“THE TREATISE ON THE RESURRECTION” (CG I,3) AND DIATRIBE STYLE

BY

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The contents of any writing must be understood as integral with the media through which these contents are manifest. Whereas attention is usually directed towards an understanding of literary form, stylistic analysis is often neglected— or assumed. However, stylistic analysis can add to our understanding of the Sitz im Leben of the writing.

In one of the first interpretations of “The Treatise on the Resurrection” (CG I,3), Professor W. C. van Unnik suggested, without further comment, that “many passages” of this discourse “remind us of the ‘diatribe’”.¹ Professor Malcolm L. Peel, seemingly motivated by his understanding of the tractate as “a personal … letter written by a teacher to one of his pupils”, but without stylistic analysis, has called this conclusion into question.² A stylistic analysis of the epistle supports the observation of van Unnik over against the conclusion of Peel.

The author of the epistle, who remains anonymous, addresses himself simply to “my son Rheginos” (43.25; 46.6 absolutely; 47.3). This address is characteristic of Jewish wisdom literature, where the sage or teacher addresses his pupils as “my son”.³ This same relationship is found in CH XIII, where the relationship of Hermes to Tat is established as that of spiritual father-teacher to the neophyte son-pupil.⁴ We may presume this to be the relationship which exists between the author of the epistle

and Rheginos. Such a teacher–pupil relationship is also characteristic of the Cynic-Stoic diatribe style.\(^5\)

All references to the reader up to 50.3 are in the second person singular.\(^6\) This suggests that, as in diatribe, a mutual ground exists between them.\(^7\) This mutual ground is revealed in 43.36; 44.1f.; 45.22f.; 45.24–39; 46.13; 46.25ff.; and 47.24–30, where the use of the plural pronoun establishes the author of the epistle to be in a teacher–student relationship over against their opponents.

In 50.4–16 the second person singular form of address shifts to the plural form of address.\(^8\) This suggests that Rheginos may be the ἰδιώτης of diatribe style, representative of a communis opinio. As such he would represent a circle of hearers with certain needs or questions.\(^9\) The author of the epistle would then be addressing this community through its representative, Rheginos, in 43.25–49.37, but addressing this wider community directly in 49.37ff. This exchange between the singular and plural address is likewise characteristic of diatribe style.\(^10\)

In 44.3–6, the author of the epistle indicates that his main theme is the resurrection. He opens the body of the discussion itself with a question (44.12–17). Such an opening question is characteristic of diatribe.\(^11\) Often the opening question corresponds to some final conclusion, the result of the argument, thus “framing” the argument.\(^12\) This “framing” is evident in the epistle as 48.3–4 picks up the opening question about the resurrection, and 49.9–36 offers a concluding section on the resurrection. As in diatribe style, the intervening argument follows “... no firm and logically disposed structure giving a strict unity to the whole”.\(^13\) The unity of the argument is found in its general theme: the resurrection.

In addition to the opening question of 44.12–17, a series of questions

\(^5\) R. Bultmann, Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe, FRLANT 13 (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1910) 66; H. Thyen, Der Stil der jüdisch-hellenistischen Homilie, FRLANT, NF 47 (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1955) 88ff.
\(^6\) Peel, op. cit., 8f.
\(^7\) Bultmann, op. cit., 65.
\(^8\) Peel, op. cit., 9.
\(^9\) Bultmann, op. cit., 11.
\(^10\) H. I. Marrou, Diatribe, Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum. Edited by Theodor Klauser (Stuttgart, Anton Hiersemann, 1957) col. 1003f.
\(^11\) Bultmann, op. cit., 11.
\(^12\) Ibid., 30, 46f.