

“MAKING CHURCH OF ENGLAND POETICAL” EPHRAIM AND THE OXFORD MOVEMENT

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- [1] In 1966 Donald Allchin gave a paper at an Oxford symposium entitled “The theological vision of the Oxford Movement,” in which he explored the important unpublished series of lectures by Pusey dating from 1836, entitled “On Types & Prophecies.” A footnote to the published volume of the conference papers acknowledges with gratitude Robert Murray’s comment about the Semitic quality of Pusey’s thought, suggesting that it was reminiscent of the Syrian Fathers, even more than the Greek. Allchin notes there that Father R. M. Benson, a close disciple of Pusey and the founder of the The Society of St. John the Evangelist (“the Cowley Fathers”), the first religious community for men in the Church of England, was also a theologian who “was first of all a Hebraist, and then a patristic scholar.” This same footnote contains the words: “The possibility of a direct influence of St. Ephrem the Syrian on Pusey would be worth investigating.”¹ This might be regarded as the starting-point for the present paper.

¹ A. M. Allchin, “The theological vision of the Oxford Movement,” in J. Coulson and A.M. Allchin (eds.), *The Rediscovery of Newman: An Oxford Symposium*, (London, 1967) 50–75, p. 69, note 1.

[2] The title, “Making the Church of England poetical,” is an allusion to a comment of Newman’s that Keble “did for the Church of England what none but a poet could do, he made it poetical.” Many years ago, John Coulson drew attention to the literary character and context of so much of Oxford Movement writing, and to the way in which Newman in particular continues the “fiduciary response to language” (contrasted with the analytic, Cartesian response) that had found a particularly important exponent in Coleridge—Coleridge who was himself a poet, and who had decried as one of the miseries of the present age that it knew no medium between the literal and the metaphorical. In religion, as in poetry, Coulson comments, “we are required to make a complex act of inference and assent, and we begin by taking *on trust* expressions which are usually in analogical, metaphorical, or symbolic form, and by acting out the claims they make: understanding religious language is a function of understanding poetic language.”²

[3] So one of the links between the Oxford Movement and Ephraim is the strong stress in both on the positive relationship between poetry and theology. It is no accident that Keble, Newman and Isaac Williams were all poets; or that Keble’s earliest and most famous work is *The Christian Year* (1827), the whole purpose of which is to set out in poetry some of the major themes of the Christian festivals and services. Later, as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, Keble made a major contribution to critical theory in his *Lectures on Poetry*.³ These include significant comment on prophecy and poetry, and the relation between religion and poetry.

[4] If we turn to the more specific links between the Oxford Movement divines and the Syriac tradition, our attention must first be given to Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800–82). Pusey was appointed in 1828, at the extraordinarily young age of 28, to the Regius Chair of Hebrew at Oxford, following the early death of the Arabist, Alexander Nicoll, who had begun the catalogue (completed by Pusey) of the Arabic manuscripts in the Bodleian. Three years earlier, in 1825, Pusey had visited Germany, making the acquaintance, at Göttingen and Berlin, of a number of German

² J. Coulson, *Newman and the Common Tradition: A Study in the Language of Church and Society* (Oxford, 1970) 4.

³ J. Keble, *Praelectiones Academicæ* (Oxford, 1844); English translation by E.K. Francis: *J. Keble, Lectures on Poetry, 1832–1841* (Oxford, 1912).

theologians—D.J. Pott and J.G. Eichhorn at Göttingen, and at Berlin Schleiermacher, Friedrich Tholuck (who was to become a close friend and correspondent) and Ernst Hengstenberg the founder of the *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*). It was on this first visit that Pusey realised with horror the power of the dissolving acids of German rationalist theology. He wrote: “I can remember the room in Göttingen in which I was sitting when the real conditions of religious thought in Germany flashed upon me. “This will all come upon us in England; and how utterly unprepared for it we are!” From that time I determined to devote myself more earnestly to the Old Testament, as the field in which Rationalism seemed to be most successful.⁴ The Old Testament meant Hebrew, and Hebrew scholarship required a knowledge of other Oriental languages. So Pusey returned to Germany in June 1826, having first sounded out Tholuck, through an American friend, H.E. Dwight (whom he had met on his previous visit) as to where he might find instruction in Syriac. When he reached Berlin, he stayed at Schönhausen, where his Oxford friend, R.W. Jelf, was tutor to Prince George of Hannover, and began the study of Syriac with Hengstenberg; at the same time he began work on Arabic. In September he moved north to the Baltic coast to study with Professor J.G.L. Kosegarten at Greifswald, spending most of his time on Arabic, but reading with Kosegarten the Syriac historian, Bar Hebraeus. At the end of this intensive year of study Pusey returned to England, already (in David Forrester’s words) a Semitic scholar of a very high order.

[5] The fruit of that is seen, as far as the theme of Ephraim is concerned, in the references to and quotations from Ephraim and other Syrian fathers alongside the citations of the Greek and Latin Fathers in Pusey’s more learned sermons, for example the famous “condemned sermon” on the eucharistic presence. In that sermon Ephraim is called as a witness to speaking of the Eucharist as spiritual “fire.” He follows Ephraim in interpreting Genesis 49:11 as a type of Christ “washing the garments” of His Humanity “with” the “Wine” of His Blood.⁵ Pusey appeals to Ephraim as his authority for speaking of the Eucharist as the coal of fire from the

⁴ H.P. Liddon, *Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, 4 vols. (London, 1893–7) vol. I, 77.

⁵ E.B. Pusey, *The Holy Eucharist, a Comfort to the Penitent* (Oxford, 1843) 22: the reference is to Jacob’s blessing of Judah, who washes his coat in wine, his cloak in the blood of the grape.

altar which cleansed the lips of Isaiah,⁶ declaring to him the

⁶ [The reference, both in the sermon of 1843 and in that of 1853, is to the *madroshe* on faith (which at that time Pusey's colleague John Brande Morris—on whom more below—was translating from the Roman edition for the Library of the Fathers—the volume was published in 1847, with a Preface by Pusey), especially 10:7–18, which may be freely translated as follows:

Lord, your robe's the well from which our healing
flows.

Just behind this outer layer hides your power.
Spittle from your mouth creates a miracle of light
within its clay.

In your bread there blows what no mouth can devour.
In your wine there smoulders what no lips can drink.
Gale and Blaze in bread and wine: unparalleled the
miracle we taste.

Coming down to earth, where human beings die,
God created these anew, like Wide-eyed Ones,
mingling Blaze and Gale and making these the mystic
content of their dust.

Did the Seraph's fingers touch the white-hot coal?
Did the Prophet's mouth do more than touch the
same?

No, they grasped it not and he consumed it not. To us
are granted both.

Abram offered body-food to spirit-guests.
Angels swallowed meat. The newest proof of power
is that bodies eat and drink the Fire and Wind provided
by our Lord.

Fire came down in anger, eating sinful men.
Fire came down, compassionate, and dwelt in bread.
Not a sinner-eating, but a life-restoring Fire is what you
ate.

Fire came down and ate Elijah's sacrifice;
Mercy's Fire became a sacrifice for life:
offering consumed by Fire, then Fire consumed in
offering by us.

Who has curled his fingers tight around the wind?
Solomon, look at what your father's Lord has made:
in the mould of followers' hands a counternatural cast
of Gale and Blaze!

remission of sin. Pusey continues: “But by these things is moreover described and pre-typified the participation of our blessings, the remission of sins through the Body and Blood of the Lord.” This link between the eucharistic elements to the cleansing fire of Isaiah was one of the points objected to by the University authorities in their condemnation of Pusey’s sermon. In a later sermon Pusey returns to the theme, quoting extensively from Ephraim:

S. Ephrem often speaks of our Lord’s Presence, under the image of “fire in the bread.” In Thy visible vesture there dwelleth hidden power.” “In Thy Bread is hidden the Spirit that cannot be eaten. In Thy Wine there dwelleth the Fire that cannot be drunk. Instead of that fire which devoured men, ye eat the fire in Bread and are quickened.” “In the Bread and the Cup are fire and the Holy Ghost.” “We have eaten Thee, we have drunken Thee, not that we shall make Thee fail, but that we might have life in Thee.” “Thy garment

Who, you asked, has netted water, using cloth?
See the Wellspring hemmed in Mary’s covering!
From the cup beneath the veil your female servants
take the sop of life.

Present in the altar’s shawl, a Power hides.
Even thought has never netted such a Force.
Love, to bridge the gulf, descends and hovers in the
apse above the shawl.

Gale and Blaze within the womb which gave you birth;
Gale and Blaze within the river where you bathed;
Gale and Blaze within our font; in bread and chalice
Holy Gale and Blaze.

Your bread crushes jaws which made of dust their
bread.

Your cup swallows greedy death, which gulps us down.
Not to make You fail have we consumed You, but to
live through You, my Lord.

On this subject, see now P. Yousif, *L’Eucharistie chez S. Éphrem de Nisibe* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 224; Rome, 1984): Notes between square brackets are by Andrew Palmer, to whom I am obliged, not only for editing this paper, but also for updating the references to Ephraim and for supplying his own renderings of the passages referred to.]

covered Thy feebleness: the bread covereth the fire
which dwells therein.”⁷

Christ gives himself in the sacrament in such a way that—Pusey again cites Ephraim—He mingles His Body in our body, and blends His Spirit with ours.⁸

[6]

In yet another University Sermon on the Eucharist, Pusey notes that the words of Institution were spoken in Syriac [Aramaic]. Referring to Nicholas Wiseman, he notes—against an earlier position maintained by George Horne—that Syriac is remarkably rich in terms meaning to signify, represent, or denote:⁹

They are used in it far more frequently than in our Western languages, and in regard to this very doctrine, are used only to affirm that our Lord “said in truth, not in type, “This is my Body.” “If,” says Maruthas, a friend of St. Chrysostom and a framer of a Syriac Liturgy, “a perpetual participation of the Mysteries had not been given, whence should those who come after, know the redemption of Christ?—Besides, the faithful afterwards would have been defrauded of the

⁷ E.B. Pusey, *The Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist* (Oxford, 1853) 40. [The references are to *Madrashe on Faith* 10:7, 8, 17, 18 (compare the version in note 6) and 19:3; 19:2–4 may be freely rendered as follows:

Who deserves to touch the clothes, which hide your
flesh?
Who deserves to touch the flesh which hides his God?
Double is the cloak You wear: a robe, a body—and the
bread of life.
Wonderful the changes in your covering!
Dying is the body hidden by your clothes;
dread the nature hidden by your body; fire is hidden by
your bread.
Mortal understanding cannot touch our Lord.
Who possesses wind-made fingers, hands of fire?
Thought itself is body in the eyes of Him who cannot
be perceived.]

⁸ Pusey, *The Presence of Christ*, 62.

⁹ N.P.S. Wiseman (1802–65), the first Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, a Syriac scholar; George Home (1730–92), an old high Churchman who was President of Magdalen College, Oxford, and at the end of his life Dean of Canterbury and (briefly) Bishop of Norwich.

Communion of the Body and Blood; but now, as often as we approach to the Body and Blood, and take It in our hands, we believe that we embrace the Body, and that we are of His Flesh and His Bones, as it is written. For Christ did not call It a type and a likeness, but that in truth, “This is My Body and this is My Blood.”¹⁰

Pusey’s use of Ephraim in these eucharistic sermons is never isolated. It is always set in the context of catenae of quotations from the Fathers, and most often from the Greek Fathers, for it was to Cyril of Alexandria, above all, that Pusey looked for his eucharistic doctrine.

[7] A much lesser figure than Pusey in the history of the Oxford Movement, but significant in the context of our exploration of Ephraim’s influence on Oxford Movement theology, was John Brande Morris (1812–1880). Morris was a Fellow of Exeter College and a learned Hebraist. He and his friends were renowned in the University for “talking strong about the characteristic Oxford Movement concerns in Morris’s rooms in the gateway tower of Exeter.” Newman described Morris as “a most simple minded conscientious fellow—but as little posset of tact or common sense as he is great in other departments.” This was following a Michaelmas sermon, in which Morris, who acted as Newman’s curate at St. Mary’s and who had a monomania about fasting, had told the St Mary’s congregation in Newman’s absence, that, “it was a good thing, whereas Angels feasted on festivals, to make the brute creation fast on fast days.” Newman caustically commented: “May he (*salvis ossibus suis*) have a fasting horse the next time he goes steeple chasing.”¹¹ It is reminder of the dottier side of the Oxford Movement. The gossip Tom Mozley, married to Newman’s sister, Jemima, wrote that Morris’s room was “a chaos of books, out of which rose three or four tall reading-stands, upon each of which were open folios in tiers, the upper resting on the lower.”¹²

¹⁰ E.B. Pusey, *This is My Body* (Oxford, 1871) 18.

¹¹ G. Tracey (ed.), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, 7 vols. (Oxford, 1978–95), vol. VII, 176; vols. 11–22 were earlier edited by C.S. Dessain (1961ff.).

¹² T. Mozley, *Reminiscences of Oriel College and the Oxford Movement*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1882), vol. II, 10.

[8]

Morris's interest for us lies not, however, in his ideas on fasting, nor in his archetypal academic chaos, but in a long poem, which he published in 1842: *Nature, a Parable*, in seven books. Tom Mozley observed that "Quaint as it is, and difficult as it is occasionally, it was and is to me a very interesting book. Newman has always stood by it most resolutely, pronouncing it a beautiful poem."¹³ In the preface to his poem Morris writes that "the work was originally undertaken as a relief from engagements of a more laborious kind. It struck me that in all writers not of the very driest class, there are some things of an imaginative hue, and that I might therefore not disadvantageously employ my leisure hours in correcting and chastening whatever amount of imaginative tendencies I had in myself, by noticing things of the kind in the works of the Fathers' (p. v). We should note Morris's aim of correcting and chastening his imagination by reference to the Fathers. This is reminiscent of the preface to Keble's *Christian Year*, which places a sober standard of feeling next to a sound rule of faith, as well as Keble's conviction that poetry had a cathartic function (the full title of his Lectures on Poetry is *De poeticae vi medica*, "On the healing power of poetry"). Morris continues that he is concerned to explore typology, and has done so by almost exclusive reference to ancient rather than to modern works. Nonetheless he is clear that in treating of the typical meaning of Nature he is but continuing the argument and approach of Bishop Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, a book which was greatly valued by Keble in particular and by the Oxford Movement in general, as giving philosophical and theological expression to the sacramental principle. "Assuming," Morris writes, "that the Church system and the system of Nature proceed from the same Author, there arises, upon the principles of that great divine, an immediate probability that there will be a similarity in the two. Thus the cleansing, and refreshing, and invigorating powers of water, are analogous to correlative powers of Baptism." (p. viii) Morris goes on: "The thing assumed in this book is that such analogies are not accidental, but

¹³ *ibidem*; J.B. Morris, *Nature, a Parable: A Poem in Seven Books* (London, 1842), with a quotation from Ephraim on the title-page: "Like is nature unto Scripture, / Like too are things within to things without" (= *Madroshe on Faith* 35:1).

designed.¹⁴ The Church system will clear up the meaning of Nature in the same way that Christianity clears up the meaning of Prophecy.” (ibid.)

[10]

Morris believes that there is a given pattern, in type and antitype, which characterises the Christian imagination. But that this pattern deals entirely with truths flowing from the economy of salvation, through the Incarnation, and the other things which take place in time. Sacraments, miracles and natural symbols come under the legitimate domain of the imagination, but not truths relating to eternal and immutable things, the doctrine of the Trinity or the like. (p. xi) These are matters which in Aristotelian terms are the subjects of *sophia*, whereas the truths flowing from the economy of salvation come under the heading of *phronesis*, or moral judgement.¹⁵ Morris’s poem explores the analogy of nature, the symbolic power of the created order, in much the same way as Keble’s poem for Septuagesima Sunday in *The Christian Year* (1827):

There is a book who runs may read
Which heavenly truth imparts
And all the lore its scholars need
Pure eyes and heavenly hearts.

Two worlds are ours. “Tis only sin
Forbids us to descry
The mystic heaven and earth within
Plain as the sea and sky.

Thou who hast given me eyes to see
And love this sight so fair,
Give me a heart to find out Thee
And read Thee everywhere.

It is the pure in heart who see God, and so can read the book of nature, the book of God’s creation, the world as sacrament, charged, as Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, with the grandeur of God.

¹⁴ An argument that we also find in Pusey’s 1836 *Lectures On Types & Prophecies*.

¹⁵ Newman likewise gave an important role to *phronesis* in his concept of the illative sense in his exploration of faith and reason in the *Grammar of Assent* (cf. J.H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, ed. I.T. Ker [Oxford, 1985] 228–30).

- [11] Morris speaks of first learning the language of nature from Wordsworth, and then refining and correcting it by the Fathers:

Yet of a cheerful temperament possest,
 I learnt to foster seeds of quiet love
 For nature's beauties, by good Wordsworth first
 Sown in me, which to water from the fount
 Of ancient Christian wisdom I design'd;
 Hoping, that what in him to disapprove
 I was not forward, by that sacred lore
 Might be amended; and with thoughts of one
 Whose oral teaching touch'd me deeper far
 With the unutterable thrill of gratitude.

(I 171–80)

- [12] Morris likewise looks to discern anticipations of the Christian revelation in pagan thought and religious ceremonial—what Newman called the dispensation of paganism, for which he found support in Justin Martyr's apologetic building on the *logos spermatikos* of Stoicism:

Though in the heathen's ceremonial
 Satanic foresight studded many a gem
 From Prophecy's abundant treasury,
 Yet over this Another's Foresight ruled.
 And turn'd these gems, on Gentile men bestow'd
 As meed for worship done him, to a glass
 Wherein, though shatter'd, shone the love of GOD
 To wiser hearts, expectant of a Light...

(I 259–66)

- [13] Morris wished "to trace the lingering steps of Truth' (I 273–4) in pagan thought, noting how Plato, "in each stone, / And tree, and glistening herb, and modest flower, / Beheld Eternal Thoughts" (I 382–4). "[A]re there not," Morris asks, "on nature's glowing page / Some things revealed for man to marvel at?" (I 439–40) In the same way as there are mysteries in the written word of Scripture ("the scroll of heavenly lore"), so, in each of nature "pages,"

"There lies full many a root
 Which the small light in this estate vouchsafed
 May keep alive, which from the Well of Light
 In bright Eternity must watered be,
 And so unfold itself to man above,

As in those courts he grows, for ever grows
Towards the Infinity he cannot reach
Which hides Itself the more it doth disclose
The treasures of all Wisdom in Itself.”

(I 443–51)

- [14] A footnote (on p. 43) refers to Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.*, ii 28, para. 3) and to the words of Origen cited by Bishop Butler at the beginning of his *Analogy of Religion* (1736).¹⁶ We might also note a link with Gregory of Nyssa’s doctrine of *eppektasis*. But it is more important, in the context of this paper, to add that Morris’s note to this passage also refers to Ephraim (*adv. Scrutat.* iii.9)¹⁷ where he speaks of the Angels progressing in knowledge. For Morris there is an *askesis* of knowledge; for him, as much as for John Keble—and both, as well as Ephraim, depend here on the Beatitudes—it is the pure in heart who shall see God. It is spiritual discipline which enables moral vision and insight; and this, in turn, enables the world to be seen as one in which “the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.”

- [15] Throughout Morris’s long poem there are numerous passages which draw on Ephraim (he is cited as often as Augustine in the notes) and we can only note a few here. In one passage, in which Morris reflects on the unity and dissonance of language, he has a reference to the Chinese philosopher, Lo-pie (itself an interesting

¹⁶ S. Halifax (ed.), *The Works of [...] Joseph Butler: The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (London, 1828) 53. Butler comments, with emphasis (p. 53f.), that “he who believes the Scripture to have proceeded from him who is the Author of Nature, may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it, as are found in the constitution of Nature.” Butler goes on from this to argue for the analogy or likeness between that system of things and the dispensation of Providence, of which Experience together with Reason informs us, i.e. the known course of Nature.

¹⁷ [Compare *Madroshe on Faith* 5:3, which may be freely rendered as follows:

Conceiving a desire to learn about the Son,
the Angels put forward questions through their seniors.
Those great ones read meanings in the way the Wind
blows.
Each Angel forms questions conforming to his rank.
Among them all, there’s none
who presumes to reach out above his own station.]

indication of Morris's range of reading),¹⁸ who says "The voices of the beasts are everywhere the same; the song of the birds is as it was in the first ages; man then must have deviated from the oneness of his language, seeing that each kingdom has its own, each province has a peculiar way of expression. Nature is one, reason is one, the beautiful is one [to all], so strange a confusion (*Unordnung*) is only deducible from some still greater confusion." Morris, following his purpose of finding anticipations of Revelation in "heathen" writers, finds this a striking passage, and parallels with Ephraim's comments on the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis, in which not only languages were confounded but the harmony of nature dislocated. In writing of the Trinity, he draws on Ephraim, who not only expounds the common patristic parallel of light to illustrate the relation of Father and Son, but also refers to heat as symbolic of the Spirit. Morris notes: "The mention, however, of Heat, as completing the type of the Everblessed Trinity, is less frequent, and has been adopted here from St. Ephrem, whose ascetic habits seem to have given him an accurate eye for nature's mysteries" (p. 98). He refers to the following passage from Ephraim: "Behold the parable of the Sun, and it is the Father; of the Light, and it is the Son; and of the Heat, and it is the Holy Spirit [...] Who shall search out how and where His Ray is bounden? bounden and yet loose His Heat; though not separate, yet they are not confounded, distinct and mingled, bound and free. Mighty wonderment!"¹⁹

[16] I quote a section of Book Two, "The Greater Light," to show how closely Morris follows Ephraim in his own poem:
Hail, then, thou heavenly light,

Who being light dost send forth light on me—
light undivided from the father-light,
And heat not separate from either two
Therewith dost give! Oh! image wonderful,

¹⁸ Page 44: Morris knew this passage Lo-Pie in Windischman, *Philosophie im Fortgang der Weltgeschichte*, vol. I, 224; Morris's familiarity with Eastern religions and philosophy may be further seen in his Prize Essay for 1843 (*An Essay Towards the Conversion of Learned and Philosophical Hindus* [London, 1843]); the footnotes to this essay, dealing with the vedas and other Hindu writings, draw copiously and explicitly on Patristic Apologetic and make particular use of Ephraim (e.g. p. 201).

¹⁹ [*Madroshe on Faith* no. 73; cf. nos. 40, 74 and 75]

That, weak and beggarly, dost still declare
 The Nature of the Holy Trinity
 Distinct in Persons, but in Nature one.
 The Sun gives light, is light, and giveth heat;
 The Sun is heat, and nothing from that heat
 Is hidden,—nothing by the Spirit of God
 Unsearch'd remains. And Christ is Light of Light;
 And whereso'er He cometh, with Him comes
 The Holy Warmth of the abiding Dove.
 For light and heat seem never uncombined ...
 (II 390–405)

- [17] Book Three of Morris's poem, “The Stars and Light,” begins with an evocation of “The earliest light that shone upon the earth,” which “Was not the sun, the moon, or any star, / But one vast Ocean of unfetter'd light, / Created image of the Uncreate.” (III 1–4) Again there is a reference to Ephraim (as also to the Hexaemeron of Basil): “Since, then, the primitive light was earliest created, it ministered with its brightness to three days ...”²⁰ There is a reference to Ephraim on Judges (modern scholarship would deny the attribution in the Roman edition of Ephraim's works), concerning Gideon's fleece, and the “battle with pitchers and torches” (p. 146f.), and another to his “discourse on the pearl,” where, Morris comments, Ephraim “appears to be comparing the cloud in the pearl to St. Mary.”²¹ “It is,” he notes, “often very instructive to find traditions which at first sight appear questionable, confirmed by fresh evidence for them in a writer like St. Ephrem, whose language was for many centuries unknown to almost all writers in other parts of Holy Church” (p. 151).

²⁰ [This is from the *Commentary on Genesis*]

²¹ [*Madroshe on Faith* 81:4, which may be freely rendered as follows:

I saw her now
 as Mary: pure,
 yet fertilised;
 as Church, with Christ
 inside her, like
 the pregnant cloud
 of prophecy;
 as heaven's bright
 epiphany
 of coloured light.]

[18] Another reference, in Book Four, “The Waters and the Winds,” is to Ephraim on the sea: “The sea by the Cross was subjected to the unbelievers: for had the crucifiers not made a cross of wood, and hung upon it the sail in the likeness of the Body, the voyage would have halted. O bosom, pure type of our Redeemer’s Body, that with breath is filled! Though unbounded, yet it closed It in. By the Breath that dwelleth in the linen-cloth, live the bodies in which dwells the soul.” Morris comments: “No translation can do justice to this: in the Syriac, the word for Spirit and wind or breath is the same, and the spirit is contrasted with the soul, as in I Thessal. v. 23. The linen-cloth is so mentioned as to call to mind the powers of the Eucharist, to spiritually “preserve the body and soul unto everlasting life.”²² In Morris’s own poem this is worked out in the following lines:

Noise was none,
 Nor voice of crying heard from that still Voice
 Who was the Word, who in a manger born
 Amid dumb beasts, was silent in His Birth,
 And in His Death He open’d not His Mouth,
 Until upon the Cross His hallow’d Flesh
 Was spread as if a sail, wherein should be
 Collected, though unbound, the Eternal SPIRIT,
 Who by It moves the vessel of the Church
 Over the billows of this troublous world
 Unto the land of everlasting Life.
 And if its sailors use due heedfulness
 To things Saint Paul hath spoken, then they fight
 Not with the idle air, but with the spirits
 That walk the heaven unseen, [...]
 [...] for they too on the Cross
 Of suffering, spreading forth their fleshly limbs,
 In that sweet attitude expect the SPIRIT
 Within their bosom, blowing joyously
 And healing rents that lessen His abode
 Until they reach the port of Abraham,
 The haven where they would be, and the strand
 Whose trees with healing leaves and freshening scents

²² Page 200f. [The passage quoted is *Madroshe on faith* 18:9–10: Andrew Palmer.] The remaining three books of Morris’s poem are entitled: V The Trees and Green Things; VI All Beasts and Cattle; VII Man, in Soul and Body.

Breathe, by that SPIRIT’S aid, a lasting might
Of life immortalizing on their weary frame.

(IV 911–25; 927–36)

[19] Morris, although in some ways a curiosity—his extremism and eccentric ways earned him the nickname “Symeon Stylites”²³—was a major Syriac scholar. For a number of years he was one of Pusey’s assistant lecturers in Hebrew, and this must inevitably have led to some cross-fertilisation of ideas between them. Morris joined the Church of Rome in 1846, just before the publication of his translation of Ephraim’s “Rhythms” in the Library of the Fathers. He was ordained as a Roman Catholic in 1849 and became chaplain to various patrons. During his time at the Maryvale Seminary (Oscott) he found a fellow Syriac enthusiast in the President of the College, Nicholas Wiseman, formerly Rector of the Venerable English College in Rome, and after the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in 1851, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. Wiseman had a European reputation as a Syriac scholar from the time of the publication of his *Horae Syriacae* in 1827. In an article on Ephraim in the *Catholic Magazine* Wiseman wrote that he had at one time intended to extract from Ephraim’s anti-Gnostic writings the system of Gnostic doctrine taught by Bardesanes and Harmonius.²⁴ He had also corresponded with scholars such as Bunsen and Tholuck in Germany, and Bishop Thomas Burgess of Salisbury on this subject.

[20] It is to another Burgess that we must now turn, as providing further evidence of the study of Ephraim among the adherents of the Oxford Movement. Henry Burgess (1808–86)—no relation of Thomas Burgess—was a Nonconformist minister who joined the Church of England and was ordained in 1850. He held doctorates from Glasgow and Göttingen, and after a curacy in Blackburn was incumbent of parish in Buckinghamshire; for the last twenty-five years of his life he was Vicar of Whittelsea near Peterborough. I count him as an adherent of the Oxford Movement through his involvement with the translation of an ancient Syriac version of the Festal Letters of Athanasius for the Library of the Fathers, though as someone from a Nonconformist background who came into the

²³ Mozley, *loc. cit.*, n. 12.

²⁴ Cardinal [N.P.S.] Wiseman, “On the Writings of St. Ephrem,” in *Essays on Various Subjects*, 6 vols. (New York, 1873) Vol. V, 316–24, p. 317.

Church of England after the high-water mark of the Oxford phase of the Oxford Movement this is conceivably a misleading categorisation. His translation of selections from Ephraim won the plaudits of W.H. Mill, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge and one of those in Cambridge who sympathised with the Oxford Movement. Mill wrote to Burgess on the publication of his translation: "I have long valued very highly the hymns of St. Ephraim, and am truly rejoiced to see that they are to be presented to the world in such a shape as to make others, besides the students of Syriac, acquainted with their singular beauty and excellence." He added that Syriac literature was not only important for biblical philology, it also had such varied ecclesiastical treasures locked up in it.²⁵

- [21] In the same year, 1853, Burgess published a second volume of translation: Ephraim's metrical homily on the Mission of Jonah, The Repentance of Nineveh, with an Exhortation to Repentance, and some smaller pieces. It was published by subscription, the list of subscribers—Dr Pusey, Christopher Wordsworth, Brooke Foss Westcott and Archdeacon Wilberforce among them—being headed by Prince Albert and the King of Hanover. The book was dedicated to Prince Albert and to Austen H. Layard, as well as to the other members of the Society for Exploring the Ruins of Assyria and Babylon; "with the conviction that their labours will tend to confirm the truth of Divine Revelation." A quotation from [Ps.-]Gregory of Nyssa is printed at the beginning: "Ephraim, the mental Euphrates of the Church, from whom the whole company of believers being watered, they produce a hundred-fold the fruit of faith—Ephraim, that fertile vine of God, putting forth the fruits of the sweet clusters of doctrine, and rejoicing the children of the church with the fulness of Divine love."

- [22] Burgess believed that Ephraim, because he was a poet, was well placed to be an introduction to the Fathers for ordinary folk. Ephraim's writings, he suggested, "come home to the heart by their recognition of the events of every-day life, and by their constant reference to the joys and sorrows which are identified with our humanity [...] Over the whole there is spread the air of unaffected piety, caught from the divine models of the Holy Scriptures, and

²⁵ W.H. Mill, in H. Burgess, *Select Metrical Hymns and Homilies of Ephraem Syrus* (London, 1853).

from intimate and daily communion with God.” Burgess’s introduction discusses the nature of the poem, and the sources he has used—Assemani’s *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Zingerle’s German translation, Adalbert Daniel’s *Thesaurus Hymnologicus*, and J.W. Etheridge’s 1846 account of *The Syrian Churches, their Early History, Liturgies and Literature*. Reference is also made to G.P. Badger’s *The Nestorians and their Rituals*.²⁶ Burgess’s translation indicates a continuing interest in Ephraim, and the growing availability of his works in English, but I do not propose to analyse Burgess’s notes on Ephraim’s poem. Instead, I turn in conclusion to one or two more general themes related to the way in which Ephraim’s writings, with their poetic, imaginative and symbolic character, were writings which had a particular resonance for the Oxford Movement.

[23] Alf Härdelin, in a fine study, has written that “the central doctrine of the Tractarians is undoubtedly the doctrine that the Church is to be understood as a visible society, having divinely empowered ministers, and having sacraments and rites which are the channels of life-giving grace. Underlying the sacramental system is the principle which the Tractarians usually call “the sacramental principle,” and which implies that God performs His works through the instrumentality of men and of material things which He makes the channels of grace in the economy of salvation.²⁷ Three elements, he suggests, determined Tractarian sacramentalism: the Romantic concept of nature; Bishop Butler’s sacramental principle; and the patristic doctrine of “Economy.” The Tractarians believed that the symbolic character of nature was no mere invention of the imaginative mind, but an objective quality inherent in creation, impressed upon it in order to give us “an index or token of the invisible.” Härdelin was the first to make use of Pusey’s unpublished “Lectures on Types & Prophecies” (1836) and he notes how Pusey says in these Lectures that nature speaks to the soul, not by reflection of the understanding, but by direct impression. Härdelin goes on: “The religious truths and meanings which nature expresses arise out of nature itself. Religious poets therefore recognize the symbolical character of nature as intimating what is true, and not only what is beautiful. It does not rest on

²⁶ H. Burgess, *The Repentance of the Ninevites* (London, 1853).

²⁷ A. Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala, 1965) 60.

subjective imagination but on objective reality.”(p. 63) As Pusey puts it: “Instances of this expressiveness of nature in conveying moral & religious truth will have been felt by every one; and they will have felt also, that these religious meanings were not arbitrarily affixed by their own minds, but that they arose out of & existed in, the things themselves.”

- [24] Donald Allchin, commenting on Pusey’s Lectures in his 1966 Newman Conference paper, draws out five major themes: (1) clarity and immediate intelligibility are qualities dearly purchased in reflection on divine things; (2) God reveals himself in images which strike us forcibly almost in proportion to our inability to capture or define them fully; (3) everything in this world can be a type or symbol of heavenly realities, and the history of God’s dealings with his people foreshadows and is prophetic of his revelation of himself in Christ; (4) to try to make a rationally intelligible and complete system of God’s ways will inevitably lead to a narrowing and limiting of our apprehension of them. What we are dealing with is a theology of revelation that is at the same time a theology of mystery, a theology which is sacramental because it is incarnational. “It is not,” says Pusey, “the things which we know clearly, but the things which we know unclearly, (which) are our highest birthright.” And Newman reminds us in his Tract *On the Introduction of Rationalistic Principles into Religion* that to say that Christianity is a revelation is not to deny that it is also a mystery. “Pusey is sure,” comments Allchin, “that without an understanding of the essential role played by type and sacrament in the process of revelation, we shall be false to revelation itself, losing our awareness of it as gift from God, into which we are called to enter, and instead transforming it into a mere conceptual scheme of our own devising. The mystery is to be lived; in the light of God are we to see light.”²⁸

- [25] The imaginative, symbolic and poetic character of Ephraim’s theology thus commended itself to the Tractarians. The fusion in his writing of the Semitic and the Greek—prophecy, for the Tractarians, was closely allied to poetry—and his sacramental economy of revelation were deeply attractive. In his Tract, “On the Mysticism attributed to the Fathers,” John Keble has much to say about poetry. He suggests that Christ condescends to have a Poetry

²⁸ A.M. Allchin, in the article referred to in note 1, p. 68.

of His own, a set of holy and divine associations and meanings, wherewith it is His will to invest material things: “[T]he works of God in creation and providence, besides their immediate uses in this life, appeared to the old writers as so many intended tokens from the ALMIGHTY, to assure us of some spiritual fact or other, which it concerns us in some way to know. So far, therefore, they fulfilled at least half of the nature of sacraments [...] they were pledges to assure us of some spiritual thing, if they were not means to convey it to us. They were, in a very sufficient sense, *Verba visibilia* [‘visible words’].”²⁹

[26]

Scripture, Keble argues later in the Tract, gives a studied preference to poetical forms of thought and language as the channel of supernatural knowledge to mankind: “It was the ordained vehicle of revelation, until God Himself was made manifest in the flesh. And since the characteristic tendency of poetical minds is to make the world of sense, from beginning to end, symbolical of the absent and unseen, any instance of divine favour shewn to Poetry, any divine use of it in the training of God’s people, would seem, as far as it goes, to warrant that tendency; to set God’s seal upon it, and witness it as reasonable and true.” In 1839 Newman wrote to Pusey that he had heard that David Friedrich Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* was doing harm at Cambridge. “The only way to meet it is by your work on Types. I think so.”³⁰ The subjective, mythological reductionism of Strauss could only be met, Newman seems to suggest by a clearly worked out symbolic and sacramental theology. Pusey had attempted this in his “Lectures on Types & Prophecies.” But perhaps Ephraim had got there long before.

²⁹ J. Keble, *Tract LXXXIX “On the Mysticism attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church,”* 148; the following quotation is on p. 185f.

³⁰ Op. cit., note 11, vol. VII, p. 145 (Sept. 12, 1839).