seek security solely within his Nicene community. Yet solidifying the boundaries between Christianity and Judaism is not his ultimate aim.

Ephrem is principally concerned to segregate Nicene Christianity from Arianism. In order to correlate Arians with Jews, Ephrem must go well beyond his congregation's direct experiences with Judaism and appeal to scriptural history. Chapter Three explores the complex telling of the history of God's people by which Ephrem invalidates both Judaism and Arianism. After describing Ephrem's christocentric-typological reading strategies, the author explains the interpretive devices by which Ephrem splits Israel into two distinct groups. Depending especially on the Golden Calf narrative of Exodus 32, Ephrem identifies a clear difference between the voluntarily adulterous and chronically unfaithful mainstream of the Jewish people and the good and pure character of Moses. The former are rejected by God whereas the latter provides the channel through which God continues his work—a distinct minority stream of faithful heroes. This line culminates in the Jewish Messiah Jesus, whose crucifixion at the hands of unbelieving Jews clarifies once again the difference between those who reject God's covenant and are therefore rejected by him (the Jews) and those who recognize his Messiah and enjoy a covenant relationship with him (the church). Christians are Jesus' spiritual descendents and heirs to the promises of Israel. As the prophets foretold, they carry forward the line of God's faithful. Outside the borders of that well-defined community are all those subject to the failures of Exodus 32: "a wide variety of opponents, including idolatrous pagans, divinely rejected Jews, and also his Christian opponents who… just like the Jews at Mt. Sinai go astray by searching after God inappropriately" (90). Ephrem's

reading of scriptural history provides him the "ideological framework" (105) he uses to help his congregants perceive what he does, that sharp distinctions exist, not only between Christianity and Judaism, but especially between Nicene Christianity and the "Judaizing" Arians.

Chapter Four conducts a comparison between Ephrem's strategies of community formation and those of some Greek contemporaries, especially Athanasius. Like Athanasius, Ephrem was an ardent supporter of Nicea yet lived during a period in which shifting political and ecclesial fortunes repeatedly called the outcomes of Nicea into question. Ephrem's strategies and devices are similar to those of Athanasius. The content of Ephrem's arguments in the *Hymns on Faith* and *Sermons on Faith* indicate that he was reacting to the subordinationist doctrines of people in Nisibis influenced by Aetians, whose teachings must have been infiltrating his church. The puzzling recurrence of anti-Jewish rhetoric alongside these anti-Homoian polemics functions to conflate Jews and subordinationist Christians so that Ephrem may erase the ambiguities between two Christian groups, identifying the quarrelsome "Arians" with Jews and underscoring Nicene orthodoxy as true Christianity.

Chapter Five summarizes the implications of the author's study, recommending several modifications to the traditional picture of early Syriac Christianity. First, connections between Jews and Syrian Christians in the 4th century must be seen as more complex than previously assumed. Not only were traditions and interpretive methods passing between the two groups, but individual believers were as well—yet this does not mean Jews were actively proselytizing Christians or that Syriac Christianity was "Jewish-Christian." Also, the anti-Jewish rhetoric of such writers as Ephrem must be interpreted with greater sophistication. Although Ephrem's harsh language reacts partly to actual relations with Judaism, it functions mainly to define subordinationist Christianity and distinguish it from Nicene Christianity, for the sake of shaping his congregants' response to Arianism. Finally, neither 4th-century Syriac Christianity nor Ephrem should be treated in isolation from the issues facing Christianity in the wider Roman empire. They must to be studied as full and constructive participants within the broader setting of late antique culture and Christianity.

The book concludes with a classified bibliography, an index of Ephrem citations, and a general index. Ample footnotes conduct discussions about various matters, some more ancillary than others. The style is clear and readable, though the book's origins as a dissertation are evident—thesis statements and summaries occur redundantly throughout. Yet these do not distract from a well-argued and coherent book that advances crucial discussion on several fronts.

In the reviewer's judgment, the basic conclusions of the book are sound and the author's discussion highly stimulating. Her careful reframing of Ephrem's anti-Jewish rhetoric enables a more nuanced reading of him and contextualizes him more richly. The book should engage anyone interested in Ephrem and early Syriac Christianity, Jewish-Christian relations in Late Antiquity, the history of the Nicene controversy, or the function of rhetoric in social construction and theological debate. A few matters invite further consideration.

In the author's reading of Ephrem's retelling of Israel's history, Jews are basically cut off as a result of crucifying Christ, an event that culminates their long tradition of rebellion against God. Jesus' own Jewishness accentuates their wickedness. The minority stream of faith in Israel passes through Christ and into Gentile Christianity, a construct that serves Ephrem well in 4th-century Nisibis and Edessa. However, we are left wondering how Ephrem accounted for the Jewishness of so many early Christians in the biblical narrative, whether that posed any problem for his historical reconstruction, and if so, how he resolved it.

Although the author strongly and repeatedly suggests that the need for pro-Nicene community formation and not actual Jewish contact is the primary stimulus for Ephrem's anti-Jewish polemics, it is evident that she is at something of a loss to ground the argument as solidly as she would like to be able to do. She correctly ascertains that her methods are not yet capable of clarifying just what relations Ephrem and his congregants may have had with actual Jews or with actual "Arians." The author's hesitance to speak with too much certitude is merited, e.g. when she draws the highly qualified conclusion that "the immediate context for *some* of [Ephrem's] anti-Jewish language was primarily the intra-Christian Trinitarian debate…" (117; emphasis hers). The question of Jewish/Christian relations in Syriac Christianity and in Ephrem's

context continues to beg attention. Armed with the enhanced perspectives on Ephrem's anti-Judaism that this book provides, a fuller investigation with the aim of describing more precisely these relationships would be welcome.

Furthermore, as the author points out, anti-Jewish rhetoric deployed to aid in the formation of Christian community as distinct from Judaism had been a recurring phenomenon since the 1st century, long before Nicea was a factor. Although the book locates some clear contacts between Ephrem's pro-Nicene and anti-Judaic language, at times it points to their mere co-existence in his rhetoric as evidence that the two strands of polemic should be more closely correlated. One of the book's contributions is to open the way for even further clarification regarding just what it is about Ephrem's anti-Jewish rhetoric that makes it distinctively Nicene.